

Maine Bicentennial Edition

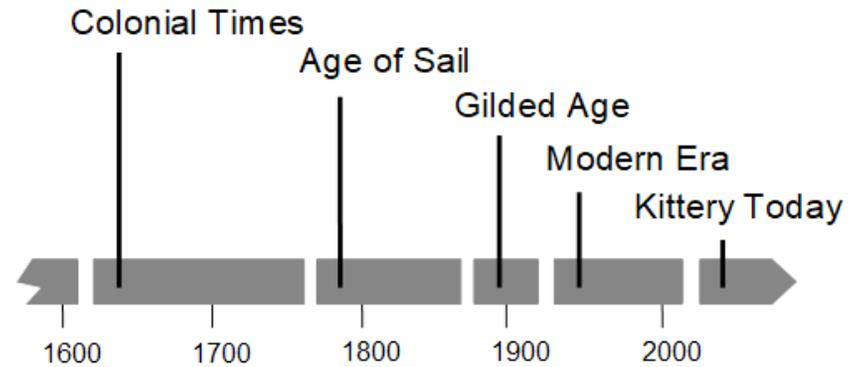
***A Brief History
of
Kittery, Maine***



*Published by the
Kittery Historical and Naval Society*

Introduction

Kittery, Maine has a long and storied history as one of the oldest towns in New England. To understand our history, we at the Museum think about broad eras of time. The contents of this booklet reflect these eras:



Before Europeans arrived around 1600, people lived here for thousands of years without a written history. Archaeology in southern Maine has indicated population shifts from environmental changes and human interaction across the region. When Europeans landed, the First People here lived in scattered villages. Their dome-shaped wigwams had frames covered by birch bark or matting. Their clothes were made from animal hides. They made ceramic pottery for containers. As hunter-gatherers, they relied on fish and seals, moose and deer, and plants for food. By the 1600's, they also grew corn, beans, and squash. They likely used birch bark canoes, rather than dugouts. They traded – and warred – with other tribes in present-day Canada and across New England. Some of their leaders or *sagamores* were known to the Europeans.

In the early 1600's, this area was visited by European explorers and then fishermen, who were based at the Isles of Shoals. Those fishermen were transients who stayed for a few months at a time, instead of becoming permanent settlers. The local islands were visited by Captain John Smith, and the Shoals were humbly named Smith's Isles by him. He loved the coastline, and wrote about this area in glowing terms. By some accounts, his promotion of the Maine coast helped to attract the later settlers.

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 Revised and corrected
 Second Edition – 2020.02.20
 Compiled from various sources

With thanks to the Rosamond Thaxter Foundation



Native Americans (Armouchiquois) lived here thousands of years before Europeans arrived around 1600. Afterwards, Maine's history sadly reflected that of many Native Americans. The Great Dying occurred between 1616 and 1619, when several epidemics swept coastal tribes. Around 1700, the remaining tribes in Maine formed the Wabanaki alliance to defend unsuccessfully against colonization.

Kittery was named by its English settlers, probably after Kittery Court, a manor house, and Kittery Point on the River Dart in Kingswear, Devon, England. The first explorer known to have visited this area was Martin Pring in 1603. In 1614, Captain John Smith landed at the Isles of Shoals on a journey north from Virginia. He found fish to be plentiful, and the islands thrived into the 1700's by sending dried salt cod back to England.

Kittery was settled by 1623; the first known house was built in 1635. The land that is now southern Maine was granted by the King of England to Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who claimed it in 1629. Although Gorges never set foot here, his nephew Francis Champernowne and members of the Shapleigh family settled here in 1636. The oldest family names in the area today are those of Gorges' relatives and friends who arrived from England. At the time, this area was known as Piscataquis Plantation.

The Town of Kittery was incorporated in 1647, making it the oldest town in Maine. It had three parishes: Lower (Kittery), Middle (Eliot) until 1810, and Upper (Berwick) until 1713. They split before Maine became a state. In 1652, Kittery and York agreed to submit to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which wanted timber and a northern buffer against the French and Indians. The Province of Maine stayed a part of Massachusetts from then until 1820. Today, that's why Maine celebrates Patriot's Day in April.

In 1653, the King's Highway was built to create a road between Kittery and Portland. It was a journey of several days. Today, that road is Route 1.

Early life in the colony was primitive, with the use of wooden implements and goods imported from England. In the 1690's, Daniel Goodwin, an early settler and a Kittery selectman, petitioned the Massachusetts Bay Colony to protect settlers from attacks by natives... and to reduce taxes.

In 1690, Fort William – now Fort McClary – was built. In 1692, the first school opened. About that time, William Whipple settled at Locke's Cove. His house still exists. His son, also named William, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence as a representative from New Hampshire.

In 1698, John Dennett bought land in Kittery for a garrison homestead to protect his family from attacks (house no longer stands). A garrison house was built of heavy timbers and often had an overhanging second floor.

In the mid-1600's, John Bray arrived from Devon, England, along with William Pepperrell, Nicholas Frost, and Alexander Shapleigh. Bray was a shipbuilder, who catered to the thriving fishing business here. His house in Kittery Point, built in 1662, still stands. It also served as a "public house" and occasional courthouse. It is today the oldest house in Maine.

About the same time, a young William Pepperrell settled on the Isles of Shoals to cure and export fish. He prospered, married Bray's daughter, and in 1682, built a house, also in Kittery Point. He became a merchant and trader whose ships traveled to the West Indies and Europe. An early leader of Kittery, he was reputedly the richest man in New England. He died in 1734. His grave is on a hill across the street from his house.

His son, Sir William Pepperrell, became even more famous. Born in 1696, he continued in his father's trade and amassed an even greater fortune. By age 30, he was married, a colonel in the militia, and on the Governor's Council. During the French and Indian Wars, he was asked to assault the "impregnable" French fortress of Louisbourg, in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. He gathered a few thousand colonists, paid from his own fortunes, and laid siege to the fort in 1745. After six weeks, his British forces were victorious and he was hailed a hero. For this, King George II made him the first American-born baronet. He died in 1759.

After Sir William lost his only son, he adopted his grandson William, son of Nathaniel Sparhawk, changing the lad's surname. This third William Pepperrell inherited a vast estate. He was also made baronet in 1774. At the outbreak of the American Revolution, he remained loyal to the King and escaped to England. His estate was confiscated in 1778, as was the Lady Pepperrell House, built in 1760 by Sir William's widow, Mary Hirst. That Georgian mansion still stands in Kittery Point today. The nearby 1732 First Congregational Church is the oldest sanctuary in Maine.

Age of Sail



Kittery – like the coastal towns of Bath, Belfast, Thomaston, and Waldoboro – became an early center for shipbuilding. In the American Revolution, a 32-gun frigate, *Raleigh*, was built here and served from 1776 to 1783. An 18-gun sloop, *Ranger*, was also built in Kittery in 1777 for John Paul Jones to command. It was the first warship to fly the new American flag. Ships were built on Badger's Island by William Badger in the late 1700's and by his nephew Samuel Badger in the early 1800's.

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) was established in 1800 when the U.S. government purchased Fernald's Island (a.k.a. Dennett's Island) in the Piscataqua River between Kittery and Portsmouth. In 1825, a bridge was built from Kittery to PNSY. In 1826, PNSY expanded to Seavey's Island. In 1847, the side-wheel steam frigate *USS Saranac*, was built there.

From the War of 1812 until after World War II, the PNSY was engaged in ship construction. Naval vessels – from wooden frigates through iron-clad warships to nuclear submarines – have been worked here for more than two centuries. Today, PNSY still has a vital role in the U.S. Navy.

Once common on the Piscataqua River were flat-bottomed cargo barges, called gundalows. Most active from the 1700's to early 1900's, the gundalows had a lateen sail that could be lowered to “shoot” under bridges. Gundalows used the rising tides to take them upriver and falling tides going downriver. Gundalows could navigate shallow rivers, carrying freight between ocean-going schooners and towns along the Piscataqua.

Throughout colonial times, some African Americans were enslaved in the seacoast region. Slavery was effectively ended in Maine with a 1783 court decision in Massachusetts. The practice ended gradually thereafter.

Maine became a state in 1820, as part of the Missouri Compromise. The decision was contentious and several votes were held before approval.

The following years, from 1820 to 1860, were boom times for Maine. The state's population doubled, numerous ships were built, fish catches were abundant, shipping and trade grew, and agriculture prospered. Travel to and from Portsmouth relied on ferry boats until the first bridge in 1822.

Whaleback Light was built in 1829 (rebuilt in 1872) at the mouth of the Piscataqua River. Slightly upriver, Fort McClary (formerly Fort William) was expanded in 1844, when its famous hexagonal blockhouse was built.

A railroad made its first appearance in Kittery in 1842, when the company later known as Boston & Maine connected Boston and Portland. The old wooden bridge to Portsmouth was remodeled with “thousands of pilings” to support rail traffic through the Kittery Junction station.

When the Civil War broke out, the “Kittery Artillery” militia joined the 27th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Local militias often enlisted as a unit. This could be devastating to a town. Kittery initially sent 51 men; a total of 36 Kittery men died in the war. While 20th Maine gained fame under Joshua Chamberlain at Gettysburg, the 27th had “a shower of stars” in Medals of Honor under Mark Wentworth of Kittery.

Colonel Mark Wentworth was a physician who practiced medicine in Kittery both before and after the Civil War. He joined 27th Maine in 1862, then commissioned to 32nd Maine in 1864. Like Chamberlain, he was wounded at Petersburg and he breveted out in 1865. Afterwards, he was a generous and prominent citizen of Kittery until his death in 1897. He was also one of two dozen Medal of Honor recipients from Kittery.

During the Civil War, 26 ships were built at PNSY, including two ironclads. Another PNSY ship, the nine-gun steam sloop *USS Kearsarge*, gained fame by defeating a notorious raider, *CSS Alabama*, off the coast of France.

A few school buildings from the post-war years are still standing. Safford School (1872-1942) – a one-room schoolhouse – is at the corner of Cutts Island Lane and Brave Boat Harbor Road. The Austin School (1875-1972) – with its distinctive bell tower – is now a private residence.

In 1873, the first batteries were built at Fort Foster on Gerrish Island, the land acquired in 1872 by the U.S. Government for outer harbor defense. The fort was occupied by U.S. troops from 1905 through World War II.

In 1855, the *USS Constitution* arrived at PNSY as a training ship. She returned in 1882, was roofed over and used as a receiving ship. She left in 1897, towed to Boston for the 100th anniversary of her launching. It was there that funds were raised by schoolchildren for her reconstruction.

Gilded Age



The period around the turn of the century was notable for grand hotels. There were four on the mainland in Kittery and one – Appledore House (1848-1914) – at the Isles of Shoals. Those hotels largely catered to summer visitors from Boston. The waterfront provided a scenic refuge to urban vacationers, who could escape the city heat by using train service that developed after the Civil War.

Local transportation was greatly improved when the York Harbor & Beach Railway opened in 1887. Its steam locomotives followed the shoreline, near today's Route 103, delivering visitors from Portsmouth ferries to hotels in Kittery Point and York. An electric trolley – the Portsmouth, Kittery and York, affectionately known as “push, kick and yank” – opened in 1897. Its power plant was beside the river in Kittery Point. Both summer visitors and residents relied on this service. The trestle pilings of these railways can still be seen in our creeks today.

In the late 1800's, Kittery earned a place in the arts. The best known of its writers was Celia Thaxter, whose works include the poem “Sandpiper” and an 1873 book, *Among the Isles of Shoals*. Celia was married to Levi Thaxter, who partnered with Thomas Lighton to build the Appledore House hotel. Celia kept a summer house on Appledore Island, visited by artists, writers, and musicians of the time. In particular, Childe Hassam is known for his impressionist paintings of that rocky island. Back ashore, William Dean Howells, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, had a summer house in Kittery Point, where he was visited by Mark Twain.

At the Isles of Shoals in 1873, a midnight murder occurred when two women were killed on the isolated island of Smuttynose. A third woman survived and identified the murderer. Two years later, he was hanged for the crime, among the last before Maine abolished the death penalty.

Rice Public Library opened in 1888, with a bequest from Arabella Rice.

In Kittery Point around the turn of the century, John Haley Bellamy was a popular wood carver, known for stylized eagles, signs, figure heads, and stern boards. A neighbor, the writer and artist George Wasson, captured the southern Maine dialect in his novels, such as *Cap'n Simeon's Store*.

In 1905, two landmark events made Portsmouth famous around the world, although both events occurred in Kittery. In July, the largest man-made explosion to date in history caused Henderson's Point on Seavey's Island to disappear. About sixty tons of dynamite removed a bend in the river that local oarsmen called “Pull-or-Be-Damned Point.” This altered the swift current of the Piscataqua River, making it less treacherous.

Two months later, in September, the Treaty of Portsmouth was signed at PNSY, ending the Russo-Japanese War in the Far East. Delegates from both countries spent the summer here negotiating at the invitation of President Theodore Roosevelt. He later received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Also in 1905, Kittery's high school – Traip Academy – opened as a private preparatory school, named for its benefactor, Robert Traip.

The uneven, rocky shoreline of Kittery is a danger to vessels approaching the coast. In 1908, the U.S. Life Saving Service opened a life saving station on Wood Island, at the mouth of the Piscataqua River. This building, which still exists today, is of a rare design. The Life Saving Service became part of the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915. During World War II, the island helped to secure anti-submarine nets, strung across the river to thwart German U-boats. The Life Saving Station was closed after that war.

Also in 1908, the Portsmouth Naval Prison – known locally as The Castle – opened at PNSY. During the Spanish-American War in 1898, the site was occupied by a stockade that held more than a thousand prisoners of war.

In World War I, a new type of vessel – the submarine – became a threat. The first American submarine (L-8) was built at PNSY and launched in 1917. By 1923, the Shipyard was commissioned to build only submarines.

The advent of automobiles in the 1900's led to numerous changes in the Kittery landscape. The trolley ceased operations suddenly in 1923. One-by-one, the grand hotels succumbed. Small grocery stores closed as supermarkets (like Dan's) opened. The last general store to survive was Frisbee's, which operated in Kittery Point from 1828 until 2016.

In 1923, the Memorial Bridge opened... linking Kittery with Portsmouth, connecting Route 1 between the states, and ending ferry service.



Modern Era

After the demise of grand hotels, the largest building in town was the Franklin Shiphouse at PNSY. Today, the current shiphouse is a second generation. In 1936, the original huge wooden structure caught fire. The inferno, fueled by oil and grease, burned the building to the ground.

In 1938, Philip (Bing) Adams acquired the Kittery Trading Post, a one-room gas station. With his reputation for honesty and continuous family management, KTP grew into the current store, last expanded in 2005.

Two tragedies struck in 1939. First, during test dives, USS Squalus sank off the Isles of Shoals. Thirty-three members of the crew were rescued with a McCann Chamber. During the rescue, Navy divers used a suit designed for deep sea salvage operations. Four of the divers received the Medal of Honor. The sub was raised and recommissioned as USS Sailfish.

That same year, construction began on a new Maine-New Hampshire Interstate Bridge (later, Sarah Mildred Long Bridge) to replace the old wooden railroad bridge. During construction, the old bridge collapsed, sending B&M locomotive 3666 into the river, where it still rests. The SML bridge was completed in 1940 and was later replaced in 2018.

In World War II, PNSY began an intense building effort. By 1944, the shipyard employed more than 20,000 people (about three times today's level) and had launched about 130 submarines since the outbreak of the war. To protect PNSY from German U-boats, an anti-submarine net was strung across the mouth of the river, from Fort Foster to New Hampshire.

Admiralty Village was built for PNSY workers, starting in 1941. A post-war reduction at PNSY led to a downturn for Kittery business, but population increased during “baby boom” years. Sale of Village units began in 1949.

The first section of the Maine Turnpike – Kittery to Portland – opened in 1947. This “mile-a-minute” highway was built without government funds. It was financed by revenue bonds, to be repaid from tolls.

After being active in WWII, Fort Foster was closed in 1948 and was then acquired by the Town of Kittery for use as a park and recreation area.

In the mid-20th century, African American travelers were often met with discrimination. In Kittery Point on Route 103, Rock Rest was a welcoming B&B, but not listed in the *Green Book*. Operated from 1946 to 1977 by Clayton and Hazel Sinclair, it was known for hospitality and good cooking.

At PNSY in 1953, USS Albacore began a transition in submarine design. Its tear-drop hull and diesel-electric propulsion were innovations that changed submarines thereafter. Today, the Albacore is a museum, located just across the river in Portsmouth, NH.

On deep diving tests about 220 miles east of Boston, USS Thresher sank in 1963. This was the lead boat in a new class of nuclear-powered attack submarines. The loss of all 129 crew members and shipyard personnel was a watershed event for the Navy. It led to a rigorous safety program, SUBSAFE, still used by the Navy today. At the Kittery traffic circle is a Thresher memorial park; the flagpole in the circle is 129 feet tall.

The last submarine to be built at PNSY – USS Sand Lance – was launched in 1969 and commissioned in 1971. The Naval Prison was closed in 1974. Despite proposals to re-use the building, the prison sits abandoned.

The town acquired Traip Academy in 1967, making it a public high school.

Lobster – once a “poor man's food” – is now a tradition along the coast. Although fishermen have changed from wood pots to wire traps, their harvesting methods have largely stayed the same for hundreds of years.

Together with the Kittery Trading Post, the famous shopping malls along Route 1 were gradually developed through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. The several Kittery outlets now combine traditional mall stores with factory-brand shops and restaurants, drawing visitors from near and far.

Over the years, Kittery industry and business have emphasized fishing, shipbuilding, trading, hospitality, retail, and the arts. Occasionally, a few manufactured products also have found markets. Arthur Martin's rowing shell, the “Alden Ocean Shell” is one. Designed in Kittery Point in the 1970's, it is probably the most popular solo rowing shell in the world.

The Piscataqua River Bridge (the I-95 “big bridge”) opened in 1972. The Memorial Bridge, carrying Route 1 to Portsmouth, was replaced in 2013.



Kittery – the Gateway to Maine – welcomes visitors from around the United States and the world. The ferries, grand hotels, and trolleys of its past are gone, but much of Kittery's heritage is still visible.

Today, Fort Foster is a town park and Fort McClary is a state park. Both are open to visitors seasonally. We recommend taking a picnic to either. Rice Public Library is busy, historic, and definitely worth a visit. Frisbee's general store is now the site of a bistro and outdoor restaurant.

In 1973, ownership of Wood Island was conveyed to the Town of Kittery. In 2012, the Wood Island Life Saving Station Association (WILSSA) began an effort to restore the building. That work is now nearly complete. The island – a town park – and the life saving station are accessible by water.

The shipyard (PNSY) remains a major Navy facility, employing thousands of people. It does maintenance, upgrades, and retrofits on the current U.S. submarine fleet, and it hosts several other defense units. The shipyard is closed to the public, but bus tours are available.

In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, yes, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is indeed in Maine. Remember that PNSY was established and named before Maine became a state.

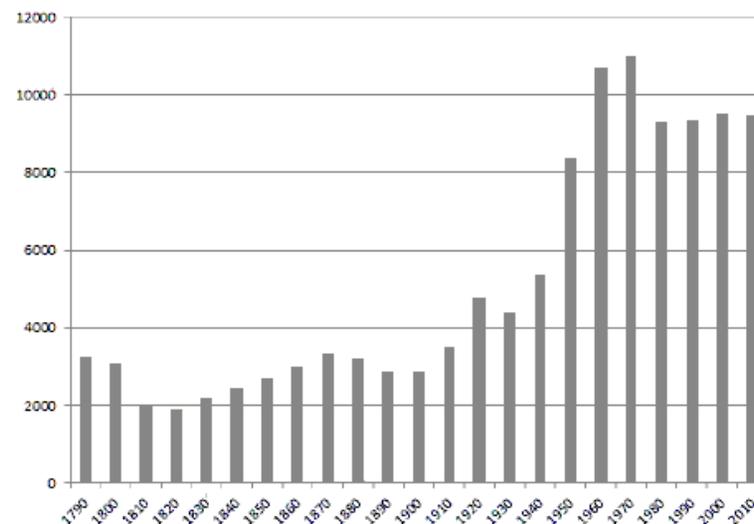
At the Isles of Shoals, five of the nine islands are in Kittery. On Appledore, the Shoals Marine Laboratory offers courses and research for students from two universities every summer. On Smuttynose, the remaining structures are tended by volunteers. Most activity is on neighboring Star Island in New Hampshire, where one of the grand hotels still exists.

For over three centuries, Kittery has managed to grow and prosper, while still preserving its New England charm. Its rich heritage reaches back to the earliest days of the country. Kittery's story is part of America's story.

The people, places, and events in this booklet are but briefly mentioned. There is a tale to be told about each of them. Learn more with a visit to the **Kittery Historical and Naval Museum**. For hours, see our website.

Kittery area is about 75 square miles. Less than 18 square miles are land.

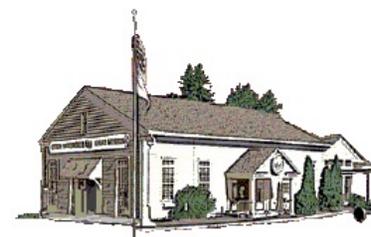
Kittery Population 1790-2010



Reference: <<https://maineencyclopedia.com/kittery/>>

About the Museum

In 2004, the *Kittery Historical Society* (founded 1935) and the *Kittery Historical and Naval Museum* (opened 1977) merged to become one. Here and elsewhere, the voices of Kittery's past can still be heard today.



We hope you enjoyed this brief history of Kittery.

www.kitterymuseum.org = or = www.kitterymuseum.com

Maine Statehood



The short story is that Maine became a state in 1820, as part of the Missouri Compromise. But as with many things, it wasn't that simple.

In 1652, the Province of Maine became a district of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Maine was part of Massachusetts for more than 160 years, governed by the Massachusetts General Court (their legislature).

The movement to make Maine a state began at the close of the American Revolution. After a first meeting in 1785, delegates from twenty towns met in Falmouth in 1786 and listed grievances against the Massachusetts government. This attempt faltered, but in 1791, the issue was revived. Separation was largely opposed by merchants and shippers in the seaport towns of York County, who had commercial and political ties to Boston. In three votes – 1792, 1797, 1807 – Kittery strongly opposed separation. Overall, many voters were indifferent, and the issue faded again.

From 1790 to 1810, Maine's population more than doubled. Many new settlers were of Jeffersonian inclinations, and they found a leader in William King of Bath. His Democratic-Republicans sought independence from the Federalist government of Massachusetts. They organized in 1815, and the General Court agreed to a referendum in 1816. Separation won, but low turnout left doubt. Another vote, held later the same year, was also inconclusive. In these two votes, Kittery strongly favored separation. The change of sentiment was partly due to the War of 1812. When the British invaded downeast Maine, the General Court voted to defend Boston. The interests of Maine were remote in Massachusetts.

Separation lay dormant for the next three years. King and his supporters revived the issue again, and the General Court agreed to another vote in 1819. This time, the majority was overwhelmingly in favor, though Kittery was split. The voters of Maine had spoken for statehood. The next tasks were to write a constitution and then secure admission to the Union.

The constitution, written at a convention in Portland in the autumn of 1819, was remarkably democratic. It established absolute freedom of religion. It apportioned the representatives in favor of small towns and the senate on the basis of population, rather than wealth. A referendum

in December 1819 approved this proposed state constitution. The next step seemed like a formality, but events proved otherwise. On the national stage, the moral dilemma of slavery now entered the debate.

The bill to make Maine a state was introduced to Congress in December 1819. A bill to admit Missouri had been submitted months before, but it had not been approved. An amendment to restrict slavery in Missouri had failed in the Senate. Southern senators, stunned by the debate and the vote, were determined to maintain a balance of slave and free states.

When the Maine bill was introduced, powerful figures in both houses took a stand. They would vote for admitting Maine only if an unrestricted Missouri were admitted at the same time. What was previously an issue only between Maine and Massachusetts now became an explosive controversy. Further, if Congress failed to act by March 1820 – a mere three months away – then Maine would revert to Massachusetts control again. Many in Maine were outraged. If they achieved statehood, that would enable slavery to spread.

In Congress, a conference committee worked out a compromise. Both states would be admitted without restrictions, but slavery would be prohibited elsewhere. Missouri could then join as a slave state and Maine as a free state. The measure passed, but the victory was bittersweet. Most of the Massachusetts congressmen from Maine voted against it.

On becoming the 23rd state in March 1820, it was fitting that Maine's first governor was William King, who had worked to make it happen.



Mark your calendars for Maine's bicentennial celebration in 2020 and Kittery's 375th anniversary in 2022. Lots of history on the way!