

Chapter 1: Historic and Archeological Resources

Brief Overview of Brighton Plantation:

Brighton Plantation, originally settled in the late 18th century, has a rich history marked by economic struggles, a reliance on the logging industry, and a steady population decline. Once home to a thriving community, its peak population of 748 in 1850 dwindled over the years, leading to its reorganization as a plantation in 1895 and the eventual surrender of its municipal status in 1949. Today, the historic village's remnants—such as the church, cemetery, and schoolhouse—stand as a testament to its past, with the intersection of US Routes 151 and 154 serving as the focal point of this quiet, enduring community.

Brighton Plantation – Historical Narrative:

In 1786, Massachusetts disposed of large tracts of unsettled land in Maine (at the time a territory of Massachusetts) by lottery. William Bingham, a wealthy Philadelphia banker, drew several townships and purchased others, giving him a total of one million acres. In 1816, the inhabitants of one of those townships (then numbered township 2) petitioned the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to incorporate the plantation of North Hill. At the time of the incorporation, there were about fifty families settled in North Hill. In 1827, the name of the town was changed from North Hill to Brighton through an Act by that Maine legislature.

Brighton reached its peak population in 1840 at 803 residents. The largest industry in Brighton Plantation, and the surrounding area, during the 19th century, was wood and the logging business. Brighton had a sawmill, gristmill, several schoolhouses, several stores, a post office, a church, a doctors office, and a hotel.

However, the town struggled with poverty. An 1895 Portland Daily Press article described Brighton as such, “Up in Somerset County is a tract of land, far from being fertile or productive of the prolific crops raised in many other portions of the Pine Tree State...The inhabitants of this much-out-of-the-way place have for many years struggled hard against the gaping jaws of Old Poverty and many have been the law suits the town has endured on account of its paupers...In 1850 the population of Brighton was 748 and has deceased each decade until in 1890 it was 454. It is reported that there are 37 paupers in that town.” Because of the declining population and the inability of the town to care for its poorest residents, the incorporation of the town was repealed in March 1895. A month later in April 1895, the town was organized into a plantation. The “paupers” at that time were then cared for “by the oldest incorporated town adjoining which will collect from the State the expense incurred.”

The closest adjoining town would be Athens. Brighton Plantation and Athens had already established a close relationship since their founding, a symbiotic relationship that continues today with Brighton residents relying on Athens for many services not offered

in the Plantation.

Brighton Plantation would surrender their municipal status in 1949. At the time the plantation had a population of 103. An infestation of birch borer had required heavy cutting to save the remaining timber in the area leaving most of the employees in the plantation out of work and few jobs remaining. Representatives from the town asked the legislative committee to surrender the town's organization.

Today, the municipal office is in the last remaining one room schoolhouse that was in operation until about 1960. There is still evidence of the historic village of Brighton Plantation where US Routes 151 and 154 intersect. There you'll find the church, village cemetery, and several other historic buildings that are privately owned. The intersection remains much unchanged though the layout of the road was changed by DOT in the last few decades.

Maine Historic Preservation Commission Data:

According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), historic and archaeological resources in comprehensive planning fall into three categories: **Prehistoric Archaeological** (Native American sites predating European arrival), **Historic Archaeological** (European-American sites from the historic record), and **Historic Buildings/Structures/Objects** (above-ground structures and artifacts). Archaeological resources, found underground, include evidence of past human habitation such as artifacts, structures, and remains.

Prehistoric Archeological Sites:

Brighton Plantation has no known prehistoric sites.

Historic Archeological Sites:

Historic archeological sites statewide include English and French trading posts, forts, homesteads of the 1600 and 1700's, and 19th century logging camps. Since waterbodies have always provided transportation and power, these areas are usually the location for historic archeological sites.

In 2023, no historic archaeological sites have been documented for Brighton Plantation.

One small area of the southwest corner of the township received a professional archaeological survey for a utility corridor but nothing of note was discovered. No professional town-wide surveys of historic archaeological sites have been conducted to date in Brighton Plantation. Future archaeological surveys if ever conducted should focus on identification of potentially significant resources associated with the town's agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the

earliest Euro-American settlement of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Brighton Plantation’s Historic Buildings/Structures/Objects:

For Brighton Plantation, Maine, where only a few historic buildings may qualify for the National Register of Historic Places, listing can provide key benefits. Recognized structures may be eligible for a 20% investment tax credit, helping owners offset restoration costs if the building is income-producing and certified historic. Additionally, National Register status raises awareness of local history, encourages preservation efforts, and provides limited protection from federally funded alterations or demolition. This designation can be a valuable tool for maintaining Brighton Plantation’s historical character and attracting potential funding or tourism interest.

The following seven (7) buildings have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. These properties generally represent when Brighton Plantation had a larger, agricultural focused community – mainly farms and their outbuildings. The properties are listed below:

Properties Eligible for the National Register			
Estimated Construction Date	Address	Architectural Style	Primary Use
1860	446 Brighton Road	Vernacular	Shed
1860	446 Brighton Road	Vernacular	Barn/Mixed Use
1890	Brighton Road / Rt 151	Vernacular/Greek Revival	Garage
1850	Brighton Road / Rt 151	Vernacular/Greek Revival	Single Family
1850	Brighton Road / Rt 151	Vernacular	Barn/Mixed Use
1880	Brighton Road / Rt 151	Vernacular	Other/Shed
1850-2011	Brighton Road / Rt 151	-	Residential

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission recommends a comprehensive survey of Brighton Plantation’s above-ground historic resources to identify properties that may be eligible for nomination to the Register.

There are other non-eligible properties that are still of historical note, and these can be seen on the Historic and Archeological Resources Map, mostly in the town center.

These buildings are all in varying conditions. All are owned by private property owners. Time and lack of funds have taken a toll. Most are in need of some form of repairs and maintenance.

Local Historic Sites and Places:

Maine Historic Preservation Commission maintains a broad range of information relating to historic properties including historic buildings, structures, sites, districts, and objects. Additional research could reveal other locations and may show that some sites are eligible to be listed.

The village church, located at the intersection of Route 151 and Route 154, is an important local historic site. The steeple was lost after it was struck by lightning and caught fire. While the fire department saved the remainder of the building, the steeple was not salvagable. The plantation maintains funds in the annual budget, \$7,945 as of the 2023 Annual Report, for maintenance and care of the church.

The Kelly Mountain Fire Tower, built in 1925, is a another significant historic landmark in Brighton Plantation, representing the region's early wildfire detection efforts. The tower features a metal frame, which, though showing signs of rust, remains structurally sturdy. Its wooden observation deck was replaced in recent years but still requires ongoing maintenance to ensure its preservation. For decades, the tower served as a vital lookout point, helping to protect the area's vast forests from devastating fires. As one of the few remaining structures of its kind, preserving the Kelly Mountain Fire Tower honors Brighton Plantation's heritage and provides a tangible link to its past.

Threats to Local Historic/Archeological/Cultural Resources:

Brighton Plantation does not have any designated historic districts that receive town protection to maintain architectural integrity or character. There are no formal historic preservation regulations or a historical society overseeing such efforts. The existing historic structures in the area are all privately owned, and without designated protections or preservation incentives, their upkeep relies solely on the individual homeowners. While historic sites have been identified, they are not currently threatened by development, as Brighton Plantation does not face significant development pressures. However, the primary concerns regarding these structures stem from time and a lack of funding. Many private homeowners do not qualify for historic preservation grants, making it difficult to secure the necessary resources for maintenance and restoration. As a result, neglect and gradual deterioration pose the most significant risks to the town's historic character.

Cemeteries:

Cemeteries are a critical link to our heritage. In Maine, municipalities are legally required to ensure the preservation and maintenance of ancient burying grounds and veterans' graves under state law (Title 13, §1101 and §1101-A). This includes protecting cemeteries from neglect, vandalism, and encroachment while ensuring that gravestones and markers, especially those of veterans, are properly maintained. Municipalities must also allow access for descendants and historians and, in some cases, provide funding

for upkeep. These responsibilities help preserve the state’s historical and cultural heritage while honoring those buried within these sacred spaces.

The following is a list of known cemeteries in Brighton Plantation, which can also be seen on the Historic Resources Map:

Brighton Plantation Cemeteries	
Name	Location
Brighton Village Cemetery	East side of Rt 151 and north side of Rt 154
Old Cemetery	North side of Back Rd
York Cemetery	North of Solon Rd

The plantation has appropriated \$11,000 for cemetery stone repair in the budget as of 2023.

Scenic Areas:

Although scenic areas might not be considered historic resources, they nevertheless can be highly valued by citizens as a part of the community heritage. Often, these scenic views are a cherished attribute that many people identify about their community. The following areas include those that can be seen from both public and private lands:

- Fire Tower, Kelly Mountain
- Smith Pond
- Wyman Pond

Protecting Significant Historic and Archeological Resources:

Brighton Plantation lacks a Historical Society, a traditional means of protective measures for buildings deemed historic. Due to the lack of traditional “Historic Districts” and the towns outdated land use ordinances, the existing regulatory protection for historic and archaeological resources is primarily provided through the state’s subdivision and shoreland zoning statues. Maine’s subdivision statute and subdivision regulation require review of the impact on “historic sites”, which includes both National Register and eligible buildings and archaeological sites. The State’s Shoreland Zoning statute includes, as one of its purposes, “to protect archaeological and historic resources”. Therefore, the town does not currently have any specific incentives or regulations for protecting historic areas and/or buildings, or potential historic or archeological resources.