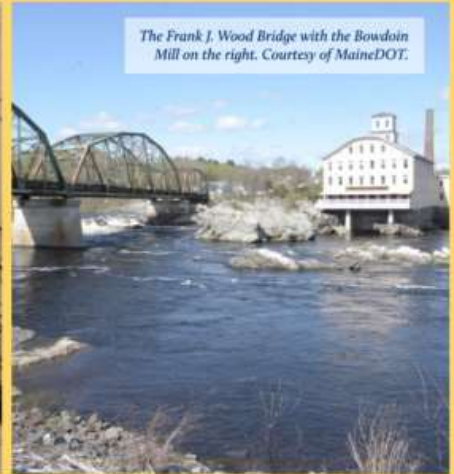




Named after the Topsham farmer who proposed moving the bridge and straightening Main Street, the Frank J. Wood Bridge is shown here nearly complete, with the old, much smaller bridge, behind it. Courtesy Pejepscot History Center.



The Frank J. Wood Bridge with the Bowdoin Mill on the right. Courtesy of MaineDOT.

BRIDGING THE ANDROSCOGGIN

At least 9 different bridges have connected Topsham and Brunswick at this location. Before bridges, a ferry located east of the falls carried people and goods across the Androscoggin River.

WOOD

The first structures to connect Brunswick and Topsham were made of wood. The first bridge was constructed in 1796 and required a toll to cross. Spring floods frequently damaged the bridge, requiring repair or full replacement. For sport, young boys would attempt to run fast enough past the toll house to escape paying.



Drawing from 1835 showing the wooden truss bridge on stone piers. Courtesy Pejepscot History Center.

- 1796 First wooden bridge built
- 1811 Bridge destroyed by freshet
- 1814 Bridge damaged by freshet
- 1827 Bridge destroyed by freshet & rebuilt on stone piers
- c.1840 Bridge enclosed
- 1842 Bridge burns
- 1877 First iron bridge erected
- 1881 Second iron bridge erected
- 1889 Third iron bridge erected
- 1932 Frank J. Wood steel bridge erected



Second covered bridge, c. 1850. Courtesy Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

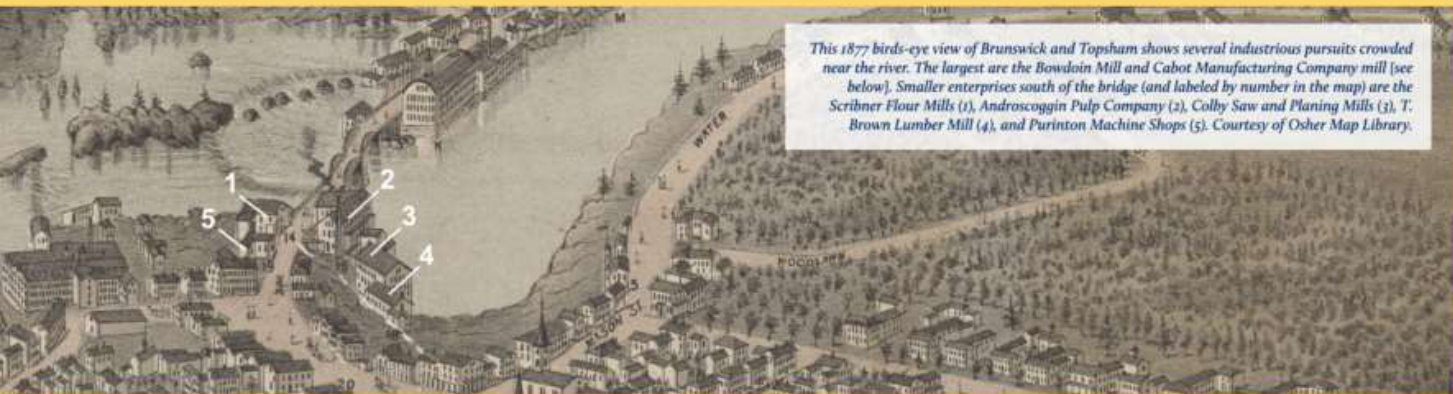
STEEL

In 1871 the toll was removed and the towns of Brunswick and Topsham took ownership of the bridge. Seven years later the towns built an iron Bow Arch truss bridge. The iron bridge was replaced just three years after its construction due to concerns over its strength. In 1932, a fourth steel bridge, designed to carry both automobiles and a street trolley, was built on a slightly different alignment that was both safer and more efficient.

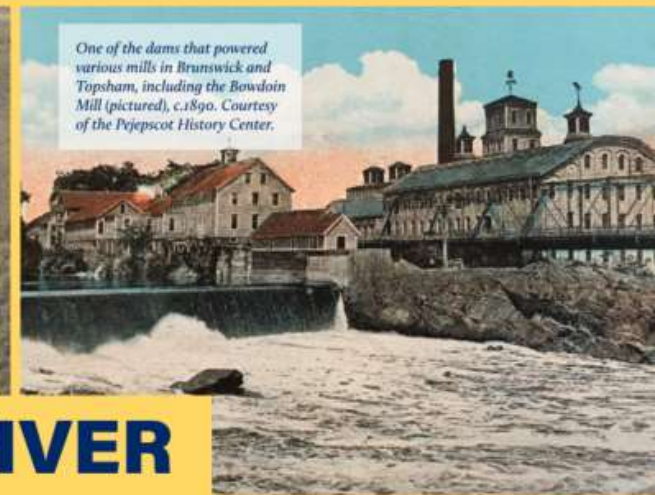


1889 iron bridge and its angled roadway. Courtesy Pejepscot History Center.

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This 1877 birds-eye view of Brunswick and Topsham shows several industrious pursuits crowded near the river. The largest are the Bowdoin Mill and Cabot Manufacturing Company mill (see below). Smaller enterprises south of the bridge (and labeled by number in the map) are the Scribner Flour Mills (1), Androscoggin Pulp Company (2), Colby Saw and Planing Mills (3), T. Brown Lumber Mill (4), and Purinton Machine Shops (5). Courtesy of Osher Map Library.



One of the dams that powered various mills in Brunswick and Topsham, including the Bowdoin Mill (pictured), c.1890. Courtesy of the Pejepscot History Center.

POWERED BY THE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER

At this location, the Androscoggin River drops 41 feet as it travels to Merrymeeting Bay. Beginning in the 1700s dams have harnessed this impressive force to power a variety of mills in both Brunswick and Topsham.

BOWDOIN MILL, TOPSHAM

Built in 1868, the Bowdoin Mill was one of the earliest paper mills in Maine, which is significant for a state known for its wood products. When the Pejepscot Paper Company began operating the mill in the 1870s it produced 5 tons of paper per day and employed 45 men and 30 women. The company made a variety of paper types, including newspaper, and later fancy tissue paper. The mill operated until 1985.

Unfortunately, much of the mill complex was destroyed in a fire in 1998. The company's office building, however, still stands to the north of the mill building.



Left: Bowdoin Mill, c.1900. Courtesy of Pejepscot History Center.

Right: A c.1920 postcard of Cabot Mill. Courtesy of Pejepscot History Center.

CABOT MILL, BRUNSWICK



The Cabot Mill was constructed in 1892 and employed 850 men and women who made cotton textiles. The mill replaced the earlier building shown in the 1877 map above, which the company had outgrown. In 1942 the mill sold to the Verney Company and began producing rayon goods. At its peak during World War II, 1,500 men and women worked at the mill. Today the mill houses light manufacturing, shops, restaurants, offices, and artist studios.

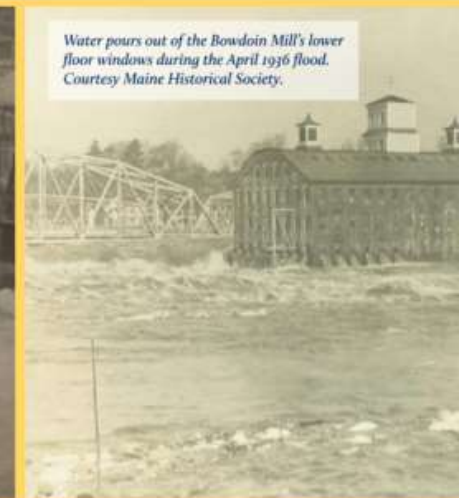
Right: Spinning room in the Cabot Mill, c.1900. Courtesy of Pejepscot History Center.



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An 1895 flood inundated the Brunswick Falls and encroached on Summer Street in Topsham. Courtesy of the Pejepscot History Center.



Water pours out of the Bowdoin Mill's lower floor windows during the April 1936 flood. Courtesy Maine Historical Society.

FLOODS: UNCONTROLLED POWER

The spring's melting snow and frequent rainfall cause the waters of the Androscoggin River to rise, which can lead to dramatic and destructive flooding.

FORCE OF NATURE

The power of the Androscoggin drew development to its falls but it could also prove destructive. The annual spring floods, known as freshets in the 1800s, damaged buildings and bridges. One of the earliest recorded floods was on June 22, 1814. It destroyed the wooden bridge connecting Brunswick and Topsham, its toll house, and damaged 21 sawmills as well as a cotton mill.



The Brunswick Falls during the Great Freshet of March 2, 1896 with Cabot Mill in the background. Courtesy Pejepscot History Center.

Excerpt from a letter from Bowdoin College student, Josiah Pierce, to his father in May 1843:

"Probably you have seen in the paper's, the damage that has been done here by the rise of the Androscoggin. It has carried away 2 mills, and about 2,000 logs have gone down the stream in consequence of the booms breaking. It was a grand sight to see the logs dash over the jam. It was so high one time, that a person who had never seen them before could not tell where the falls were."

Courtesy of Pierce Family Collection, Maine Historical Society

THE FLOOD OF 1936



The record setting 1936 floodwaters reached the deck of the Frank J. Wood Bridge. Courtesy Maine DOT.

In April 1936, the rivers of Maine experienced widespread, record setting, flooding. The Androscoggin River rose 28 feet, its highest recorded flood level at Brunswick and Topsham. The flood waters crested the Frank J. Wood Bridge but did not damage the structure. Flooding continues to be a seasonal threat and the current bridge has been designed to withstand future flood projections.

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Aerial photograph of the Androscoggin River at Brunswick, looking north towards Topsham. Courtesy Maine Imaging.

THE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER: AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE

Originating at Umbagog Lake in New Hampshire, the Androscoggin River is the third largest river in Maine and features multiple sets of powerful falls.

FOOD

The Androscoggin River has supported several species of fish, including salmon, alewife, and sturgeon. The Abenaki were the first to fish the river. When European colonists arrived in the seventeenth century, they also looked to the river for sustenance, ranging from local subsistence fishing to large catches for export. The river also supported crops, including the Abenaki corn planting grounds at present-day Canton and Jay.



The area just below the Brunswick Falls is an excellent place to see Atlantic Sturgeon leaping, particularly from May to August. (Top: sturgeon, bottom: alewife and salmon) Courtesy NOAA Fisheries and Maine Department of Inland Fisheries

INDUSTRY

The dams constructed at Jay, Rumford, Lewiston, Lisbon, and Brunswick-Topsham have powered various industries, including paper and textiles. While these industries brought wealth to the surrounding areas, the dams and the pollution generated by the mills severely impacted the health of the river. The paper mills, in particular, discharged such large amounts of chemicals that the oxygen levels in the river were reduced to a point where they could no longer support life.



The Pejepscot Paper Mill complex, pictured c.1900, was located upriver from the Brunswick Falls. It included both pulp and paper mills and produced newsprint. Courtesy Maine Historical Society.

RESTORATION & RECREATION

The high pollution levels of the Androscoggin River inspired U.S. Senator and Rumford, Maine, native Edmund Muskie to sponsor the Clean Water Act in 1972. Since its passage, the river's water quality has improved and is now clean enough to support a variety of fish and wildlife species, although some areas still fall below the standard. The river is a popular source of recreation, from boating to fishing. It continues to generate hydropower through dams at Riley, Jay, Otis, Livermore, Brunswick, and Berlin, New Hampshire.

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Passengers arrive decked out in their finest at the LB&B's Merrymeeting Park in Brunswick, c.1900. Courtesy of Pejepscot History Center.



Many trolley companies built amusement parks to boost ridership on the weekends. Merrymeeting Park included a casino (pictured here), amphitheater, walking trails, zoo, and dance pavilion. Courtesy of Maine Memory Network.

TROLLEYS: FOR WORK OR PLAY

Street railways, or trolley lines, were popular forms of local and regional transportation that carried both passengers and freight in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

ESTABLISHMENT

The first trolley line to operate in Topsham and Brunswick was the Brunswick Electric Railroad. The line opened in 1896 and initially only ran 3.5 miles from the Sagadahoc Fairgrounds in Topsham to Bowdoin College in Brunswick.

For the trolley to pass over the Androscoggin River, the railroad had to strengthen the steel truss bridge to hold the added weight of the electric car.



A trolley car travels across the Frank J. Wood Bridge, c.1935. From: *Trolleys to Brunswick, Maine 1896-1937*.

EXPANDED SERVICE

In 1898 the line became the Lewiston, Brunswick & Bath Street Railway (LB&B), with expanded service to Lewiston and Bath, including stops in Lisbon, Lisbon Falls, and West Bath. This line connected with other regional trolleys allowing riders to travel to Augusta, Biddeford, Mechanics Falls, Portland, and Waterville.



A ticket for the Lewiston, Augusta & Waterville Street Railway, which absorbed the LB&B in 1907. Courtesy of Pejepscot History Center.

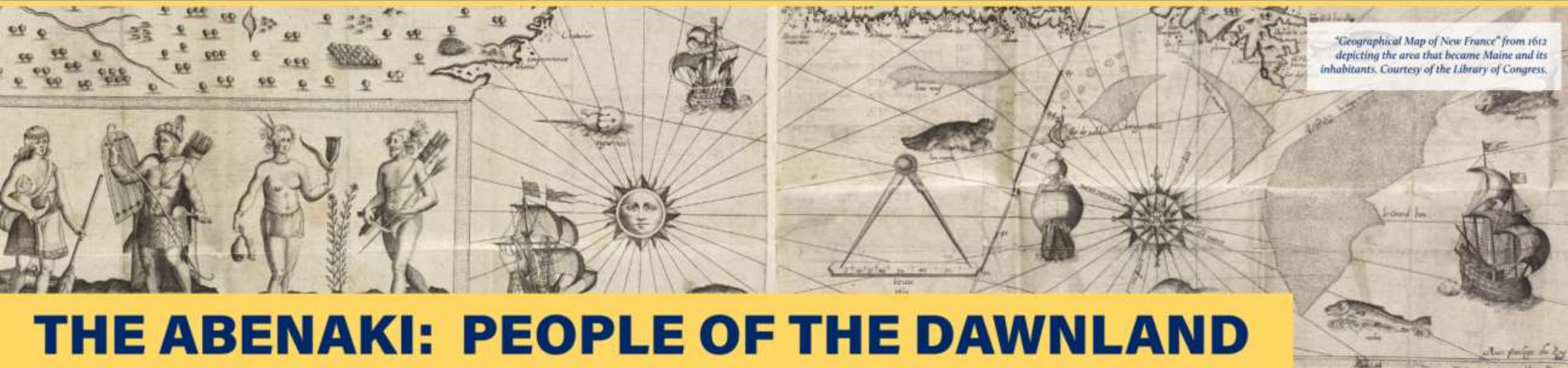
INCREASING COSTS



In 1932 the trolley line was reconstructed in the north end of downtown Brunswick as part of the approach to the new Frank J. Wood Bridge. Courtesy of MaineDOT.

The trolley line ceased operations in 1937 after years of declining profit. The rising popularity of the automobile decreased fares and also led to more road and bridge projects that required the trolley company to pay for track relocation and portions of bridges carrying the line (see photo left).

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"Geographical Map of New France" from 1612 depicting the area that became Maine and its inhabitants. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

THE ABENAKI: PEOPLE OF THE DAWNLAND

The Abenaki belong to the North American Aboriginal group called the Wabanaki, which means "people of the dawnland."

LIFE IN THE PEJEPSCOT

Wabanaki tradition states that they have inhabited this land since the beginning of time. The Abenaki lived in what is now western Maine, including around the Androscoggin River. Pejepscot is a Wabanaki place name referring to the Androscoggin River basin and translates to "crooked like a diving snake" or "long, rocky rapids of the river."

The Abenaki were semi-nomadic and moved locations based on the seasons, and established villages and towns near land where they grew corn, squash, and beans. They travelled to hunt, fish, trade and meet with other Abenaki families or Wabanaki groups. The Abenaki crafted birch bark canoes to travel throughout the region's waterways. They used a network of trails to carry canoes and belongings overland from one body of water to another.



Birch bark is lightweight, resilient, and waterproof, making it an ideal material for canoes. This canoe dates from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Courtesy Pejepscot History Center.

COMMON POT

The Wabanaki have a close relationship with the land. It is considered "common pot," and does not belong to one person or group. Living things and select objects have a spirit or force, and share a common network. The arrival of Europeans, who saw land as property, disrupted this way of life, decimating Wabanaki populations through disease and war.

Many Abenaki moved north to Quebec, while others continue to inhabit their historic tribal lands in the U.S. In Maine, the Wabanaki are represented by four federally recognized tribes: Houlton Band of Maliseet, Mi'kmaq nation, Penobscot Nation and Passamaquoddy Tribe.



Eighteenth-century watercolor of an Abenaki couple. Courtesy of the City of Montreal Records Management & Archives.

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SEASONS OF THE RIVER

The Androscoggin's Ever Changing Wildlife Population

"A river doesn't just carry water, it carries life."

— A.D. POSEY, AMERICAN AUTHOR, FROM "WRITE IT DOWN"

As it flows between two cities, the Androscoggin River is oxygenated by both the dam and the natural rock outcroppings. The swirling water, surrounding trees, and expansive sky are an attraction to a variety of wild creatures—feathered, furred, and scaled.

When you look at the sky, the water – or ice – below, and the surrounding landscape, what creatures do you see? Who do imagine might be living, or passing by, in the river as it flows beneath you?



Transient Populations

Your wildlife sightings can vary greatly, from one day to the next—or season by season—as the many species that visit this bountiful location move about the environment.

If it is Spring, you might see a Great Blue Heron standing on the rocks, watching for a Shad to pass by within striking range. In winter the heron will likely have flown south to a warmer climate, and the birds you might see from this viewpoint are the gulls, crows, and perhaps a Bald Eagle—species that might live in Maine year round.



The Fishing Experts

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Jumping Sturgeon!

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