

A Small Town with a Limitless Boundary of History

Old Eliot, Maine

By:

Amanda Field

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University of Maine at Augusta

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And

Minoring in: Advocacy

This paper was not of my choosing nor the time period, regardless of this I do not have any regrets of having to do this paper. I learned so much in so little time. My home town was more than I ever thought and knew.

A small York County town that lays on the shoreline of the east bank of the Piscataqua River is known as Eliot, Maine. Eliot may in fact be small with a total area of 21.3 sq. mi., however my home town's history unquestionably extends far beyond the town borders. Over two centuries ago Eliot was not an independent town; it was known as the North Parish of Kittery. Kittery was formerly the Province of Maine under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Regarding the travels to meeting in Kittery and economic factors in 1810, the North Parish and Kittery divided into two separate towns, as the Massachusetts's government had given permission. In 1820 the Missouri Compromise enabled Maine to enter the Union as the 23rd State (Maine, n.d., South Berwick, n.d., Varney, 1886.)

In the mid 1800's Eliot was a small, tight-knit community, since the town's population was not above 2,000 (Varney, 1886.) The town was a farming community; the soil of the land was rich and soft, although some areas proved to be best for raising and caring for livestock. The land was adorned with trees- pines of an abundance of varieties, maples, birch and many more. Beautiful homes, farms, cottages, garrisons, ships, schools, and churches were built, many of which still stand tall and firm today. Eliot is a town that can be described as "home grown". The families that started and built the town, and even before it was a town, still live there generations and decades later. It is a town where everyone knew everyone, neighbors helped each other out, and as a whole the community worked together to complete the needs of the town (Cauchon, 2005, Dixon, n.d., Maine, n.d., "Town Pound,"2013, Vetter, 1998.)

The Town of Eliot's political setup was constructed through elections. Town officers were voted for and consisted of two selectman, treasurer, constable, auditor, arbitrator, superintendent of the schools and Almshouse, town repair planners, collector, and an S.S. Committee (was unable to acquire the meaning of this). Some residents were elected into more than one position.

Town expenditures consisted of, but were not limited to, the of payment of town officers, partial support for the poor, schools (Eliot had 8 districts), county tax, state tax, town supplies, printing, orders from outside sources, construction and repairs, supplementary tax, and contingency purposes ("Report of the," 1861.)

When the words slaves or slavery appears, many people are quick to judge and establish a connection to the Southern part of our country. But here in the North we cannot be excused our doubts as well. Prior to The Revolutionary War and the Civil War, records show that Eliot in fact also had slaves. When The Commonwealth of Massachusetts abolished slavery in 1783, as Kittery was still under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, all Providences in Maine were required to follow. Eliot organized in 1844 the Eliot Anti-Slavery Society which provided support, published anti-slavery information, and held meetings with speeches. Joshua Foster was not an Eliot resident, however his grandson Phillip Foster did reside in Eliot, and he was without a doubt was as pro-slavery extremist. He illustrated his views as an editor of the only pro-slavery newspaper in the area; States and Union ("The Foster,"2013)

Touching briefly on this, as I will expand upon it shortly, the Hanscoms family in 1783 established The Hanscoms Shipyard in Eliot. As written by Vetter on the Clipper Ship "Nightingale" which launched from Eliot on June 16, 1851, "as said to be representative of the heart and soul of Eliot" (pg.19.) The "Nightingale" was told to be a beautiful, record setting speed, luxurious clipper ship of all times, however a part of her past was not so luxurious (pg.19.)

In November of 1860 Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election. Maine was primarily a Republican state, and did add to President Lincoln's success, but how Eliot was involved in the political arena is unknown, as no sources of information was available to me. Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, 1861 in a private ceremony for safety reasons. On April 12, 1861 the Civil War began with the Battle of Fort Sumter. It was also around this this time that the Hanscoms Shipyard in Eliot clipper ship "*Nightingale*" was captured by the Union Navy for the transportation of slaves for trade. She was seized and turned into a warship and was put into service as part of a blockade to cut off shipments of supplies to the southern ports for the Confederate Army. ("The Foster", 2013, Vetter, 2010. pg.19.)

In August 1862 a recruiting officer, Captain Edmund Dixon of Eliot, pitched up a tent on Greenacre's Field to enlist anyone to join the army. The 27th Maine Volunteer Infantry was composed of mostly Southern York County, and was the infantry which Eliot served in. The 27th Maine began with 949 men, their service was not a long or exciting one, as they did not engage in any battles. Their main

duty appeared to be picket line duty in various areas around and near Washington, D.C. to protect our capitol. October 20, 1862 was the beginning of the 27th Maine duties, on the 28th of June 1863, with only two days left for duty under the orders of President Lincoln, his Sec. of War Stanton asked for men from the 25th and 27th Maine to stay behind for just a bit more time with the Battle of Gettysburg. Only 300 men from the 27th Maine stepped forward. On June 30th the men who did not volunteer returned home. The remaining 300 from the 27th Maine returned home on the 17th of July 1863. President Lincoln had informed those men who stayed behind that they would receive the Medal of Honor, however records show that the number of medals were over produced at 864 and all were distributed, and in 1917 Congress purged the medals even if they had been earned. The 27th Maine had no casualties from the war itself. One died from an accidental discharge, and another nineteen died from diseases and weather conditions. Eight men of office status resigned, another fifty-four were discharge or had deserted.

Attempting to find to just how many men were enlisted from Eliot was an exhausting search and I was unable to find an accurate number, but was able to find approximately twenty four (27th Maine, 2012, Dixon, n.d., Dow, 2005., Foner, 2013, Vetter,1998, pg.59.)

Method of Research

Historical research is a challenging task in any way, on any topic. Eliot is my home town, but as it is an average of two to three hours of driving time from where I am now, I was unable to make the trip for on-site research. I spent many hours scouring the internet for resources, asked my college Liberians for assistance, used the Maine state Library, emailed my home towns' historical society, and continuously was road blocked in so many frustrating ways. I can only wonder how professional historians and hobbyists really cope with all the dead or blocked roads. There were many sources of information I would have loved to have read and knew without reading them I would be lacking an investment of knowledge and information, however they are all dispersed throughout the state and can only accessed in the library to view. As many are full family collections, rare, irreplaceable, the originals, and historically to the State of Maine a vast part of our heritage as a whole. This paper as an historical paper is one that can never be done properly and efficiently in the duration of a seven week course. There is no way enough time can be devoted to finding and sifting through the available material. Most things that I found in my research on my home town were interesting, but time consuming. It is so interesting to read about the history of an old farm house that is only a mile from where you grew up, however when it is not in the right time frame for this term paper it takes way time. Having only seven weeks to complete the term paper,

as well as several chapters to read each week, a quiz every Tuesday, a midterm essay inflicted a struggle to find adequate sources that would have been most appropriate for my paper, to provide exceptional high quality, and relevant information. In no way do I regret this assignment in fact it has been very intriguing to learn so much; that I did not my town beyond my childhood years. As I still have all the sources I have printed off, I can still on my own time, read more in-depth and continue to research what I am able to.

Discussion

I usually prefer to be able to pick my topics to research in my courses, often times I find it to be easier with more effective result. My 7th grade school year at Marshwood Jr. High School, now has a different name, is located where once the building's name boar Marshwood High School. It was where my mom, older sister and I all graduate from. My younger sister graduated from the newly built Marshwood High School. American History became my favorite subject in 7th grade. My school days as kid weren't the most exciting, as I was not the most efficient student, however, the year with Mr. Petri, and the year that followed with Mr. Zamarchi (please excuse any misspelling) truly sparked my interest in the historical aspects of our country. I could often be found with a book that had some historical significance to it, a historical fiction, or a true historical story, and I loved conversations that involved American History. My term paper has been interesting, as well as frustrating due to the many sources being spread

throughout Maine; thus being unavailable to me. I have learned so much in such a small amount of time, which I am definitely going to use some of my spare time to continue reading through and investigating my home town. I never knew had so much behind the forest of my childhood home or Sturgeon Creek around the corner of the road from my home where the first settler landed around 1636. There were many times I played in the creek with friends and got into trouble for it as it was and is not safe. Does any of this change how I feel and think of Eliot?

Not at all, my features of the past as I grew up were, and still are that almost everyone knew everyone else. My brother's 1st grade teacher was my 1st grade teacher, as well as my younger sister's 1st grade teacher. My mom babysat a few of my teachers when she was a kid, and she went to school with several of my teachers, or she knew his or her siblings. The family that lived two houses down to the left of our house was where my mom's house was as a child (since demolished) and my grandfather built a new house. He and my grandmother moved to Arizona and the family that moved in had children, one was in my high school class the other a grade or two above me. My family's home sits in a field where strawberries once grew and my mom and her best friend would pick them. No, my thoughts and feelings have not changed; it has actually added to them. It makes me proud to be from Eliot, Maine. I have learned about the many important areas of the town, what has been done through the years to keep them intact or in shape, and how most have been

memorialized or are in that process. Regarding why Eliot does not have its own specific Civil War monument is that Kittery has one established for the 27th Maine Volunteer Infantry, however my town has marked those who have served in the war as we know and have been able to find with special markers. We have not in any way forgotten them and still are in search for any other who's may be missing from the list, and so forth.

As stated by Darryl Cauchon, "Perhaps not much ever happened in Eliot Maine, but you'll sure like it there," (2005.) Perhaps, Mr. Cauchon needs look beyond our quiet, beautiful residential town basic library sources and truly see the beauty beneath the surface of this town. Eliot has been kept small as the community does not want to add twenty different stores that are not needed, when Portsmouth, New Hampshire is a ten minute drive with every store that one would need. In all honesty the reason Eliot has remain a small quiet town, is without doubt from the generations that continue to reside there, the families that are growing new generations, to the keep the natural purity to The Town of Eliot, Maine.

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