**LINCOLN COUNTY**

Lincoln County, contains 456 square miles with 451 miles of coastline, six rivers and a 2010 census population of 34,457. The original Lincoln County's western boundary began at the eastern edge of Casco Bay (Small Point) followed the Casco Bay shore to the New Meadows River across the carrying place to Merrymeeting Bay and then 30 miles up the Androscoggin River where the boundary ran North 2W to the Canadian border. The easterly boundary was Nova Scotia extending from the sea to the northerly reaches of the territory of Maine. In 1760 Lincoln County covered three-fifths of the territory of Maine; the remaining portion of the State was in the counties of York and Cumberland. Out of the 1760 Lincoln County land area were formed the additional 13 counties that comprise the State today; although their configuration has changed over the years preceding statehood in 1820.

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**The Lincoln County** **Flag**

The famous painting "[The Battle of Bunker Hill](http://www.americanrevolution.org/bunklg.html)" by John Trumbull holds a special significance to the residents of Lincoln County.  Extensive research  has concluded that the Lincoln County flag dominates the painting's upper half.  The field of the flag is red, the canton (the upper left corner by the staff) is white and a green pine tree stands proudly on the canton.  The flag flown at Bunker Hill was in fact only one of the many versions of the New England Flag which was already almost a century old at the time.  The pine tree, used for the masts of ships, was a symbol of the hardy New England frontiersmen and it is not surprising that it was chosen as a symbol.  The red field was common to many British and colonial flags of the period.

The original painting is owned by Yale University while a version with life size figures is seen by millions in the United States Capitol Rotunda.  Seventy brave men who fought in the Regiment of Maine at the Battle of Bunker Hill would recognize that flag at once.  They proudly fought under it on a Saturday afternoon, June 17, 1775.

**It All Started Over** **250 Years Ago**

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The year 1760 witnessed France being fully and finally driven from Canada.  A real sense of peace and hope soon settled upon mid-coast Maine.  In Boston, the Kennebec Proprietors, a group of well connected businessmen with extensive land interests on the Kennebec River, succeeded in having the separate settlements of Frankfort (now Dresden and Swan island), Wiscasset Point and Sheepscot west of the River (now Alna) incorporated into a new town to be known as Pownalborough.  This name was chosen to honor Governor Thomas Pownall who signed this Act into law on February 13th, 1760.

A few months later, on June 19th, 1760 in Boston, the House of Representatives and the Governor’s Council of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay passed and engrossed Chapter 7 of the Acts of 1760/1761: *An Act For Erecting And Establishing Two New Counties In The Easterly Part Of The County of York.* Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson signed the *Act* the following day [Governor Pownall had been dismissed from Massachusetts and reassigned to the Governorship of South Carolina on June 3rd or being too much a friend of the Colonies. He always remained so. Lincoln County was named in honor of Pownall’s place of birth in England.]  This *Act* was to take effect on November 1st and name the new Town of Pownalborough as County seat.

All lands east if the New Meadows River (dividing Brunswick and West Bath), Merrymeeting Bay and the Androscoggin River, extending north and east to Canada (90% of what is now called Maine) became Lincoln County.  We remained together all through the tumultuous times of the American Revolution until 1790 when Washington and Hancock Counties split off.  Kennebec County (with the lands to the north) split off in 1799 followed by Waldo in 1827, Adroscoggin and Sagadahoc in 1854 and finally Knox in 1860.

The *Act* creating both Cumberland and Lincoln County was meant to encourage settlement.  By brining meaningful civil government to a more local level, citizens had better access to a legal system of Courts, Registries of Deeds and the enforcement of law.  These institutions helped to create order and arbitrate community standards as the old military frontier quickly became civilized.

Shrewdly, in 1760 the Kennebec Proprietors offered to build a Court House for the new County on their lands at Fort Shirley on the Kennebec River, and at no expense to the government.  The palisade was torn down, the soldier’s barracks were converted into a house for the gaoler, a corner blockhouse was converted into a gaol and the largest building north of Portsmouth, New Hampshire arose on the parade ground.  This Pownalborough Court House opened with a Grand Procession and Entrance of the Courts on September 9th, 1761.

His Majesty’s Court of General Session of the Peace and Inferior Court of Common Pleas sat at Pownalborough in June and September.  After the reorganization of the courts in 1782, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court also sat at Pownalborough from 1786 on.  The Court Room measures 45 ft. x 20 ft.

This building served witness to some of the most important government decisions and actions in Maine as we progressed from the wilderness of the French and Indian War period, through the turmoil of the American Revolution and into the period of rapid settlement that eventually led to Maine Statehood.  The Pownalborough Court House is currently kept open to the public as a seasonal house museum by the Lincoln County Historical Association.

County services operated out of this Pownalborough Court House until 1794, when the physical seat of county government was transferred to the eastern parish (Wiscasset Point) of Pownalborough At that time the western parish of Dresden and Swan Island, and the northern parish of Alna  (then known as New Milford) separated and became towns unto themselves.  Coincidentally, Dresden and New Milford were incorporated on June 25th, exactly 34 years after the first Townmeeting of Pownalborough.  On June 10th, 1802, the now geographically smaller town of Pownalborough changed its name to Wiscasset.

**In Wiscasset**

Upon relocation to Wiscasset, the Courts briefly met in the Meetinghouse until a new wooden Court House could be erected about 20 rods down the Common from today’s 1824 Lincoln County Courthouse. Wiscasset Hall was of two stories with sixteen each 12 over 12 windows on the first floor, 2 doors, a cupola and a balcony on the SE front.  The Court Room was 39 ft. long.  Unfortunately there was no room for County Offices or for storage of Records which then numbered 40 volumes of Deeds, 8 volumes of Probate Records and 15 volumes of Court records.  When the brick building (now home to the Wiscasset Public Library) first opened as the Lincoln and Kennebec Bank in 1805, the County Records were stored underground there in the “jug” vault.

Wiscasset Hall served the courts until 1824.  At that time it was moved to the north side of Maine Street between today’s Sunken Garden and the Blythe House.  Renamed Lincoln Hall, it continued to serve as a public building until lost to fire November 28th, 1846.  The first jail to be built in Wiscasset was located behind today’s Wiscasset Town Office at the NE corner of Washington and Churchill Streets.  Jail time replaced the pillory, the stocks and the whipping post.

This new jail was wooden and not very secure.  1794 to 1811 was a period that saw lots of mob actions concerning ownership of land.  Often people being held for harassing land surveyors were broken out of this jail by large groups of their friends.  It wasn’t long before the public and County agreed to build something a bit stronger.

The new granite Jail opened on Federal Street in 1811.  It would serve as the County Jail until 1913, and continued to hold prisoners on Court day through 1953.  The 1811 Old Jail and attached 1839 Jailer’s House are currently operated as a seasonal museum open to the public by the Lincoln County Historical Association.  County prisoners later were held in a series of cells in the basement of the 1824 Lincoln County Courthouse until about 1985 when a new Jail opened as part of the current Sheriff’s Office.  Now prisoners are held at Two Bridges Regional Jail.

 

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**1824 - The** **Lincoln County Courthouse**

The Lincoln County Courthouse was built in 1824. Of Georgian architecture, it is the oldest courthouse in Maine in which court is still held. It is patterned after many old English buildings and the courtrooms remain almost identical to the way they were in the beginning. The actual cost of the building is said to have been $10,843.09. The building was enlarged in 1950 and 1972 but the additions were done in a manner that retains the architecture and character of the original building. Still remaining in the courtroom are the circular niches in which the stoves stood and a marvelous old curved bench. In the traverse jury room there are antique chairs and a table. The stairway is granite with an iron stair rail, and scales used in 1856 to test weights and measures are displayed in a hallway.

The latest addition to the Courthouse grounds is the 1998 Communication Center dedicated to emergency and public service communications in Lincoln County.