

MADISON

Historic and Archeological Resources

HISTORIC AND ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Historical and archaeological resources contribute to a community's character and individuality. An inventory of historical and archeological buildings, sites and areas is necessary to understanding the community environment and preserving the best of the past. A brief history of Madison provides some context with which to view the current historical and archaeological resources.



Madison's history is deeply connected to its landscape, from the Kennebec River that shaped transportation and commerce to the hills, farms, and rural roads that influenced patterns of settlement. As one of Maine's early interior communities, the town reflects centuries of change, growth, and adaptation that have left a lasting mark on its character.

Located in Somerset County, Madison is bordered by the Kennebec River to the west, Solon to the north, Cornville to the east, and Norridgewock and Skowhegan to the south. Its downtown village developed between the river and present-day Route 201, a strategic location that facilitated the movement of people, goods, and industry. This setting helped establish Madison as an important regional center and contributed to the preservation of significant historic and archaeological resources that continue to illuminate the area's past.

What distinguishes Madison is the remarkable continuity of its story. The town's history spans thousands of years, beginning with Wabanaki use of the region's waterways and resources, followed by European and French-Canadian settlement, the emergence of a thriving nineteenth-century mill community, and its evolution into the residential, agricultural, and business community of today. Together, these layers of history have shaped the unique identity of Madison and its place within Maine's heritage.

This chapter explores Madison’s historic and archaeological resources, identifies current protections and areas of vulnerability, and highlights opportunities for preservation and community engagement. It aims to guide future growth and land use decisions in a way that respects and sustains Madison’s unique heritage for generations to come.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AND TIMELINE

Madison's history reflects the broader story of Maine's settlement and economic growth. From the longstanding presence of Native American peoples to the arrival of European and French-Canadian settlers, the area developed through its abundant natural resources and strategic waterways. Early economic activity was closely tied to both

domestic and local markets, with the first significant businesses established along the Kennebec River corridor. As the community expanded, development spread inland toward Lake Wesserunsett, also known as Hayden Lake, creating the foundation for the town's continued growth and prosperity.

Early Settlement- 18th Century: Long before European settlement, the area now known as Madison was home to the Norridgewock Abenaki, a principal community of the Abenaki Nation and part of the Wabanaki Confederacy, a historic alliance of Indigenous peoples in the Northeast. The Norridgewock lived along the banks of the Kennebec River, where they farmed, fished, and maintained a thriving village that served as an important cultural and political center.



The arrival of Jesuit missionary Father Sébastien Rasle in 1694 strengthened the relationship between the Kennebec Abenaki and the French. At the Norridgewock Abenaki village, Rasle established the Narantsouak Mission, which became an important center of religious, cultural, and diplomatic activity within the village.

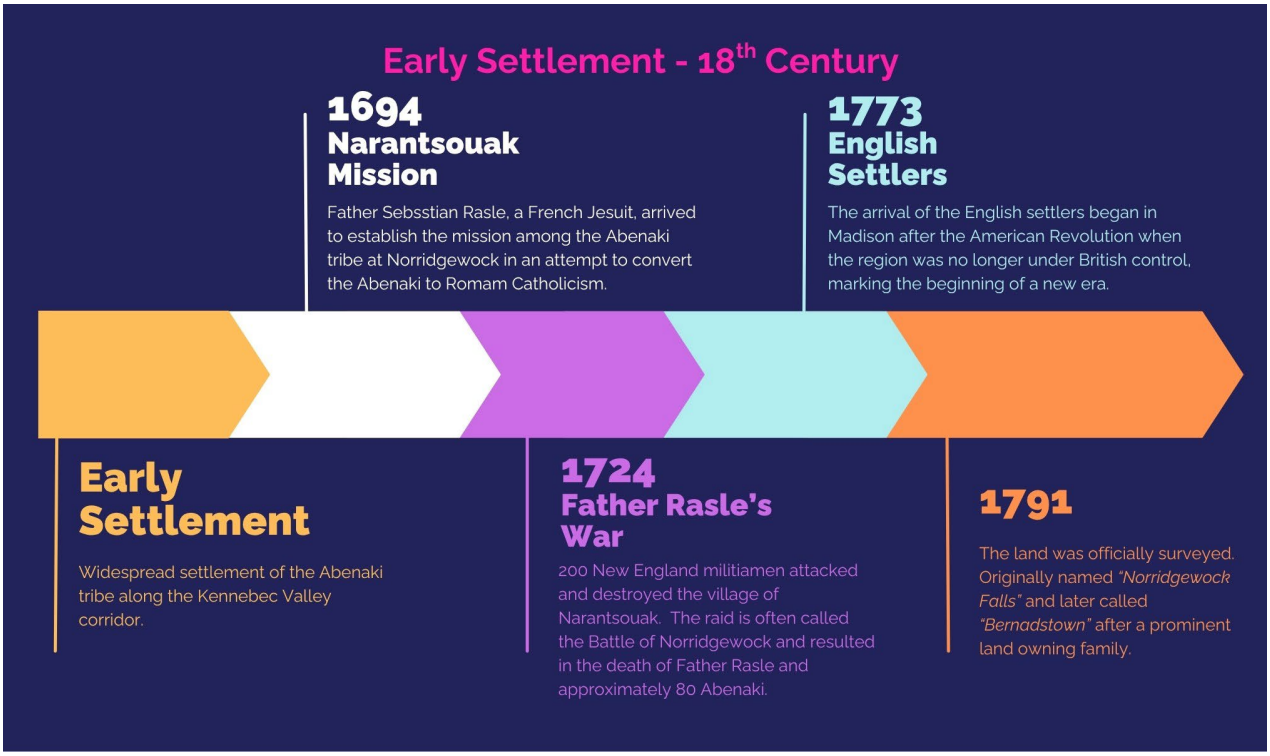
As tensions between the French, English, and Indigenous peoples escalated, the village became a focal point of regional conflict during Father Rasle' War (also known as the Battle of Norridgewock). In 1724, English forces attacked and destroyed the settlement at Old Point, killing Father Rasle and dispersing the Abenaki community.

Today, this historic Norridgewock Abenaki settlement area is preserved as the Norridgewock Archaeological District, a National Historic Landmark that includes *The Pines, Sébastien Rasle' Monument,* and other significant archeological sites associated with the former Abenaki village of the Nanrantsouak mission. Recognized as one of Maine's most important Indigenous heritage resources, the district contains extensive archaeological evidence that provides valuable insight into centuries of Abenaki settlement, culture, and interaction with European colonists, helping to preserve and interpret a critical chapter of the region's history.

The first permanent English settlement in the area that would become Madison was established around 1773. Following the decline of Native settlement at Old Point, new settlers arrived along the Kennebec River, drawn by its agricultural potential and water power. The area was surveyed in 1791 and was initially known as Norridgewock Falls,

later becoming Bernardstown before its incorporation as the Town of Madison on March 7, 1804. The town was named in honor of James Madison, who would later serve as the fourth President of the United States. Over the following decades, Madison grew as an agricultural and industrial community, shaped by its strategic location along the Kennebec River.

While English settlers established the foundations of modern Madison in the late eighteenth century, French Canadian and Acadian immigrants helped shape the town's cultural identity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following the Grand Dérangement (1755-1764), many Acadians resettled throughout Maine, while later waves of French Canadians arrived from Québec seeking farmland and work in the region's lumber, agricultural, and paper industries. Madison's location along the Kennebec River made it a natural destination for these settlers, whose Catholic faith, French language, and cultural traditions became an enduring part of the community's heritage.



19th Century: On March 7, 1804, the legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts officially incorporated the area known as Barnard's Township #1 into a town by the name of Madison. Maine was still part of Massachusetts and would remain so until 1820, when it entered the Union as a separate state.

Settlement around Lake Wesserunsett, formerly known as Hayden Lake, began in the early 1800's when Jedediah Hayden made a small clearing on the shore, an event that marked the beginning of what would become the Lakewood area. Development accelerated in the 1820s with the establishment of gristmills and sawmills along the shores of the Kennebec River and Lake Wesserunsett. After purchasing 350 acres on the lake's eastern shore in 1804, Elisha Lincoln established the area's first sawmill and gristmill at the lake's outlet, providing essential services for the growing community. Over time, East Madison emerged as the region's principal village and commercial center, supporting a thriving local economy that included grocery stores, a blacksmith shop, schoolhouses, a woolen mill, fulling and cloth-dressing mills, tanneries, chair manufacturing, and a shingle mill. These enterprises made East Madison an important center of commerce, industry, and community life during the town's early years.



In 1828-1829 Nathan Houghton constructed the first toll bridge across the Kennebec River, connecting Madison and Anson and creating an important transportation link that strengthened trade between the two communities. Houghton also established gristmills along the river, contributing to Madison's early economic growth. As the town developed through the 19th century, businesses and industries included show manufacturers, dry goods and grocery dealers, and window manufacturers. The first dam across the Kennebec River was built during this period to harness waterpower for lumber production and manufacturing. The Lakewood area in this timeframe continued to emerge as an important destination, with the development of a trolley line connecting Skowhegan and Lakewood helping to attract visitors from all over New England. The Lakewood Theater which was built 1882 remains America's oldest summer theater.

Founded in 1881 along the Kennebec River, the Madison Woolen Mill became one of Maine's leading textile manufacturing and a contributor to the Town's economy. The mill produced woolen fabrics, employed as many as 1,500 workers at its peak, and supplied cloth for U.S. Navy uniforms during World War II. After decades as the cornerstone of Madison's industrial growth, the mill declined with the changing textile industry and eventually closed, leaving a lasting legacy in the community.

With Madison's industries continuing to expand in 1888, a company organized to manufacture wood pulp acquired the rights to generate power from the dam, laying the foundation for the Town's emergence as a major papermaking center. That same year, the State of Maine formally recognized the Madison Village Corporation, which maintained its own fire and police departments as well as electric works department. By

the turn of the twentieth century, the wood pulp enterprise had become part of the Great Northern Paper Company. In 1947, the Maine legislature dissolved the Madison Village Corporation, and its fire, police, and electric utility functions were transferred to the Town of Madison.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Archaeological resources provide tangible evidence of past human activity and cultural development through artifacts, features, sites, and other material remains. These resources help document the history of human settlement and land use which contributes to a community's understanding of its cultural heritage. According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), archaeological resources are generally categorized as either *prehistoric* or *historic,* both of which are considered during comprehensive planning. Together these resources offer important insights into the people, events, and traditions that have shaped the Town of Madison over time.

- ***Prehistoric Archaeological Resources*** – These refer to Native American sites that predate European contact, generally prior to the 1600s. In Madison, these include sites along the Kennebec River associated with the Wabanaki people, who have lived in the region for over 13,000 years. Such sites are typically located near waterways and often contain artifacts, remnants of seasonal camps, or evidence of fishing, agriculture, and ceremonial use.

- ***Historic Archaeological Resources*** – These are sites that date from the early European settlement period and are associated with Madison's colonial and post-colonial history. Examples in Madison include early farmsteads, mills, blacksmith shops, cemeteries, and remnants of early transportation infrastructure such as the old portage trails. These sites provide insights into the town's 18th and 19th century agricultural and industrial heritage.

Archaeological resources—both prehistoric and historic—are typically found below ground and are often identified by remnants of past human activity, including foundations, tools, ceramics, food remains, petroglyphs, or modified terrain. In Madison, these resources are concentrated along the Kennebec River and its tributaries, where both Wabanaki and European settlers lived, traveled, and worked.

Prehistoric Archeological Sites:

The Town of Madison is home to eight documented prehistoric archaeological sites identified by the MHPC. Three of these sites are located along the shore of Wesserunsett Lake, while five are situated along the banks of the Kennebec River. Among the most significant are the archaeological resources associated with the Norridgewock Archaeological District. Designated a National Historic Landmark, this district contains important prehistoric and historic archaeological resources, including evidence of centuries of Indigenous occupation and the remains of the Norridgewock village and the seventeenth century Jesuit mission established by Father Sébastien Rasle.



Abenaki Artifacts – Image Source: Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Professional archaeological survey for prehistoric sites in Madison have been conducted in several areas, including along the banks of the Kennebec River upstream (north) of the Madison dam; approximately 1/4 mile downstream of the dam; the Pines and the Nanrantsouak Mission site of Father Rasle (also known as the Norridgewock Archaeological District) along the river at the town's southern boundary; an industrial development site along Pooler Brook, and a portion of the proposed Skowhegan bypass that extends into the southeastern corner of Madison.

According to the MHPC, considerable portions of Madison east of the Kennebec River are characterized by glacial outwash soils that may have been attractive locations for Native American settlement and activity. The MHPC also notes that additional archaeological survey work is needed on the higher terraces and floodplains beyond the immediate banks of the Madison Dam impoundment, as well as along the shoreline of Wesserunsett Lake and its outlet stream. A small area of windblown sand southeast of Martin Corner has also been identified as having protentional for Paleoindian archaeological resources and warrants professional investigation.

Given the likelihood that additional prehistoric sites remain undiscovered, further archaeological surveys and careful monitoring should be encouraged in areas proposed for development, particularly near water resources and known Indigenous travel corridors.

Madison's prehistoric archaeological resources face a number of ongoing and potential threats including:

- Natural shoreline erosion caused by flooding and fluctuating river levels,
- Development pressure along the Kennebec River corridor,
- Recreational disturbance or unauthorized artifact collection.

Protecting and preserving these resources is essential to honoring Madison's deep Indigenous heritage and ensuring that future generations can better understand the long history of human occupation and cultural development within the Kennebec River Valley.

Historic Archeological Sites:

Historic archeological sites in Maine include English and French trading posts, military forts, early homesteads dating to the 17th and 18th centuries, and 19th century logging camps. These sites often contain physical evidence of past human activity, such as building foundations, wells, refuse deposits, transportation features, industrial remains, and artifacts that provide insight into Maine's settlement, economic development, and cultural history. Since waterways served as essential transportation routes and sources of power throughout much of Maine's history, many historic archaeological sites are found along rivers, streams, and lakeshores where people lived, worked, traded, and traveled.

As of March 2025, one historic archaeological site in Madison has been publicly documented, the Narantsouak Mission (Old Point), detailed below. While the site itself is not separately listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is located within the Norridgewock Archaeological District, a designated National Historic Landmark.

Site Name	Site #	Site Type	Periods of Significance	National Register Status
Narantsouak Mission *(Old Point)*	ME 260-001	mission	1690s - 1724	Listed *(Part of the Norridgewock Archaeological District)*

Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

Archaeological investigations have been conducted at the Narantsouak Mission site and within the broader Norridgewock Archaeological District, however no comprehensive town-wide survey for historic archaeological resources has been conducted in Madison. Future survey efforts should focus on identifying potentially significant resources associated with the town's agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the earliest Euro-American settlement and development of the community in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Given the limited extent of previous investigations, there is considerable potential for the discovery of additional historic archaeological sites throughout Madison. Areas warranting further study include former village centers, mill sites, early farmsteads and homesteads, historic transportation corridors, and other locations associated with the town's agricultural and industrial development.

Historic archaeological resources in Madison face several potential threats, including:

- Ground disturbance from road construction, new construction, utility installation, and other development activities.

- A lack of awareness of archaeological site locations during land use changes and project planning
- Natural deterioration resulting from erosion, weathering, flooding, or the absence of documentation and preservation efforts.

To help protect these irreplaceable resources, future development planning should incorporate archaeological review in areas with known or suspected historic sensitivity, particularly where ground disturbance is anticipated. Identifying, documenting, and preserving historic archaeological sites will strengthen Madison's ability to interpret its past and safeguard the cultural heritage that has shaped the community.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS / STRUCTURES / SITES and OBJECTS:

Historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts are important components of a community's cultural heritage and provide a tangible connection to the past. As recognized by the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), these resources may include individual buildings such as homes, churches, civic buildings, and barns; structures such as bridges and tunnels; monuments and other objects; archaeologic and historic sites; and larger historic districts characterized by a concentration of significant resources.

Historic Buildings, Structures, and Objects – These are above-ground resources that reflect Madison's built environment and architectural history. They include churches, homes, civic buildings, and barns, many of which date to the 19th century and contribute to the community's historic character. Some of these structures are individually significant, while others contribute to broader historic landscapes or village settings.

In Madison, these above-ground resources reflect the evolution of the community's-built environment and architectural traditions, with many dating to the 19th century and contributing to the Town's distinctive historic character. While some properties are significant on their own, others derive their importance from their role within historic landscapes, neighborhoods, or village settings. Eligibility for or listing on the NRHP is the recognized standard for identifying resources worthy of preservation due to historic, cultural, architectural, or archeological significance at the local, state, or national level.

Listing on the NRHP provides recognition of a property's historic, cultural, architectural, or archeological significance and can make certain properties eligible for preservation incentives. Income-producing historic buildings that are rehabilitated according to federal preservation standards may qualify for a 20 percent federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. To be eligible, a property must be a certified historic structure and meet the National Register Criteria for Evaluation est by the National Park Service. These criteria are consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation*, which serve as the national benchmark for pre activities. The National Park Service also uses related criteria to identify exceptionally

significant properties as National Historic Landmarks and to evaluate historic and prehistoric resources within the National Park system.

In addition to financial incentives, the NRHP listing provides a limited level of protection for historic resources by requiring the consideration of potential impacts when federal funding, permits, or licenses are involved. While listing does not prevent private owners from altering or demolishing property, it helps ensure that federally assisted projects take historic preservation concerns into account during project planning and review.

The following five Madison locations have been listed on the NRHP:

- **Lakewood Theater**, located on the shores of Lake Wesserunsett, is America's oldest summer theater and one of Maine's most significant cultural landmarks. Originally built in 1882 as a spiritualist camp, it was transformed into a summer theater in 1901 by Herbert L. Swett. During the 20th century, it became a nationally known summer stock and Broadway theater, attracting notable performers such as Betty White, Groucho Marx, and John Travolta. Designated the State Theater of Maine in 1967 and listed on the NRHP in 1975, Lakewood Theater continues to preserve its rich theatrical heritage while serving as a vibrant performing arts venue.



- **Norridgewock Archeological District,** located along the Kennebec River in Madison, preserves the site of the Nanrantsouak, one of the most significant historic Abenaki villages in Maine. Occupied for centuries, the village served as an important center of Indigenous life and later became the focal point in the 1724 Battle of Norridgewock (also known as Father Rasle' War). Recognized for its exceptional archaeological and historical significance, the district was designated a National Historic Landmark and listed on the NRHP in 1993, ensuring the preservation of this important record of Maine's Indigenous heritage.



- **Old Point and Sébastien Rasle Monument,** located at the rear of St. Sebestian Cemetery in Madison, commemorates the historic Norridgewock Abenaki village and the events of the 1724 Battle of Norridgewock (also known as Father Rasle' War), resulting in the deaths of Father Sébastien Rasle and many Abenaki villagers. Erected in 1833 on the site of the former mission established by Rasle, the granite monument honors the Jesuit missionary's work among the Abenaki and serves as a reminder of the regions Indigenous, military, and religious history. The

site is a contributing feature of the Norridgewock Archeological District and was individually listed on the NRHP in 1973.

- **The Weston Homestead,** located along the Kennebec River at the end of Weston Avenue in Madison, is one of Maine's finest examples of early nineteenth century Federal-style architecture. Built in 1817 by Benjamin Weston, a member of one of Madison's founding families. Listed on the NRHP in 1977, the homestead retains many original features and reflects Madison's early agricultural and community history. In the 2010's, portions of the property were conserved through a combination of private ownership, continued agricultural use, and the acquisition of surrounding lands by Somerset Woods Trustees, creating the Weston Woods and Waters Trail and preserving the area for recreation and conservation.



- **Madison Public Library,** located at the corner of Old Point Avenue and Pleasant Street, the library is one of Madison's most distinctive historic landmarks and an important example of a Carnegie library. Designed by local architectural firm Snow & Humphreys and constructed by Henry and William Johnson, the unique octagonal Classical Revival building was completed in 1906 and dedicated in 1907. The library has served as a center of education and community life for more than a century. Listed on the NRHP in 1989, it remains one of Madison's most recognizable landmarks.



The MHPC recommends conducting a comprehensive survey of Madison's above-ground historic resources to identify additional properties that may be eligible for listing on the NRHP. In addition to these potentially eligible resources, Madison contains a number of historically significant properties that do not meet National Register criteria but still contribute to the town's cultural heritage and community character. Many of these sites are identified on the Historic and Archaeological Resources Map, with notable concentration located in the southwest portion of the community.

Local Historic Sites and Places:

Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) maintains extensive information on historic resources throughout the State, including historic buildings, structures, sites, districts, and objects. Additional research and documentation may identify other historic resources within Madison and determine whether some properties are eligible for listing on the NRHP.



The Town of Madison conducted historic resource surveys in 1985 and 1989, documenting many of the community's significant historic properties. Several downtown buildings exemplify late 19th and early 20th century architecture, including the Blackwell Building (1902), the Odd Fellows Block (1899), and the Congregational Church (1893). Another notable historic property, the Christopher Wholesale building (1921) was acquired by an adjacent landowner and demolished in 2016. Public input gathered during the planning process suggested a need for an updated community-wide historic resource survey, greater collaboration among local historical organizations, and the development of an informational map highlighting Madison's historic and cultural assets.

Several of Madison's original school buildings have been altered, replaced, or lost over time. The original Main Street school built in 1895 and subsequently destroyed by fire in 1928. A new school building was constructed on the site in 1929 and continued to serve the community's educational needs for more than eight decades. The building was demolished in 2013, and the site is now occupied by the Main Street Playground.

The original Madison High School, located on Folsom Street, was constructed between 1920 and 1921 and served as a central educational and community landmark for more than six decades. The campus also included an athletic field that was improved during the 1930s through New Deal-era projects, reflecting the school's importance as both an educational and recreational hub. The building was destroyed by fire in 1986, and a new High School was constructed approximately two miles from downtown on Main Street, opening in 1988. Following the fire, the former high school site, including the rustic Rushworth Gymnasium, was redeveloped into the current junior high school facility, which was completed in 1989 and continues to serve the community today.



In the mid 1920's, Madison expanded its educational facilities with the construction of two elementary schools. The Weston Avenue School was built in 1925, followed by the Old Point School in 1926. Both schools served generations of Madison students and played a significant role in the community's educational history. An addition was constructed at the Old Point School in 1960, allowing the facility to continue serving students until 2013 when the district consolidated and reorganized which led to its closure. The building continues to serve the community today as a municipal facility housing the Madison Historical and Genealogical Society, a local cable access television station (CATV-11), and meeting place for local boards and committees.

The Weston Avenue School served as an elementary school until the New Learners Lane School was built in 1999. The building then housed the school district's administrative offices until 2013. After standing vacant, it was demolished in 2014. Although the property had previously been identified in the Cultural & Architectual Resource Management Archive (CARMA) as eligible for listing on the National Register, the building no longer exists and should be removed from the inventory.

Beyond Madison Village, the historic survey identified several significant historic buildings in East Madison including the former East Madison Baptist Church, which has since been converted to residential use, the East Madison Grange, and the nationally recognized Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Located along East Madison Road and Lake Wesserunsett, these properties reflect the area's rich religious, agricultural, educational, and cultural heritage and contribute to East Madison's distinctive historic character.

A comprehensive survey of Madison's historic above-ground resources should be conducted in order to identify other properties that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Those that have been deemed eligible are listed below:

Property Name	Year Built	Location	Use
Madison Post Office	1960	24 Weston Avenue	U.S. Post Office
Madison Congregational Church	1892	Route 201A at Main Street and Old Point Avenue, northwest corner	Former Congregational church; most recently used as an event venue. At time of writing was for sale.
Madison Paper Mill	1890	Main Street	Formerly a paper mill; now operates as a wood fiber insulation production
Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture	19th and 20th centuries	40 Art School Road	Formerly Red Farm, Rowell Farm, and Cummings Farm. The art school was established in 1946 and is in continuous operation.
Lakewood Theater's associated structures	1899	Route 201 and Beach Rd or Theater Road	The surrounding buildings that made up the resort area of Lakewood with club house, inn, clay tennis courts, restaurant, cabins, etc. Still mostly in use and preserved. Could potentially seek historic district designation.

Source: Town of Madison

CEMETERIES

Cemeteries are invaluable links to our shared heritage, providing tangible connections to the people, events, and traditions that shaped our communities. In Maine, municipalities are legally responsible for the preservation and maintenance of ancient burying grounds and veterans' graves under state law (Title 13, §§1101 and 1101-A). These responsibilities include protecting cemeteries from neglect, vandalism, and encroachment; maintaining gravestones and markers, particularly those of veterans; and ensuring reasonable access for descendants, researchers, and historians. In some cases, municipalities may also provide funding for cemetery upkeep. Through these efforts, communities preserve important historical and cultural resources while honoring the individuals laid to rest within these sacred spaces.

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

NAME	LOCATION	PRIVATE / MUNICIPAL OWNED
E. Walters (Barrons Corner) Cemetery	West side of River Road	Municipal
Kincaid (Blackwell) Cemetery	Kincaid Road	Municipal
Gould Family Cemetery	Conjockty Road	Private
Danforth Cemetery	West side of River Road	Private
East Madison Dam Cemetery	East Madison Road	Municipal
E. Thompson Cemetery	River Road	Municipal
Forest Hill Cemetery	East Houghton Street and Park Street (43)	Municipal
Leakos (Hayden) Cemetery	East Madison Road	Municipal
Jewett Cemetery	Horsetail Hill Road	Municipal
Madison Bridge Burying Ground	Old Point Avenue	Municipal
Saint Sebestian Cemetery	Father Rasle Road	Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland
R. Holden Cemetery	River Road	Municipal
Stoutamyer Cemetery	Russell Road	Municipal

Source: Town of Madison

The Town of Madison oversees the operation and maintenance of cemeteries within its jurisdiction. Forest Hill Cemetery is currently the only municipally owned cemetery with active burial operations; however, the cemetery has a limited number of burial plots remaining. As available space continues to diminish, the Town will need to address future cemetery capacity needs and consider options for accommodating future burials. The remaining cemeteries listed in the table above consist of a combination of municipally and privately owned cemeteries. Although active burials no longer occur at these locations, they continue to be maintained by the Town. Madison also contains several private family cemeteries situated on private property.

THREATS TO LOCAL HISTORIC / ARCHAEOLOGICAL / CULTURAL RESOURCES

Despite Madison's rich historical character, the community faces ongoing challenges in preserving its architectural and cultural heritage. Over the past several decades, a number of historic structures, both privately and municipally owned, have been lost to demolition. Deferred maintenance, evolving community needs, and the high cost associated with rehabilitation can make older buildings difficult to preserve. Municipal properties have not been immune to these pressures. Two of Madison's former brick school buildings have been demolished, resulting in the loss of important landmarks that reflected the Town's educational and architectural history. Most recently, the Weston Avenue School, a prominent neighborhood landmark dating to the 1920's, was demolished in 2016. The site has since been redeveloped with affordable housing, meeting a significant community need, while illustrating the ongoing balance between historic preservation and redevelopment.



The demolition of these public buildings highlights a broader preservation challenge facing many communities. When maintenance is deferred over an extended period, older structures can quickly become costly liabilities. Roof failures, aging mechanical systems, code compliance requirements, and accessibility improvements often require significant investment to keep historic buildings functional and occupied. For private property owners, the expense of rehabilitating and maintaining historic structures can be prohibitive, particularly when grant funding, tax incentives, or other financial assistance programs are unavailable. While many residents value and wish to preserve their historic properties, limited financial resources and access to technical expertise can make these efforts difficult. Without adequate support, deterioration may continue until demolition becomes the most practical or economically feasible option.

At the same time, successful examples throughout Maine demonstrate that historic rehabilitation can effectively meet modern community needs. The adaptive reuse of former schools, mills, and civic buildings has created quality housing for seniors and families while preserving the architectural character and cultural identity of local communities. Madison's experience reflects both the opportunities and challenges associated with this approach. When funding, partnerships, and community support are available, historic preservation can serve as an effective tool for revitalization and economic development. Without proactive planning, investment, and preservation strategies, Madison risks losing additional historic resources to deterioration, demolition, and redevelopment pressures in the years ahead.

Madison has taken proactive steps to support the preservation of its historic building stock by offering grant opportunities to private property owners for rehabilitation and maintenance projects. Through locally administered façade improvement and building assistance programs, the Town has helped several downtown property owners restore storefronts, improve building exteriors, and retain architectural features that contribute to Madison's historic village character. Available to both commercial and residential property owners, these programs provide valuable financial assistance for maintaining and enhancing older buildings. By helping to offset repair costs and address maintenance needs before they become more significant issues, these grants support community revitalization efforts while preserving the character, appearance, and historical identity of Madison's neighborhoods and downtown areas.

MADISON HISTORICAL RESOURCES

At the state level, The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) established by the Maine Legislature in 1971, serves as the official historic preservation office. The commission works to identify, protect, and promote Maine's historic and archaeological resources through programs such as the National Register of Historic Places, preservation planning, archaeological and architectural surveys, project reviews, tax incentives, grants, and public education initiatives. Through these efforts, the MHPC helps preserve Maine's cultural heritage while supporting the rehabilitation and stewardship of historic properties throughout the state.

The Town of Madison is home to two historical organizations dedicated to preserving and promoting the community's heritage: the Madison Historical and Genealogical Society and the East Madison Historical Association. Together, these organizations represent the history of both village centers and play a vital role in documenting, preserving, and sharing Madison's past.

Organized in 1999, the Madison Historical and Genealogical Society currently has 78 members and meets on the third Saturday of every month. The Town supports the society by providing space at the Old Point Avenue School for displays, meetings, and the preservation of its existing collection. Valued at more than $1 million, the collection includes local artifacts and historical documents that are available for public viewing on Saturdays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.



The East Madison Historical Association (EMHA) plays a key role in preserving the history and heritage of East Madison. Operated by dedicated volunteers, the association collects, catalogs, and shares photographs, artifacts, family histories, and other materials that document the community's past. The current location of EMHA was donated to them in 2010 and neighbors the East Madison Fire Station.

Through their preservation efforts and educational programs these organizations help ensure that the stories, traditions, and historic resources of Madison remain accessible for future generations. By collecting and sharing historical materials while promoting awareness of the community's rich past, these organizations continue to strengthen the protection, appreciation, and preservation of Madison's cultural heritage.

PROTECTING SIGNIFCANT HISTORIC AND ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The Town of Madison actively coordinates with local and regional partners to preserve and interpret its historic and archaeological resources. The annual pilgrimage commemorating Father Sébastien Rasle at *The Pines* archaeological site reflects collaboration among local Catholic parishes and Indigenous communities and recognizes the significance of the Wabanaki peoples in the region's history. Madison also works with the Somerset Woods Trustees, which manages trails and conservation lands along the Kennebec River and within the *Historic Pines* area, helping to connect cultural resource preservation with natural resource stewardship.

Beyond these measures, Madison should continue to strengthen regional partnerships that support the preservation and interpretation of historic and archaeologic resources. Opportunities exist to collaborate with neighboring municipalities, regional organizations, and state agencies, including the MHPC, on resource mapping, interpretive programming, heritage tourism initiatives, and funding strategies. Enhanced coordination can help protect significant cultural landscapes, improve public awareness of local history, and address preservation needs that extend beyond municipal boundaries.

EXISTING LAND USE PROTECTIONS

Shoreland zoning and natural resource protection measures provide an important layer of defense for Madison's archaeological and historic sites, particularly along the Kennebec River and Lake Wesserunsett, where many of the community's earliest settlements and prehistoric sites are located. These areas fall largely within the Town's Shoreland Zoning District, which helps minimize impacts from development by regulating activities such as excavation, vegetation removal, and construction within 250 feet of the water. This protection indirectly safeguards significant archaeological resources that may otherwise be disturbed by erosion, shoreline alteration, or redevelopment pressures.

Beyond the shoreland, however, much of Madison's archaeological and historic landscape does not fall under specific local protection. The Town's Site Review Ordinance includes review standards intended to prevent "undue adverse effects on scenic, natural beauty, historic sites, and rare or irreplaceable natural areas," which offers a general safeguard against inappropriate development. However, the ordinance currently lacks detailed review criteria or a mapped inventory of known or potential

archaeological and historic resources to guide the Planning Board in making consistent, informed decisions.

In practice, Madison relies on a combination of state coordination and local oversight to protect these resources. When projects are subject to state or federal permitting, the MHPC reviews proposed activities for potential impacts to archaeological or historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. At the local level, site plan and subdivision reviews provide opportunities to reference MHPC data and require applicants to consult with the Commission when projects occur near known or sensitive areas such as The Pines site or those along the shorelines of Lake Wesserunsett and the Kennebec River.

While Madison benefits from several existing tools that help protect its historic and archaeological resources, many important sites and buildings lie outside regulated areas, leaving them vulnerable to demolition, neglect, or incompatible redevelopment. The lack of an updated historic inventory, clear review standards, or a local preservation ordinance limits the Town's ability to identify, evaluate, and proactively safeguard its most significant cultural assets. Strengthening these frameworks would ensure that future growth continues to respect and preserve Madison's historic character.

LOOKING FORWARD

Madison could strengthen its existing land use protections of archaeological and historic resources by:

- Incorporating specific historic and archaeological review standards into its Site Review Ordinance
- Adopting a Historic Resource Overlay District
- Developing a mapped inventory of sensitive sites in partnership with MHPC and the local historical societies.

These improvements would provide:

- Clearer guidance for applicants
- More consistent review by the Planning Board
- Stronger long-term protection of the community's cultural and historic heritage.