



HISTORICAL WOLFEBORO

Wolfeboro claims to be the oldest summer resort in America because New Hampshire's Colonial Governor, John Wentworth, built his country estate here in 1769. Sadly, he enjoyed his 3600 acre property for only a few years. As a Loyalist, he fled when the American Revolution began, and his home on the shores of what would later be named Lake Wentworth. His home burned in 1820, the same year he died. Now the cellar hole and surrounding land is a state-owned historic site, and the road leading past it is memorialized as the Governor John Wentworth Highway.

Long before, however, the Abenaki tribe ranged throughout central NH. Their trails circled Lake Winnepesaukee and fanned out to other lakes and along river valleys where fish and game were plentiful. The Libby Museum displays two dug-out canoes from Rust Pond found in the 1950s. The native american presence had largely disappeared by the mid-18th century, however. Wolfeboro's proprietors granted land in 1759 to a group of men who agreed to settle the town, and named it in honor of General James Wolfe, a hero at the battle of Quebec that year.

The first permanent settlers of Wolfeboro arrived in 1768, the same year that Wentworth began clearing land for his estate. Surrounding towns were settled about the same time.

By 1775, Wolfeboro's population numbered 211. The falls along the Smith River powered both a saw mill and grist mill, and there were other settlement clusters in North Wolfeboro, Wolfeboro Center, and Pleasant Valley.

Currently, housing in Wolfeboro takes many forms from modern upscale shorefront homes, traditional and historic homes, manufactured homes, condominiums, rural single-family homes, and housing for the elderly.

With the exception of Lake Winnepesaukee, native american place names in Wolfeboro are scarce. There is no documented evidence of an native american village in Wolfeboro, though what is now Main Street was a well-traveled trail. Contact with native americans was rare because most native populations had moved off the land before white settlers arrived. One story, passed down through oral tradition, is related by Walter P. Bowman in his history of Lake Wentworth (1956). A boy from a Pleasant Valley family, while ice fishing, was taken by a band of Indians to their camp near what is now Kingswood Lake in Brookfield. The next day, trying on a pair of skates that the Indians had offered, the boy feigned an inability to skate, got away from his captors, and was then able to escape down Warren Brook and return home safely. In the 1800s, small farms and mills provided a livelihood, and schools and churches were built in the various areas of town.

By 1850, Lake Winnepesaukee had become an important commercial route and steamboats offered an improved means of travel and freight in the warmer months of the year. Construction of the grand Pavilion Hotel that year marked the beginnings of the elite summer tourism industry. Both The Lady of the Lake and the Mount Washington provided scenic excursions and provided connections to other towns around Lake Winnepesaukee as well as access to the White Mountains.



Above: 1900 - This vintage postcard is of Center Street, Wolfeboro Falls, near the bridge over the Smith River.

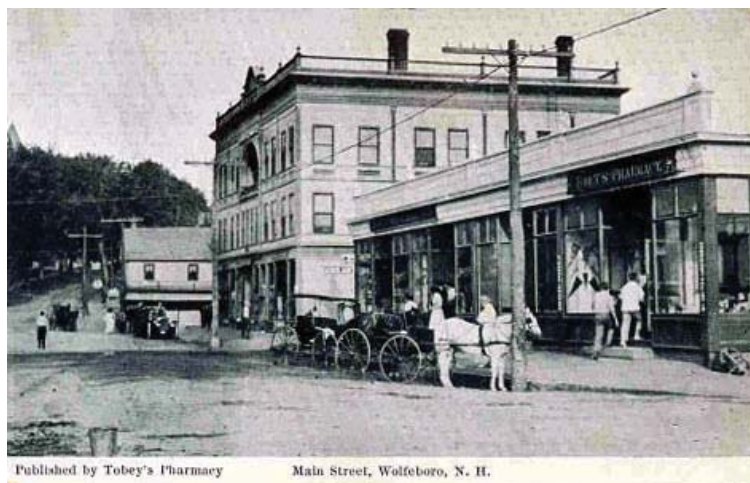
Alton Bay had railroad service from Dover starting in 1851. Wolfeboro's rail connection arrived in 1872 and dramatically changed the economic fortunes of the town. The spur line from Sanbornville provided transportation and freight service directly to the town docks,

linking with steamer service there. More tourists came to spend time in the country, more hotels were erected, and gradually lake shore and island lots were purchased by private owners who constructed summer cottages and camps.

Economic prosperity eluded the town, however, despite a number of manufacturing enterprises including a small shoe factory, a blanket mill, and box factory. The period from World War 1 through the Depression was particularly difficult. In the teens and 20s the population dropped to about 2200, about equal to Civil War era levels. Commercial activity in the town's village centers sharply declined, and few new buildings were erected. Passenger rail service ended in the 1930s though freight service continued into the early 1970s. The overall character of the town remained unchanged.

After World War II and into the 1960s, Wolfeboro began to grow again. Post-war prosperity and optimism along with aggressive tourism promotion at both the state and local levels led to expanded summer tourism and year-round development. Overall population sharply increased. Expanded commercial development in the downtown and around Back Bay included new shopping centers, bowling lanes, and a movie theater. A new high school was built and Brewster Academy transitioned to a private preparatory school. Huggins Hospital was enlarged. A new modern marble edifice was built to house the Wolfeboro National Bank. Developers provided new neighborhood housing.

Since the last master plan in 2007, Wolfeboro has strengthened its reputation as a desirable place to live and vacation, especially for retirees. While old hotels, cabin colonies, and the Allen A are gone, there are still many small inns, condos, and private rentals available. Venues and non-profit organizations devoted to arts and culture abound. More summer homes dot the shorelines, and many of these have been converted to year-round residences. The highways servicing the town have been improved to allow for easy and rapid access from population centers to the south.



With a new Heritage Commission, the successful rehabilitation of the Town Hall, and the recent renovation and opening of the Pickering House, Wolfeboro citizens have shown that they value the historic charm of the town, its rich history, and the advantages of its environment. Past efforts have paid off; continued attention to manage historic and cultural resources, and arts and culture, will add more luster to an already bright future.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND RESOURCES IN WOLFEBORO

There are many historic buildings and historic areas in Wolfeboro. The master plan of 1980 contains a map of these areas. Others could be added now that 40 years have elapsed; typically historic resources are those that are 50 years old or older.

To simplify this chapter's approach and encourage further designation of historic structures or areas, this list shows all designated historic sites in Wolfeboro as of August, 2018. A narrow set of criteria was used to compile this list:

- That there is already some designation of it as a historic resource.
- That the resource, event or structure is 50 years old or older.
- That the property has significance, using one or more of the following standards: National Register of Historic Places, State Register of Historic Places, local ordinance, NH Highway Marker Program, or other local recognition.
- That the property has integrity, again using National Register criteria of 7 factors: form, materials, design, setting, workmanship, feeling and context).
- That it is publicly-owned, commercial or non-profit owned, or is receiving local tax relief for its historic significance.
- Cemeteries and burying grounds are not included.