

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE DUCKTRAP RIVER

By Diane Roesing O'Brien

The mouth of the Ducktrap River in Lincolnville has been inhabited by Native Americans for centuries. Evidence of Moorehead Phase or, as they're more popularly known, Red Paint People, can be found north of the mouth near the shore. Also along this stretch of shore is evidence of other people; their tools, ceramics and midden refuse such as bones and shells all attest to their presence.

By the 16th and 17th centuries European explorers were sailing along the Maine coast. Whether or not they landed on the future Lincolnville's shore or not is unknown. The discovery of an early clay pipe stem points to some 17th century European contact, but it could possibly have been dropped by an Indian who'd received it in trade at Castine.

Sometime between 1760 and 1770 white or European settlers were attempting to live at Ducktrap. These people were squatters with no legal claim on the land. By the time the Revolutionary War was over in 1783, though, settlers began moving into the area at a steady rate. Two veterans of the War, General George Ulmer and his brother Major Philip Ulmer, settled at Ducktrap. George was granted the mill rights to the river by General Henry Knox who held the Waldo Patent, or title, to the whole area. The Ulmer brothers operated as many as five sawmills on the river, using timber cut on their several thousand acres upstream.

During the 19th century at various times a gristmill for grinding grain operated upstream of the present bridge, as did a sawmill. The dam for these projects is still visible at low tide. A large lime kiln stood on the south side of the river, downstream of the bridge; it was fed limestone from a horse drawn railroad that ran four miles inland to a big quarry. Ships were built at the Trap as well, probably on the north, downstream shore where the land is flat.

Much of the river has remained wild, though there was much activity on its tributary, Black Brook, near Slab City Road. Here was a gristmill and shingle mill, each with large ponds behind their dams. The ponds are gone but their grassy remains can still be seen. Upstream on the Ducktrap itself,

above Route 52, stood a large mill, the Gould mill, still in operation in the early years of the 1900's. Nearby tall granite abutments are all that is left of a bridge that crossed the river here.

By 1905 when millowner William Howe was killed in an accident in his sawmill at Ducktrap all industrial activity ceased. The mill closed, the kiln was long gone, and the area was given over to summer visitors, and the occasional salmon fisherman. Even that fishery gave out; the last commercial salmon fisherman quit in 1947, the year he only caught four fish.