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## Stroudwater Historic District

The Stroudwater Historic District is significant as an early village which still conveys a coherent sense of a place, as well as its distinctive history. The fact that Stroudwater is now part of the City of Portland, where comparable eighteenth and early nineteenth century settlement has been considerably obliterated by fires and later development, makes this historic district even more important to the city. Moreover, Stroudwater is a good example of the planning of a New England village, not according to rigid plans and stereotypical central commons, but in terms of the natural topography that both respected the landscape and exploited it for economic advantage. For instance, the streets on which the historic structures now stand follow the high ground and were originally the roads used to haul masts to the Fore River. For these reasons the historic district is of inestimable educational value, requiring special protection to preserve it from the intrusion of twentieth century urbanism.

The village of Stroudwater, now incorporated into the City of Portland, occupies the western bank of the tidal Fore River where it is joined by the Stroudwater River. The historic district contains about thirty residences, dating from the Colonial, Federal, and Greek Revival periods and standing on the gentle hills that slope down to the Fore River. In addition the district includes the village burying ground, sites associated with collecting and exporting of masts, mills, tanneries, and shipyards which supported the inhabitants, and the section of the Cumberland and Oxford Canal which runs along the eastern bank of the Fore River opposite the village.

Three periods of prosperity formed the village of Stroudwater and gave it its distinctive character. The first period was the permanent settlement begun in 1727 by Colonel Thomas Westbrook, mast agent for King George II, who moved to the confluence of the Fore and Stroudwater Rivers from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Colonel Westbrook built roads on which to haul the mast timbers, a landing from which to launch them down the Fore River to Portland where they were shipped to England, a large bridge across the Fore River, a garrisoned house for protection from the Indians, and dams, saw mills, and a paper mill.

The next major period of growth occurred after the Revolution with a shipping trade based on stores, saw mills, and a tannery. The Embargo Act of 1807 caused commercial recession, with the economy recovering about 1830 with the completion of the Cumberland and Oxford Canal. The canal opened up new sources of lumber and raw materials, and stimulated exporting and importing with the interior and shipyard activities on the Fore River until the railroads made canal transportation obsolete in the second half of the nineteenth century. The fact that Stroudwater village was not swallowed up by Portland's industrial expansion after the Civil War helped to preserve the topography of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century village and a majority of its residences.

Several of the residences included within the Stroudwater Historic District are outstanding examples of the architecture of their time period. The George Tate House (1755) is a National Historic Landmark which was carefully restored by the National Society of Colonial Dames in Maine and is open to the public in the summer. The house of a mast agent for the royal navy, it is a wood-frame and clapboarded structure with a central chimney and an unusual gambrel roof

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House (1797), the Francis Waldo House (c. 1765), the Samuel Ficket House (1795), the Martin Hawes House (1853), and the Dr. Jeremiah Baker House (1799) are significant examples of their respective periods. The remaining houses, even though more modest, contribute to the overall integrity of the historic district.

As important as the surviving structures are the locations of early village activities, even though most of the early non-residential buildings do not survive. The burial ground to the north is still extant with the earliest grave stone dating to 1739. Along the Fore River are the sites of shipyards and wharves used from 1717 to the 1850's, a bark mill and a tidal mill of the 1830's, and the Cumberland and Oxford Canal (1825 – 1830). On higher ground near the Tate and Means houses is the site of the mast yard (1727 – 1770's). And behind the houses on the west side of Westbrook Street are remains of the Stroudwater Dam of 1845, built to replace one further upstream.

The Stroudwater Historic District is Portland's only surviving and best preserved example of the early settlement and development that characterized the Maine coast. While the late nineteenth century industrialism largely passed it by, the village has been threatened in the twentieth century by the growth of the Portland International Jetport and the commercial development to the west which has led to new buildings and the widening of roads in the area. Yet the preservation of about thirty structures in a landscape that still evokes the appearance of Stroudwater in the first half of the nineteenth century in terms of spacing of the houses, their setback from the street, and even the absence of curbstones provides a unique historic district in the City of Portland. Sensitive protection is required to maintain its integrity.