

Macartney House Museum



c. 1815

Tour Guide



25 Main Street, Oakland, Maine 04963 www.rootsweb.com/~mecoakla/

Town of Oakland

- ◆ Settled about 1780, and originally called Coombs Mills, as a part of Winslow
(Prior to Winslow's incorporation in 1771, the whole area was called Kingsfield, and earlier, Tacconet. More information about Oakland's name changes is available at the back of this guide in a copy of the 1983 Centennial Program.)
- 1802 - Became part of Waterville when that city separated from Winslow; also known as Pullen's Mills, and from at least 1827, as West Waterville
- 1873 - Incorporated as West Waterville
- 1883 - Name changed to Oakland
- ◆ An industrial center until the 1960's
- ◆ More axes and scythes manufactured here from 1850 to 1960 than any other place in the world
- ◆ Birthplace of Central Maine Power; Walter Wyman and Harvey Eaton incorporated the Oakland Electric Company in 1889
- ◆ Gateway to the famous Belgrade Lakes Region of Central Maine
- ◆ Population in 2006, about 6000

Note of Interest: The nearby town of Dearborn was divided between Belgrade and Waterville, with the remainder being incorporated into Smithfield by 1843.

Oakland Area Historical Society & Macartney House Museum

- ◆ Macartney House given to the historical society in 1977 by Waterville Savings Bank
- ◆ OAHS Incorporated in 1977
- ◆ Macartney House moved 100 feet back to current location in 1978
- ◆ Macartney House Museum opened in 1983

This guide is a compilation of writings from over the years by many OAHS members. Special thanks for the information in this brochure go to Mike Denis, Christine Hillman, Betty & Ray Smith and Ruth Wood.
This compilation was last edited on September 9, 2006 by Ramona Freeman.

The Curator's Files at the Macartney House Museum:

1. Accession Book - A record of all items in the museum. As items are received they are given consecutive numbers and listed in the accession book with item numbers, donor name and date. Christine Hillman kept this record for the first two years.
2. Accession File – A collection of folders in the filing cabinet arranged by the number of each donation. Each folder holds a sheet, or sheets, with more detailed information about the gift. In addition to number, donor, donor's address and date, there is a brief description of each item and a note about the gift.
3. Donor File - This is a card file in alphabetical order by donor with name, address and item numbers of their donations.
4. Subject File - An alphabetical card file by subject, with room locations listed.
5. Inventory – An early list of items put together by Mike Denis, and later Raymond Smith. (The inventory is not up-to-date at this time).

Note: This summary came from a talk by Ruth Wood, long time OAHS Curator, on June 5, 2006.

Macartney House Museum

A Little History

Built about 1815 by Leonard Cornforth, this is one of the oldest houses in Oakland. Mr. Cornforth was born in England in 1790 and came to Readfield as a child in 1797. He first purchased land in what is now Oakland in about 1815. He also built several sawmills, gristmills, and carding and fulling mills in the area. When first built, the house was in the woods, nearly a mile from the settlement of West Waterville, near Messalonskee Lake. As the settlement grew, the built-up area eventually encompassed the area near the house, presently called Main Street.

The building is named for its primary occupants, the Macartney Family, who lived here for three generations:

- 1) The first Macartney, William, bought the house in 1852/53 from John Cornforth & William Blake. He was prominent in town affairs, and had been town treasurer for Waterville. In 1870 he was a retired druggist. William and his wife, Betsey Smith Macartney (1801-1883), had two children, William Henry and Octavia. William died in 1891 at 83 years old and is buried in the Old Cemetery.
- 2) William Henry (b. July 1836) was fifteen when his father bought the house, which was his home, it seems, for most of the rest of his life. William H. was a scythe maker and also active in civic affairs, including several years as postmaster. Prior to becoming postmaster, he was a musician during the Civil War with Co. B. of the 21st Maine Infantry, which mustered in between October 14, 1862 and August 25, 1863. (We have a collection of his fifes on display in the ell.) William H. and his wife, Ellen M. Richardson Macartney (1832 – 1924), had four children, Winfred, J. Clayton, Dwight P., and Mary. William H. died by suicide in his home on 9 Nov. 1896, at the age of 60. He is buried with his wife in Lakeview Cemetery.
- 3) Dwight Preston Macartney, was born on May 21, 1867 in the Macartney home where he resided practically all his life. Upon graduation from high school, he entered the service of the United States Post Office Department, where he worked for 48 years, for 22 of which he served as postmaster. He was known as a musician of “unusual ability and had entertained many with his banjo.” He was a member of the Odd Fellows and of the Men’s Universalist Club of Oakland. He married his first wife, Henrietta B. Thompson (1890-1927) on 5 Dec. 1916; and his second wife, Marion Alice Warren, on 15 Oct. 1932. Dwight died 28 August 1938, and is buried with his first wife in Lakeview Cemetery.

The Macartney House was acquired by the Oakland Area Historical society in 1974 from Waterville Savings Bank. It was moved back about 100 feet to its present location and set on a new foundation. The original granite blocks supporting the fire place were numbered and moved one by one into the new foundation.

Architecture & Furnishings

The exterior of the house is a good example of a Federal-trimmed Cape Cod, a blend of styles popular about 1815. The house is substantially as it was built. Changes over the years have been mostly cover-ups, rather than destruction of the original.

The roofline at the top of the first floor is a bit taller than on most Capes, allowing room for the hand-carved fan over the front door. The typical Cape Cod design has a center hall with a room on either side and a long room at the back.

The ell on the east side is original, and may have served as a general store, since Cornforth was a merchant.

At one time the house was made into a two-family. The apartment on the right had the three upstairs bedrooms. For the left side, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a porch was added. When the home was moved in 1978, the additions were taken off and the building was restored to its original dimensions.

Parlor

The room on the right as you enter the museum is the parlor, and is mostly Federal trimmed. This was a more formal room used for visitors and was probably the nicest room in the house. Perhaps it was used for weddings and funerals. The furniture in the room is early Victorian. The chairs with printed material are originals to the Macartneys.

Points of interest on the table in the center of the room include a Bible, a stereopticon with viewing cards, and autograph books. When cards are positioned correctly on the stereopticon, you see a 3-D picture. The autograph books were very popular in the late 1800's. Friends would write verses in them. Notice the fine penmanship and the dates. One little book was probably given to a bride, as you will see when you read the messages.

The little pitchers on the mantel are Luster Ware. The two tall vases are Bristol vases. On the table in front of the window is an elaborate silver pitcher, which has a ceramic lining that is removable. The pitcher was used for water.

The fireplace, a shallow Rumford type, was more efficient than the deeper models.

Dining Room

The dining room, across the front hall from the parlor, was remodeled about 1840, and is in the simple Greek revival style. The mantle piece would have framed a cast-iron stove rather than a fireplace. The mouldings on the windows are Federal and are original.

The table is mahogany with inlay around the edge; notice the large claw feet. It is Victorian, and the chairs covered in rose velvet go with it. The organ against the outside wall is Victorian and can still be played.

The small side buffet has three goblets that are Portland glass. The glass jar surrounded with a frame of silver is a pickle jar. Notice the silver tongs hanging on the side. The bottles are bedside carafes.

The china cupboard has a complete set of Haviland China. Over the mantel is a Currier & Ives print. On the small table are souvenir plates. There is also a china container called a cracker jar, which is from the middle to late 1800's.

The gramophone is from about 1905, and the sofa is one that the Macartney family owned.

The framed wreath hanging near the hall door is over 100 years old, and is called a Victorian confection. This Victorian confection originally belonged to the Sawtelle family and was probably made to memorialize a deceased family member or to honor a living person, as was the custom at the time. Bertha Stineford, a long-time librarian in Oakland, donated this to the museum.

The Keeping Room

The keeping room is the room across the back of the house and would have been the center of family activity. It has three major features: 1) a large brick fireplace for open hearth cooking, with andirons to support the wood and a crane to hang kettles, 2) a beehive oven on the top left used for baking things like bread and pies, and 3) a potash oven below used to produce the lye that was used in soap making.

There are a number of common and handy cooking utensils in and around the fireplace. Notice the pan that looks just like a skillet, except that it has a very long handle and three legs attached so it can be set right over the fire, it's called a "spider."

Another important cooking utensil for the fireplace was the Dutch oven, also called a bake-kettle. Dutch ovens could require fresh coals be put on top and bottom every half hour or so – a big commitment of time. Variations of these kettles are still popular.



On the table across the room are some different objects used in the past – a bottle capper, a washboard, and soap stone bed warmer. The table is set for a meal. Notice the 2-tine forks and the ironstone dishes.

Also in this room is a cobbler's kit. The cobbler would go from farm to farm to repair or make shoes. There is also an ear horn used by a hard of hearing person.

Next to the fireplace are a wool spinning wheel and a wool winder. Items like hats, mittens, sweaters and socks would be made from yarn that had first been spun from the wool fibers sheared from sheep. When the wool clothing was worn beyond repair, the fabric would be recycled into fabric strips and braided into rugs and other useful items. Notice the braided rug holder used in making the rugs.

The case at the far end of the room has tools that were made in Oakland. Ax heads, scythes, cycles, etc. Over the years there have been over 100 industries in Oakland.

The room off the keeping room, next to the tool case, could have been a pantry, buttery, or a borning room. We think it was a borning room where Mother had her baby and was able to stay close to the family. It is now a Research Room.

Upstairs

The stairways were probably changed in the mid or late 19th Century. Originally the front one went up to the left, entering the master bedroom where the outline and mouldings of the door can still be seen.

The back stairway, now a closet, went from the ell to a back room, where the boarded-over area can be identified.

Upstairs, there are now three rooms, originally 2 bedrooms and a hall. The master bedroom has drawers and closets which may date from 1860. The room also had a fireplace at one time.

As you go up the stairs, you will see an old trunk with a baseball suit lying on it. Beside it are a catcher's face guard, mitt, ball, and basketball. Also, a stuffed bird.

The first room you come to is the children's room. The bed is a spool bed with a rope bottom. There is a wooden tool on the bed used to tighten the ropes (therefore the expression, "sleep tight"). The clothes on the bed and hanging on the walls are late 1800's or early 1900's. The blue rocker is known as a nursing rocker. There are dolls, books, and games for children. Also, a slate board and chalk.

The next room is the sewing room. There are two pedal sewing machines, and a sewing machine head that is quite old. The lady at the sewing machine is wearing an 1860's dress. The white dress on the form is circa 1905, and is a summer dress. The iron crib is Victorian. On the wall is a display of objects used for tatting, knitting, crocheting, and sewing.

Costume Room

The last bedroom upstairs is where we have displayed clothing worn over the years by ladies. They should all be tagged with dates. There are shoes, beaded purses, bonnets, and shawls displayed.

Notice the beautiful quilts with elaborate hand stitching. Some of them are called Crazy Quilts. Most quilts were made from scraps of leftover fabric, or recycled clothing, and could be decorative or very practical.

Office

The room off the parlor and keeping room is what was known as an ell. It may have been an office or small general store built at the same time as the main house.

The roll top desk is from the Oakland Town Office when it was in Memorial Hall.

The cast iron wood cook stove has different ironing tools and cooking utensils on it. Cast iron stoves, introduced in the 1820's, were considered big labor saving devises (compared to the fire place).

Notice the irons, which were heated on the stove before using. Often interchangeable wooden handles would be used to hold the hot irons; and when one iron cooled, the handle was reattached to another iron that had been heating up on the stove.

The glass case holds pictures and jewelry, as well as a collection of fifes originally belonging to William H. Macartney.

The two small rooms off the office were added when the house was sub-divided about 1900 and have been remodeled by the society for current use as a pantry and bathroom.

Notice the hand pump in the pantry. Most households had to haul or pump water from a cistern or well until the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, when municipal water system began piping water into city homes. Rural families continued to haul and pump water throughout the century.

Basement

From the Office, go down to the Basement, where there is a large display of tools. Notice the granite foundations for the house and fireplaces. The granite is original and was numbered and moved piece by piece when the house was moved.

Maine had many granite quarries in the 1800's and early 1900's, and still has some active ones. This granite may have come from one of several nearby quarries in Norridgewock near Dodlin Hill, or from quarries in Hallowell near Lithgow Hill.

Garden

Be sure to visit the period gardens outside. With a great deal of help from the Waterville Area Garden Club, we have planted flowers that would have been in Maine gardens in the 1800's and early 1900's.