Thomaston, Maine

A Place You Want to Be
Incorporated in 1777, Historic Thomaston in midcoast Maine has a history that harks back to 1630 when a trading post was built for exchange with the local Native Americans. It was nearly another century before Fort George was built in 1719 at the base of present-day Knox Street. This settlement was called Lincoln and pre-dated the name of Thomaston.

Nestled on a hillside overlooking the scenic Georges River (St. George River), the village boasts more than three hundred 19th century homes, many of which were constructed for over 100 sea captains and their families who called this port their home. Countless numbers of vessels were launched from Thomaston’s waterfront bordering the bucolic Georges as it laconically flows through the lower part of the village. Due to the thriving shipping industry, the town’s moniker became “the Town That Went to Sea.”

Thomaston’s history is rich with tradition and architecture. Attracted by employment, Pilgrim descendants, Scotch-Irish, Germans and other New England settlers arrived to work in industries initiated by Major General Henry Knox, Secretary of War in President George Washington’s first cabinet in 1789. Knox acquired vast parcels of land (a 567,000-acre tract known as the Waldo Patent in Maine) and soon became an 18th century Renaissance man.
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In 1794 this town patriot built “Montpelier”, a mansion influenced by famed architect Charles Bullfinch, in a stately landscaped setting on the riverbank looking downriver to sea. His family moved here in 1795. He commenced shipbuilding, logging, brick-making, imported sheep, planted orchards, built inland canals, quarried lime, and speculated heavily in various land holdings. He died in 1806 and his estate passed out of the family to shipyard owner James S. Creighton in 1854.

Shipbuilding flourished during the 19th century with two of the most successful shipbuilders - Edward O’Brien and Samuel Watts - being among the nation’s first millionaires. Along with the swelling shipbuilding industry came the demand for more houses. Most of the village architecture is of the Greek Revival period built by a host of architects, shipwrights and housewrights. William Keith and James Overlock are two of the predominant architects, some of their designs seen in the photos to follow. Other fine examples of Italianate, French Empire, Gothic Revival, Victorian and Colonial Revival architecture exist side by side in orderly fashion on tree-lined streets.

Thomaston is worth a visit and worth a stay. Perhaps the early moniker should have been “the town where those who wanted to be waited for those who went to sea.”

No matter the claim, Thomaston is most definitely a place you will want to be.
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Montpelier
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Note: This photo essay was created for the Thomaston Town Website by Margaret S. McCrea, Thomaston Historical Society historian. All photos were taken by the author. The buildings pictured are but a sampling of several 19th century architectural examples lining the streets of Thomaston, Maine. The essay is intended to present the ambience of this picturesque New England village.