Welcome to Auburn’s Museum in the Streets®
historic walking tour.

Auburn’s history is a manifold tale of Native Americans and settlers; entrepreneurs and visionaries; industrialization and the American Dream. Illustrated panels will guide you along the Riverwalk and through the downtown, to discover snippets of Auburn’s past, including notable people, buildings, and events of historical significance in the founding and building of this community.

The people of Auburn have been intricately tied to the Androscoggin River throughout history, which has helped shape the community, the land and the river itself over time. The western side of the Androscoggin River between the Great Falls and the Little Androscoggin was originally settled by the Anasagunticook tribe. In 1684, Chief Warunbee sold land to Richard Wharton. After Wharton’s death, the land passed on to the Pejepscot Proprietors. After decades of legal battles over land rights, the claim was incorporated in 1802 as the Town of Danville. In 1842, the eastern section of the Town of Minot became the Town of Auburn. The name was inspired by the Goldsmith poem, “The Deserted Village.”

When Androscoggin County was formally established in 1854, the legislature provided that the voters decide whether to locate the county seat in Lewiston, Danville, or Auburn. The bill’s sponsor presumed Lewiston would be chosen, but Danville and the towns west of the river voted for Auburn. Five years later, Auburn absorbed the portion of Danville north of the Little Androscoggin, and in 1867, the state legislature voted to annex the remaining area of Danville to Auburn. Auburn was incorporated as a city in 1869 and elected Thomas Littlefield as its first mayor. In 1917, Auburn became the first city in Maine to adopt the council-manager form of government.

Beginning in 1835, shoe manufacturing quickly grew into Auburn’s largest industry. During the Civil War, the output of shoes and boots roughly doubled. The following three decades saw a tenfold increase in shoe production as the industry mechanized, peaking at roughly 6,000,000 pairs per year. A labor strike in 1937 caused failure of some companies, and later foreign imports largely ended Auburn’s reign as the “shoe capital of the world.”

Today, leading economic sectors of employment are healthcare, retail trade, education, and manufacturing. Auburn has taken advantage of its large geographic area to become home to shopping centers, car dealerships, industrial parks, an airport, and an intermodal transportation center. In addition, Auburn is fortunate to be an urban area with many natural areas, access to the river, outdoor adventures, agricultural land and natural resources, all within the city limits. Auburn has twenty sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The population is about 23,000.

This walking tour consists of 30 panels, 15 of which are located in downtown Auburn. As you walk this trail, please be respectful of both public and private property. Enjoy the tour!
Along this trail you will discover the rich heritage of Maine’s second largest city. Illustrated panels guide you along the Androscoggin River and through the downtown to learn about Lewiston’s significant residents, entrepreneurs, buildings, and cultural transformations in the founding and building of the community.

This area has been inhabited for over 10,000 years. Native American tribes, known as Wabanaki (“meaning ‘People of the First Light’” or “Dawnland”) were the first to settle in the region, followed by the first white settlers in 1770. A Boston-based land company called The Pejepecott Proprietors granted the land to Jonathan Bagley and Moses Little of Newbury, Massachusetts. They were tasked with the mission of settling fifty families in the new township. The name “Lewiston” honored the late Job Lewis of Boston, a Pejepecott Proprietor.

The people of Lewiston have been intricately tied to the Androscoggin River throughout history, which has helped shape the community, the land and the river itself over time. Among the first projects pursued by the settlers were the construction of a canal, a timber dam, and a sawmill at what was called “Lewiston Falls.” Although textile mills would eventually become the foremost employer, the town’s first settlers were mostly farmers of English heritage. Thus, Lewiston had a widely dispersed population. Only in 1823 was a bridge constructed, replacing ferries, to connect Lewiston with the other side of the river.

In mid-nineteenth century, Boston investors took advantage of the hydro-power of the river with the construction of canals and textile mills. This drew to the area many Irish, French-Canadian, and other immigrants looking for work. These mills were an enormous source of jobs. The rapid population growth from 1,801 in 1840 to about 20,000 in the 1880s led to the establishment of several schools and city services. Lewiston was incorporated as a city in 1863, electing Jacob Ham as the first mayor. During the twentieth century, the population and businesses expanded outward from the city center to the suburbs and surrounding towns.

Since 1940, Lewiston’s population has hovered between 35,000 and 40,000. Shops and homes that emptied with the closure of the mills have started to refill with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, who have found a new home in Lewiston. The city is home to four colleges and universities, three museums, and more than forty sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Lewiston now is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse, and economically powerful cities in Maine. Lewiston is fortunate to be an urban area with many natural areas, access to the river, outdoor adventures, agricultural land and natural resources, all within the city limits.

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