

"AN EXCURSION TO BANGOR" (JULY 1833)

by James Brooks, Editor of the *Portland Advertiser*

The *Connecticut* took on board a multitude of us last Monday morning, many to speculate in land, a fever which has seized our good citizens, and the best of fevers, for it puts into their pockets instead of taking it; and some few on a pleasure excursion [without] any other object than to look at the islands, and breathe the sea air, and to run around Bangor. We left about 8 A.M. and after cruising among shoals of rocky islands, by crags and eagle-like cliffs that the waves have in vain lashed for centuries, we were almost on the broad sea. Seguin, and its light at the mouth of the Kennebec, we passed about noon. The mouth of the Sheepscot and Damariscotta were soon in sight—and next came Pemaquid Point, and the far-famed Monhegan, [a] classical island in the eastern waters, of whose story many a romance might be woven. Off Monhegan was a small fleet of fisherman, at work upon our mines— not the mines of Georgia, full of gold, not even the mines of Pennsylvania, but mines full of treasures, to be won by toil and danger—the mines of the inexhaustible deep. Island after island, rock after rock, appeared on every side, some sterile as the sands of the deserts, but more now mantled in their covering of green. Lighthouses were visible on every quarter. Whitehead with its warning bell was passed by five o'clock, and by six we were off "Owl's Head," a place deserving a much better name from the bold and not altogether uncultivated scenery it presents to the view. "Owl's Head" is the end of a cape or a promontory in Thomaston, not far from the mouth of Penobscot Bay. It is a cliff projecting into the Bay—and near it is a house, which equals in appearance any of the best built houses one will see in the South, out of Richmond and Charleston. It was dark when we cruised up the Bay, and so I could see nothing of the islands and scenery around us.

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Bangor was in sight soon after sunrise, Tuesday morning, for we made but a slow progress in the dark night up the Penobscot; Bangor, the forthcoming city of the East, to put to shame the maxim, now in everybody's mouth, that "westward the star of Empire takes its way." They have told us so much of the growth of Bangor, and of the wonder-workings of the enterprise of the people there, that I did open my eyes to see something remarkable; but after all, I did not expect to see such blocks of buildings, so much stability, and such a fleet in the harbor. The Kenduskeag, which divides Bangor, and over which a bridge is

thrown—a bridge, in the daytime, ever full of passengers, was now well lined with schooners. The Penobscot itself was, without exaggeration, crowded with a little fleet, all taking in lumber; lumber of almost all sorts, from the well-sawed pine hoard down to the shingle. The tide was down, and with some difficulty we landed; for the wharves are of great height, on account of the great rise and fall of the tide.

I went to the Exchange Hotel on the eastern side of the Kenduskeag, and soon breakfast was in preparation, and multitudes came pouring in from all quarters. Bar and sitting room, chamber and parlor were full. There were some from Massachusetts, many from Portland, many from all parts of the State who had crowded here, either to buy or sell land, or, at least, to see what was going on.

But of Bangor, what is to be said! It is not a beautiful place, and never will be, because houses are sprinkled about as if they had been strewn from a pepper box. It is built upon three banks of two rivers, two of the Kenduskeag, and the other, of the Penobscot. Houses tower upwards in all sorts of places: here is a little palace, and there another, perched strangely on the side or summit of a hill. It seems as if men throw up houses as we throw up rockets, and thus, of course, they go up in all manner of appearances. I saw one house that had grown up like a wheat kernel in alluvial lands, in a day or more; but there was no sign of a street thereabout, and thus the man and his family must drop into a ravine till Providence sends him a better opportunity to visit his neighbors. There is a mania for building. Houses are coming up in all directions. I know not how many they are building, but brick and mortar, granite and timber are strewn about on highway and bye-way. A large hotel is going up, destined to be the Tremont of the East, and to remind us in Portland that we are very far behind the age in the enterprise, not only necessary to enrich, but to beautify our city.

Bangor has much the appearance of a hundred villages springing up on the non--slaveholding side of the Ohio—with this difference, that the buildings there are chiefly of wood, cheaply built and hastily thrown up; and here they are fine blocks of brick with granite fronts, or handsome white houses that would do credit to any estate in Virginia or Carolina. I do not remember of seeing what can be called a miserable house in Bangor. The Exchange is a building that would do credit to many of our large cities. The churches are numerous, and often elegantly built. Already they are numerous enough for a city; and it is such a spectacle that distinguishes New England, for nowhere, not

even in the middle States, are such churches, and so numerous, to be seen, as any village in New England of any size can exhibit.

Rents and lands in Bangor, I should think, are higher than with us. There are not buildings enough to accommodate tenants, and hence a pressure, and of course a demand, and a high price. Business, if one can judge from appearances, is exceedingly brisk. The business streets are full of people. Market men from the country are thick. People move and trade upon the high-pressure principle, and hence all is lively, animating and exciting.

It is unsafe to look ahead and say what Bangor will be, unless one has travelled over the back country. They who have travelled there, represent it as a fine country, and as capable of sustaining a large population. If so, long after the lumber trade has ceased, which will not be for very many years, Bangor must increase, and then there are some of the finest water privileges in the world for factories or whatever else ingenuity may devise. Bangor, at the head of navigation, must command this backcountry trade and with but a tithe of the enterprise now existing among the young and middle-aged men there, it cannot be many years before Bangor will count its fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants.

Already a railroad to Orono, distance 12 miles, is seriously talked of. An omnibus, and two or three stages, run up and down once or twice a day, full of passengers. The income from them, added to the transportation of boards, which are injured in carrying them over the falls, must make the investment valuable.

I have said enough to let our friends of the South and West know that the East is not all a wilderness—and now, for tomorrow, I will go up to Orono and Old Town, where are the relics of the once brave and hardy Penobscots.

VISIT TO THE PENOBSCOT

I went in company with a friend to the Indian Old Town, where are the remains of the Penobscots. Our way was over a good road, chiefly on the banks of the river. We passed Stillwater, as it is called, where there are many sawmills, many fine houses, and much business—a village that would be an ornament to a far older country. After crossing a bridge and riding some 4 or 5 miles, we came to

Old Town. Here was a fine hotel, (Walburga's?)—also numerous saw-mills, myriads of logs—with signs of energy and life all around us.

An Indian, half drunk, resting on his knees, but skillfully paddling, carried us over the smooth water in his birch canoe, sitting flat on its bottom. Rows of slab houses met our eyes, not very inviting in their appearance, but yet tolerably comfortable. I went into one. It had no floor but the earth, which had been swept. A kind of bedstead, eight or ten inches high, all boards, was there. The skins of a deer and moose were upon it. A coffee pot was in the middle of the hut, under which were embers of wood, and over which was a hole to let out the smoke. There were, however, in the settlement, many better houses than this, frame houses painted white. The church, for there is one, is a neat building, and of imposing appearance.

Many of the Indians were away, encamping on the Penobscot near Bangor. Of those we saw, nearly all had white blood in their veins. Many of them were fine looking persons. Nearly all spoke broken English as well as Indian. They were comfortably clad, and live comfortable, at least, far more so than the Creeks and Choctaws, whom I have met. In truth, the blood of the Penobscots is so intermingled with that of the white that the race may be considered as nearly extinct. The boys have bows and arrows, but they are not the unerring arrows of the wild Indian. Some small attempt at agriculture is, I am told, undertaken. The women make baskets and things of that sort and beg without much hesitation—and then there is a state of barbarism but very little better, if so agreeable, as that of the real savage.

Two Indian boys, sober and well-clad, ferried us back to the mainland. By dark, we were going down the Penobscot, and late in the evening were at Bangor.

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The *Connecticut* proposed an excursion down the river ... and who would refuse an opportunity to sail about the Penobscot? A large company started in the afternoon, and I started with them. We went by Brewer, which is promising to be something of a place, and Hampden, the trade of which Bangor is engulfing, and Frankfort, from the river apparently a beautiful village, and Bucksport, not uninviting, wrapped up in fog as it was, and other villages. And the great distinction between our part of the country and the southern part is that there

are villages everywhere—about every 6 miles, and there, few or none—till we wound round a point, run up the Bagaduce, and were off Castine.

Evening was hurrying on, and we hastened up the hill towards the Fort, so memorable in the story of the Revolution, as well as in the last war, and there we rambled over mounds and hillocks, and amid old bricks, mortar and stone that reminded one of old castles and old story books. Everybody remembers, or ought to remember, the wonderful escape of General Wadsworth from this place, and so I will not recount this old interesting story as all journalists are bound to do. Everybody knows that the British held it in the last war, and can hold it in another, unless the general government launches out some thousands in a generous appropriation.

The British were a happy set of mortals then, though it must have been no small work to have thrown up such a fortification, for they had their theater, and passed their time without much danger from an enemy, commanding Castine, as they easily did from a position so elevated, and so well girted by water.

Castine is one of the best-looking places a traveler will see for many a day's journey. The streets are regular. The houses are in fine order, neatly painted, and well finished —outwardly I can only speak of—with all the comforts one could well ask for. Its trade is greatly diminished, other places upriver usurping it, but now there is some commerce, and I am told it is no small rendezvous for fishermen.

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