

AUTUMN SPLENDOR

What could be more appealing to antiques collectors than an autumn drive up the Maine coast?

By Courtney Malcolm



October is the height of “leaf peeping” season, when hordes of camera-toting tourists load up their cars and head north to capture the beauty of a New England autumn. For antiques collectors it’s the perfect time to take a weekend shopping trip—and the perfect place to visit is the coast of Maine.

Like anywhere in New England, antiques shops in Maine inhabit every town and pop up along every country road and highway. Dusty storefronts with names like “Bargain Barn,” “Dot’s Good Deals,” and “Good Old Things” rub shoulders with elegant shops housed in stately mansions, selling “Fine Antiques.”

But Maine’s rural character, maritime tradition, and sheer size sets it apart and guarantees an enormous variety of antiques and collectibles from which to

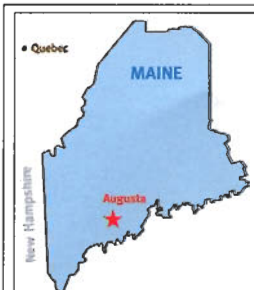
choose. As Sam Pennington, editor of the venerable *Maine Antique Digest* points out, Maine antiques often came from homes with attached barns and room to store those Windsor chairs when they were replaced by more “modern” styles.

Throw in the treasures brought home by sea captains and sailors, combined with the valuables used by the rich to decorate their summer “cottages,” and you have a veritable smorgasbord of goods. You’ll come across everything from fine European furniture and American folk art to farming tools, wooden snowshoes, and candlesticks made from moose antlers.

More than half of the visitors to Maine never make it past the bargain outlets of the southern coast. But just past Portland is Maine’s mid-coast, an

area of charming fishing villages, rocky coastline and hundreds of antiques opportunities. Here you can experience a taste of Maine and pick up a bargain at the same time! Three towns in this region make a great day or weekend itinerary, offering a variety of scenic, historical, and antique options.

As you get off Route 95 and head up the coast on Route 1, the first town you’ll come to is **Brunswick**. Home to Bowdoin College and the Brunswick Naval Air Station, Brunswick is also where Harriet



Antiques-rich Maine has plenty of starting points.



Beecher Stowe penned *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which some historians believe was the spark that started the Civil War.

At the height of the Industrial Revolution, Brunswick was a thriving mill town, using the power of the Great Falls of the Androscoggin River to churn out shoes, textiles, and wood for shipment all over the world. As textile manufacturing declined in the mid-20th century, most of the mills were abandoned, but in 1986 one of them was converted into one of the best antique

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A sampling of scenes from old Maine via vintage postcards: The Wiscasset Inn (above); "12 Rod Road," complete with classic cars, in Brunswick (center); and the Carlton Bridge and Kennebec River as seen in Bath.



markets on the coast, Cabot Mill.

With more than 140 dealers in 15,000 feet of space, Cabot Mill is clean, airy, and well-organized, with each item clearly described and priced. You can find all the expected antiques and collectibles here—postcards, Victorian footstools, cast-iron skillets, and Depression glass—along with a few surprises, such as African masks and soapstone Inuit carvings. The inventory is constantly changing so if you see something you like, grab it—it's sure to be gone the next time you stop by.

Before you leave town, head down Maine Street to Day's Antiques, housed in the "Pumpkin House," a restored Victorian mansion. Browsing in Day's is like poking around in your elderly aunt's house—an aunt who lived to be 103, collected voraciously, and never threw anything away. High-end American and European furniture sits on fine carpets and shares space with bronze statues, crystal, and model sailboats, all displayed under the benevolent gaze of anonymous 19th-century burghers in gilt or other types of frames. In the basement, clocks, prints, and paintings cover the brick walls while chairs, sofas, and highboys form a veritable maze.

Your next stop is **Bath**, "the city of ships," eight miles up Route 1. Situated on the banks of the Kennebec River, Bath is just upstream from where the first ship in the New World was built in 1607. That shipbuilding tradition has continued at the Bath Iron Works, whose enormous red and white crane dominates the skyline.

Bath is not only a charming city, rich

in maritime history, it's the ultimate in one-stop shopping at the eight antiques dealers lining Front Street. One of the best is Cobblestone & Co., offering a wide selection of antiques and collectibles in the quintessential treasure-hunting atmosphere. It's packed to the gills with dishes, silverware, ancient American flags, license plates, and decoys, but there are also higher-end items such as mission-style furniture, art deco vases, and fine china.

A few doors down is Front Street Antiques & Books. The antiques side specializes in china and early glass, but those of us who love literary works are partial to the book emporium. Serpentine shelves run along every wall. Volumes are piled up to and across the rafters. Homemade signs point to categories from world history (Winston Churchill has his own section), philosophy, and natural science to cooking, mysticism, and classical fiction. Feel free to waste hours here, thumbing through *Boon Island* or *Mark Twain's Collected Works*; the owners won't mind a bit.

Head back out on Route 1 and drive 10 miles north to **Wiscasset**, the self-proclaimed "prettiest village in Maine." Grand 18th- and 19th-century sea captains' homes are reminders that Wiscasset was once the most important shipping center north of Boston. This is also antiques nirvana, with virtually every tree-lined street playing host to a shop or two. Pick up a map of the local stores at any one of the shops and start wandering.

Some of the well-known shops here are Lilac Cottage Antiques and Marston House, but don't miss the eclectic inventory and low-key atmosphere of a shop called Part of the Past Antiques on Water Street, just off Main Street/Route 1. Also check out Robert Snyder and Judy Wilson's Gallery of American Antiques & Folk Art. (During our visit, they had a c. 1930s hand-carved wooden moose on display with a nose to die for; price: \$2,700.)

Finally, there's The Wizard of Odds and Ends. Proprietor Richard Plunkett has created an antique collector's fantasy: hand-painted miniatures, chocolate and cake molds, gilt birdcages, costume jewel-

SOURCES & RESOURCES

ANTIQUÉ DEALERS

- **Cabot Mill Antiques** (www.cabotiques.com)
Fort Andross, 14 Maine St., Brunswick, ME 04011. Phone: 207-725-2855
E-mail: curator@cabotiques.com
- **Cobblestone & Co.**
176 Front St., Bath, ME 04530-4064.
Phone: 207-443-4064
E-mail: cblstn@blazenetme.com
- **Day's Antiques**
Pumpkin House-153 Park Row, Brunswick, ME 04011. Phone: 207-725-6959
E-mail: DAYSantiques@clinic.net
- **Front Street Antiques & Books**
190-192 Front St., Bath, ME 04530-2609.
Phone: 207-443-8098
E-mail: frontst@blazenetme.com
- **Part of the Past Antiques**
37 Water St., Wiscasset, ME 04578.
Phone: 207-882-7908
E-mail: partofpast@clinic.net
- **Robert Snyder and Judy Wilson's Gallery of American Antiques & Folk Art**
Main St./Rt. 1, Wiscasset, ME 04578.
Phone: 207-882-8140 or 4255
- **The Wizard of Odds and Ends**
7 Main St., Wiscasset, ME 04578.
Phone: 207-882-7870

GUIDEBOOK

- *An Explorer's Guide to Maine*, by Christina Tree and K.W. Oxnard (Countryman Press, 2003)

INTERNET

- www.visitmaine.com. Check out this site's antiquing trails feature.
- www.maineantiques.org. The Web site of the Maine Antiques Dealer's Association.

PUBLICATIONS

- *Down East* (www.downeast.com) has been the magazine of Maine for more than 50 years. Published monthly, it offers invaluable insights into places to visit, as well as insight into the mind of the Mainer.
- *Maine Antique Digest* is a favorite resource of antiques collectors all over, not just in Maine. Launched in 1973 as a local guide, it branched out nationally a year later. Includes antiques news and a calendar of shows and auctions (www.maineantiquedigest.com).

ry, and vintage clothing are placed on every available surface. The find of the day: a pair of gentleman's and lady's red Victorian-style tufted chairs, in perfect condition, for \$850.

Despite that old Maine adage, you can indeed get there from here, and Brunswick, Bath, and Wiscasset are just the beginning of what this state has to offer. Pick up a guidebook, a map, and plenty of cash (you get better discounts if you don't use plastic) and find out for yourself why the sign at the state border so proudly declares "Maine: Worth a Visit/Worth a Lifetime." ❁