

A Brief History...

For centuries in pre-historic times, the dramatic Falls of the Saco River near where it now crosses Main Street, attracted summer visits from the Native people for seasonal fishing and hunting. By the early 17th century, the safe harbor and abundant natural resources attracted European visitors. In 1617 a company of adventurers lead by Richard Vines weathered a winter at the mouth of the river in a place still known as Winter Harbor. Permanent settlers arrived in 1631. Both sides of the river were considered as one town, known first as Saco, and after 1718, as Biddeford. For the next century the town remained sparsely settled because of the devastation of frequent wars with the Natives and the French.

In 1716, William Pepperrell, a young merchant from Kittery, purchased 5,000 acres and timber rights to an additional 4,500 acres on the east side of the Saco River. Pepperrell sold off parts of his holdings to Millwright, Nathaniel Weare, and Mariner, Humphrey Scammon, to help expedite his lumbering operations.

The village grew steadily throughout the 18th century. In 1752, Sir William Pepperrell, then an English Baronet, donated four acres of land near the Falls to the town for use as a village common, a burying ground, and a site for a new meetinghouse. The settlers on the eastern bank separated from Biddeford in 1762 and named the new village Pepperrellborough in honor of the town's benefactor. The town grew rapidly in size and wealth as farming, lumbering, and shipbuilding bloomed and prospered. By the time of the Revolution, the growth of international commerce in the town required the government to establish a customs house near the wharves.

In 1805, the town dropped the weighty and difficult to spell name—Pepperrellborough, in favor of the simpler ancient name, Saco.

Some Interesting Facts...

- » Saco's Charter was signed by Governor Joshua Chamberlain on February 5, 1867
- » Saco's Thornton Academy last won a State football championship in 1988.
- » Saco is one of a few towns remaining that has a drive-in movie theater.
- » Saco's first City Administrator was Jack Dexter.
- » Saco's City Hall cost \$18,225 to build.
- » Saco's First Parish Congregational Church, built in 1862 and considered historical on the National Register of Historic Places, burned to the ground in 2000 but will rise from the ashes as it is being rebuilt on the exact same spot.