

## HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

### Introduction:

Solon's history is deeply embedded in its landscape, from the banks of the Kennebec River to the ridgelines and rural roads that define its settlement patterns. As one of Maine's early interior towns, Solon holds a rich legacy shaped by Indigenous stewardship, colonial-era settlement, and 19<sup>th</sup>-century agricultural and industrial development. Located in Somerset County along Route 201, Solon's geography made it both a natural river crossing and a strategic site in the movement of people and goods. This unique positioning has left behind a wealth of historic and archaeological resources that contribute to the town's identity and offer valuable insight into Maine's broader history.

What sets Solon apart is the continuity of its cultural narrative—from thousands of years of Wabanaki habitation to the rise of a vibrant mill village in the 1800s, followed by a transition to the quiet, residential and agricultural community it is today. This narrative is reinforced by Solon's place along the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway, where Indigenous, colonial, and logging-era histories are interpreted and preserved for public education and appreciation.

Many of Solon's historic structures, roads, cemeteries, and scenic landscapes remain intact, reflecting the architectural styles, industries, and lifeways of earlier generations. Although the town lacks a formal historic district, both the built and archaeological environments tell an important story that is still visible in the present-day landscape.

This chapter explores Solon's historic and archaeological resources, identifies current protections and areas of vulnerability, and highlights opportunities for preservation and community engagement. It aims to guide future growth and land use decisions in a way that respects and sustains Solon's unique heritage for generations to come.

### Historical Narrative and Timeline:

Solon is located along the Kennebec River in central Maine, part of the homeland of the Wabanaki peoples, who have lived in the region for over 13,000 years. The Kennebec River – called *Kwenebeki*, meaning “deep river” – was a vital corridor for travel, agriculture, ceremony, and diplomacy. Wabanaki communities, including those associated with the Kennebec and Sandy Rivers, maintained permanent and seasonal settlements along the riverbanks, with agricultural fields producing corn, beans, and squash, and extensive use of riverine resources like salmon and eels.

The Kennebec River served not only as a vital resource, but also as a major transportation corridor, connecting to a larger travel network through the Great Carrying Place Portage. Caratunk Falls, just south of present-day Solon, marked the transition from navigable waters to rapids and falls, requiring portage and supporting seasonal settlements that have left significant archaeological remains.

In Solon itself, four significant prehistoric archaeological sites have been documented along the Kennebec River, including the Williams Dam and Evergreens sites, both listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These reflect millennia of Indigenous habitation and activity, supported by rich fish runs and forest game.

**Early History- 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries:** The Kennebec River Valley was a focal point of conflict between the Wabanaki communities and European colonial powers throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Wabanaki, who had lived in kinship with the land and waters of the Kennebec River for thousands of years, found their homelands increasingly encroached upon by European settlers and military expeditions. Despite violence and displacement, the Wabanaki presence in the region was never fully extinguished. Oral histories and archaeological evidence confirm that Wabanaki people continued to live, hunt, fish, plant, and gather in the Solon area well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their descendants remain connected to their ancestral homeland today.

**Revolutionary War- 18<sup>th</sup> Century:** Solon also played a notable role in the Revolutionary War as part of the route taken by Benedict Arnold's 1775 expedition to Quebec. Arnold led more than 1,100 Continental Army soldiers up the Kennebec River as part of a bold but grueling campaign through the Maine wilderness. The expedition passed through what is now Solon, where the troops portaged around Caratunk Falls before continuing their overland march north. This moment in national history is commemorated locally through a series of historical markers, including plaques placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One such marker near the Kennebec River identifies the area where Arnold's troops left the water to begin their overland trek. This portion of the Arnold Trail to Quebec, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, establishes Solon as a meaningful waypoint in a nationally recognized Revolutionary War corridor. These commemorative sites contribute to Solon's cultural landscape and offer opportunities for heritage tourism, education, and regional interpretation alongside the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway.

**Early Settlement- 18<sup>th</sup> Century:** European colonization began in earnest in the late 1700s. In a bid to strengthen its territorial claim, Massachusetts granted townships in the Kennebec Valley to settlers, including Revolutionary War veterans. The area now known as Solon was deeded to a group from Salisbury and Amesbury, Massachusetts. Among the first Euro-American settlers were William Hilton and William Hunnewell from Wiscasset, who arrived in the 1780s.

Out of necessity, early settlement in Solon occurred along the Kennebec River and tributary streams. The first saw and grist mill was built on Fall Brook in the 1790s. At one time in Solon's early history, it has been claimed that there were seven dams on Fall Brook, each supporting one or more business establishments, such as tanneries, starch factory, gristmills, carding mills, a carriage factory, and several sawmills.

**19<sup>th</sup> Century:** These settlers established a river-centered agrarian village pattern. The early economy revolved around subsistence and commercial agriculture, and by the early 1800s, Solon's village core grew near the banks of Fall Brook and the Kennebec River. A series of mills – grist, lumber, and saw – used water power from these sources, creating an industrial village center. The establishment of a ferry service across the Kennebec River by 1828 and a bridge in 1910 further anchored Solon's development along Route 201. By 1809, Solon was incorporated through the general court of Massachusetts.

To name just a few mills and enterprises, the Solon Lumber Company mill was established in 1906, followed by the Northern Maine Packing Company in 1908 and the Central Maine Potato Company in 1913—both located near the Solon railway depot. The Solon Manufacturing Company, founded in 1935, was another significant enterprise well into more recent history. Thanks to Solon's advantageous location on the Kennebec River, numerous other businesses operated in town over the years, many of which left a lasting imprint on its history.

**1893:** The old Caratunk House burned. It was subsequently rebuilt in 1895, as the New Caratunk House, later Gray's Tavern, and presently the Solon Hotel.

**Settlement Continues- 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries:** From 1820 to 1850, waves of Irish immigrants settled in Solon, followed by smaller numbers of Scandinavian families in the early 1900s and French Canadians in the 1930s and 1940s. The town's population peaked around 1850, with 1,419 residents.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Solon's village structure solidified around the industrial and religious core: mills, churches (including the 1837 North Main Street Church and Pleasant Street Methodist Church), schools, the Caratunk Hotel (now the Solon Hotel, 1895), and eventually a railroad bridge and pulp mill. This linear village pattern along the river and Route 201 mirrored other Kennebec River towns, with outlying farms forming dispersed rural settlement nodes.

With the rise of the automobile, shifts in manufacturing, and the centralization of services in regional hubs like Skowhegan and Madison, Solon's local industry declined. Farming also became less viable, and by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, many of Solon's historic agricultural lands were fallow or converted to residential use. Today, the town functions primarily as a residential and commuting community.

Despite economic changes, the historic settlement patterns are still evident. The main village along Route 201 retains its traditional form, with civic buildings, churches, and historic homes. Many 19<sup>th</sup> century structures remain in use and have been preserved. Smaller hamlet-like clusters, such as South Solon, maintain traces of their historical identity through structures like the South Solon Meeting House and associated cemeteries.

**1925:** In September 1925, a fire swept through Solon's village center, destroying 19 buildings along the west side of Main Street and both sides of Ferry Street. Several structures at the top of Ferry Hill were also lost. This event had a profound effect on Solon's history, abruptly shutting down businesses, increasing unemployment, and ultimately contributing to a decline in the town's population.

## Maine Historic Preservation Commission Data

According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), there are three categories of historic and archaeological resources that are considered during comprehensive planning:

- **Prehistoric Archaeological Resources** – These refer to Native American sites that predate European contact, generally prior to the 1600s. In Solon, these include sites along the Kennebec River associated with the Wabanaki people, who have lived in the region for over 13,000 years. Such sites often contain artifacts, remnants of seasonal camps, or evidence of fishing, agriculture, and ceremonial use, and are typically located near waterways.
- **Historic Archaeological Resources** – These are sites that date from the early European settlement period and are associated with Solon's colonial and post-colonial history. Examples in Solon include early farmsteads, mills, blacksmith shops, cemeteries, and remnants of early transportation infrastructure such as the Caratunk Carry. These sites provide insights into the town's 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century agricultural and industrial heritage.
- **Historic Buildings, Structures, and Objects** – These are above-ground resources that reflect Solon's built environment and architectural history. They include churches, homes, civic buildings, and barns, many of which date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and contribute to the community's historic character. Some of these structures are individually significant, while others contribute to broader historic landscapes or village settings.

Archaeological resources—both prehistoric and historic—are typically found below ground and are often identified by remnants of past human activity, including foundations, tools, ceramics, food remains, petroglyphs, or modified terrain. In Solon, these resources are concentrated along the Kennebec River and its tributaries, where both Wabanaki and European settlers lived, traveled, and worked.

## Prehistoric Archaeological Sites

The Town of Solon is home to four documented prehistoric archaeological sites, identified by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission as Sites 69.5, 69.6, 69.17, and 69.21. All four are located along the banks of the Kennebec River, an area of known cultural significance that has been continuously inhabited by Wabanaki peoples for over 13,000 years. These sites reflect the long-standing presence and seasonal lifeways of Indigenous communities who relied on the river for transportation, fishing, and agriculture.

Two of these sites, —Site 69.5 at Williams Dam and Site 69.6 at The Evergreens Campground—have been determined to be of exceptional significance and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Professional archaeological surveys were conducted along the riverbank in connection with hydroelectric relicensing activities at Williams Dam, and extensive investigations have been carried out at The Evergreens Campground. These efforts have helped document and preserve the cultural history embedded in the landscape.

Although no prehistoric archaeological sites have been formally identified outside of the river corridor, the potential for undiscovered sites elsewhere in Solon remains. Additional survey work and careful monitoring should be encouraged in areas of proposed development, particularly near water sources or known Indigenous travel routes.

Existing and future threats to Solon's prehistoric archaeological resources include:

- Natural shoreline erosion from flooding and fluctuating river levels,
- Development pressure along the Kennebec River corridor,
- Recreational disturbance or unauthorized artifact collection.

Preserving these resources is critical to honoring Solon's deep Indigenous history and ensuring that future generations understand the full human story of the Kennebec River Valley.

## Historic Archaeological Sites

To date, 11 historic archaeological sites have been documented in the town of Solon, reflecting a wide array of settlement-era, industrial, transportation, and domestic heritage resources. These sites range in date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and offer a tangible record of early Euro-American occupation and development along the Kennebec River and within Solon's inland agricultural and village areas.

Notable sites include the Caratunk Falls Inscriptions (pictured at right) (ME 397-002), which are believed to date to 1775 and may be associated with the movement of Benedict Arnold's expedition to Quebec, and the Caratunk Carry (ME 397-003), a historic Wabanaki and Euro-American portage route used heavily in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Evergreens (ME 397-001) site may represent early contact-era activity. Other sites document community infrastructure, including Parkman's Blacksmith Shop (ME 397-011) and the Coburn & Moore Grist Mill (ME 397-010), both of which appear on the 1860 county map and represent Solon's 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial economy.



Domestic and agricultural life is represented in sites like the Pierce Farm (ME 397-006), Pierce Cemetery (ME 397-004), and residential sites such as H. Peavey (ME 397-008) and Mrs. S. Stone (ME 397-009), both of which are considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. These resources provide critical insight into the lifeways, architecture, and land use patterns of Solon's earliest non-Indigenous settlers.

No town-wide surveys for historic archaeological resources have been conducted to date in Solon. As such, there is significant potential for the identification of additional historic sites, especially those related to Solon's early Euro-American agricultural, domestic, and industrial development in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Areas of particular interest for further archaeological investigation include former village centers, mill sites, early homesteads, and historic road corridors.

Threats to these sites include:

- Ground disturbance from roadwork, new construction, or utility projects,
- Lack of awareness of site locations during land use changes, and
- Natural deterioration in the absence of preservation or documentation.

Future development planning should include provisions for archaeological review in historically sensitive areas, especially when ground disturbance is likely. Identifying, documenting, and preserving these resources will help Solon protect and interpret its unique historical legacy.

## **Solon's Historical Societies**

### *Solon Maine Historical Society*

The Solon Historical Society, located at 28 South Main Street, was founded with a mission to "gather and share the history of Solon, Maine." It operates seasonally – open every Tuesday from March through November (10AM-2PM) and by appointment in the winter – and holds monthly board meetings (4<sup>th</sup> Mondays, March-November). The Society's collection and programming reflect Solon's heritage through archival documents, exhibits, and community outreach. While the Society does not formally own any properties, it plays an advisory role in stewardship of above-ground resources.

### *South Solon Historical Society*

The South Solon Historical Society oversees the South Solon Meeting House (1842), a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980. This building is meticulously maintained in good condition by the nonprofit South Solon Historical Society. It remains open daily (unlocked at dawn) and is used for community gatherings. Its continued activity reflects effective stewardship and adaptive reuse.

## Solon's Historic Buildings/Structures/Objects

The recognized standard for determining whether a historic resource is worthy of preservation is eligibility for—or formal listing on—the National Register of Historic Places. Administered by the National Park Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National Register includes buildings, districts, structures, objects, and sites that are considered significant at the national, state, or local level for their architectural, cultural, or historical importance.

Solon has a plethora of historic buildings, structures and objects throughout town—far too many to list. Maine Department of Transportation maintains a public GIS map called Cultural & Architectural Resource Management Archive (CARMA) that is a database for these resources. CARMA documents the location, type of resource, eligibility status for listing on the National Register and other relevant information.

The table below shows a small portion of the buildings, structures, and objects in Solon; as stated above there are too numerous to include here, and many have already been determined as eligible to be listed on the National Historic Register.

TABLE 1: HISTORIC AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES IN SOLON

Site Name	Site Type	Periods of Significance	National Register Status
The Evergreens	Contact	17th Century	Undetermined
Caratunk Falls Inscriptions	Petroglyph	1775	Undetermined
Caratunk Carry	Portage	17th-18th centuries	Undetermined
Pierce Cemetery	Cemetery	1795-present	Undetermined
Caratunk House	Hotel	1841 to present	Undetermined
Pierce Farm	Farmstead	1793 to present	Undetermined
The Lake Road	Road	1830 to present	Undetermined
H. Peavey	Domestic		Eligible
Mrs. S. Stone	Domestic		Eligible
Coburn & Moore Grist Mill	Mill, Gristmill	Present on 1860 map	Undetermined
Parkman's Blacksmith Shop	Blacksmith's Shop	Present on 1860 map	Undetermined

Source: Cultural & Architectural Resource Management Archive (CARMA) Map

The site type refers to the primary use or age of the site. Contact refers to “pre-contact” or sites that represent the period before or during first contact between Europeans and Indigenous communities. Domestic refers to residential homes. Often, the first resident or builder is used as the site name.

<http://www.maine.gov/mdot/mapviewer/?show=Historic%20Districts,Historic%20Properties,Roads%20General&hide=FFC,MEDOT%20Regions>

In Solon, one property is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The South Solon Meeting House, located at 25 Meeting House Road in Solon, is a distinguished example of rural Gothic Revival architecture, built in 1842 to serve the First Congregational Church of Christ community. Its layout features a square tower with Gothic-arched louvers and pinnacles, while the interior retains original box pews, pulpit, and choir loft, preserving its mid-19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic.

From 1952 to 1956, benefactress Margaret Day Blake, a trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago and former Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture attendee, launched a bold fresco initiative at the meeting house. Under her Margaret Blake Fellowships, 13 prominent artists, many affiliated with the Skowhegan School, filled the interior walls and ceiling with buon frescos depicting biblical and secular themes. The result earned the South Solon Meeting House the moniker “the Sistine Chapel of Maine” and represents a unique intersection of Maine’s religious architecture and mid-century American Art.

As a testament to its architectural and artistic significance, the Meeting House was listed on the National Register in 1980. In 2006, the South Solon Historical Society, in partnership with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, supported a capital campaign that led to comprehensive interior and exterior renovation by 2009. Today, the South Solon Meeting House remains open daily from dawn until dusk and is managed by the South Solon Historic Society.

### **Local Historic Sites and Places**

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has identified several properties in Solon that appear eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, though they have not yet been formally nominated. Many of these are located within or near the village center and represent a rich cross-section of Solon’s residential, civic, and commercial history. Among them is the Caratunk House, now operating as the Solon Hotel, a large, turn-of-the-century inn originally built in the 1890s to accommodate woods crews. While altered, it remains one of the few buildings of its type still standing in the region. The Solon Public Library is another locally significant structure—architecturally modest but culturally important as a civic institution serving the town for generations. Both buildings are strong candidates for National Register nomination.

Residential architecture throughout Solon further enhances the town’s historic character. Homes along North Main Street and surrounding areas display a variety of 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century styles, including Greek Revival, Italianate, Vernacular Farmhouse, and 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> Century Revival forms. Many of these homes retain their original form and detailing and collectively present a remarkably intact historic streetscape. Given the architectural cohesion and the concentration of eligible properties in this area, Solon may be a strong candidate for the designation of a historic district, which could provide additional recognition and protection while making property owners eligible for tax incentives and grant opportunities.

It appears that a solid preliminary review has been conducted in the core village area, with multiple properties flagged as eligible. However, additional survey work is warranted in more rural areas of town—including early farmsteads, mill sites, and secondary road corridors—where there is likely untapped historic significance. Many properties outside the village may also meet the criteria for eligibility but have yet to be documented in detail.

As it stands, Solon has a notable stock of historic buildings that reflect the town's agricultural, industrial, and civic past—many of which could be preserved and celebrated through formal nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Doing so would provide not only greater visibility for these resources but also access to important tools for rehabilitation and preservation, supporting both heritage tourism and community revitalization efforts.

### **Threats to Local Historic/Archeological/Cultural Resources**

Solon's historic and archaeological resources represent a vital link to the town's past, yet many of these assets face growing threats due to a lack of formal protection, limited public awareness, and pressures from development, neglect, or incompatible land use. Currently, there are no designated historic districts within the town that receive local regulatory protection. While Solon has one building formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places—the South Solon Meeting House—most of the town's historic structures, including those identified as eligible for listing, remain in private ownership and are not subject to preservation oversight.

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has identified a number of historic archaeological sites along the Kennebec River, including former mill sites, early homesteads, and portage routes. While a portion of these have been documented through prior survey efforts—such as near Williams Dam and The Evergreens—most have not been comprehensively evaluated. Erosion, recreational use, and shoreline development pose risks to these sensitive sites. Unauthorized artifact collection and construction-related ground disturbance are additional threats to Solon's prehistoric and historic archaeological resources.

Among above-ground resources, a number of historic homes and civic structures in the village area have been identified as eligible for National Register listing but remain unprotected and in varying states of condition. While some, such as the Solon Public Library and the Solon Hotel (formerly Caratunk House), are maintained and in active use, others may be threatened by deferred maintenance, lack of reinvestment, or redevelopment pressure. Outlying farmsteads and older barns are particularly vulnerable due to shifting economic realities in agriculture and disuse.

Solon does not currently have zoning overlays, historic preservation ordinances, or financial incentives targeted toward preserving historic properties. As a result, there is no municipal mechanism to prevent demolition, insensitive renovation, or neglect of privately owned historic structures. Furthermore, areas with historic or archaeological significance have not been formally mapped or protected through land use planning and therefore may be inadvertently compromised by future development or subdivision activity.

While some significant historic resources remain in good condition, others have clearly fallen into disrepair or face neglect. Without local preservation incentives—such as property tax abatements, rehabilitation grants, or regulatory tools—these buildings risk losing their historic integrity or being lost entirely. Community-based solutions such as preservation outreach, technical support for property owners, or a small preservation fund could provide meaningful incentives to encourage stewardship.

## Cemeteries

Cemeteries are a critical link to Solon's heritage, offering tangible connections to the town's earliest families, veterans, and cultural traditions. These sacred spaces preserve genealogical records, local craftsmanship, and evolving community values. The town of Solon has an obligation to protect and maintain certain public cemeteries, while others remain under private or family ownership.

The following is a list of known cemeteries in Solon, which are also identified on the *Historic and Archaeological Resources Map*:

- **South Solon Cemetery** – A prominent burial ground containing graves of early settlers and veterans. This cemetery dates back to 1833.
- **Pierce Cemetery** – An 18th-century cemetery associated with the historic Pierce Farmstead, recognized in archaeological records.
- **Village Cemetery (Main Street)** – Serves as the principal cemetery for the central village area. This cemetery was incorporated in 1870, but dates on headstones are much older.
- **Hilton Cemetery** – Located on River Road, this small, family cemetery is notably the burial ground for the first settler of Solon.
- **Evergreen Cemetery** – Located on River Road, this cemetery was originally known as Maple Grove Cemetery. The name was changed to Evergreen Cemetery in 1881.
- **Rowell Mountain Cemetery** – Located in a rural setting on Rowell Mountain Road; includes burials from surrounding farmsteads. **Other Private or Family Cemeteries** – In Solon's early days of settlement, it was typical practice for families to set apart a plot of land on the home farm to be used as a family burying ground. Sometimes several families in a neighborhood united in this project. The results were small family or private cemeteries, scattered throughout the town, many of which remain undocumented. These small cemeteries often have limited or informal means of maintenance.

These cemeteries reflect diverse periods of Solon's history, from early agricultural settlement to more recent community development. While several are maintained by the town, many private cemeteries face challenges such as overgrowth, weathering, and lack of clear ownership or caretaking responsibility.

## Protecting Significant Historic and Archeological Resources

As of 2025, Solon does not have any formally designated historic districts, either at the local or federal level. However, the town contains a significant number of historic buildings and structures—particularly within the village center—that retain a high level of architectural integrity and could potentially qualify for designation. The presence of multiple properties identified as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places suggests that a historic district nomination could be a viable strategy for both recognition and preservation.

Solon is served by two active historical organizations: the Solon Historical Society, which maintains archives and promotes local history through programs and exhibits, and the South Solon Historical Society, which manages the South Solon Meeting House—a nationally listed historic property. Both organizations contribute meaningfully to preserving the community's cultural and architectural heritage, but they operate largely in an advisory or volunteer capacity, without regulatory authority.

There is evidence of community interest in preserving these resources, particularly among residents who value the town's rural character, older homes, and long-standing institutions. Public interest has also been shown through the restoration of the South Solon Meeting House and continued use of historic buildings like the Solon Library and village churches. However, without formal protections—such as preservation ordinances, design review, or zoning overlays—many historic and archaeological resources remain vulnerable to neglect, insensitive alterations, or demolition.

The only significant regulatory protection comes when federal or state funding is involved, triggering a review for properties listed or eligible for the National Register. This means that most historic and archaeological sites in Solon are not proactively protected through municipal policy. To ensure long-term stewardship of these resources, the town could consider conducting a comprehensive architectural survey, supporting National Register nominations, creating a local historic district or design guidelines, and offering incentives for preservation. Such measures would help bridge the gap between community values and long-term resource protection.

## Existing Land Use Protections

Although the town of Solon does not currently have any formally designated local historic districts or a preservation ordinance, certain protections for historic and archaeological resources are incorporated through state statutes and existing local regulations. Most notably, both the town's Subdivision Ordinance and Shoreland Zoning Ordinance include language that indirectly supports preservation efforts.

Under Maine's subdivision statute (Title 30-A §4404), municipalities are required to consider the potential impact of proposed developments on historic sites, including those listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. As a result, Solon's subdivision review process includes consideration of known historic and archaeological resources during application review, particularly when such sites have been previously documented or mapped.

Solon's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance also provides an important layer of protection. One of its stated purposes is explicitly "to protect archaeological and historic resources." This provision ensures that any development proposed within 250 feet of a water body—including the Kennebec River, Fall Brook, and other tributaries—is subject to regulatory review that includes potential impacts to cultural resources, many of which are concentrated along these waterways.

Solon's inclusion in the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway adds another layer of cultural and interpretive protection, as the corridor highlights Solon's role in Maine's historical transportation and logging routes. While not regulator, this designation supports view-shed preservation, heritage tourism, and access to grant programs. Existing interpretive signage at Robbins Hill and other key locations helps educate the public and reinforce the historical identity of the community as a part of the larger cultural landscape.

Despite these built-in protections, Solon's current ordinances do not require applicants to conduct archaeological or historic surveys as part of site plan or subdivision approval. In practice, protection depends largely on whether sites are already known to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission or visible to local reviewers. There is no mechanism requiring coordination with preservation professionals or MHPC unless triggered by state or federal permitting processes. This leaves many undocumented or less visible resources vulnerable to disturbance or loss, especially in areas beyond the shoreland zone.

To improve the effectiveness of local protections, Solon could consider adopting clearer language in its ordinances that would require surveys or professional consultation in areas with high archaeological or historic potential. Mapping known resources, collaborating with MHPC on updates, and training staff to recognize culturally sensitive areas would also strengthen protections. As public interest in preservation grows, these measures would help ensure Solon's cultural heritage is not lost through inaction or oversight.

## Important Partners for Historic and Archaeological Preservation

Important partners for historic and archaeological preservation in Solon include both local organizations and state-level agencies. The Solon Historical Society and South Solon Historical Society play a central role in preserving, interpreting, and promoting awareness of the town's cultural heritage. These groups maintain archives, facilitate public programming, and steward key resources—such as the South Solon Meeting House, a nationally recognized historic property. Their volunteer-driven efforts have been instrumental in preserving Solon's architectural character and connecting residents to the town's past.

The Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway Management Group and the associated Historical Society are also important regional partners. They have developed interpretive installations, supported archaeological surveys, and contributed to regional preservation planning that includes Solon.

At the state level, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) is a key partner, providing expertise, technical assistance, and regulatory oversight for projects involving historic and archaeological resources. MHPC maintains the official inventory of Solon's historic properties and archaeological sites and advises on matters related to National Register eligibility, preservation planning, and compliance with state and federal review processes. Additional partners may include the Skowhegan History House Museum, which supports regional heritage initiatives, and the Maine Archaeological Society, which can offer guidance on the protection and documentation of prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. Strengthening connections with these partners will be essential as Solon continues to document and preserve its unique historical legacy.

## Historic & Archaeological Resources Analysis

- Solon has a rich history that resulted in the settlement pattern that is still clearly visible today.
- The town's history was shaped by its geography along the Kennebec River and Route 201.
- Solon reflects a long cultural history— from thousands of years of Wabanaki habitation to 19th-century mill village development and today's rural community character.
- Solon lies along the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway, helping preserve and interpret its layered history.
- There are four documented prehistoric archaeological sites, identified by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission in Solon.
- The MHPC has documented 11 historic archaeological sites Solon.
- The MHPC has documented 1 historic buildings, structures, and objects in Solon: the South Solon Meeting House. Numerous other buildings and structures were determined to be eligible for listing.
- The South Solon Meeting House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and is managed by the South Solon Historic Society.
- Solon Maine Historic Society and South Solon Historic Society are both active and serve separate purposes in town.
- While Solon lacks a formal historic district, many structures, landscapes, and archaeological sites remain intact and convey its historical identity.
- Historic and archaeological resources have minimal protection in Solon. The Subdivision and Shoreland Zoning Ordinances both have the state mandated language that offers slight protection of these resources.