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LD 761

Speaking as the Manager of Collections at the Castine Historical Society, I am strongly in favor of this bill, which would allow for much-needed investment into some of Maine's lesser known historical sites.

Some tangible benefits are obvious, including increased potential for tourism, education, and research. There are also a number of less obvious benefits, such as increased civic pride and engagement, investment in place, memorialization of our ancestors, and better quality of life. Most important of all is the capacity for these sites to act as a reference for us to understand our own place in history; how the past still exerts a direct influence on our thoughts and actions today, and how our society has changed over time.

On-site visits to interpretive historical sites are integral to a holistic understanding of history by children and adults alike, offering new and memorable educational opportunities and helping immensely to put existing knowledge into a place-based context.

I understand that one of the historical sites which would benefit from this legislation is Fort George, located in Castine. I can speak directly to the need for better conservation and interpretation of this site in particular.

Fort George, the last fort in America to be vacated by the British after the Revolutionary War, is perhaps the single most important physical testament to Maine's role in the formation of the United States. Constructed by British forces in the early summer of 1779 on the strategic Castine peninsula, the fort variously represented a British consolidation of land and sea power, a buffer between Canada and the rebel strongholds in Massachusetts, and a refuge for Loyalists as they fled north.

Before British forces had even finished its construction, Fort George was the target of the Penobscot Expedition, a major assault by American forces which featured one of the first marine landings in U.S. history. The Expedition's sea battle represents the worst defeat of the American Navy before Pearl Harbor, and is still taught in military academies as an example of why unity of command is an operational necessity. These superlatives should indicate how immeasurably important Fort George is as a Revolutionary War site, and indeed as a U.S. historic site in general. It was also reoccupied by British forces in the War of 1812, demonstrating Maine's repeatedly tenuous position as a contested territory.

It is very disappointing, then, that the sizeable earthworks of the fort, which loom prominently over the Maine Maritime Academy campus, have not yet benefited from significant preservation or historical interpretation. There is a great deal that could be done to shore up the site's legacy and utilize it as a valuable tool for teaching, tourism, and civic engagement. I hope this legislation can be enacted to serve both this important site and others around Maine.