

## Testimony in Support of I.D. 762

Dr. Steven K. Ingram, President, Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

Eagle Island, off the coast of Harpswell, is far enough into Casco Bay to offer isolation but close enough for its perfect symmetry to capture the imagination of a young man. Robert E. Peary could see its mystical shape against the horizon during breaks from his studies at Bowdoin College and bought the island with the first money he could save as a surveyor after graduation. His dream was to build a family home on its southern promontory, finally completed in 1904, delayed by his 8 trips to research and explore the Arctic regions, culminating in his 'discovery' of the geographic North Pole in 1909. Three Peary family generations summered on Eagle Island until 1967 when the family donated the island and the Peary house and its contents to the State of Maine with the stipulation that it be maintained and shared with all people, especially the citizens of Maine.

Since then, Eagle Island has been designated and managed as a State Historic Park under the Bureau of Parks and Lands and its predecessors. As one of many state historic parks, it has had to share limited state funding for its operation, maintenance, and management. The island's staff of one or two rangers were often overwhelmed by five to six thousand visitors during summer operation and the Bureau's small maintenance staff had to divide their time among all historic sites. To support the state in the operation of Eagle Island a volunteer, non-profit organization, the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island, was formed in 1992. Over 1500 volunteer hours per summer provide docent support to assure all visitors get the rangers' customary Eagle Island welcome and volunteer work crews provide trail maintenance, minor repairs, and gardeners to tend the historic family gardens and annual plantings. Donations to the Friends from visitors and supporters of historic preservation have funded major improvements to the island including composting toilets for the convenience of visitors, a fire suppression system for the museum, security system for the museum artifacts, solar power as needed, and most of the materials and labor for the construction of the Welcome Center.

But deferred maintenance of the structures has been an issue year in and year out. The island environment and the winter storms challenge the 120-year-old structures. The integrity of the external shell of the museum has suffered failure of the roofing in spots, window and window sills and casings deterioration, and general aging as with any wooden structure in an island setting. The deferred maintenance became a crisis during the covid years when the museum was closed to visitors. Moisture penetration gave mold a foothold in several interior places and this has yet to be addressed. Further, the January 2024 storms swept away the pier providing access to the island and did significant damage to the stone work protecting the building foundations. This storm damage is being addressed with funding planned from federal FEMA

finds, but the deferred maintenance remains a critical need for the funding proposed in I.D. 762.

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island stand ready to add its financial support to the funding coming from I.D. 762. Together we can offer a joint state-private match as leverage for significant grant funding to meet the critical needs of state historic sites.

Eagle Island is just one example of the need for additional state funding common to all state historic sites.

I.D. 762 offers the state the opportunity to recommit to its historic sites and thereby to celebrate Maine's unique history and its contributions to our nation's history.