



**TESTIMONY  
OF  
Steve Bromage, Executive Director  
Maine Historical Society**

February 7, 2025

132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
and the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

*LD 210, HP0132 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027*

**Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy** members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Steve Bromage, Executive Director of the Maine Historical Society. Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony to you today.

**I. Public Service**

**Maine Historical Society** is a private non-profit whose mission is to preserve and share Maine's story.

We were founded in 1822—just two years after Maine became a state—and have been collecting, preserving, and promoting research, scholarship, and engagement with Maine history ever since.

Based in Portland, we work closely with communities and partners throughout the state, and serve a statewide audience, visitors to Maine, and people interested in Maine throughout the world.

MHS's core program areas include the **Brown Research Library**, the **MHS Museum** which includes the **Wadsworth-Longfellow House** (1785-6), a National Historic Landmark, and the **Maine Memory Network**. We also partner with and provide archival, curatorial, storage, and other services to individuals, institutions, and businesses.

**(a) The Brown Research Library.** The **Brown Research Library** provides access to the most comprehensive collection of archival material related to Maine history, and serves researchers, scholars, educators, students, genealogists, the general public, and professionals from many fields.

Our collection include archival, library, and special collections that document Maine, New England, and U.S. history and genealogy. Strengths include maps and treaties which illustrate the shared Wabanaki and Colonial experience; European exploration, settlement, and land-use; personal, business, and organizational records that document Maine's economic, religious, social, and political history; family history collections; Maine's participation in national and international events; natural resources, maritime history, and social reform movements; and exceptional photography, map, newspaper, architecture, and engineering records.

Major collections include the extensive archives of the **Central Maine Power Company**, **Bangor Theological Seminary**, the **Merrill Companies**, and **Maine Medical Center**.

We have recently completed major collections initiatives related to our early Maine photography, Portland Press Herald Glass Plate Negative, clothing, and architecture collections—each is available online through the Maine Memory Network.

Many of these collections are cared for and stored at the **P.D. Merrill Collections Center** which we developed in partnership with **Portland Public Library**. The Center has transformed MHS's ability to care for, grow, and mobilize our collections. The facility provides 18,000 square feet of climate-controlled space to manage, digitize, and house our collections which are the foundation for all MHS activities.

MHS also supports extensive **scholarly and publishing activities**. This includes publishing the journal *Maine History* in partnership with the History Department at the University of Maine, and regularly hosting fellowships and scholarly forums.

**(b) Maine Historical Society Museum.** The MHS Museum offers tours of the Wadsworth-Longfellow House and changing exhibitions and public programs that use Maine history to provide information, context, and perspective for issues of contemporary interest and concern.

Recent major initiatives explored immigration, veterans' issues, Maine's food heritage and economy, and Maine's evolving paper industry. Our first major Maine Bicentennial exhibition, *Holding Up the Sky: Wabanaki People, Culture, History & Art* (2019) explored 13,000 years of Wabanaki presence in and stewardship of Maine and was developed with eight Wabanaki co-curators. Our 2021 exhibition—*Begin Again: Reckoning with Intolerance in Maine*—explored how Maine fits into the national dialog on race and equity. In 2023, *CODE RED: Climate, Justice & Natural History Collections* explored the importance of the environment to Maine's identity and way of life, and how climate change may affect that.

Last year's exhibition *Music in Maine* celebrated the role that music plays in Mainers' lives. Opening in March, our new exhibition, *Notorious: Maine Crime in the Public Eye, 1690-1940*, will explore Maine's fascination with true crime, from the Salem Witch Trials in 1692 to the shootout with Brady Gang in downtown Bangor in 1937.

Each initiative includes an exhibition, digital resources, extensive public programs delivered via Zoom, and educational resources that support remote learning. All are available online.

MHS also provides extensive **Education** programs at its museum and through Maine Memory Network.

**(c) Maine Memory Network.** See below.

**(d) Maine History Maker Award.** MHS also presents the annual Maine History Maker Award which honors contemporary Mainers who are making a difference *today*. Recent award recipients include the L.L. Bean family, the Cianchette family, Earle Shettleworth, Jr., Harold Pachios and Severin Beliveau, and Joan Benoit Samuelson.

Through these activities, MHS serves approximately 500,000 people each year on our campus, through outreach programs, and online.

## **II. Employees, Total Budget, and the General Fund**

MHS has a staff of 24 full-time, 5 part-time, and 8 seasonal employees, and a current total annual budget of approximately \$2.6 million. Our budget is supported by membership, individual giving, earned income, endowment, and foundation and government grants. In the proposed Biennial Budget for 2026-2027, MHS would receive \$44,864 annually from the State of Maine General Fund, less than 2% of our operating budget.

## **III. Funding Initiative**

State funds received by Maine Historical Society support the continued development, maintenance, and outreach services provided through the Maine Memory Network.

The **Maine Memory Network** ([www.mainememory.net](http://www.mainememory.net)), our nationally-recognized digital platform, empowers Maine communities to share their collections, stories, and perspectives. Maine Memory has evolved constantly since its launch in 2001 and serves as a robust platform for a wide range of historical interests and activity. It includes historical material contributed by 300+ partners across Maine—local historical societies, libraries, town offices, and many others. Maine Memory features hundreds of digital exhibits, educational resources, *My Maine Stories*—a portal that enables individuals to share their stories, and *Maine History Online*, a sprawling introduction to Maine. The model radically expands the perspectives that are included in Maine history. New material is added constantly. Maine Memory also provides deep access to many of MHS’s most important collections.

Every one of those 300 partners referenced has received training and support from MHS staff. Each gains extensive benefits from the infrastructure MHS provides, and our continued digital leadership.

Maine Memory Network content is used ravidly by readers around the world, and featured in numerous ways, including exhibits, program initiatives, educational resources, and through our new e-publication, **Maine Connection**, which shares 4-5 diverse stories about Maine each month, and highlights communities and partners throughout the state.

Annual operating costs for Maine Memory are approximately \$250,000. In the current year, state funding accounts for just under 18% of its operations. Sustaining Maine Memory as a free and vital public resource is one of MHS’ foremost strategic priorities. The state’s general fund allocation is essential to that.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

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We have built an organization dedicated to exploring what makes Maine “Maine,” and to drawing together and sharing the stories and contributions that people from every corner of the state make to the Maine Experience.

Having celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2022, MHS is deeply focused on establishing a strong foundation for MHS’s third century of service to Maine.

Over the past decade we have made strides in every area of the organization, from the level of care and access we provide to the collections, to groundbreaking exhibits that provide context for key Maine topics, to our continued digital leadership, to our commitment to serving and being relevant to the broadest possible audience.

We have a powerful vision and well-developed plans for expanding the role that history and MHS play in Maine.

But we have been severely limited in what we can accomplish by the small size of our team and modest budget.

In response, in June 2022 the MHS Board adopted MHS’s 2022-2027 Business Plan which focuses on building capacity and expanding our reach, audience, and impact.

The Business Plan is guiding us as we transform MHS from a small but mighty organization that consistently fights above its weight to one that has the capacity and resources to inspire and be a source of perspective *for all people who care about Maine.*

Increased state funding will be essential to sustaining this work and expanding our impact. We look forward to sharing more about our plans and collaborating with you in the months and years ahead.

I encourage you to draw on MHS—we work closely with communities in every one of your districts, and provide tremendous resources to support your work in the Legislature.

Thank you so much for your interest and support. I’d be happy to answer any questions.