

**Testimony of Barry Hodge- Chairman Board of Trustees
General Henry Knox Museum**

**Chairman Senator Ross
Chairman Representative Pluecker
Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee
Senator Beebe-Center
Representative Matlack**

My name is Barry Hodge and I am the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the General Henry Knox Museum. I am here today to support LD 1264 and the amendment . I would like to start by saying that we have no desire or intention to sell the building, property or collection. We have no intention to cease providing education and historical programming. In fact, this year we have expanded our programming significantly, created a new scholarship program and increased the number of school age student workshops.

We do ask that you approve an amendment that removes the historical preservation easement. The removal of the easement is critical to the survival of the Museum. In 1999 when the Legislature voted to give the building, land and collection to the Friends of Montpelier via LD540, there was no easement required by the act. However, upon presentation of the quitclaim deed a right of first refusal and a historic preservation easement was attached. The right of first refusal is not an issue since we have no intention of ever selling the property. However, the easement is enforced based on National Park Service rules and regulations. Those rules and regulations prevent us from maintaining the property using common sense approaches, materials that will stand the test of time, offer energy efficiency and provide protection of the collection.

The building is a replica of the original Montpelier. It is not on historic grounds. The original Knox Estate was over a mile away. When this building was constructed in 1930 by the Knox Memorial Association with support of the DAR and Cyrus Curtis, in order to obtain actual Knox artifacts such as the General's bed, his bible, his Medal and several other important pieces, the heirs required the it be fire proof. Therefore, they built a brick and steel structure and placed wooden siding on the exterior with plaster on the interior walls. This method quickly became a problem since condensation would develop between the brick and the wood. It also permeated into the plaster interior walls. The moisture problem required the building to be painted every five years and significant interior work to be done on the walls and ceilings.

The Knox Memorial Association could not afford to maintain the building and gave it to the State of Maine in 1965. The State held the property until 1999 when it was given to the Friends of Montpelier. During the period of the State ownership there were many concerns about the lack of maintenance and an article was written in Down East magazine in 1984 pointing out and questioning the State's stewardship of the building.

Fast forward to 2018 when Museum representatives approached the State concerning the possibility of having to return the property. The Bangor Daily News did an article on the possibility of the Museum closing and interviewed Tom Desjardin, Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands. He stated "It's a wonderful place, people learn a lot of things about history. The group has done an amazing job and they can't make it work." Desjardin stated further " We couldn't make it work and that's why we gave it away". The State could not make it work even though they were not restricted by a historic preservation easement.

An interesting fact is that the Maine Historic Preservation Committee oversees 146 Easements in the State of Maine. The General Henry Knox Museum is the only replica building on the list. Interestingly, the last surviving original building of the Knox Estate, the Thomaston Historical Society building does not have an easement nor does Fort Knox in Prospect, an actual historic site.

Well, we can make it work, if we are not restricted by the onerous and repressive historic preservation easement. We have the 100th Anniversary approaching in 2030 and have approximately \$750,000.00 to raise to bring the building into all its glory. That will not be possible if we are going to be constrained by the easement. What will happen then to the only museum in the country that honors the life and legacy of a great American hero, General Henry Knox?

CHAPTER 10

H.P. 398 - L.D. 540

Resolve, Authorizing the Transfer of Certain State Historic Site Property

Preamble. Whereas, the Constitution of Maine, Article IX, Section 23 requires that real estate held by the State for conservation purposes may not be reduced or its uses substantially altered except on the vote of 2/3 of all members elected to each House; and

Whereas, the land authorized for transfer by this resolve is within the designations in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 12, section 598-A; and

Whereas, the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands within the Department of Conservation may sell and convey lands with the approval of the Governor and the Commissioner of Conservation in accordance with the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 12, section 1814; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands authorized to convey Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum, consisting of historic site land, improvements, structures and historical collections, to the Friends of Montpelier. Resolved: That the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands within the Department of Conservation may by deed and gift agreement convey Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum, including 4.2 acres, more or less, of historic site land and related improvements, structures and historical collections, in the Town of Thomaston, Knox County, to the Friends of Montpelier, a nonprofit corporation, to be used for historic preservation and public education purposes. The contract for the transfer must contain a reversion clause specifying that, if the Friends of Montpelier do not continue to use the building and the collections for public educational, historic or cultural purposes, the building and collections will revert to the Bureau of Parks and Lands; and be it further

Sec. 2. Appropriation. Resolved: That the following funds are appropriated from the General Fund to carry out the purposes of this resolve.

2000-01

**CONSERVATION,
DEPARTMENT OF**

Parks - General Operations

All Other (\$1,805)

Deappropriates funds no longer needed for insurance payments due to the transfer of a historic property from the State to the Friends of Montpelier.

See title page for effective date.

CHAPTER 11

H.P. 656 - L.D. 912

Resolve, to Transfer Land in Edmunds

Preamble. The Constitution of Maine, Article IX, Section 23 requires that real estate held by the State for conservation purposes may not be reduced or its uses substantially altered except on the vote of 2/3 of all members elected to each House.

Sec. 1. Director of Bureau of Public Lands authorized to convey real estate in Edmunds. Resolved: That, pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 12, section 598-A and section 1837, subsection 1, once the Bureau of Public Lands acquires title from the Town of Dennysville to a parcel of land and the structure situated on that land in Edmunds, Washington County, the Director of the Bureau of Public Lands is authorized to convey that parcel of land to the Dennys River Historical Society. The parcel of land consists of approximately 9/16 of an acre and is bounded and described as follows:

Beginning at a point located 41 feet 8 inches S. 22°E. from the southeast corner of M. E. Church; thence N. 67° 15' W. 9 rods more or less to the center of the traveled highway between the 2 bridges; thence along said highway bearing N. 20° 45' E. 10 rods more or less to the intersection of the traveled Hurley Point Road; thence along said Hurley Point Road bearing S. 64° E. 10 rods more or less; thence S. 25° 30' W, 9 rods more or less to the point of beginning said land to contain 9/16 acres more or less.

The director is authorized to convey the above-described property and improvements to the property on the condition that the property and improvements be retained by the Dennys River Historical Society and used exclusively for public purposes and on further condition that, in the event the presently unorganized township of Edmunds becomes incorporated as a town, then the Dennys River Historical Society, upon the request of the Town of Edmunds,



**TOWN OF THOMASTON
SELECT BOARD**

Resolution

**A Resolution of the Town of Thomaston Supporting
The General Henry Knox Museum**

WHEREAS, the General Henry Knox Museum, a Maine non-profit 501c3 organization, is a vital piece of American Revolution history in the Town of Thomaston since 1930, providing quality community and educational programming, preserving a historically significant replica museum and property; and

WHEREAS, the General Henry Knox Museum is the only building in our country representing the legacy of Major General Henry Knox, American's first Secretary of War in President George Washington's first cabinet, the man who was critical to formulating the plan for General Washington's crossing the Delaware and commanded the entire river crossing, end to end, the leader who designed the plan and mobilized his men to move 59 tons of cannons in the dead of winter over 300 miles overland from New York to Boston Harbor, forcing British ships to evacuate Boston Harbor without firing a single round, the man who commanded artillery at Trenton, Monmouth and Yorktown, and upon his military retirement was an integral part of Thomaston, Maine's history, introducing various industries like shipbuilding, logging, brick making, and lime quarrying, starting local militia groups and employing many townspeople, and designing the Thomaston Cavalry flag, one of the oldest Maine Military flags still in existence, the original of which resides at the General Henry Knox Museum for the anyone to view, the image of which is also the official Thomaston Maine flag; and

WHEREAS, the Town Select Board determines that the preservation of the General Henry Knox Museum is of paramount importance to the economic vitality of the Town of Thomaston and the region; and

WHEREAS, the General Henry Knox Museum continues to request compromises with the State of Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission regarding the removal of a historical conservation easement in order to repair the museum in an energy efficient and cost-effective manner to ensure its survival.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thomaston Select Board will advocate and support the General Henry Knox Museum's efforts to reach a resolution with the State of Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Thomaston Select Board this 8th day of January, 2024.



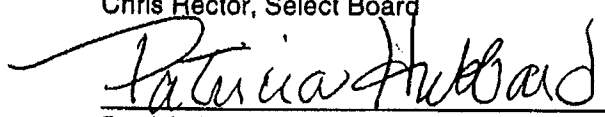
William Hahn, Select Board Chair



Peter Lammert, Select Board Vice-Chair



Sandra Moore, Select Board

Chris Rector, Select Board


Patricia Hubbard, Select Board

Attest:

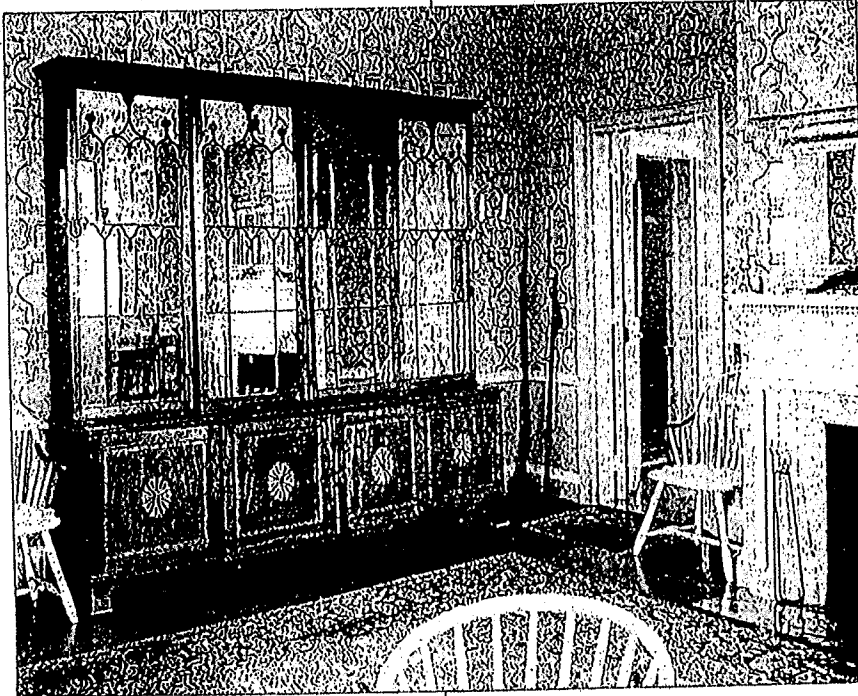

Melissa Stevens, Town Clerk

January 08, 2024

Date

while inside, moisture-laden walls had sent strips of wallpaper cascading down to the floor. Even now, despite the newly whitewashed outside, the plaster walls rising above the lovely flying staircase in the central hallway — as well as in some of Montpelier's eighteen other

hold onto the mansion for only one more generation, until Henry's last child, daughter named Lucy, died in 1854. When the managers of the Knox and Lincolnton Railroad subsequently decided the site of the weather-beaten manse was right in the way of where they wanted to lay their railroad track, the fate of the house was quickly sealed. A few futile efforts were made at raising funds to save it, but as one writer later observed, it was widely felt that the county of Knox, partitioned off and named after the general just a decade before, was a sufficient memorial. The general's house was torn down in 1871.



The exquisite central flying staircase (opposite), well lit by the many-windowed monitor roof, remains in good shape, as does the general's library (top), with its mirrored, inlaid bookcase and fine Federal-style moldings. Amid the twining vines of the dining room's authentically reproduced wallpaper, Mrs. Knox's spinet still stands, a sheet of music at the ready.

rooms — remain pockmarked from water damage.

Over the last few years, while guidebooks and tourist brochures still blithely touted this historic monument as a worthwhile attraction, residents of Thomaston and environs had become increasingly alarmed as the building began looking undeniably shabby. "It looked terrible," says Mary Louise Meyer, a concerned area resident. "A lot of people were scared to pieces that it was ready to fall down." Questions began arising about just how carefully the state, which has owned Montpelier since 1965, was managing its stewardship. Just how bad was the condition of the old place? Was it worth saving? And in a time when so many badly needed social and economic programs were going begging, should taxpayers' dollars be used to shore up an old house? These questions and others focused new attention on General Knox's grand old estate, attention it sorely needed.

A hundred twenty-five years ago, Montpelier was in even worse condition. After the general's death in 1806, the family fortunes had taken a rapid downhill slide and the Knoxes managed to

It took more than forty years before the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) began to campaign for a more fitting monument. The Colonial Revival fervor of the day, inspired by America's steadily growing worldwide stature and wealth, was being felt in Maine as well. This renewed interest in the nation's roots gave rise to a mania for early antiques — and for refurbishing great eighteenth-century houses, of which the state had plenty. Many fine old houses in York were rescued in the years after the turn of the century, as well as South Berwick's gracious Hamilton House. Back in Thomaston, the good ladies of the Genealogical Knox Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution fixed their energies on their local hero. *Fixated* might be a better word. No mere statue or stone would do for the man who had turned the tide of the great Revolutionary battles in Boston, Trenton, and Yorktown. Instead, they envisioned a full-scale replica of his mansion.

Having a dream was one thing; getting it built was another. Quite simply, the DAR discovered that accomplishing this lofty goal was not as easy as voting to do it and setting up committees. Even though the recent restoration of George Washington's home in Virginia had been successful, the financial uncertainty surrounding World War I put a decided crimp into plans to recreate the home of the man sometimes called Washington's favorite general. In spite of an appropriation from the state legislature, as well as considerable efforts in fund-raising nationwide by the DAR and by the Knox Memorial Association (which had been formed locally to involve many people as possible in the effort), the dream of rebuilding Montpelier did not become reality until the late 1920s, nearly sixty years after the original's demolition — and only then with the gift of \$150,000 donated in several timely

(Continued on page 39)

CAN THE GENERAL HENRY KNOX MUSEUM BE SAVED?

The General Henry Knox Museum is fighting for its survival. For a year and half the Board of Trustees of the Museum have been attempting to negotiate with the State of Maine and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission concerning the maintenance of the Museum. The State and the MHPC have ruled that the building is a historic site. In fact, the building is a replica of the original Henry Knox home that was demolished in 1871 due to its dilapidated condition and to make way for the railroad. The only remaining original building is now the home of the Thomaston Historical Society.

The replica built in 1929-1930 is not located on the site of the original Estate. It was built upon a hill, on donated land. The structure upon completion was owned by the Knox Memorial Association and due to enormous maintenance costs was given to the State of Maine in 1965. In addition to being a very large building, the unique construction of the building created many issues with maintenance. The building was built with steel and brick in its entirety then the exterior was clad with wooden clapboards affixed to the brick with furring strips. This allowed moisture to collect between the surfaces creating moisture issues on the interior and significant issues with paint on the clapboards. The State owned it from 1965 to 1999 when they deeded the property to the Friends of Montpelier. This is where the problem begins. The 119th Legislature during its First Regular session in July of 1999 considered LD540, a proposal to authorize the transfer of certain property associated with Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum, from the State to the Friends of Montpelier. The actual enacted law summary is as follows: *Resolve 1999, chapter 10 authorizes the transfer of certain property associated with Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum, from the State to the Friends of Montpelier. The deed and gift agreement provided for the property and historical collection to be used exclusively for historic preservation and public education purposes. The Resolve requires the contract conveying the property to contain a reversion clause to provide for the property to revert to the Bureau of Parks and Lands if it is not used for these purposes.* The problem that confronts the Trustees of the General Henry Knox Museum today is that a Historic Preservation Easement was added after the legislative action and made part of the deed to the Friends of Montpelier.

Our mission is twofold. Our passion is to tell the story of Henry Knox, a true American hero. A man who rose from being a humble bookseller in Boston, Massachusetts to become an amazing General in Washington's army to fight the British for independence. His contributions led him to become Washington's right-hand man. After the war was won, he went on to become the first Secretary of War for our liberated country. The story of his life is truly amazing, and it is our responsibility to make sure it is always remembered. We also have the duty to maintain the General Henry Knox Museum so that we have a location to show visitors what Henry's house was like and tell them about the man. It is the position of the Board of Trustees that we maintain the building using commonsense approaches which will enable us to achieve energy efficiency, protection of the collection of artifacts and allow us to reduce the enormous amount of maintenance that the building requires while maintaining the overall appearance of the building.

The MHPC has decided that National Park Service guidelines apply to our building even though it is a replica. They state that we are on the National Register of Historic Places. We are not listed individually on the register based on our merits. We are listed as part of the Thomaston Historic District. A district that contains many wonderful homes on Main Street, Watts Hall, and the last surviving original building of the Knox Estate. Interestingly, many of these structures are much older than the Museum but they do not have an easement. The State then takes the position that any building constructed more than 50 years ago is historic. Think about that, any building built prior to 1973 is considered historic. That premise is ludicrous.

As we approach our 100th year anniversary in 2030 we want to bring the Museum to all its glory and it will require a great deal of work, but we are willing to do what is necessary to make that 100th year anniversary special. Some of the work that we must undertake is a direct result of the State's lack of maintenance during the 34 years they owned the building. Additionally, some of the work that must be done was due to poor workmanship during the period the State owned the building. An excellent example is the front porch. The front porch was rebuilt by the State in 1992-93. In their construction they used pressure treated lumber and replaced the stairs and sections of the porch railing. The columns that support the porch are hollow and do not contain a supporting beam or pipe. A recent structural engineering study showed the porch does not meet required load capacities. Therefore, we need to rebuild the porch completely and bring it up to code. To do so we must make the railing 42" inches high. Our plan was to use composite materials, Intex and Azek that will not rot, will stand the test of time and reduce our maintenance. It is indistinguishable from wood. We submitted engineered drawings of the balusters and railings using Intex. They were identical in profile shape. The only difference is the balusters would be an additional 12" taller to meet code. The MHPC denied our plan and made the following declaration. The porch railing must be restored using the current railing even though much of it is severely deteriorated and then to make it code height they are requiring stainless steel

posts be erected, connected by a stainless-steel cap at the 42" code height. Then in the 12" space between the current railing and the stainless-steel cap, install three horizontal stainless-steel cables. In essence, this creates a stainless-steel fence assembly behind the existing railing. In their opinion this is a requirement based on the NPS rules. No consideration was given to appearance. To us this would be a major alteration to the appearance of the front of the building. The list goes on and on of their inconsistent and burdensome rulings that are not based on any common sense. What makes the front porch ruling even more ridiculous is that the rear porch needed to be rebuilt and in 2006 the MHPC approved rebuilding it using composite materials to make it code compliant.

Another project that we have attempted to receive permission for is windows. Currently they are single pane windows that are 92 years old. There are 66 windows in the structure, so the loss of heat is considerable. We have suggested a combination of restoration on the large front windows which are 9 over 9 double hung and ground floor windows which are single sash. We would then replace the remaining 36 double hung windows with new energy efficient windows. The State again refuses to consider this project and insists on all the windows being restored and proposes that, if we want energy efficiency, we could add storm windows to the exterior. Again, this would be a visible exterior alteration since the structure never had storm windows. Our goal of achieving some degree of energy efficiency is denied. However, an excellent example of the double standard being applied to the detriment of the General Henry Knox Museum is the Blaine House. The Blaine House built in 1833 is on the National Register of Historic Sites on its own merits. However, to achieve energy efficiency and reduce the amount of oil used, the State installed heat pumps several years ago. Further, they are currently installing solar panels. We simply want to add energy efficient windows to reduce the amount of oil we use (which is comparable to the amount the Blaine House used) but we were denied.

We asked permission to remove the old broken and uneven front walkway and create a memorial walkway to honor all veterans serving and who have served. The project was denied based on the ruling that the existing walkway was "historic". Again, there is nothing historic about the walkway brick. When the building was constructed, they ordered additional brick to create the walkway. It was not brick that came from the original mansion nor was it historic brick that Henry Knox had made in one of his businesses. Our walkway would have been a fitting tribute to all veterans, and, after all, Henry was a veteran.

What will happen to the General Henry Knox Museum if the State refuses to budge on their unreasonable expectations concerning the building. The Trustees have certainly abided by the original intent of the legislature when they passed LD540. We have had continuous programming and educational events for the public. We have fulfilled our mission of telling the story of Henry Knox and the significant contributions he made during the Revolutionary War so that we live in a free nation today. And we have done our best to maintain a very difficult building despite a burdensome and overly restrictive easement that should never have been placed on the building. Could the State take the building back? Possibly, although what would they do with it. In 2018, Tom Desjardin, Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands stated in a newspaper article *"Desjardin commends the Friends of Montpelier for the tremendous work they've done to offer valuable programming and keep the museum going. But the State cannot take back responsibility for the building. If the building was Knox's original home, the State would be obligated to keep the museum going, even at a financial loss."* The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands would not maintain it because the building is a replica, not an original artifact. So, what would the State do with the building? Would they sell it? It would be difficult to sell with an easement that runs in perpetuity. Would they tear it down? That is a distinct possibility. As Desjardin stated, whereas it is not the original building but a replica, it is a liability. What about the collection? The Maine State Museum would be involved in the disposition of the collection, and they have indicated they would retain a few of the original artifacts that have considerable value and sell the rest to provide for conservation of the retained articles.

Does this make any sense at all since the Museum is currently being efficiently operated, fulfilling its required obligation to the intent of LD540, and willing to bring the Museum to its glory for the 100th anniversary. Any reasonable person would have to agree that the best solution is for the continued operation of the Museum for public enjoyment, enrichment and not allow the story of Henry Knox to be lost. Removing the impediment of the easement and allowing the Trustees to maintain the Museum using maintenance methods which will result in energy efficiency, protection of the collection while reducing the overwhelming maintenance and operating cost, is a sensible solution.

Thank you!

Barry Hodge