

Nicole Grohoski
Senator, District 7



P.O. Box 1732
Ellsworth, ME 04605

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski
In Support of LD 791, “An Act to Support the Maintenance of Historic Fort George in Castine”

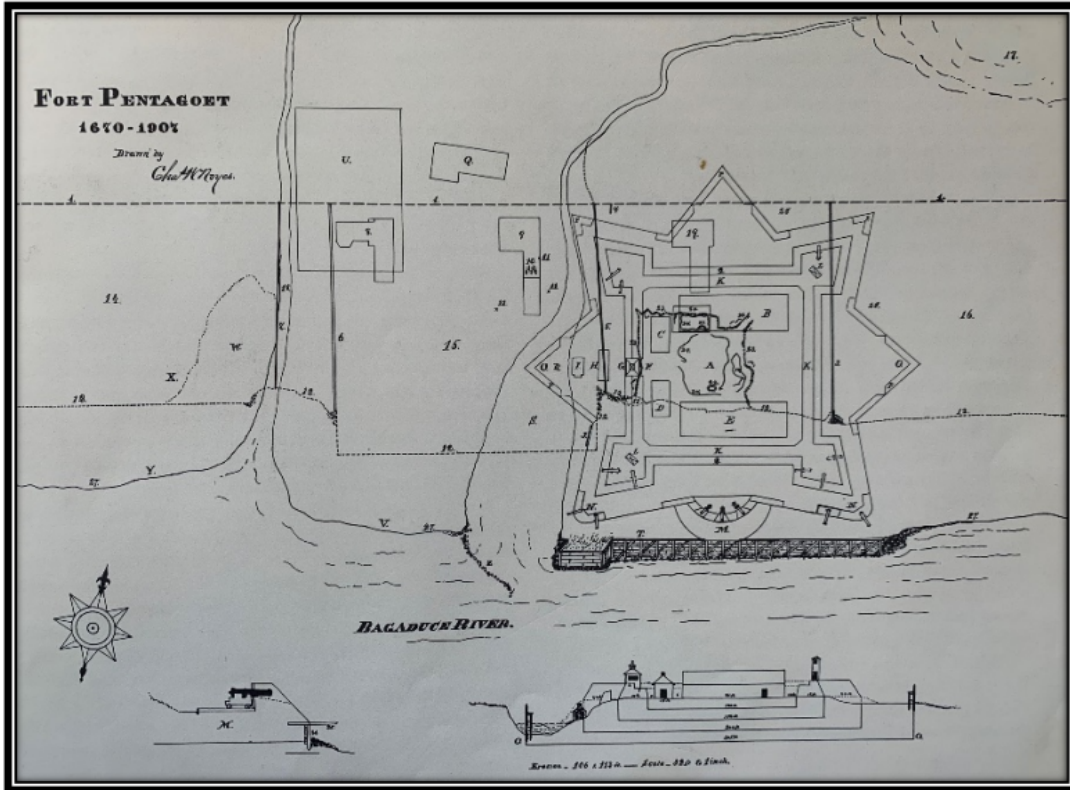
Before the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
13 March 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. I am Senator Nicole Grohoski and I represent District 7, the majority of Hancock County. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to introduce and express my support for **LD 791: An Act to Support the Maintenance of Historic Fort George in Castine.**

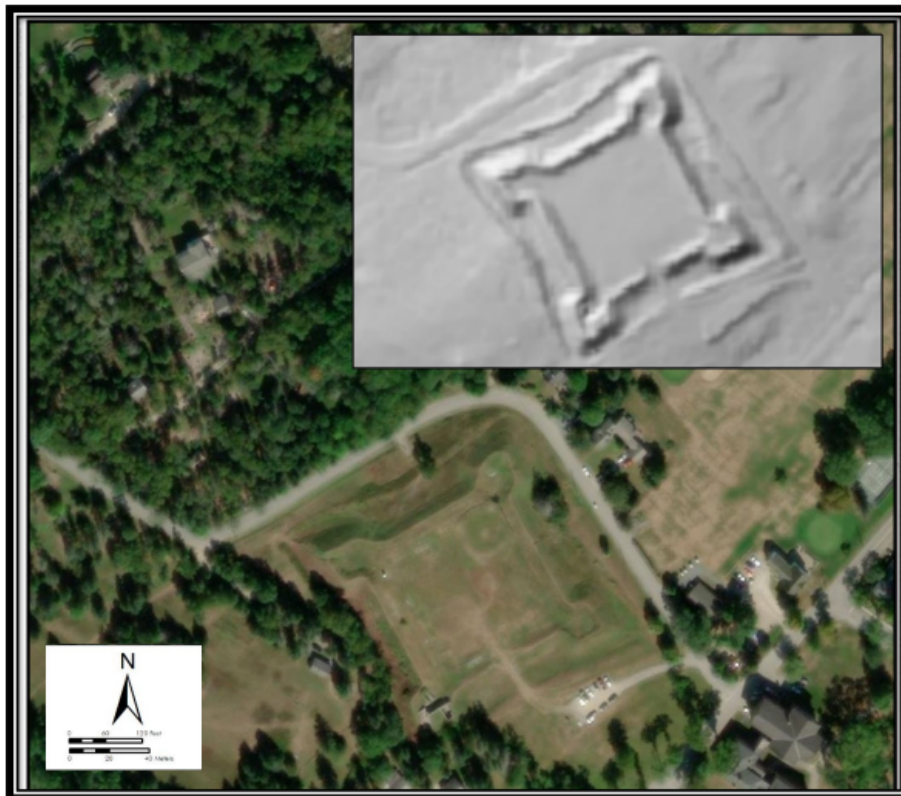
Few Maine towns have a colonial history as decorated as that of Castine. The Town of Castine – ancestral homeland of the Penobscot people – has been a battleline for four nations because of its strategic position on Penobscot Bay: the Abenaki, the British, the Dutch and the French. French colonists settled Castine in 1613, seven years before British colonists settled the Plymouth Colony.

Fort George was erected by the British during the Revolutionary War to protect the Crown Colony of New Ireland, what is now Downeast, Central, and Northern Maine. The Americans attempted and failed to wrest Fort George from British grip in the calamitous Penobscot Expedition (1779). The British abandoned the fort until the War of 1812, when they invaded Maine and tried again to make New Ireland a reality. When the Treaty of Ghent was signed, American troops took charge of Fort George and used it from 1815 to 1819.

The Fort consisted of earthen ramparts, ditches, and projecting bastions in each corner. I’ve included a few images from the Fort George Historic Properties Management Plan that was completed in 2021 with funding from the Department of the Interior (National Park Service) and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. If you are interested in learning more about the design and history of Fort George, I am happy to share this comprehensive document with you!



Hancock County Atlas, 1881 (Doudiet 1978).



Current conditions of Fort George, Town of Castine, Hancock County, Maine, on a 2019 aerial photograph and 2019 digital elevation model.

The State of Maine formally acquired Fort George in 1940 and invested in the refurbishment of the fort's magazine in 1960. Since 1981, the management and maintenance of Fort George have been governed by a contract between the State and Town of Castine. Basic upkeep – like lawn mowing and keeping the ramparts clear of saplings – has been ongoing, but the lack of greater maintenance investments by either party has unfortunately resulted in much of the fort falling into disrepair. A great deal of it is unsafe. As a result, no one wants to promote what could be a crown jewel of America's early history.

You'll note that this bill asks for an appropriation of \$1 million dollars, which would restore Fort George and help with interpretation and promotion of the site. This number is an estimate, based on the 2021 Management Plan. Castine is a resourceful community of 1,320 people, but the financial burden of properly managing this fort (along with others in the town) is too great. I have brought this bill before you because the Fort is a part of our greater history which should be preserved, and it is also owned by the State.

As I mentioned, the State and Town have been in a renewing agreement for over 40 years now, which both parties agree is outdated. I am pleased to report that since introducing this bill, staff from the Bureau of Parks and Lands and the Town of Castine have been meeting to discuss a new way forward, joined by regional legislators and members of the Castine Historical Society.

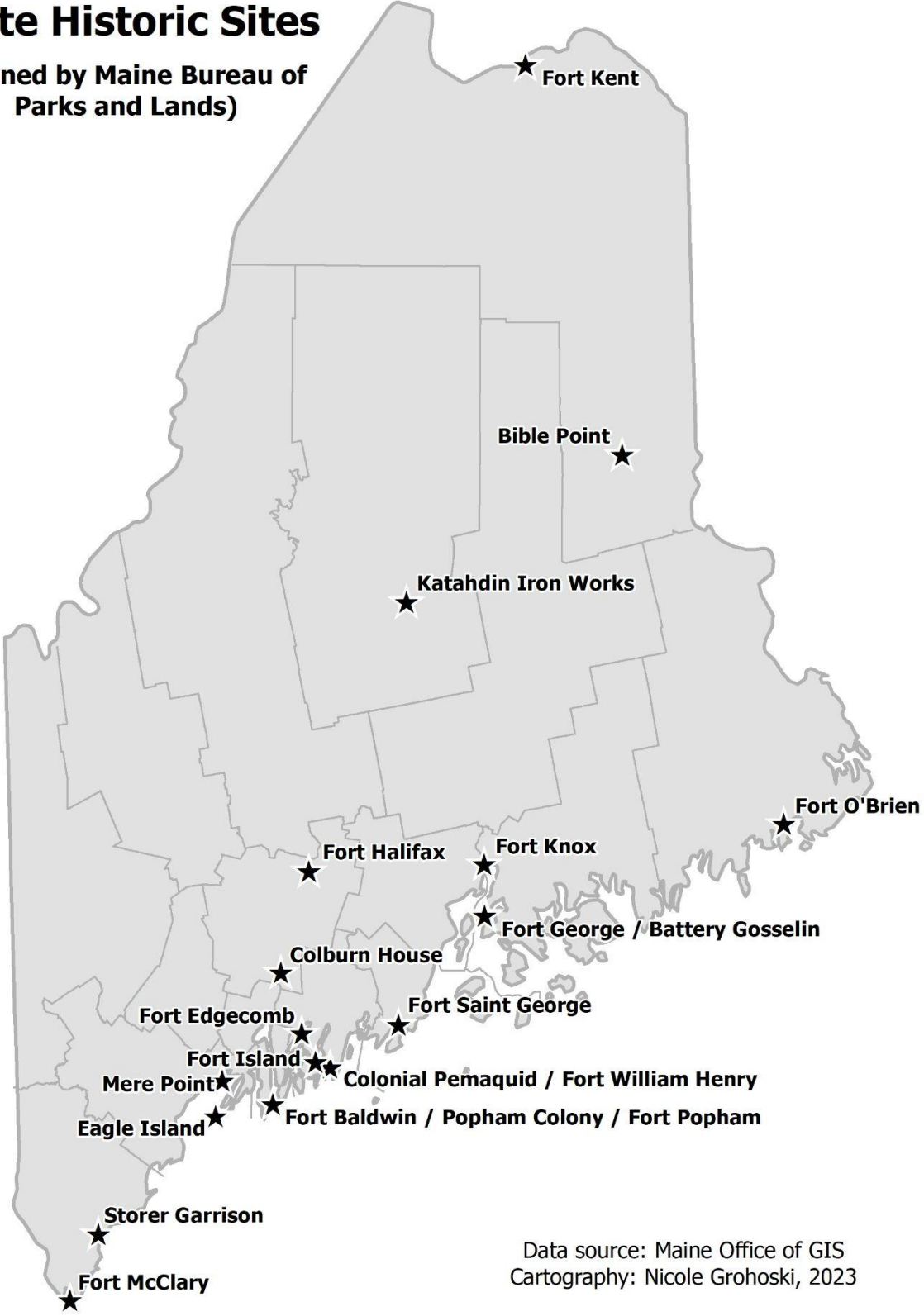
Through these meetings, we have learned that there are around 20 historic sites that are owned by the State (see map below), many of which are also in disrepair and unsafe. Two years ago, the Legislature authorized \$50 million in American Rescue Plan funds to rehabilitate our State Parks; however, this money is not available to State Historic Sites. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission is able to provide some resources to these sites, but their funding is limited compared to the need.

As I have learned more about these important sites all around our state, I have become convinced that it is not enough to champion the restoration of Fort George – we should allocate funds to improve all of our historic sites that are in need. It is incumbent upon us to learn about and preserve these important pieces of American history. Furthermore, I think there would be a great economic development benefit if these sites were restored and interpreted for visitors. This is especially true for Fort George, seeing as Castine is home to Maine Maritime Academy, which provides a nice connection between the past and present.

I look forward to continuing the conversation about preserving Fort George and other State Historic Sites with both the Bureau of Parks and Lands and this Committee. Thank you for your attention and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

State Historic Sites

(Owned by Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands)



Data source: Maine Office of GIS
Cartography: Nicole Grohoski, 2023