



# MAINE STATE ARCHIVES

Department of the Secretary of State

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## JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### LD 183, “An Act To Establish Juneteenth as a Paid State Holiday”

*Testimony Provided by Kate McBrien, Deputy Secretary of State for Archives  
February 17, 2021*

#### **Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and Members of the Committee:**

My name is Kate McBrien from Union. I serve as the Deputy Secretary of State for Archives. The Maine State Archives does not have a formal position on LD 183 but seeks to provide useful information from the Archives’ collection that may assist the committee in its deliberations on this legislation.

The Juneteenth holiday celebrates the emancipation of those who were enslaved in the United States. The date commemorates the 19<sup>th</sup> of June in 1865, when US Army General Gordon Granger proclaimed freedom from slavery in Texas. It is important to note that this announcement came two years after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

Maine’s own history of slavery is not yet well known, but scholars are learning more information as hidden histories are researched and discovered. The Maine State Archives holds records within our collection that document this slave institution in our own state – records such as the estate papers of Sir William Pepperell of Kittery or the Last Will & Testament of Tilly Haggens of Berwick prove the ownership of enslaved people in Maine. We even hold an account dated to 1777 that describes the capture of Boston, an enslaved man, who was the property of John Underwood of Kittery.

Maine was still a district of Massachusetts in the 1780s when that state abolished slavery. However, despite this legal decision, Maine census records in 1790 still show enslaved people in our state. Most famously, in 1820 Maine entered the Union as its own state as part of the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Maine to enter as a free state while Missouri maintained slavery in their state.

The Maine legislatures’ opinions, discussion, and determinations about slavery also reside in the Maine State Archives. Our records include Maine legislative resolves and correspondence about federal slave laws, abolition petitions, state responses to the fugitive slave act, as well as the original Maine ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment. Importantly, Maine refused to acknowledge or adhere to the Fugitive slave law, which required the return of runaway slaves.

Specifically, I’ve submitted a few documents from the Maine State Archives collection that directly relate to the Emancipation Proclamation, which is at the heart of the Juneteenth holiday. One is a resolve from 1863, documenting Maine’s support for the Emancipation Proclamation, discussing the dangers of slavery and the need to abolish it. Also attached is the actual ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment. Governor Samuel Cony wrote a letter to the Maine State Legislature at the

time of its passing, commending the members for passing this important change to our federal constitution. One section of his letter that stood out to me is:

“I congratulate you personally that in your character as the constitutional representatives of the people of Maine, the felicity is vouchsafed to you, to give effect to their will by voting for the extirpation of a system utterly at variance with every other American institution, offensive to the best instincts of our species, founded in disregard of the first principles of human justice and in violation of the laws of God”

– Governor Samuel Cony

The collections of the Maine State Archives show us Maine’s long history of first slavery, then abolition in the calls for the freedom of enslaved people. Maine was the heart of the slavery debate early in our republic’s history. It is this history that is recognized and honored through the Juneteenth holiday.

I thank you for your consideration and am available to answer any questions.