MAINE HUMANITIES COUNCIL reading programs roam across the globe: Let’s Talk About It groups discuss Indian and Cuban literature; New Books, New Readers shares stories from Uganda, Mexico, and Haiti; and Born to Read distributes Chinese and African folktales to children.

At the same time, programming at the Harriet P. Henry Center for the Book is attuned to the rich literary tradition found right here in Maine. Let’s Talk About It offers series including “Defining Wilderness: Defining Maine” and “The Mirror of Maine: The Maine Community in Myth and Reality” to libraries across the state. The 2006 summer institute on Hawthorne and Longfellow was the latest in a long line of teacher enrichment programs to explore Maine literature in the context of region and history. In the 1990s, the Born to Read program worked with Portland Adult Education on A Somali Alphabet, a bilingual book written by a refugee from Mogadishu. Born to Read also uses picture books such as The ABCs of Maine to instill pride of place in young readers.

These programs have emerged from a long tradition of Council support for regional literature. In the early eighties, the Council sponsored two projects that demonstrated a renaissance of interest in Maine writers. In 1982, a conference entitled “A Spirit of Place: 200 Years of Maine Poetry,” organized by the College of the Atlantic and the University of Maine at Augusta, brought panels of scholars to over 600 people in eight sites, from Orono to Alma. A 1986 project on the Maine novel in the 20th century was the first of several collaborations with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance (MWPA). Symposia on “Women Pioneers” and “The ‘Real’ Maine” turned a spotlight on lesser-known writers. (This project received an unexpected boost when a proclamation from Governor Brennan declared a Week of the Maine Novel to recognize that “the Maine Humanities Council has chosen to support the Maine Novel in the 20th Century Conference with major funding as part of its commitment to the cultural life of Maine” and that “the voice of Maine people and their ways and habits are uniquely revealed through works of the creative imagination.”)

In 1988, the Council supported the MWPA, along with the Maine Council for English Language Arts, in the creation of an anthology of Maine literature for use with middle and high school students. The resulting handsome volume, Maine Speaks, was enormously successful and continues to be reprinted. In August 1989, Down East magazine praised “the unity of imagination” in the anthology’s arrangement. “Maine does speak,” wrote the reviewer, “compellingly, its voice rich and lean, simple and complex, poignant and wry, defiant and inviting.” Maine Speaks is not the Council’s only effort to disseminate Maine literature for a wider readership. At the conclusion of The Century Project (see timeline on page 5), the Council reprinted At the Earth Turns: by Gladys Hasty Carroll and sponsored a reading by the 92-year-old author. It also reissued Lura Beam’s A Maine Hamlet. Maine literature projects have emerged in other formats, too. Students in Aroostook County produced a coloring book based on Longfellow’s Evangeline. Following a major conference on Edwin Arlington Robinson, the Gardiner Public Library created a walking tour of the poet’s hometown, now enhanced by a virtual tour accessible through the library’s website.

And just this very autumn, the Council has produced a 30th Anniversary collection of audio interviews with several contemporary Maine writers, conducted by Charlotte Albright (many from the Maine Public Broadcasting Network archives) called Maine Writers Speak. This CD is a gift to the state of Maine, in recognition of its literary icons (and iconoclasts) through the ages.
EAR Friends,

When asked to write my “swan song,” I immediately agreed. My mind quickly filled with images—of swan-boats in the Boston Public Garden, *Swan Lake* with Nureyev and Fonteyn, Schubert’s *Schwanengesang*, *Leda and the Swan*, even *Swann’s Way*, the subject of our most recent Winter Weekend. But what was a swan song, anyway? I headed to Webster’s.

Sure enough, “the parting work or performance by an artist, writer, musician, etc.” As a lifelong printmaker, that artistic note had some appeal. But why associate such moments with a bird? On I read. Definition 2: “the song sung by the hitherto mute swan at the moment of death.” Or as Orlando Gibbons put it more nicely in a famous motet:

*The silver swan, who living had no note,*

*When death approached, unlock’d her silent throat….*

No thanks! There’s plenty of life yet in this old bird. More in the spirit of Proust’s *Swann* than Gibbons’s swan, let me say farewell with a few reminiscences of an extraordinary quarter century at the Maine Humanities Council. From a memory-bank filled with both joys and anxieties, with the power and pleasure of ideas and the real-life pangs of trying to realize them, three truly pivotal moments stand out.

*July 1981* | There I was, standing uncertainly on Exchange Street in the Old Port, waiting to go in for my job interview with Karen Bowden, the director of a five-year-old non-profit which until that year had been known as the Maine Council for the Humanities and Public Policy. After years of teaching art and studying counseling, I wanted to try something different. It was just going to be an experiment; I had no idea I was about to launch my life’s work. I went on to become interim director, then in 1985 director, working closely with the multi-talented Richard D’Abate as my associate.

The Council in those early days was a small grant-making agency serving as a “pass-through” for federal money from the National Endowment for the Humanities. We had a low profile. Aside from some museum people, librarians, and college professors, few Mainers had ever heard of us. Yet what remarkable things we accomplished with very little money! The *Maine at Statehood* celebration, the state’s first AIDS conference (with Susan Sontag as keynoter), the many historical projects we helped fund, the early encouragement we gave to the work of two historians who went on to win the Pulitzer Prize (Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Alan Taylor), the grant support that helped establish a number of Maine institutions, such as the mediation program in the Maine court system, the Holocaust Human Rights Center of Maine, and Northeast Historic Film…these are just a few highlights from a distinguished list.

But the experience was a humbling one: although I’d lived in Maine since 1964, I soon realized I had had only a small “window” on the state. The learning process continues to this day as I travel around this wonderful place, meeting the people in every community who care deeply about the humanities. It soon became clear that you can accomplish far more working with partners than setting out alone.

*January 1995* | That lesson came in handy when the Crisis of 1995 struck the quiet and unsuspecting world of state humanities councils. It was as if the bottom had dropped out when Congressional attempts to eliminate the NEH and the NEA came very close to succeeding. But I didn’t want my staff to lose their jobs, and I couldn’t bear to think that everything we’d accomplished would be lost. I knew I was a competent administrator, but could I become a different kind of leader? Could we save the Council?
It took a great marshalling of many forces. The state councils banded together and made their voices heard in Washington. At home, our courageous board members redefined the nature of our relationship to the people of Maine. We had been badly shaken, but the Council came out of it stronger and far more visible. What had been a small, grantmaking organization affiliated with a federal agency suddenly had to re-invent itself. We had to be nimble and pro-active as a fully operating nonprofit, and we realized we had to do a much better job of explaining to people why what we did mattered.

How very proud I was of our board members, under Geoff Gratwick’s leadership, when they voted in 1999 to accept the NEH Challenge Grant we had been offered—and when, a year later, they proved with their own checkbooks that we could start to meet the match. I quickly learned that asking people for money was not an embarrassment, but a noble deed—as long as your cause is a worthy one. My mentor in these matters was a dear and much missed friend, the late Harriet P. Henry, who in her own path-breaking career as a lawyer and judge had already taught the women of Maine a lesson in what they could accomplish in public life.

And that led to key moment number three…

September 22, 2000 | …when I stood in front of the gold picket fence here at 674 Brighton Avenue, in Portland, our new home, the nerve-center of our statewide activities, made possible by that capital campaign. We officially moved into the beautifully renovated building that day and have hardly caught our collective staff breath ever since then.

There are so many other projects, so many other people I remember with thankfulness and affection. I contemplate with great pride our close collaboration with the state’s cultural organizations, academic institutions (whose scholars serve us in so many important ways), and service agencies, our nationally-replicated literature and medicine project, our innovative teacher programs, the work in prisons and youth detention centers, and in literacy initiatives for adults, teens, and young children, our New Century projects around the state, our quick response with community programs after 9/11—programs which brought together over 1,000 people in 64 libraries throughout Maine. None of this could have been possible without a brilliant, creative, and energetic staff, one of whom—Erik Jørgensen—has been chosen in a national search to succeed me. I leave the job in the best of hands. It gives me comfort, too, to know that associate director, Victoria Bonebakker, whose wisdom has guided me for the last seventeen years, will continue to work with Erik.

But swan songs can be tricky to sing. There’s the famous story of the night when Leo Slezak (the father of the movie actor Walter Slezak) was singing the title role in Lohengrin. In the final act the hero is supposed to leave on a swan-boat. Stagehands missed their cue, and the boat came in behind Slezak as he sang his farewell aria. The boat then moved stage left without him. As he saw it pull away, he leaned over the edge of the stage and asked the conductor: “What time does the next swan leave?”

I promise not to miss my boat.
1977
The first Seminar in the Humanities and Public Policy gathers state legislators, executive department heads, and scholars in the humanities for an intense intellectual discussion of common concerns.

An experimental pilot program is succeeded by a new $501(c)3 organization—the Maine Council for the Humanities and Public Policy (MHC)—as Maine’s affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In its first 16 months of operation, MHC makes 42 grant awards totaling $216,950. Guidelines emphasize that a public policy issue involving scholars in the humanities must be the focal point of a project.

Humanists as Mediators (University of Maine Law School): leads to establishment of Alternative Dispute Resolution within the Maine Court System.

A Final Day of Maine (Maine Public Broadcasting Network): a televised conference on population change and migration with seven documentary programs created with input from scholars.

1978
“Cut and Run”: Critical Problems of Work in the Maine Pulpwood Industry, wins $75,000. MHC establishes film collection at Maine State Library and associated film discussion grant program.

MHC sponsors two-day conference in Bethel: “The Humanities in Society.” The Kennebunks: A Wistful Place (Birds Store Museum): the first full-scale interpretive exhibition funded by a MHC grant, covering tourism, architecture, and social history in the Kennebunks from 1870 to 1920. The exhibition attracts 7,000 visitors.

The Maine Humanities Council is renamed, in keeping with diversification of programming and grantmaking, to reflect the broad scope of the humanities—in time to face potential for significant cuts from NEH; the Reagan administration asks for 50% cut in the NEH budget for 1982. In anticipation of cuts, the MHC closely reviews past and present programs, but the cuts never materialize.

New Perspectives in Local History conference organized by the Council. See related article, page 7.

1980
MHC applies for the first NEH Exemplary Award grant and wins $75,000. MHC establishes film collection at Maine State Library and associated film discussion grant program.


Come from Far and Near: A Film about Forestry, was screened and discussed in 20 communities and on public television. It proved controversial when paper companies contested the film’s presentation of the Maine forest industry.

The Holocaust Remembered (Bates College): the first statewide conference on the Holocaust sets the stage for a summer program for teachers and the establishment of the Holocaust Human Rights Center of Maine and “Maine Survivors Remember the Holocaust,” a film produced for Maine Public Broadcasting.

Dorothy Schwartz is appointed Executive Director of the MHC. A pilot project (funded by a grant) of scholar-facilitated reading and discussion programs in public libraries is the origin of Let’s Talk About It, which continues today in partnership with the Maine State Library, offering groups in 15 libraries each year.

1981
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From Stump to Ship (University of Maine, New England Archives of Folklore): restoration of 1930s film documenting Maine logging barnstorms the state with huge audience turnout. This project leads to founding of Northeast Historic Film in Bucksport.

Music in Baroque Culture, the MHC’s second Exemplary Award project of $75,000 from the NEH, offers statewide interpretive concerts, lectures, an institute for teachers, and a poster exhibit that is distributed to every high school in Maine.

1982
MHC receives third NEH Exemplary Award for Masters Seminars in the Humanities for Maine Teachers on the topic of the U.S. Constitution.


1983
NEH Exemplary Award Funds Maine at Statehood: The Forgotten Years, 1781-1805: the first large-scale project conducted by the Council. See related article, page 6.

Nuclear War Discussion Project (Nuclear Issues Educational Project): events in 8 communities draw over 1,000 participants.

1984
Print and Protest in the Age of Luther, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther, features a conference, traveling exhibit, and public programs in libraries to “encourage the public’s recognition that history is not the narrow discovery of ‘what happened,’ but instead, the matrix of relations for all human thought and endeavor.”

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Dorothy Schwartz is appointed Executive Director of the MHC. A pilot project (funded by a grant) of scholar-facilitated reading and discussion programs in public libraries is the origin of Let’s Talk About It, which continues today in partnership with the Maine State Library, offering groups in 15 libraries each year.

1986
MHC sponsors a conference entitled AIDS: Plague, Panic and the Test of Human Values at the Augusta Civic Center. The keynote speaker is Susan Santag. It draws an audience of 600 and significant media attention for a topic then considered quite controversial.

1987
The Land of Norumbega wins another NEH Exemplary Award. See related article, page 2.

Exhibition Programs of Maine distributes film and exhibit resources to schools and local communities across the state.

1988
The Land of Norumbega wins another NEH Exemplary Award. See related article, page 7.

1989
In collaboration with the New Hampshire Humanities Council, In the Beginning: West, Text, Context offers seminars on biblical language and text.
1990

The MHC helps nurture creation of Maine Association of Museums.

Forgotten Connections: Maine's Role in the Navajo Textile Trade (Penobscot Museum), an exhibition of textiles, basketry, pottery, and photos from the Southwest, attracting over 20,000.

Bouthot, produced and directed by Huey and screened through the lives of Ben Guillemette and Lionel “Toots” Bonsoir, is on display at the University of Maine at Machias.

1991

The Maine Grange (University of Southern Maine): an exhibition of photographs of Grange halls by Rose Marasco is combined with lectures and oral history testimonials.

1992

Modelled on a program in Vermont, New Books, New Readers begins offering reading and discussion programs to adult basic learners at 7 pilot sites. Early support from the Maine State Library and the NEH helped the program to grow, and continuing foundation support keeps it thriving at over 30 sites per year.

A Midwife’s Tale (Old Fort Western): research and scripting for a film directed and produced by Huey and screened in six major Franco-American communities.

1993

Diverse People, Different Places: Native Americans, Europeans, and the Environments They Created, a reading and discussion program, is co-sponsored with the Massachusetts and New Hampshire Humanities Councils.

1994

The MHC wins last and largest ($163,000) NEH Exemplary Award for The Century Project: Modern Times in Maine and America, 1890-1930. See related article, page 7.

Growing Up Reading (Island Medical Center): This early literacy project in Stonington and Deer Isle supplements free picture books with training in how to share them with children—a model that will later inform the MHC’s current Born to Read program.

1995

Crisis at the federal level: Congress threatens to cut funding for the humanities. Constituents respond to a call for support. Articles appear in newspapers across the state, editorials for and against the MHC. Grant programs are suspended for one year; a committee is formed to find new sources of funding.

1996


1997

The Maine Center for the Book, a division of the National Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, is created as the programming arm of the Council. As part of the new center, Teachers for a New Century offers content-rich professional development programs for Maine teachers K-12 on subjects ranging from Asian Studies to 19th-century poetry.

The first Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care® reading and discussion group is formed at Eastern Maine Medical Center. Within five years, groups are established at 25 hospitals across the state, bringing together doctors, nurses, receptionists, trustees, administrators, and others. National expansion begins in 1999, eventually encompassing 17 states (and growing).

Barn to Read is founded to promote reading aloud to young children, based on new brain research. Expansion into all of Maine’s counties and partnerships with other stakeholders ensue. The program has since trained hundreds of volunteers and thousands of early childhood professionals in early literacy.

1998

The MHC joins the Maine Cultural Affairs Council (CAC), which was founded in 1991 as a forum for interagency planning. Other members are the State Museum, the State Library, the State Archives, the Maine Arts Commission, the Maine Historical Society, and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. The first Winter Weekend program, on The Odyssey, is held. The Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize is established to recognize exemplary work in the humanities.

The MHC wins the first combined appropriation of $3.2 million from the Maine legislature to the CAC.

1999

The New Century Community Program begins with the first combined appropriation of $3.2 million from the Maine legislature to the CAC.

2000

The MHC begins a $1 million capital campaign for a new building and moves to 674 Brighton Avenue. The Stories for Life program brings probationers and probation officers together to read and discuss short stories in Auburn, Bangor, Biddeford, and Hallowell.

2001

One month after 9/11, the Council organizes Let Freedom Ring. Sixty-four libraries across the state host almost 1,000 Maine people for reading and discussion programs using excerpts from W.H. Auden’s “September 1939” and Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech (January 6, 1941).

The Maine Center for the Book brings the national Letters About Literature contest to Maine. Students across the state write letters to authors, living or deceased, describing how the authors’ works changed the students’ views of the world.

2002

The MHC launches the Thoughtful Giving program with an NEH grant to explore philanthropy as civic engagement. Initial work with the Bangor Rotary Club leads to more reading and discussion programs in libraries and other settings.

2003

The Harriet P. Henry Center for the Book is named in honor of longtime MHC supporter and former board chair. Working with local public schools, the MHC wins the first of its two Teaching American History grants from the U.S. Department of Education for a three-year institute on American biography.

2004

The MHC holds a three-day institute in New Harbor to explore connections between literature and civic life. Reel: Waking Up French (Penobscot School): an educational DVD by Ben Levine about the revival of the French language in Maine draws large audiences.

2005

The MHC brings the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street exhibit Born Again! Celebrating an American Icon to Maine. The Sazoo Museum, Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel, and Bethel Historical Society are local hosts. Combined attendance at exhibits and events exceeds 3,000.

A training for Maine librarians presented by the Council and Poets House in New York City, Poetry in the Branches offers ideas for poetry programming with readings and workshops from Maine poets.

2006

Dorothy Schwartz announces her retirement as Executive Director. After a national search, Erik Jorgensen is appointed as her successor.

The Council celebrates its 30th Anniversary with a series of oral history workshops, a traveling performance and discussion on taxes (the Theater of Ideas play Tonying Maine) and Humanities Fest, a free day-long celebration in Lewiston.

A competitive grant from the NEH’s We the People initiative funds a summer institute at Bowdoin for thirty teachers from across the country on “Hawthorne & Longfellow: A Literary Friendship.”
30 YEARS
“THE LOCAL AND THE PARTICULAR”: HISTORICAL INQUIRY FOR A CHANGING MAINE

BY BRITA ZITIN

The Maine Humanities Council supports dozens of programs each year—teacher institutes, grant-funded projects, Let’s Talk About It book discussion series—with historical themes. In the past 30 years, three programs stand out as examples of this enduring priority: to connect history and community, past and present, through projects that reach out to wide audiences through ambitious means.

THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF STATEHOOD

In 1982, with an Exemplary Award from the NEH, the MHC embarked on a massive history project called Maine at Statehood: The Forgotten Years. The political aspects of the federal era in Maine (approximately 1783 to 1820) were already well-understood. However, social and cultural history—the period’s resonance in rural towns, on the frontier, and for the lower and middle classes—had been largely ignored.

A symposium for scholars revealed the depth of this untapped material. Once researchers seized their subjects, the Council helped them bring their works in progress to the public—often for the very first time. As scholar Richard Moss wrote, “It’s ironic that it took a federal program to get Colby historians working with the local high school, two blocks from campus, but it’s the truth.” Both parties were grateful for the connection. “I feel we ‘local folk’ have gained a good deal from coming in contact with outstanding scholars,” wrote a Hampden man, while scholar Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reported, “it would be hard to overestimate the contributions of the Maine at Statehood project to my own scholarly development.” (Ulrich’s Statehood work contributed to her Pulitzer Prize-winning book A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard.)

The film version of A Midwife’s Tale was funded by the Council and premiered in 1997 during a weekend conference attended by over 1,000 people. See timeline on page 5.)

Like many Council history projects, Maine at Statehood was designed to link the past to the present: in this case, stratification of class, conflict between the coast and the interior, and outside economic control. Tracing the formation of the state’s image—its intransigent land, its independent character—through the federal period proved fascinating to a wide range of Maine people. “Statehood has seized the public’s imagination,” declared an outside evaluator.

An exhibit entitled “From Revolution to Statehood” was one of the highlights of the project, and attracted about 24,000 visitors as it traveled to museums in Saco, Brunswick, Bangor, and Portland. The central portion of the exhibit, “Maine Towns,” was designed by the American History Workshop in Boston. A kiosk described the development of representative Maine towns using maps, engravings, and photographs of surviving buildings, while a

SELECTED

BIDDEFORD

Different Lives
$3,000: A group from Biddeford, Maine is a former mill town whose residents have traditionally been factory workers and largely Franco-American. The arrival of the private University of Maine at Biddeford in the 1970s drew a professional class supported by labor from city residents. When UNE outsourced many of the jobs held by Biddeford natives, the discord between these communities became impossible to ignore. Inspired by Studs Terkel’s Working, a team from UNE decided to explore the class divide in Biddeford through the lens of labor. Scholars have conducted over fifty interviews with Biddeford residents from a cross-section of occupations. Community partners including the Heads of Biddeford, Saco Valley Land Trust, and the Biddeford-Saco Rotary helped identify interview subjects, while UNE personnel from Media Services, Creative and Fine Arts, History, and the Office of Multicultural & GLBTQ Services lent their expertise. The final product will be a documentary film and companion book entitled “Different Lives.” Look for screenings starting this fall; or contact UNE Media Services at (207) 602-2414 for more information.

LEWISTON

Mainely Girls
$4,750: In 2005, Mainely Girls of Rockport received funding from the Maine Humanities Council to expand the Girls’ Point of View Book Club from the successful model established in Vinalhaven five years before. By跨界跨越, a lending library to offset the cost of books. Mainely Girls was able to launch new clubs in Bath, Limestone, Boothbay, North Haven, Damariscotta, Belfast, and Islesboro. The clubs introduce high school girls to young adult fiction and nonfiction depicting strong, resourceful female characters developing self-respect and autonomy—in sharp contrast to the girls they’re used to seeing on TV and in the movies. Adult women facilitators help the girls connect with, learn from, and talk openly with their peers about the books, fostering a lifelong enthusiasm for reading and discussion. In 2006, Mainely Girls is adding thirty new sets of books to the lending library and establishing twenty new clubs across the state. To learn more (or to find out how to start a club in your area), please contact Natasha Irish, program director, at (207) 235-5707 or magiris@maine.gov.

30 YEARS

Being Somali in Lewiston
$3,000: United Somali Women of Maine will produce and disseminate a multimedia educational DVD called Being Somali in Lewiston. Fostering Community Dialogue and Learning Through Image and Reflection Professor Lacey Gale and photographer Kate Lapides generated the raw material for the project by interviewing Somali immigrants, particularly women and girls, in consultation with UWSM staff. The fruits of their falsehood—over 600 photos and seventy pages of interview transcripts—will be archived at the Maine Folklife Center and also distilled into a 15-minute DVD. Local residents Harum Hussein will contribute a soundtrack, while Robin Fleck, the English Language Learner Team Leader for the Auburn school district, will contribute a soundtrack, while Robin Fleck, the English Language Learner Team Leader for the Auburn school district, will contribute a soundtrack, while Robin Fleck, the English Language Learner Team Leader for the Auburn school district, will contribute a soundtrack, while Robin Fleck, the English Language Learner Team Leader for the Auburn school district, will contribute a soundtrack.

GRANTS FROM

PORTLAND

Malaga Island Radio Program
$3,000: The story of Malaga Island is part of the enigmatic history of race in Maine. In 1912, gray- frosted, black, Irish, Portuguese, and “cross-race” residents were forcibly removed from the island by the state because they were considered a blight on the coastal landscape and a financial burden to the town of Phippsburg. For years, this story has remained hidden, but it has recently resurfaced as a research topic and the subject of a 2005 Newberry Honor book entitled Lizzie Bright and the Robotnik Way. WMPG will produce a 25-minute documentary program to tell this untold story. One of the connections behind this hidden history and current attitudes toward race in Maine. The program will air in the fall of 2007. Updates on production and airdates will be available on WMPG and at www.wmpg.org.

ROCKPORT

A Girl’s Point of View Book Club
$4,950: In 2005, Mainely Girls of Rockport received funding from the Maine Humanities Council to expand the Girls’ Point of View Book Club from the successful model established in Vinalhaven five years before. By跨界跨越, a lending library to offset the cost of books. Mainely Girls was able to launch new clubs in Bath, Limestone, Boothbay, North Haven, Damariscotta, Belfast, and Islesboro. The clubs introduce high school girls to young adult fiction and nonfiction depicting strong, resourceful female characters developing self-respect and autonomy—in sharp contrast to the girls they’re used to seeing on TV and in the movies. Adult women facilitators help the girls connect with, learn from, and talk openly with their peers about the books, fostering a lifelong enthusiasm for reading and discussion. In 2006, Mainely Girls is adding thirty new sets of books to the lending library and establishing twenty new clubs across the state. To learn more (or to find out how to start a club in your area), please contact Natasha Irish, program director, at (207) 235-5707 or magiris@maine.gov.

LEARSPO T

Faces of a Maritime Town
$4,950: In 1880, ten percent of all the master mariners in the United States came from Searsport, Maine—a town of only 2,500 people. For many years, the Penobscot Marine Museum has displayed photographs of over 300 Searsport ship captains. In 2006, museum staff and scholars will update and expand on this display, incorporating elements that reflect the true diversity of a maritime community: wives, shipyard workers, and others who played indispensable roles in the voyages of Maine’s famous Down Easters and other vessels. The lives of approximately 15 captains will be researched and interpreted through touch screen technology and printed tour cards to put a human face on the age of sail. To learn more, visit www.penobscotmarinemuseum.org or call (207) 549-3520.

Penobscot Marine Museum
brochure offered walking tour routes and helped visitors make connections between the featured communities and their own towns. This civic centerpiece was funded by “Maine People,” a collection of artifacts, manuscripts, and works of art curated by William David Barry and Peter Simmons. These materials evoked the federal-era lives of ten Maine people, from Sarah Molasses, a Penobscot woman; to Supply Belcher, a composer and teacher; to William King, the state’s first governor.

Maine at Statehood set a precedent for the Council’s history programming. Over fifty other initiatives joined the Council as co-sponsors for the project activities. Many of the formats used to disseminate content—lectures, library programs, traveling exhibits—remain in use. For instance, a number of other walking tours, such as “Edwin Arlington Robinson’s Gardiner” (1996) and the “Portland Women’s History Trail” (1997), have since been designed with Council funding. The 2006 release of the Kennebec-Chaudière Heritage Corridor audio tour and a forthcoming project in the Saint John Valley are two more examples of how cultural tourism projects continue to be a focus for Council grants.

Perhaps most profoundly, Statehood’s focus on small towns and ordinary lives led to a recognition that local history is common ground for academic and community historians. This consciousness of “the need for greater cooperation between the academy and local historical societies and the shifts in scholarly concern that make such cooperation possible: the growing interest among historians in the local and the particular, in the community and the family” would inform almost every future history project. (The quote is from a report on the 1981 conference “New Perspectives in Local History.”)

MAPS AS MIRRORS

In 1989, the Council organized Land of Norumbega: Maine in the Age of Exploration and Settlement, which anticipated the Columbian quincentennial by highlighting the culture and cartography of New England from 1498 to 1650. The impetus for the project was the LEARNING FROM THE PAST, LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER—In the mid-1990s, another NEH Exemplary Award (one of the last ever granted) fueled The Century Project: Modern Times in Maine and America. This sprawling project examined fin-de-siècle Maine (1890-1930) through the lens of two guiding questions: “As we approach the 21st century, what can we learn from the generation of Mainers who dealt with the challenges of the early 20th century? What has been lost and what has been gained in the transition to the modern world?” Themes included industry, social reform, pluralism, tourism, and the arts.

Among many other components (including a two-day introductory symposium, a 30-minute video, a film series, and a number of library reading programs) the Century Project included the Council’s first dedicated grant-making program. Seventy-five local organizations received funding and support to conduct their own research on the period, with significant input from local people who lived through it. French Island residents in Old Town compiled a cookbook of traditional Franco-American cuisine. The Weld Historical Society preserved and reproduced the folk art of a rural amateur painter. Charleston public school students interviewed local elders and started an archive of the town’s history. Many other Maine communities also benefited from Century Project grants.

At the conclusion of the Century Project, the Council reflected on its implications: “Out of this flurry of activities, several lessons emerge. One is that Mainers are intensely interested in local history. Another is that Mainers are eager to talk to each other across the generations in an effort to record, preserve, and interpret the sort of everyday experiences that often do not get into the history books. A third lesson—one with implications for everyone interested in the humanities—is that, for all the changes the 20th century has brought, people in Maine value the ways in which their communities nurture a strong sense of place.” As communities endeavor to locate themselves in time and place, the Council will support their continued efforts.
Chaucer begins *The Canterbury Tales* with his famous evocation of “Aprill with his shoures sote” and some general remarks on the English proclivity to “goon on pilgrimages,” but the author quickly gets down to business. I’m going to tell you what they were wearing, he announces—“and eek in what array that they were inne” (line 41)—as he starts gossiping about the peculiarities of each of his twenty-nine fellow pilgrims.

This (literally) material note, at the very beginning of literature in “modern” English, sets the pattern, if you will, for so very much of what follows. Big ideas, epic heroes, solutions to the problem of life—yes, they all appear now and then in British literature, but what British writers have really been good at is recording the teeming facticity of life. Empiricism has long roots. It starts with Chaucer’s noting the rust stains left by his armor on the worthy Knight’s fustian tunic. The Nun’s fastidious linen, the Monk’s fur-lined sleeves, the Franklin’s little purse of silk, even the tufted wart on the Miller’s nose—all these details of costume and countenance serve to flesh out Chaucer’s panorama of 14th-century English life and to give clues to the true nature of these chatty and often quarrelsome travelers.

Chaucer is a very funny writer, and the *Tales* often strike the festive note we thought appropriate for Winter Weekend in the Council’s 30th anniversary year. It will be the tenth such weekend, a public humanities program that to date has brought to Maine readers lively discussions of works by Homer, Dante, Melville, the anonymous Beowulf poet, Mary Shelley, Tolstoy, Mann, Cervantes, and Proust.

Held on the Bowdoin campus in Brunswick during the college’s spring break, Winter Weekend 2007 begins at 4 p.m. on Friday, March 9, and continues until late afternoon on March 10. The $200 fee includes a copy of the text (in modern English), background readings, lectures by specialists in Chaucer and in English history, performances, group discussions, and a banquet based on medieval English cookery books.

If you haven’t looked at any of the tales since high school, you may be in for some surprises. Chaucer isn’t just “bawdy”; he’s happily obscene. And Chaucer is not just a teller of jolly tales. There is much darkness in the narratives: “The Prioress’s Tale,” for example, is a classic of medieval anti-Semitism. Do the twenty-four tales express the author’s own world-view, or does he allow his characters to speak for themselves? After all, one of the characters Chaucer has invented turns on his creator and tells him that he—Chaucer—isn’t very good at telling stories. Moreover, a generation of feminist scholarship has not only re-vivified medieval studies in general, but has given new life to Chaucer’s proto-feminist, the Wife of Bath. Join us at the Tabard Inn on March 9 to learn more.

To register, visit the Winter Weekend page of the Council’s website, www.mainehumanities.org. Space is limited.
...INSERT...
All about Families

The Hello, Goodbye Window, by Norton Juster & Chris Raschka (Illustrator)

Nanna and Poppa’s kitchen window is not any ordinary window: it is the center of their granddaughter’s visits, especially when those treasured visits begin and end. From the perspective of a little girl, this is an imaginative and warm story of family, love, and fun. A Caldecott Medal winner for illustration in 2006. (Ages 4 - 8)

Thanks to the Animals, by Allen Sockabasin & Rebekah Raye (Illustrator)

This charming tale from a Passamaquoddy (Maine Native American) storyteller follows Baby Zoo Sap’s family as they travel north for the winter. When the wide-eyed infant tumbles off the back of the family sled while everyone else is asleep, Zoo Sap’s crying attracts first a pair of beavers, then a moose, then a bear, and soon a whole pile of animals who gather together to keep him warm. Raye’s warm illustrations reflect the harmony between people and nature. A special feature of this book is a list of Passamaquoddy words for all the animals! (Ages 3 – 8)

My New Baby, by Annie Kubler (Illustrator)

This board book tells a story purely through pictures about a little boy’s new infant sibling. It reflects the excitement that many young children experience with a new baby in the house, and shows the positive experiences the little boy has. The absence of words makes this a wonderful book for children just learning to “read” on their own. In Born to Read programs, it always invites conversation—an important facet of early literacy development. (Ages 0 – 4)

All about Animals

Little Dog, by Lisa Jahn-Clough

Little Dog is a city dog, roaming the streets for food, being ignored or chased away. Rosa, an artist, can’t find inspiration; her artwork only reflects the gloom of her neighborhood. When she and Little Dog meet and take a trip to the country, both suddenly begin to see all the color that had always been around them. This sweet, gentle tale of friendship is written and illustrated by a Maine author. (Ages 4 & up)

Song of the Water Boatman, by Joyce Sidman & Beckie Prange (Illustrator)

This lyrical book brings poetry and ecology together with beautiful verses about pond life and fascinating tidbits about the critters in question (spring peepers, caddis flies, and the water bear, to name a few). And did you know that wood ducklings dive from nests of tremendous heights when they are barely fledged? Nature in crisp, realistic illustrations and compelling text. (Ages 5 - 12)

Peek-a-Who?, by Nina Laden

This board book is full of bold and colorful imagery, with curious pop-ups and rhymes introducing a cow, ghost, zebra, and finally a mirror to reflect the child. Infants will delight in listening to and learning to “read” this book to themselves. (Ages 0 – 3)

All Kinds of Tales & All for Babies >
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Detach and mail this form via the enclosed envelope (Maine Humanities Council, 674 Brighton Avenue, Portland, ME 04102-1012), or call the
Maine Humanities Council at 207-773-5051 or toll-free at 1-866-637-3233. The Maine Humanities Council is a 501(c)3 organization and a portion
of your gift is tax-deductible.

All Kinds of Tales

The Problem with Chickens, by Bruce McMillan (& Curriella, Illustrator)
The ladies in an Icelandic village bring home a delightful group of hens to provide eggs for the community. Cakes, breads, and pastries are all in great
supply, until the chickens start acting up. So comfortable are they in this little town and so much do they admire their benefactresses that the chickens begin
a Maine author. (Ages 3 – 8)

Honey…Honey…Lion, by Jan Brett
This book follows the adventures of Honeybird, an African species known for leading stronger animals to honey, letting them break open the hives, and then
joining the feast. Playful sounds are evoked—Pitter, patter! Splish, splash! Sprong!—as the tale follows the pair through a rich African landscape—and then back again at break-
neck speed. The page borders come alive with other animals watching, curious and mirthful, as Honeybird teaches Badger a lesson about sharing. (Ages 3 – 8)

Tomie’s Three Bears and Other Tales, by Tomie dePaola
This board book includes dePaola’s versions of the classic nursery tales Goldilocks
and the Three Bears, the Three Little Pigs, and the Little Red Hen. The simple text
is charming, but the adorable illustrations are this book's greatest asset. Very
small children will love “reading” these stories over and over again. (Ages 0 – 3)

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All for Babies

This Little Chick, by John Lawrence
This little chick is a clever one, adopting the language of the other
barnyard animals as he makes his rounds. The vivid and crisp illustrations
are huge, a delight to young children (and to the adults reading to them).
The story directly encourages children to participate and guess what
the little chick will say and do next. This edition was a New York Times
Best Illustrated Book in 2002. (Ages 0 – 3)

Simms Taback’s Big Book of Words, by Simms Taback
A sturdy little book designed for active use by little hands, Simms Taback
presents a fun learning opportunity for infants. Using one vivid watercolor
per page, along with a word that describes it, this is a stellar picture
dictionary, divided into categories of playthings, clothing, food, and
animals. Babies just learning to identify familiar objects excitedly anticipate
each page, many of which suggest a theme (shoes following socks in the
clothing section, for example). Small children will love shouting out the
words they have just learned. (Ages 0 – 3)

Peekaboo Baby, by Margaret Miller
For infant first learning about books, photographs provide excellent
visual stimulation—and there are few things that babies love more to look
at than other babies. This tough board book is a favorite among very
young readers, who swiftly memorize the simple words and “read” them
to their parents. Showing photos of a diverse group of babies in peek-a-
boo positions (including inside a hat and behind a lollypop), this book
will make babies eager to play peek-a-boo themselves. (Ages 0 – 2)

< All about Families & All about Animals