The Maine Humanities Council, a statewide non-profit organization, uses the humanities—literature, history, philosophy, and culture—as a tool for positive change in Maine communities.

Our programs and grants encourage critical thinking and conversations across social, economic, and cultural boundaries.

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Maine Humanities Council seeks to expand its list of potential nominees to fill future openings on its Board of Directors. The Council looks for a wide geographic representation and range of civic and/or academic experience. To notify the Council of your interest, please send a letter and a résumé to:

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The Maine Humanities Council is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Editor: Diane Magras
Design: Lori Harley
The Maine Humanities Council envisions the communities of Maine transformed by the power and pleasure of ideas, and 2015 was a year spent in vigorous pursuit of that vision. In cities and towns throughout the state, the Council worked to promote the humanities—literature and history, poetry and philosophy—as a means for Mainers to think and talk together about matters of importance.

This was true for library patrons across the state who attended MHC-sponsored *World in Your Library* programs on foreign policy issues. It was true for Veterans who gathered to read literature together and reflect on their service. It was true for over 200 participants in the Council’s venerable *Winter Weekend* program, which in 2015 explored race, culture, and language in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*

The Maine Humanities Council believes that we have a role to play in shaping the future of our state—that by using the tools of the humanities we can help Mainers to engage more deeply with our history and understand more fully the complicated issues we face today.

This is no ivory tower pursuit. The Council takes seriously the idea that democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens, and in large part ours is the work of creating conditions where wisdom and vision can flourish.

Coming up in 2016, the MHC is presenting a major initiative, one permeating much of our programming. Designed to provide opportunities for learning and conversation around our nation’s evolving understandings of equality, inclusion, and freedom, *A Broad and Sure Foundation: The 14th Amendment in American Life and Imagination* will engage issues both historical and contemporary. We hope this initiative will serve as a concrete example of the kind of transformation that can be brought about through the power and pleasure of ideas.

Thank you for your generous support of the Council’s work. As an independent nonprofit organization, the Council depends upon your support, and we could not do this work without you.

Hayden Anderson
Executive Director
W e knew that a match lay in our future. That was apparent from the first time we met. In the summer of 2014, the Maine Humanities Council was brainstorming the ways in which it could more effectively bring its work to Maine’s students. The Civil Rights Team Project, a school-based anti-bias program from the Office of the Maine Attorney General, was seeking more strategies to support its teams in participating schools. There was clearly a mission match, and match for planned work, too. As a team sharing our respective strengths and resources, the MHC and CRTP would increase the impact we both could have on civil rights teams and their school communities.

We started thinking big for our first year of partnership, choosing the Civil Rights Team Project student trainings for middle level and high schools. Held every fall, these trainings invite all the students who serve on civil rights teams throughout the state to sessions in Augusta, Brewer, Farmington, Portland, and Presque Isle. The trainings help teams see their work in the context of a statewide lens. They also identify civil rights issues in their school communities and gain tools to be an active, visible, and vocal presence in addressing these issues. In the 2015 school year, more than 1,200 students from 96 schools across the state participated.

The centerpiece for our nine middle level and high school trainings this year was the PBS American Experience docudrama *The Abolitionists* (made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Created Equal project). Students and team advisors watched close to one hour of clips focusing on Angelina Grimké, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison, and Frederick Douglass, all key figures within the abolitionist movement surrounding the American Civil War. The film looks at how they were drawn to the movement to abolish American slavery, the tactics they employed in their work, and their successes and failures — and those topics provided a parallel in students’ own thinking.

We asked students to focus on how to get people thinking and talking about civil rights issues, using the abolitionists as examples and inspiration. Students shared their thoughts through “community circles,” structured opportunities for students to connect with the film and interact with students from other schools. With the film as “text,” we guided participants in thinking and talking about their own work in the Civil Rights Team Project through prompts like these:

- The abolitionists were a diverse group. In what ways are your civil rights team or student group diverse? In what ways could you be more diverse?
- The abolitionists’ work is very difficult. It’s not easy to change people’s minds about something. People resist change. How do we continue on with difficult work when people resist us?
- Angelina Grimké wants to make gender equality and women’s rights part of the abolitionist movement. She is basically told that it’s not the right time and that everyone needs to be united in fighting against slavery. What do you think of this argument? Is unity ever more important than doing what’s right?
- Both Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe tell stories. Why do you think this storytelling is a good idea for the abolitionist movement? Why do stories work so well?

Students also shared their voices in three “working lunch” activities. The first asked students to think about basic guidelines, with a specific focus on actions, for being good allies and advocates in the world of civil rights; students wrote their ideas on a large sheet of paper taped up on the wall. Both the MHC and CRTP are compiling all guidelines into one master set.

In the second of the working lunch activities, students created a mural of things they’d like to see abolished in our schools. Hundreds of ideas were shared, resulting in an impressive look at students’ concept of social change. Many sticky notes focused on:

- Specific forms of bias (racism or transphobia and many other -isms and -phobias)
- Specific examples of bias-based language
- Categories of jokes related to people’s identities
Some notes were especially powerful because they were so specific (see the list of “stickies,” below, right).

Although the wide range of responses could be discouraging, we’re encouraged to think that our students have identified these issues as the things that we need to abolish in our schools. Even better, they are working to make it happen.

Our third working lunch activity asked students to vote for their favorite of four quotes. They were from our four featured abolitionists, but students didn’t know that; the quotes were presented, unattributed:

• If a law commands me to sin I will break it. (Angelina Grimké)
• It’s a matter of taking the side of the weak against the strong, something the best people have always done. (Harriet Beecher Stowe)
• We may be personally defeated, but our principles never! (William Lloyd Garrison)
• Without a struggle, there can be no progress. (Frederick Douglass)

Students overwhelmingly chose the Frederick Douglass quote as their favorite. This was true at all nine of our middle level and high school training sessions. It’s exciting to think that the words of an escaped slave and leading abolitionist are inspiring the work of our student civil rights teams today. Perhaps some of the students who attended these trainings will go on to write something that will one day be remembered by others who are continuing on with our vision of safe, welcoming, and respectful communities for all our people.

We asked students to end the training by identifying some of the many ways we can get students in our schools thinking and talking about civil rights issues.

Students considered the ways in which the abolitionists got people thinking and talking, and how they might accomplish that in today’s world. They also recalled the strategies employed during the day’s work that got participants thinking and talking. In the end, students went back to their schools with plenty of ideas and inspiration. And what will they accomplish? The example of the abolitionists is our model: it may not be easy, but through their commitment, they’ll achieve great things.

Learn more about the Civil Rights Team Project on their website: maine.gov/ag/civil_rights

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**STICKIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stop the racism towards Somalis</th>
<th>Not recognizing Eid as a school holiday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jokes about Asians eating cats and dogs</td>
<td>The assumption that people with physical and mental disabilities are stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokes about black people being drug dealers or thugs</td>
<td>People being called out on their learning disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL in the basement</td>
<td>No insulting language around disabilities, not “bound” to a wheelchair, not “suffering from” anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We shouldn’t say “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance because not everyone follows a religion that worships God</td>
<td>Gender- or sex-determined colors for graduation gowns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of the Arabic phrase “Allahu Akbar” (God is great) to make fun of Islam</td>
<td>“You’re pretty good for a girl.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ladies and gentlemen” (there’s a lot in between)</td>
<td>Purposely misgendering people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling a guy who wears pink “gay”</td>
<td>Indian mascots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wanna see the gay way of doing/saying this/that?”</td>
<td>Mexican jokes (yes they happen a lot)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**UPPER LEFT:** Middle level and high school Civil Rights Team Project members are ready for their training. PHOTO: BRANDON BALDWIN | **ABOVE:** Small group discussions help students, from Augusta and other central Maine towns, broaden their civil rights conversations. PHOTO: NICOLE RANCOURT
Over 50 Veterans gathered across Maine last year to read and reflect on writings that spanned 3,000 years—ranging from Homer’s Odyssey to contemporary works. Two things were prominent in each of those conversations: trust and connection.

TRUST: this begins with the MHC’s close collaboration with Veterans, scholars, VA staff, and others working with Veterans. This began in 2015 at the program’s inception and continues every year within each book group. True collaboration results only when there is trust, and we have been fortunate in having the trust of our advisors and partners, as well as their generosity and wisdom. We couldn’t hold this program without them.

CONNECTION: this is seen during every meeting in the camaraderie among the groups. Differences in age, rank, branch, year, and country of service never affected this. What mattered were the shared experiences of serving in the armed forces and reflecting on that together through the readings. “I got the opportunity to interact and network with fellow veterans, learning from them and creating invaluable connections and relationships that I will carry for the rest of my life,” one Veteran told us. “I learned that I am not alone in all of this.” Some of the Veterans Book Groups ended with potlucks; some participants have gone out for coffee, gone to one another’s homes for dinner, introduced their families to one another, and have formed other groups. Connections were also made with civilians. One group was very moved and surprised that a civilian-facilitator could care so much about them and what they had to say. Some were puzzled—though pleased—that a humanities council would think to offer programs for Veterans.

And some in the groups talked about feeling a sense of connection with others across time and culture through the readings. One participant had the revelation that “throughout history people have been feeling the same things I have during and after they fight in a war.”

In 2015, MHC programming for Veterans also included public performances (including a public viewing and discussion of the documentary “Last Days in Vietnam”), which drew a total audience of more than 600 people.
NEW BOOKS, NEW READERS

Providing humanities programming for an audience you wouldn’t expect is a hallmark of New Books, New Readers. For more than 25 years, this program has brought high-level humanities discussions to adult new readers throughout the state, including immigrants learning English. Last year, the program reached a new audience: migrant farm workers picking apples near Buckfield. In July and later in October, these groups read Cynthia Rylant’s An Angel for Solomon Singer and Eve Bunting’s A Day’s Work. Discussions were lively, as both books were near to participants’ lives and prompted strong feelings. Once, the conversation ran late and cut into the workers’ valuable sleep time. Another conversation produced multiple and nuanced positions on what bosses owe workers, what “a fair day’s work” is—and, of course, what is meant by “fair pay.” Both were dynamic, focused, and sophisticated discussions that drew on lifetimes of hard labor and complex work experiences. The group asked New Books, New Readers to return in 2016—a clear testament to this initiative’s success. In this and other groups statewide last year, New Books, New Readers reached over 1,300 people in 13 towns.

In 2015, the MHC awarded the Prize to Donald Soctomah (center) chatting with Joseph Conforti (left) and MHC Executive Director Hayden Anderson (right) after the award ceremony. PHOTO: KEVIN BENNETT

LIBRARY PROGRAMMING

“Hugh Manatee,” the MHC’s plush mascot, was the star of a 2015 social media game where participants statewide (librarians, patrons, and the general public) guessed which library he was visiting. Those visits to libraries encouraged these crucial MHC partners to showcase aspects of their work and resources. Hugh helped the MHC foster relationships with its library partners in a whimsical vein, but also represented the tremendous reach of our library programming, visiting 45 throughout the state. PHOTO: CHASE EMERSON MEMORIAL LIBRARY, DEER ISLE

This year saw a blossoming of MHC library programming throughout the state. With scholar-facilitated book discussions and foreign-speaker series leading the way, we reached over 1,700 people in 41 towns statewide. We also reached new library partners, including the Edmund Library at Northern Maine Community College in Presque Isle. The majority of participants at this library were college students, but they were also joined by community members, faculty, and college staff. The total audience throughout this five-event series, “The Mirror of Maine,” was 154 people—a big number for this kind of programming. This site also benefited from one of the means that professors have at their disposal to encourage participation: some teachers offered their students extra credit for both attending and taking part in the discussion. The result: students who were not in the habit of reading much for pleasure joined avid readers as active participants—many having their first exposure to the Maine authors and poets of the series.

THINK & DRINK

Connection over big ideas is what this MHC “happy-hour” discussion program is all about. Last year saw programming in both Portland and Bangor. In the opening session of “Redefining Organizing,” our first Bangor Think & Drink, one participant remarked on the difficulty of community organizing in more rural areas and said the program made her feel more connected and less discouraged. In Bangor, this theme of “redefinition” was a subject we and our audience explored in the context of organizing, environmentalism, and food. Portland took on “disruption” for its theme and attracted crowds—including one reaching almost 150 people—on topics including whiteness, authority, art, and gender. The program saw close to 500 participants from both towns enthusiastically exchanging powerful ideas over a drink.

HUMANITIES

CONSTANCE H. CARLSON PUBLIC HUMANITIES PRIZE

In 1998, the Maine Humanities Council created the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize in honor of the first woman campus president in the University of Maine system (Presque Isle). Since that time, the Council has seen six awardees, representing philanthropy, higher education, historical scholarship, and community service. This award has aimed higher education, historical scholarship, and community service. This award has aimed

DOROTHY SCHWARTZ FORUM ON ART, SCIENCE, AND THE HUMANITIES

“Communicating Climate Change,” last year’s forum, offered a deep conversation about a crucial contemporary topic. Speakers shared a broad look at climate change, including perspectives from Andrew Pershing (Gulf of Maine Research Institute), Susanne Moser (Susanne Moser Research & Consulting), Jan Piribeck (University of Southern Maine), and Michel Droge (Maine College of Art). Thomas Tracy (Phillips Professor of Religious Studies, Bates College) covered the humanities aspect of the event with “Climate Change as a Moral Challenge.” He described the challenge of engaging in coordinated action against climate change, since it’s hard to see the benefit right now; how egalitarianism would create huge behavioral displacements, making it difficult to manage change; and how moral and religious resources can help us to find hope and help us to create change. This was the second annual Dorothy Schwartz Forum and took place at the Portland Museum of Art.
“If not me, then who? If not now, then when?” British actor Emma Watson asked this question in a speech she made in September 2014 as the United Nations Women Global Goodwill Ambassador. Her words inspired Machias Memorial High School junior Abigayle Hopkins, one of the MHC’s Student Humanities Ambassadors in 2015, to plan “The Feminist Project,” a discussion aimed at defining and discussing feminism with over 150 of her peers. Three panelists came to share their own experiences with the crowd that gathered at the University of Maine at Machias for this public event last fall, including Shenna Bellows, former candidate for the U.S. Senate; Rick Doyle, an attorney at The Next Step Domestic Violence Project; and Cheyenne Robinson, an activist student at the University of Maine at Machias. The MHC’s Student Humanities Ambassador program provides rising juniors and seniors in Maine with the opportunity to do real humanities programming. With MHC advice and local mentorship, Student Humanities Ambassadors identify a topic and create, plan, run, and evaluate a humanities-based program or event for their community.

Among the powerful letters written for this annual contest (students grades 4 through 12 write to an author, living or dead, about how his or her work changed them), the state’s winning letter for grades 7 and 8 this year won at the national level, too. Gabriel Ferris of Waterville Junior High wrote to Walter Isaacson, author of the biography Steve Jobs. “It’s only been a month or so since I finished your book on Steve Jobs,” Gabe said in his letter. “I still think about it a few times a week. You changed my life in a way I didn’t anticipate. I’m conflicted about the price of success.” Well done, Gabe, and congratulations to everyone who participated. Many thanks to the Library of Congress and to the David Royte Fund for making this program possible.

Each year, Winter Weekend draws together an audience of avid readers who explore an important work of literature, enjoying presentations by scholars on various aspects of the book, from cultural context, to critical analysis, to explorations of specific themes. In 2015, the enduring relevance of literature was reinforced for all audience members when Cedric Gael Bryant (Colby College), discussing Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, stood back-to-back with an audience member to physically illustrate the ways that racism can prevent us from seeing each other. The audience's audible reaction of shock and dawning awareness led to the first-ever Winter Weekend standing ovation.

This three-year partnership with Maine Historical Society reached over 3,400 Mainers of all ages, offering 100 events in 12 communities statewide. Last year, its final year, concluded with a rich range of programming by each community’s collaborative team. From a theatrical adaptation of actual Civil War-era letters between a Bethel couple, to students in Scarborough writing an original play from research into Scarborough-area soldiers and family members, the teams’ commitment to learning and sharing their local history created unforgettable moments.
2015 ANNUAL REPORT

GIVING

MAINE Humanities Council donors make a difference for people across Maine. They inspire the exchange of perspectives that lead Mainers to a better understanding of themselves, one another, and the world. They enrich the state by supporting the programs described in this report. We are grateful for their generosity.

If you feel inspired to contribute:

- fill out the enclosed envelope;
- go to mainehumanities.org; or
- contact Diane Magras, Director of Development, at 207-773-5051 or diane@mainehumanities.org.

We are proud to devote the space in this report to thank all of our donors at all levels of giving. Whether your gift was $10 or $10,000, you've helped us make a difference in Maine.

The list that follows represents gifts received in the 2015 Fiscal Year (11.1.14 – 10.31.15).

Asterisks (*) denote Maine Humanities Council Board Alumni.

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What is the 14th Amendment?

The constitutional amendments adopted in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War have been called the basis of America’s second founding, a “broad and sure foundation” providing equality for all before the law. Through the Reconstruction period and beyond, these amendments have fundamentally shaped our ideas of citizenship, equality, and liberty.

In 2016, the 150th anniversary of the passage of the 14th Amendment, the MHC is presenting statewide programming to explore its history, evolution, and contemporary significance. Our understanding of the 14th Amendment shapes debates around marriage equality, immigration, and other topics central to our national conversation—and appreciating its text—what it actually asserts and how it has operated over time—challenges us to connect contemporary events to the principles that dictate how individuals are empowered and protected in our nation.

In exploring this important amendment, we can all consider the value of democracy in American life and discuss some of the most important and challenging questions facing our country and our communities.