The Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel provided a beautiful and contemplative setting for Gary Lawless and the poetry-listening community in Lille. Read more on page 4.

PHOTO: DON CYR
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.

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:

Governance Committee Chair
Maine Humanities Council
674 Brighton Avenue
Portland, ME 04102-1012

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

Editor: Diane Magras
Design: Lori Harley
The Demands of Democracy

Throughout the year, I regularly have the opportunity to speak with groups of Mainers about the mission and work of the Maine Humanities Council. In introducing the MHC to folks who are unfamiliar with us, I find it helpful to reference the federal legislation — passed by Congress in 1965 and signed by President Johnson — that created the National Endowment for the Humanities. If you haven’t read that law recently, I encourage you to do so. There are lots of powerful and relevant ideas in there. For example, the legislation talks about access to the arts and humanities as a way to “make people of all backgrounds and wherever located masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants.”

The text of the law acknowledges that United States leadership in the world “cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect…for the Nation’s high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.”

These are ideas that feel completely fresh and pertinent to today’s world. But my favorite line is one that could fit on a small bumper sticker. It’s a line that distills and expresses the essence of what the Maine Humanities Council is working to support throughout the state: “Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens.”

In the rush and responsibilities of everyday life, I think it can be easy to overlook the fact that our democracy makes ongoing demands on us as citizens. Ours is not a passive form of government, and our responsibilities as citizens are not altogether simple or straightforward. Wisdom and vision are traits that do not come naturally to most of us, but must be nurtured and cultivated.

I think it’s also noteworthy what’s NOT said about the demands of democracy — democracy does not demand expertise or technical knowledge, not partisan zeal or ideological purity. Also, importantly, democracy does not demand wisdom and vision in its leaders. Leaders will come and go, but the wisdom and vision of the citizenry is the key to the wellbeing of the democracy.

In describing the mission and work of the Maine Humanities Council, you could do worse than to say that we are in the business of working with Mainers to create conditions such that all of us are better able to satisfy the demands of our democracy. Throughout the entire year, in venues large and small around the State, we use the tools of the Humanities to bring people together to read and think together and listen to one another, knowing that this is a great way to cultivate wisdom and vision.

This is worthy and important work, and we are very grateful to you for your participation and support. I invite you to get more involved! To learn about upcoming opportunities near you, please visit mainehumanities.org.

Hayden Anderson
Executive Director
LOONS AND LOCAL LIFE:
A STORY OF POETRY EXPRESS

BY JAN BINDAS-TENNEY,
MHC PROGRAM OFFICER

Lincoln, Maine, a town of about 5,000 in the middle of Penobscot County, is in a moment of emergence. As Lincoln Memorial Library Director Linda Morrill puts it, “I have watched the town lose our paper mill, struggle to move forward, and in spite of the downfall of losing our top employer, the strength and resilience shown by the people of our community has been amazing.”

Director for the past ten years, Morrill has been a powerhouse, exuding warmth and welcome from behind her glasses, desk of books, and towering cataloging projects. Upon a patron’s first visit to the library, she walks them on a tour, showing off a memorial garden, a children’s garden built by local students complete with plastic dinosaurs, and local artwork hung in every corner of the vibrant and bustling building. As Morrill explains, “the library has become a place for all to showcase their art, music, and stories, reaching out to not just the Lincoln residents but surrounding towns as well.”

In late August, the Lincoln Memorial Library hosted Poetry Express, a new program from the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine State Library. Fourteen Lincoln residents joined Orono poet Kathleen Ellis to talk poetry and learn how to perform it, a step the program takes before offering a public poetry event. Participants in this group included UMO freshman Lauren Dodge, runner up in last year’s Poetry Out Loud competition; musician Jeff Hamm; homeschooling mother of four Ashley Mitchell and her seven-year-old daughter Lily-Rebecca (who recently placed third in the annual Lincoln loon calling contest); and retirees from Lincoln and from away.

The group perused poems chosen by Ellis and the Maine State Library: poems about closed-down paper mills, deer, moose, and the natural landscape of the Lincoln area; and lumberjack ballads. Karen Richards, who owns a tailoring shop in town, defined the term “dry kye” from the 1916 ballad “The Days in Old Penobscot Stream”: “It’s the fresh water drift wood left from logging. I used to collect it with my grandmother down at South Twin Lake.”

Participants were amazed to find their lived experiences, history, and culture reflected back at them in the poetry. “She’s a local girl,” said retired professor and School Board member Bill Davis after reading poems by Amy Belle Adams, who taught English at the local high school in the 1920s. Davis selected one of Adams’s poems—“Earth Has Not Anything to Show More Fair”—to read aloud and said he hadn’t known that poetry could be like that, so intimate and local, written by and about his neighbors in Lincoln.

The early participants were ready to help lead the public event. Jeff Hamm kicked off the evening with an original tune about the closed-down paper mill. Lauren Dodge soulfully read “At the Grave of the Unknown River Driver” by Millinocket poet Paul Corrigan; while retiree Lynn Robinson read “September Staying” by Bucksport poet Patricia Ranzoni and talked about her first winter “staying” in Maine. The undisputed highlight of the event came when Deb Argast read Gary Lawless’s “Listening for Loons” peppered with live championship loon calls by seven-year-old Lily-Rebecca Mitchell.

The event closed with an impromptu open-mic at which community members read their own poetry. Deb Argast’s partner Anne Argast read a poem she’d just scribbled on scrap paper with a golf pencil about her lay-off in Indiana. “Being here tonight,” she said, “I realized
what we have in common. We all have experienced a great loss.” In that moment, poetry sewed a stitch between the people of Lincoln. They grieved, laughed and imagined together as a community.

U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith says, “In order to get to community, we have to go quiet, slow down, allow ourselves to be both vulnerable and brave, and approach one another with an idea as simple as, I’m me, you’re you, we are not the same, and yet perhaps we can feel safe here together talking about something as simple as a poem.”

That is what happened in Lincoln in late August.

Overwhelmingly, participants said the single most surprising thing about *Poetry Express* in Lincoln was the number of people, quantity, and quality of readers and writers of poetry in Lincoln. In short, residents were reminded of their own capacity. The Lincoln Memorial Library is now launching a new poetry group this month and as a result of *Poetry Express* the local writers group has re-kindled. Seven-year-old Lily-Rebecca is now working on a book of her own poems that she hopes to house in the children’s area of the library for other kids to enjoy.

As Linda Morrill puts it, *Poetry Express* “highlighted the emotions we all feel but are not sure how to communicate.”

We hope you’ll join us next year for *Poetry Express* at a town near you.
On September 8, 2018, Gary Lawless came to the Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel in Lille. Lille is a tiny village of 90 people on the Saint John River in northern Maine, halfway between the towns of Van Buren and Madawaska. It is a distinct village, one of two making up the town of Grand Isle. Gary attracted a small but warm audience. He didn’t expect a crowd because poetry requires dedicated attention, and stimulates the mind. A small group brings informality and ease. It certainly did in this case.

Gary and his wife arrived earlier in the day. It was warm and sunny with a hint of the autumn to come. I was mowing a 10-acre field behind the Musée when they drove up. Gary looked like a poet with a full beard and congenial eyes. His wife Beth, a Franco, wanted to visit any Desjardins that might be buried in the cemetery. She was not disappointed. Gary had been at the Cary Library in Houlton the evening before and was still elated by the reception there and the knowledgeable and appreciative audience.

Before the start of the event, Gary expressed that he was a bit apprehensive. He didn’t know what to expect. I told him that the audience would be warm and appreciative. Just before the reading, he and Beth sat in the front row as the participants came in. They started conversing, and very quickly the conversation became too interesting and engaging to announce the start of the program! I managed to mention that Gary was the poet who had come to see us and gave a few biographical comments about him and his wife as well. Gary started speaking about his activism and his use of poetry in his mission to give voice, through poetry, to people who are in life situations that cry out for dialogue.

The day after the reading, I was listening to CBC radio and serendipitously, heard on the program “Writers and Company”: “We seldom come across poetry in our daily lives and our minds are starving for meaning.” This got me thinking about the evening before with Gary. There are so many people in precarious life situations these days that are bottled up in inexpression. Poetry is sometimes a means to unlock the meaning of what they are experiencing, and what their path can teach them and their companions. Later the same day, I was watching an interview about a photographer who was on an excursion accompanied by Jane Goodall. Jane said, “We can never win an argument by appealing to people’s
heads. It’s got to be in their hearts, and art is the way to their hearts.” Poetry is a direct line to the heart and the complexities that make up the meanings found in perplexing life situations. The evening with Gary was like that.

The atmosphere of the “performance” was intimate and the audience was very participatory, due mostly to the conversation before the program started. Gary was at ease. The audience experienced a reading and murmured in appreciation rather than applaud. There was a lot of talk about social problems, and the poetry that Gary read added much to the dialogue.

A member of the audience, Rachelle DeFarges, related later that, “Gary and Beth are amazing people. Poetry rocks my soul and he read a few that were so beautiful, poignant, painful... pick an adjective. His gentle manner and reading style were delightful; the tiny gathering was intimate and completely enjoyable. … Gary was philosophical about that, said his feelings aren’t hurt by tiny gatherings.”

That is the nature of rural settings, especially ones that have fluency in two languages. The American side of the Saint John Valley has fewer than 14,000 people in a geographic area that spans well over 100 miles. Events like this are rare. The audience came from a distance, but, up here, we have to travel a distance for everything, and often attend events in Canada, where most of the population of this region resides. We really appreciated this opportunity to have Gary and Beth. They stimulated our imaginations. We believe they enjoyed it as well.

Joseph Donald Cyr is the director of the Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel. He is also a former member of the MHC Board.

In Lille
Archangels raising their horns facing the dawn facing the river, St. John singing the light one hundred years of sunrise

by Gary Lawless (written in honor of his visit to the Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel)

This was one of Gary Lawless’s “Voices of Maine Poetry” trips, which he made in the late summer of 2018 to share poetry from unheard Mainers. In 2017, the MHC awarded Gary the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize for his leadership in giving voice to Maine’s underserved populations through poetry and the creative process, and for his ardent devotion to the environment and to all those that inhabit it. For more about this prize or Gary, go to mainehumanities.org.
SPOTLIGHT ON GRANTS:

THE BASKET TREE

It was challenging to pick just one grant to focus on in this publication, but we’ve been excited about this project at the Abbe Museum, and we hope readers will have a chance to visit this important exhibit, which is up right now.

Baskets for sale at the 2016 Native American Festival and Basketmakers Market. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ABBE MUSEUM
In recent decades, a new threat has endangered the basketmaking tradition in Maine—the emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle which kills ash trees. On May 29, 2018, the presence of the emerald ash borer beetle in Maine was officially confirmed by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

Ash and sweetgrass baskets are one of the best-known Wabanaki art forms, and many people make or supplement their income through basket production. The Abbe Museum’s new exhibit *The Basket Tree*, co-curated by Darren Ranco (Penobscot) and Jennifer Neptune (Penobscot), explores the ability of the Wabanaki to protect this important cultural resource on and off reservation lands, so that livelihoods of Maine’s Indian basketmakers can continue and flourish for generations to come.

“Baskets hold our communities together by connecting young to old, and weavers to apprentices, ash pounders, block and gauge makers, sweetgrass gatherers and braiders, and other weavers and friends in our own tribes and beyond. More than a means of survival, baskets continue to be an inseparable part of the culture and traditions of the Wabanaki,” said Jennifer Neptune (Penobscot), Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance and co-curator of *The Basket Tree*.

The exhibit will be on display at the Abbe’s downtown Bar Harbor location through March 2019, and then will have a two year run in the Abbe Museum at Sieur de Monts Spring in Acadia National Park. The mission of the Abbe Museum, Maine’s first and only Smithsonian Affiliate, is to inspire new learning about the Wabanaki Nations for everyone who visits—on every visit as well. With two locations—in Bar Harbor and at Sieur de Monts Spring—the Abbe works closely with the Wabanaki people to share their stories, history, and culture with a broader audience.

With a collection of over 70,000 archaeological, historic, and contemporary objects, the Museum’s collections conservation program is recognized nationally as a model for museums. The Abbe also holds the world’s largest and best-documented collection of Maine Native American basketry.

*The Basket Tree* is made possible by the generosity of an anonymous donor, Acadia National Park, and Maine Humanities Council.

Starr Kelly, Curator of Education,
Abbe Museum
GRANTS: REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Do you know a Maine nonprofit organization eager to pursue a humanities project? Encourage its staff to check out the Maine Humanities Council’s grant opportunities. Our grants support non-profit organizations across the state in developing public projects that incorporate one or more humanities disciplines (literature, history, philosophy, and culture). The projects we support:

• stimulate meaningful community dialogue,
• attract diverse public audiences,
• are participatory and engaging,
• invite discovery of the humanities in interesting and exciting ways,
• incorporate the guidance of humanities professionals,
• are free, and
• are collaborative.

We’re especially interested in projects serving rural areas and those that reach intergenerational audiences.

At right, you’ll find pertinent information about and past examples of the three most common categories of grants we award.

**Questions? Interested in applying?**
Contact Jerome Bennett with questions or to discuss a project: 773-5051 or jerome@mainehumanities.org.

**MAJOR GRANT**

**Grant Amount:** $1,001 to $7,500

**Upcoming Application Deadlines:**
Optional draft due December 3, 2018; final due January 30, 2019

**Focus:** Supports a variety of larger humanities projects such as exhibits, conferences, films, and other initiatives. Major grant projects have well-developed thematic content, broad public outreach, and strong scholar participation.

**Sample, $5,000 for Dawnland (produced in 2017; viewable until 12.1 at pbs.org/independentlens/films/dawnland; screenings via dawnland.org):**
Dawnland is an independent feature documentary tracing the complex journey of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission, the first such body in the United States to ever investigate Native American experiences in State child welfare. It’s the story of stolen children, cultural survival, and the historic truth and reconciliation process for Wabanaki and Mainers. Dawnland goes behind-the-scenes with Maine-Wabanaki REACH, the organization responsible for the commission and the implementation of its recommendations.

**ARTS & HUMANITIES GRANT**

**Grant Amount:** up to $1,000

**Upcoming Application Deadline:**
April 2019

**Focus:** A partnership between the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Arts Commission, Arts & Humanities Grants support innovative community projects that include both arts and humanities components.

**Sample, $850 for Art in Exodus (June 3–30, 2016):**
In recognition of World Refugee Day, Maine College of Art presented the second annual Art in Exodus exhibition, a mentoring, exhibition, and storytelling project through which refugee artists shared their art and culture. Featured artists included Kifah Abdullah from Iraq (acrylic paintings and writing); Nabaa Alobaidi from Iraq (traditional pyrography woodburning); Titi De Baccarat from the African country of Gabon (mixed media paintings, sculpture, and jewelry); Jawad Alfatlawi from Iraq (handmade traditional instruments); and Diana Brown from Colombia (wearable textile art). The exhibit included an opening reception in which Kifah Abdullah read from his recently published book of poems, a Portland First Friday Artwalk in which the public met the artists, and a storytelling event in which the artists discussed the art and cultural issues related to their identities as refugees.
QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS:
THE STERLING SILVER PATH TO PHILANTHROPY!

Seventy is one of those “zero year” birthdays that sneaks up and surprises! Many find 70 a freeing age with more time to focus on cherished life goals such as family, friends, pursuing passions, and supporting causes that inspire us. Yet, while life in the “silver lane” can be grand, for many it is downright irritating to discover that IRA assets must start to be distributed once one reaches the age of 70½. It is one thing to choose to withdraw IRA assets, pay the income tax and use the remainder to enjoy life. It is a rude awakening to be denied choice as a result of a birthday. Some present!

Still, for the charitably inclined, there is a silver lining of sorts. IRA owners who have reached the age of 70½ can give qualified charities their annual required minimum distribution (RMD) up to an annual limit of $100,000 without recognizing the IRA distribution as income. This direct gifting of one’s RMD is called a qualified charitable distribution (QCD), and it is a big deal. For example, let’s assume fictional Irene has just turned 70½. She has an IRA rollover account, and must take a RMD of $35,000. Until this year, she only withdrew $20,000 annually from her IRA. Now the law requires her to withdraw $35,000. If she places the entire RMD amount in her checking account, it will be taxed as ordinary income. Assuming Irene is charitably inclined, she may instead make a direct distribution(s) to charity of all or part of the $15,000 that exceeded her customary withdrawal without recognizing it as income.

Why is this a big deal? For most, it is now the only way to make a tax advantaged gift to charity. While charitable deductions technically survived the 2017 year-end tax act, for most taxpayers, itemized deductions will be of limited or no benefit. Let’s assume Irene is married to Joe. They file a joint tax return; and for 2018, they will receive a standard deduction of $24,000. In Maine, itemized deductions have largely been comprised of state and local taxes. Under the new tax law, state and local property and income taxes are deductible only up to a $10,000 ceiling. Consequently, many taxpayers, especially married taxpayers, will never accumulate enough itemized deductions to surpass the standard deduction of $24,000.

While many studies show that people will continue to give to the causes they hold close to heart regardless of the tax benefit, it is always nice to be rewarded for doing good. For those who rankle at RMD rules that force them to take IRA distributions simply because they have reached a certain age, the QCD is welcome relief. By exercising a QCD, the power of social impact is returned directly to the hands of the donor with no bureaucratic intermediary. Thus, for many who give, 70 may be the new coming of age after all.

~Jean M. Deighan,
Co-Founder and CEO,
Deighan Wealth Advisors

MINI GRANT
Grant Amount: up to $1,000
Upcoming Application Deadlines:
March 1, 2019
June 7, 2019
October 4, 2019

Focus: Supports a wide variety of public humanities projects, such as exhibits, lecture and film series, reading and discussion programs, symposia, cultural celebrations, etc.

Sample, $1,000 for Talking Wires/Presque Isle Historical Society (April through October 2018):
The telephone and switchboard started a communication revolution that is still evolving today. In light of the human and social importance of this technology to rural Maine, the Presque Isle Historical Society created an exhibit celebrating two antique switchboards in its collection. This exhibit included the switchboards, historic photographs of operators, and artifacts such as headsets and ID cards; as well as oral history recordings of interviews with retired switchboard operators still living in Presque Isle today.
THE PROGRAM
Let’s Talk About It, the Maine Humanities Council’s reading and discussion series in libraries statewide, reaches into some of the state’s most rural communities, serving people who love books and ideas. Such programming feeds the mind, and depends on quality books.

Books from themed series are lent to participants. The most popular series go out to as many as three different towns each year. Sometimes books get damaged. And sometimes books become obsolete. And sometimes the series theme shifts to better fit with concerns and issues of today, which makes certain books less relevant.

OUR NEED
In a perfect world, we’d have the budget to replace every single book. But new books add a strain to the program’s slim budget. We could use some help. Each year, we create a “book registry” online that allows the purchase and donation of a replacement book to Let’s Talk About It. The registry keeps up-to-date totals of what books are still needed.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY
If you like the idea of giving a gift of a book that will travel to St. Agatha in Aroostook County, Greenville in Piscataquis County, Norway in Oxford County, and then off to more sites the next year and more the next, please consider purchasing a book from our Let’s Talk About It registry at mainehumanities.org. Your gift would be tax-deductible—and would ensure that the right books, in the right condition, reach Let’s Talk About It participants statewide.