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Community gathers at Biddeford's McArthur Public Library (see page 4).
PHOTO: DIANE MAGRAS
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.

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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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
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Strong Candidates across the State

The Maine Humanities Council created the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize in 1998, and since then we have awarded the prize five times, most recently in 2010. The Prize is the highest honor the Council bestows, awarded to recognize an individual or organization for exemplary work in the public humanities benefiting the people of Maine.

The Council has not awarded the prize in a few years, but this is clearly not for lack of worthy recipients. Spend a little time traveling around the state and it becomes quickly evident that there is a lot of great work going on. In cities and towns throughout the state, inspired, dedicated, hardworking Mainers are using the public humanities to transform their communities.

Through the humanities, we develop empathy, gain historical perspective, and sharpen our critical reasoning skills. These are important components of a human life well lived, and they are essential elements of strong community. All over Maine, we can find champions of the humanities, leaders whose creativity, determination, and grit are making a real difference for our state and its people.

Earlier this year, a steering committee of former MHC Board members convened to select a nominee from among a great many worthy individuals and organizations. Committee members did extensive research, weighed the impressive strengths and merits of a remarkable group of nominees, and engaged in detailed discussions and spirited debates. Throughout, the process was characterized by careful deliberation and a sense of purpose. By the end, one exceptional nominee rose to the top and was forwarded to the Council’s Board of Directors for consideration. The Board’s vote was unanimous.

Next spring, Donald Soctomah of Indian Township will become the sixth recipient of the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize.

Donald has been a leader in the public humanities for decades. I first met him just last year when I visited the Passamaquoddy Cultural Heritage Museum in Indian Township. The Museum’s impressive collection is housed in a small building not far from the Tribal offices.

Donald is a warm, welcoming, kind man; this much is instantly clear when you meet him. But spend some time with him and you’ll start to understand the depth of his knowledge and scholarship and the breadth of his public service. Whether it’s his work as Historic Preservation Officer for the Passamaquoddy Tribe, his efforts to preserve and encourage use of the Passamaquoddy language, his long service in the Maine State Legislature, or his impressive output as an author and scholar, Donald’s accomplishments are impressive.

The state of Maine is a richer, better place thanks to Donald Soctomah’s dedicated, faithful work. He is a perfect example of how one person can use the public humanities to make a real difference for a community and, indeed, a state. The Maine Humanities Council is very proud that next spring Donald Soctomah will be the newest recipient of the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize. You can read more about the Prize and about Donald’s leadership in the next few pages.

Hayden Anderson, PhD
Executive Director
In 1998, the Maine Humanities Council established the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize to recognize exemplary contributions made to the public humanities in Maine—in memory of a true friend of the humanities.

Constance Carlson (1915–1997), a founding member of the Maine Humanities Council, served on its Board from 1975 until 1981 and helped to build the foundation that would become the strong Maine Humanities Council known today. An inspiring university president, beloved professor, and dear friend to many, Connie was known for her commitment to education and literature and her sense of humor. The recipient of many honors, she was also an ongoing supporter of the humanities and remained a devoted member of the Council’s Bangor Community Seminar for many years following her service on the Board.

The two stories at right are from people who knew Constance Carlson well.

The Maine Humanities Council is dedicated to sustaining the power of the humanities to enrich, enliven, and leaven our lives. The Constance Carlson Prize was named for a woman who exemplified and promoted that mission.

Constance Hedin Carlson grew up on the grounds of Bangor’s mental health hospital where her father was superintendent. Connie knew the patients and their families and learned their stories. That early fascination with the story influenced her life.

Connie attended Vassar, received her PhD in English from Brown, and, widowed and with a young daughter, returned to Maine in the early 1960s to teach at UMaine Orono. There, in 1972, she was the first woman to win the prestigious Distinguished Faculty Award. But as greater testimony to her teaching, the award was given in a turbulent time, amidst Vietnam protest and cries that the traditional liberal arts curriculum was irrelevant. In this charged environment, students selected a humanist who did not share their liberal politics and who held students to rigorous standards.

Connie had a unique ability to translate a life of literature and ideas to a world of action and power. Her humanities scholarship propelled her capacity to make change. Connie’s passion for the power of words and her ability to create a story—on paper and in public—fueled her many successes.

In the 1970s, Connie chaired the Task Force on the Status of Women at the University of Maine. The status of women was contentious. Connie assembled vigorous opponents of change and held the first meeting in a room on campus usually used for social occasions. She used the University china to serve coffee and tea to her enemies—becoming the stereotype she sought to change. She gently provoked, she listened, and she engaged and organized the group as her beloved Jane Austen’s Emma Woodhouse had organized the suitors she found for Harriet Smith. It was masterful. Connie loved meetings: she embraced them like the unfolding of a good short story. She led the Task Force to a consensus, which no one had thought possible. Her report was powerful and, like her career, did much to advance the status of women in Maine.

A founding member of the Council, Connie served on countless boards and commissions, was dean of Bangor Community College, and the first woman campus president in the University system, at the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

While at Presque Isle, Connie recruited a well-known scholar to speak on campus. The scholar was convinced he had fallen into a desolate outpost of intellectual deprivation. Following his talk, the audience pressed him with thoughtful questions. Always the teacher, Connie had taught this fellow a lesson—the humanities have an audience in every community and we are all teachers and learners.

Connie Carlson’s legacy will continue as long as this prize carries her name and honors others who, like her, set the standard for leadership in the public humanities.
DONALD SOCTOMAH:
A LIFE IN THE HUMANITIES

In 2015, Donald Soctomah will be the recipient of the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize. The Maine Humanities Council’s highest honor, the Prize is awarded to an individual, institution, or group in recognition of outstanding contributions to the public humanities in Maine.

Donald Soctomah serves as Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township in Maine. In that and other roles, he has worked to steward and protect native culture and lands through resource management, policy-making, teaching, and the promotion and dissemination of history and language. Thanks to Soctomah’s groundbreaking efforts during his eight years in the Maine State Legislature, Maine K-12 students learn about Maine Native American history in school, and Maine place names now show cultural awareness and sensitivity toward the state’s native populations.

Soctomah is known for his commitment to traveling throughout Maine and beyond to speak about native culture, as well as for an impressive writing and filmmaking output. His works include histories of the Passamaquoddy tribe (Passamaquoddy at the Turn of the Century and Hard Times at Passamaquoddy), children’s books (Remember Me: Tomah Joseph’s Gift to Franklin Roosevelt), historical films (Healing Woods: Native Relations with Nature; N’Telompemk: The Story of Passamaquoddy; and History of the PassTribe), compilations of traditional tribal music (Songs of the Passamaquoddy), and an interactive CD (Landscapes, Legends & Language of the Passamaquoddy People) replete with maps and meticulous research. Soctomah has also frequently served as tribal historical consultant to the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, Animal Planet, and Maine Public Broadcasting.

Soctomah received his BS in Forestry from the University of Maine at Orono in 1984, a degree in the Professional and Advanced Study of Silviculture from Michigan Tech/Suny College in 1998, and was awarded an honorary Doctorate in Humanities from the University of Maine at Machias in 2006.

Past Prize Recipients: Tabitha King, Billie Gamman, Northeast Historic Film, Neil Rolde, Joseph Conforti.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DONALD SOCTOMAH

CONNIE CARLSON:
A MEMORY FROM NANCY MACKNIGHT

There are many firsts on Constance H. Carlson’s résumé. But her illustrious achievements and awards do not suggest the woman of wit and wisdom who was marvelous company.

Connie was my cherished mentor when I first joined the Department of English at the University of Maine in 1972 and she was Dean of what was then Bangor Community College (now the University of Maine at Augusta-Bangor Campus). But our friendship may have begun because we shared an Alma Mater. Connie graduated from Vassar College 25 years before I did, which put us on the same Reunion schedule. We would make often-adventurous drives to Poughkeepsie in Connie’s Volvo. Vassar’s custom is to house each reunion class in separate dormitories. For Connie’s 50th and my 25th, we drove first to Connie’s assigned dorm, where a squad of undergraduates assembled to take both Connie’s and my bags, to Connie’s delight.

Connie’s sense of humor was wonderful and infectious. Her enjoyment of people-watching was often unexpected and more often than not sly. We once went on a whale watching expedition in the face of a thick fog. Very soon, almost everyone on board was violently seasick. Connie unwrapped a salami sandwich and offered me half. When I declined, she said, “I am the daughter of Norwegian sea captains. I certainly hope you are not going to be seasick.” I would not have dared. Her not-so-gentle ribbing revealed her own indomitability and her ability to influence others (if only, in this case with me, to avoid seasickness).

When Connie helped to found the Maine Humanities Council in 1975, she was engaged on a project that was closest to her heart. Whatever her position, she was a teacher and a devotee of the humanities. She herself embodied the mission of the Council.
IKE the books on their shelves, public libraries are full of character: suave and charming, warm and exciting, brilliant and quirky. Sometimes the specific type of character is due to a single librarian, but more often the library itself and the staff and patrons together make libraries what they are.

To the Maine Humanities Council, libraries are some of our dearest friends, and they’re at the core of our work. Since 1985, libraries across the state have hosted our scholar-facilitated Let’s Talk About It reading and discussion series, foreign policy speaker series, and community-wide discussions.

And those are opportunities for a library’s character to shine through. The McArthur Public Library in Biddeford has a distinct character, one forever linked with a sense of community on many levels. It’s the oldest tax-supported library in Maine, founded in 1863. Housed in an impressive brick building with a clock tower and additions from 1965, 1995, and 2010, the McArthur is a community pool of knowledge. One of the first public libraries to join the Minerva library consortium in 2000 and later the Maine Infonet, the McArthur is now connected with 60 other libraries statewide, as well as with the University of Maine System, Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin Colleges. One full-time and three part-time circulation staff at the McArthur have consistently processed around 34,000 interlibrary loan items per year for the past few years. (At McArthur itself, average circulation runs around 130,000 to its patrons.)

“In the future, it’s inevitable that all Maine libraries will be connected,” Sally Leahey, recently retired Assistant Director, told me when I spoke with her recently about her time at the McArthur. Connection: that’s a very important word at the McArthur. Sally and its other librarians have gone to an extreme to connect with other libraries. And to connect with the community, in a zany way: the whole staff has camped out on the library’s roof, duct-taped each other to the library’s wall, and dyed their hair blue. These antics attracted patrons, gained attention, prompted children to read for 8,000 hours over the summer, but did something more: they reached the community by being within the community.

That may begin with antics, but also goes beyond. “So many McArthur staff are involved with the wider community and see their roles as just as important beyond the walls of the library,” Circulation Supervisor Jackie McCann said. “We participate in everything from Donut Club to Bacon Street Festival to various Heart of Biddeford events. We have staff who are running programs in Biddeford Primary School, Middle School, and High School; reading to daycare groups; participating in Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. Our outreach has even taken the form of adopting a local park, planting, weeding, and raking to help keep our corner of the community looking its best. This makes everything we do in the library even that much more effective, as we really know and participate in our community.”

It’s an appreciative and passionate community, one that Jeff Cabral, Library Director, noticed as such when he first joined the staff in 2011 when “the history of a mill town in the midst of a renaissance really struck a chord with me.”

Jeff sees his role at McArthur as preserving and building its legacy, both the brick library itself, the collections, as well as its role within the community. Support from the City of Biddeford reflects an appreciation of this perspective. “In my mind,” Jeff said, “the strength of public libraries has always been found in their staff, their collections, and the communities they serve.”

The staff members clearly value each other, too. Children’s Librarian Deanna Gouzie confessed being in awe of the McArthur before she first began working there. These days, awe has changed into a deep appreciation of the library’s camaraderie. “The humor, the imagination and the positivity are infectious,” she said, “and create a welcoming place for employees, but most importantly for our patrons.”

And if you talk with the staff at the McArthur for any length of time, the concept of community is always foremost, and focus often returns to the patrons. Young Adult Librarian Brooke Faulkner remarked on this, the library’s “consistent habit of putting the people...
served by the library first. Whether we are talking about library policies, programs, or the collection, even if we debate about the specifics as a staff, it always comes back to the question of how our patrons can best be served and how we can most freely make materials and resources accessible to people."

The McArthur’s quest for remarkable service to its patrons has involved partnerships with the Maine Humanities Council. In 2007, Sally Leahey introduced the MHC’s Let’s Talk About It library discussion group through the series “Detective Fiction in the 20th Century: A Notion of Evil” (this during the same year that McArthur’s book group for adults began).

Since then, the McArthur has been one of the MHC’s loyal library partners, holding theater of ideas performances, regular Let’s Talk About It series, and other programming.

The McArthur Public Library is a wonderful gift for its community, and the MHC is grateful to have the opportunity to work with it.

**THE McARTHUR IS SPECIAL BECAUSE...**

*As the newcomer to McArthur, I can honestly say it is the most welcoming staff I have ever worked with. People genuinely care about each other and about the library. That feeling comes through to the public. This is more than a service organization — it is truly part of the community. Even though they serve well over one hundred thousand people a year, everyone who enters gets friendly, personal service.*

- Melanie Taylor Coombs, Adult Services Librarian

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- Brooke Faulkner, Young Adult Librarian

*I have always been proud of our library’s sense of vision and willingness to support staff and services that they know will be useful and important to the public. I know I would probably still be working out of state had they not been willing to hire an archives professional and, more importantly, to make my position a full-time job so I can actually make a living doing something I love. What a wonderful gift.*

- Renee Desroberts, Reference and Archives Librarian

*I think what makes it so amazing is the collective culture. Everyone on staff genuinely likes each other; we are a very close-knit group. We listen to each other, we brainstorm and problem-solve together. Because we have this connectedness, we have created an environment in which we are all free to openly share ideas, which leads to more creativity and innovation. This translates into better services for our patrons.*

- Deanna Gouzie, Children’s Librarian

*It makes my job easier when I have such experienced staff at McArthur; they are a creative, educated, and talented group, and the shared history goes back many years.*

- Jeff Cabral, Director
THE STORIES
WE SHARE

My work brings me in contact with fascinating people. I hear stories from them about their families, work experiences, and books or authors that have made a difference in their lives. Such stories have been valuable to me personally, broadening my own understanding of the world, delighting me with new knowledge. Many are so good that, as a storyteller myself, I’ve often wanted to share them.

This column will do precisely that, sharing stories of friends of the MHC with our readers. It will only be a taste of the many excellent stories I hear, but the taste, I hope you’ll find, will be a pleasant one.

— Diane Magras, Editor

EPISODE 1:
A FRIENDSHIP AND
THE LITTLE PRINCE

Certain books find a place in our hearts and don’t easily budge. A childhood moment of discovery with that book, a gift of the text from a beloved relative, or a connection felt with it as a young adult tend to be the most common ways that books first enter those hallowed parts of our lives. But sometimes the story isn’t quite so simple.

For MHC friend and Maine artist Barbara Goodbody, that book is Antoine de Saint Exupéry’s The Little Prince. Earlier this year, upon seeing “The Pilot and the Little Prince,” a Morgan Library & Museum exhibit in celebration of the book’s 70th anniversary, Barbara reflected on the unusual connection she has with that book, one based on a lifelong friendship.

This friendship began in France in 1944 and didn’t involve what was then a very young Barbara, at least at first. France was reeling from German occupation and struggled under rule of the Vichy government with its own complicated feelings: humiliation, frustration, and suspicion of one another, mixed with a bold patriotism and determination to stand by the three principals of liberty, equality, and brotherhood that had long defined the country. The invasion of Normandy’s beaches on D-Day and subsequent bombing raids by Allied planes freed the country, but many residents, in the midst of celebration, still felt that life was a shaky business.

Captain Robert M. Morris of the U.S. Navy commanded the arrival of one of the amphibious landings that liberated southern France. On August 15, 1944, his fleet landed as part of Operation Dragoon close to a town called Agay on the southeastern coast between Saint-Raphaël and Cannes. He had been prepared for battles with the German Army, but found Axis forces reduced, most of the German Army having been redeployed for Normandy. Captain Morris requisitioned a villa on the coast as his base. He quickly made friends with the villa’s inhabitants, the Duke and Duchess d’Agay.

The Duke and Duchess happened to have been the brother-in-law and sister of Antoine de Saint Exupéry, who, in New York City, had just finished writing a book he called Le Petit Prince. And Captain Morris happened to have a daughter back home in the States named Barbara.

Captain—later Admiral—Morris’s experience started a friendship that continued with new force when he returned frequently to France in the 1950s. Often, he had his daughter Barbara with him, and she grew to know the ex-pat community as well as people he had met during the liberation, including, of course, the Duke and Duchess d’Agay.

Barbara herself became close friends with Saint Exupéry’s grand-niece Natalie, and through Natalie met the Countess Marie de Saint Exupéry.
Antoine's mother. Up through her 80s, Marie lived in the Châteaux de la Môle in la Môle, a tiny town in the hills of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region. (At the Morgan exhibit, Barbara was delighted to find a drawing of that châteaux in Peter Sís’s The Pilot and the Little Prince.)

“Marie was a great writer herself,” Barbara remembers. She heard about plays put on and stories told when the family was at home. And she remembers vividly Marie’s library, the walls painted red and covered with photographs of Antoine and his three sisters.

As a family, the Morrises read The Little Prince, and Barbara heard her father’s story of how he first met the author’s closest relatives. All the family visited France, but Barbara especially made it a priority. She continued as she grew older, and her relationship with the family itself continued.

But Barbara’s ties to the book extend to the region, too, and each time she reads The Little Prince, she remembers what Agay was like when her father was there.

In 1994, Barbara visited Agay during the 50th anniversary celebration of the region’s liberation. During the ceremonies, the mayor of Agay formally named a street after her father—Rue Admiral Morris—and hung a bronze plaque on the villa that her father had requisitioned.

Later, Barbara went back to the street and stood to look at the plaque in silence. A fashionable French woman walking past paused.

“Il son mon père,” Barbara told her, slightly choked with tears. “He was my father.”

“Il son mon libérateur,” the woman warmly responded. “He was my liberator.”

And that was another link: between place, between families, between the complicated relationship France had with the United States. Early in the war, Antoine de Saint Exupéry felt strongly that the United States should take action to free France from German rule. He had begun to feel despair of it ever happening when he wrote The Little Prince.

“We in the U.S. haven’t experienced this,” Barbara said. “The French had four or five years under German rule. There were times when they didn’t have any food. The Germans were all over the towns, making the atmosphere bleak. We sit in cafes and restaurants and talk liberally about our government. Can you imagine not being able to say a word? To be fearful that you’d be whisked away?”

She sees that world when she reads The Little Prince and imagines its ambitious, frustrated author at work trying to write a story that would depict the world he knew, the world he feared, and the world he hoped would be. It’s a world that will forever be in Barbara’s mind thanks to the ongoing friendship between the families.
THE OTHER PUBLIC HUMANITIES

BY KRISTEN CASE

Among the conclusions frequently drawn about the heavily reported “crisis in the humanities” is that humanities departments are woefully out of touch—with today’s students, with the new economy, with the public at large. The argument is a familiar one. In response to a similar climate of hostility in the late 1980s and early 90s, the term “public humanities” gained traction, spawning a host of programs, like Brown’s John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage and Yale’s master’s program in the public humanities. Designed to forge ties between humanities research and the communities in which it takes place, the programs represent a positive response to accusations of irrelevance. But what about the other public humanities—the humanities as practiced in the fluorescent-lit and cinder-block-walled classrooms of the public university? While civic-minded projects are worthy of praise, we must also better articulate what the humanities offer inside the classroom and why those classroom experiences matter for students, especially those served by public universities.

During one of my general-education classes on Thoreau’s Walden, a student raised his hand. Like many students, he was initially resistant to Thoreau, but today he was agitated. “I want to talk about the boxes,” he said. He read the passage:

I used to see a large box by the railroad, six feet long by three wide, in which the laborers locked up their tools at night; and it suggested to me that every man who was hard pushed might get such a one for a dollar, and, having bored a few auger holes in it, to admit the air at least, get into it when it rained and at night, and hook down the lid, and so have freedom in his love, and in his soul be free.

… Many a man is harassed to death to pay the rent of a larger and more luxurious box who would not have frozen to death in such a box as this. I am far from jesting.

There was a pause when he finished. “Our houses are just big boxes,” he said. He didn’t quite know how to articulate what he wanted to say. He looked at me; he looked at his classmates. “We take out loans, we take on all this debt, and they’re just boxes. Why do we do that?”

Later in the semester, a student in an upper-level seminar on literature and philosophy came to my office. I suspect she wouldn’t have come were it not required. She was almost always silent in class, and when she came to talk to me about her paper, she had difficulty getting started. She asked if she could use my laptop. I passed the computer over, and she opened her notes on Heidegger’s late lecture on “The Thing.” She took a breath and began tentatively: “Heidegger says that when we try to define something, ‘the thing as thing remains proscribed, nil, and in that sense annihilated.’ I think he means that by defining things, we give them identities, but we also destroy them.”

“What do you mean by ‘destroy’?” I asked.

Now she looked at me, and didn’t need her notes. We had read the Heidegger essay months ago. She’d been working to articulate this all semester: “I mean, when we say what something is, we kill its other chances. I think we do that to people, too.” This idea changed things for her, complicated her relationship to others and to herself.

These moments—one of collapse and one of clarity—represent what is, for me, the heart of the humanities classroom. They are difficult to characterize and impossible to quantify. They are not examples of student success, conventionally defined. They are not achievements. I want to call them moments of classroom grace. There is difficulty, discomfort, even fear in such moments, which involve confrontations with what we thought we knew, like why people have mortgages and what “things” are. These moments do not reflect a linear progress from ignorance to knowledge; instead they describe a step away from a complacent knowing into a new world in which, at least at first, everything is cloudy, nothing is quite clear.

I cannot say how many of my students have moments like these, and of those, how many have better lives
because of them. Part of preparing the ground for those moments is ceding authority as to what “better” means. Emerson says, “literature is a point outside of our hodiernal circle through which a new one may be described. The use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it.” This movement, from one circle to another, is both frightening and exhilarating. In it we possess what he elsewhere calls a “power not confident but agent.”

The most substantial contribution of the humanities to public life does not come through empowering elite students and faculty members to reach out to their communities, but by extending the most fundamental element of a real humanities education—the power to doubt and then to reimagine—to as many people as possible. Material power, economic power, political power, all forms of human agency, are finally dependent on the power of imagination, which is why Shelley called poets “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” We cannot be a democracy if this power is allowed to become a luxury commodity.

A corollary to this argument is that the real work of the public humanities is already happening at public colleges and universities all over the country, that the “crisis in the humanities” is not the result of a disconnect between ivory-tower humanities faculty members and the demands of a changing economy, but rather of our collective misunderstanding of what education in the humanities is and why it matters.

A year ago, North Carolina’s governor, Pat McCrory, threatening cuts to UNC’s flagship campus at Chapel Hill, said, “If you want to take gender studies that’s fine, go to a private school and take it.” McCrory’s statement suggests that the public university is a place for training rather than for real thinking and questioning, that such questioning is not relevant for public-university students, for first-generation college students—that such students need not worry about imagining their lives because their lives have already been imagined for them.

To say that women’s studies, or philosophy, or French is a waste of time for students who need more-practical training is to tell those students we already know who and what they are. It is to kill their other chances.

In the name of keeping those other chances alive, I want to make a plea for a very unsexy kind of public humanities: the kind that involves a classroom, and desks in a circle, and books. And I want to insist that it be a real classroom: the kind you physically walk into, where people complain about the weather and their finals and their lousy jobs before class starts, and to which, at our little campus in western Maine, people trudge from across town or drive for an hour in snow to be together for a while and talk.

The kind of thinking that asks why we have debt and what things are is risky, so we need real places, real walls, inside of which relationships and trust can be built. If you want to ask a young person to really think, to allow some of what she thinks she knows to be shattered, you have to make sure the classroom will hold her up. She has to know that her fumbling for words will not be laughed at, that her new idea will be listened to. Providing that kind of public humanities doesn’t require a foundation or a multi-million-dollar endowment, but it does require both space and time: real rooms and real hours.

In describing the difference between mere comprehension of scripture and what he calls “the sense of the heart” that is animated by God’s grace, the 18th-century Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote, “There is a Difference between having a rational Judgment that Honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.” The grace that he believed was necessary for salvation was like the sweetness of honey: It could be given only directly, never secondhand. Edwards believed that he could help his congregants prepare for such moments but that he couldn’t himself make them happen.

I don’t believe in Edwards’s God, but I do believe in something like grace, in something that teaching can prepare the way for but cannot itself effect—instantly of apprehension in which old worlds collapse and new possibilities are articulated.

The underfunded and undervalued humanities classrooms of the public university are places where that kind of grace can happen and does. They are places that keep other chances alive for all of us.

Kristen Case, pictured opposite, is an assistant professor of English at University of Maine at Farmington.

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MISSISSIPPI COMES TO MAINE:

18 YEARS OF WINTER WEEKEND

BY CHARLES CALHOUN

Only two degrees of separation lie between me and William Faulkner—well, three, if you count the horse.

In 1965, as an undergraduate at the University of Virginia, I took a course on literary biography from a young professor named Joseph Blotner. He was a brave man to teach such a course. His department was dominated by New Critics, who viewed biography as a blight on literary studies, and by the towering figure of its chair, Fredson Bowers, the pit bull of textual critics—men (and they almost always were men) who devoted their lives to the painstaking editing of, say, 17th-century poetry (a field where one misplaced, misread comma could mean professional suicide). Professor Blotner’s risky championing of the human factor in literature was made secure by one thing: he had befriended the late William Faulkner, the 1949 Nobel Laureate, and was busy writing his biography.

Alas, the great writer had led a very dull life. His biographer overcame this problem by accumulating every scrap of information that he could unearth about his elusive subject, who had died only three years earlier. In 1974, Blotner produced a two-volume, 2,115-page book. The age of bloated, detail-obsessed literary biography had begun. Faulkner was a handy subject because he had come from Mississippi in 1957 to live in Charlottesville, where his daughter had married into the local gentry, and would eventually become master of the Farmington Hunt, the Albemarle County equivalent of a patent of nobility. The 60-year-old writer was soon on horseback himself, riding to hounds. That he frequently fell was a blow softened, it was said, by copious draughts of brandy.

Faulkner had befriended Farmington’s semi-legendary huntsman Grover Vandevender, a local man hired to raise, train, and hunt with the foxhounds, a vivid figure in that small world. He provided Faulkner with mounts. A decade later, I found myself trying to learn to ride at Vandevender’s farm in Ivy. This was as quixotic in its own way as the great writer’s dreams of equine glory (a friend told me I looked very good on horseback—until the horse started moving), but I entertained the fancy that the docile old hack on which I perched had been, in happier days, one of the fiery hunters off of whom the great man had so often spilled.

Horses play only a small role in Absalom, Absalom! (1936), but the novel plays a very powerful one in our understanding of the self-destructive falsity of the myths of Southern “honor” and Southern “gentility” and of the corrosive effects of the region’s obsession with race. It has often been voted the Best Southern Novel. I would go a step farther: I would call it the Greatest American Novel. It has two close competitors—Moby-Dick and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn—but it speaks more directly to our present confusions than either of those masterpieces.

Alongside The Sound and the Fury (1929) and Light in August (1932),
Faulkner, the avid horseman, at Rowan Oak, 1962. Photo: Ed Meek, Meek School of Journalism and New Media Collection, University of Mississippi Libraries

Desc. Faulkner, the avid horseman, at Rowan Oak, 1962. Photo: Ed Meek, Meek School of Journalism and New Media Collection, University of Mississippi Libraries

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Absalom, Absalom!, the novel we are reading for Winter Weekend 2015, is the highpoint of Faulkner’s unusual career. In other circumstances, this largely self-educated citizen of Oxford, Mississippi, might have ended up the town drunk. Instead, he sat down at Rowan Oak — an antebellum house that looks impressive from a distance yet strangely ordinary inside — and from the 1930s through the 1950s wrote a series of novels that changed the way we think about that genre. Combining the stream-of-consciousness techniques of Joyce with the symbolism he picked up from the French, Faulkner transformed his impoverished, defeated, yet still self-deluded world into the stuff of great literature. Among Americans, only Whitman has had as great an influence abroad: it is impossible to imagine 20th-century Latin American or East European writing without Faulkner’s example. On the other hand, it is the duty of every good Southern writer to avoid sounding Faulkneresque, a difficult feat achieved, for example, in the limpid prose of Eudora Welty and Walker Percy.

But how seductive that prose can be! There was, I recall with Proustian certainty, a peculiar aroma to those darkened, heavily curtained rooms in the “nice” parts of town — some combination of furniture polish, bug spray, dried rose petals, dust-filled carpets, distant cooking odors, yellowing books, eau-de-cologne, and human perspiration. (I don’t write “sweat” because ladies like Miss Coldfield, even in her penury, did not sweat, they “felt the heat” until they could escape it, sitting in the dusk on their porches to catch “the cool of the evening.”)

If you had read Absalom, Absalom! in 1936, it might have seemed an accurate portrayal of the tragedies of such lives — one that suggested the impossibility of escape, however one longed for it, from the burden of Southern history and the imperatives of revenge.

If you had read it in the years of the apparent triumph of the Civil Rights Movement — say, the Carter presidency — when decent Southerners thought the region might finally have escaped that past and rejoined the United States, Faulkner’s story could have seemed a period piece.

Read today, it jolts you back into reality. We have a president who is only half white, and the violence of my Deep South youth is largely a thing of the past, but the old poverty, ignorance and resentment remain. Faulkner’s Snopeses seem to be triumphing. And it’s still a one-party South, only the parties have changed.

Faulkner, who was cautiously pro-civil rights (a brave stand for his time and place), would, I suspect, not be surprised. A fear of darker skins seems to consume much of this country (not only in the South). No one has explored the consequences of such fear with greater fictive power than that small man in his pink hunting coat on his very big horse.

...Absalom, Absalom!, the novel we are reading for Winter Weekend 2015, is the highpoint of Faulkner’s unusual career.

Charles Calhoun, author of Longfellow: A Life, created the Maine Humanities Council’s Winter Weekend, beginning with The Odyssey in 1997. He has presented this major program ever since.
The Maine Humanities Council’s grant program assists non-profit organizations in Maine develop public projects that incorporate one or more humanities disciplines. We’re particularly interested in supporting projects that are collaborative, stimulate meaningful community dialogue, attract diverse audiences, are participatory and engaging, and invite discovery of the humanities in interesting and exciting ways. These pages highlight some of our recent grants.

**DENMARK**

$1,000 | <TITLETK>

<TITLETK>, an original full-length dance piece created in Denmark by the HIO Ridge Dance collective, used Denmark, Maine, as a laboratory to investigate the nature of place in dance making, relying on oral testimony, audience participation, song and spoken word for full expression.

> Denmark Arts Center

**EASTPORT**

$1,000 | The British are Coming, the British are Coming!

Eastport held commemorative activities in July 2014 marking the 200th anniversary of the town’s capture by the British during the War of 1812 when a fleet of British Nancy ships with 2,000 soldiers invaded the island city of Eastport. A garrison remained to hold the city in British hands until 1818. The Border Historical Society commemorated this capture with a series of weekend events, including sea chanteys of the War of 1812, a play, music, reenactments, and scholar talks. This grant helped fund an evening panel discussion featuring four distinguished authors who have written about the time period. The subject of the panel was the Passamaquoddy Bay area in the War and featured a summary of each author’s work, discussions about the unique situation of the border area and how each side coexisted in the four years of occupation, and participant questions.

> Border Historical Society

Halifax Citadel National Historic Site and soldiers.

PHOTO: PARKS CANADA / D. WILSON
**MACHIAS**

**$500 | Box Car Box Office**

Using vintage footage from Northeast Historic Film and other resources, historically and culturally significant films and companion discussions are being offered free at Station 1898, a landmark 116-year-old train station each Saturday night through winter 2014 to 2015.

➤ Machias Bay Chamber of Commerce

**PITTSFIELD**

**$551 | The Last Word: An End of Life Book Discussion Series**

*The Last Word* featured speakers and fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and autobiography that helped participants explore aspects of preparing for personal death and the deaths of loved ones.

➤ Pittsfield Public Library

**SKOWHEGAN**

**$1,000 | Where Were You in ’64?: Margaret Chase Smith’s Campaign for the Presidency in the Year That Changed the States**

*Where Were You in ’64?* examines the epochal and pivotal year 1964. This year saw the arrival of the Beatles and British Invasion, the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the deepening of the American involvement in the Vietnam War following the Tonkin incident, and Margaret Chase Smith’s historic run for the Republican presidential nomination in an election that marked the resurgence of the conservative movement. The grant included an exhibit, book discussion series, lectures, and essay contest at the library, in conjunction with theatrical performances and movies in the community.

➤ Margaret Chase Smith Library

**WATERVILLE**

**$1,000 | Out & Allied Youth Theatre**

The play *Gays of Our Lives* ran at the Waterville Opera House in June 2014, focusing on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning) teenagers and the everyday challenges they face, such as coming to terms with their sexuality, coming out, being an ally, and battling stereotypes. The play was drawn from pieces written by Maine youth and compiled into the *Out & Allied* anthologies. More than 25 Waterville High School seniors and juniors worked with the Waterville Inclusive Community Project to write, direct, act, promote, and produce the production. This project aimed to educate the community on the issues faced by gay teens and their friends and families.

➤ Waterville Inclusive Community Project
Why Darwin Matters

NOVEMBER 15, 2014
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND,
PORTLAND CAMPUS

It’s time to retire the long-held myth of a division between science and the humanities. These disciplines are far more ideologically dependent than we often think, and only by looking beyond the perceived divide can we explore how intersections between science and the humanities shape our lives.

Dorothy Schwartz, Executive Director of the Maine Humanities Council from 1985 through 2006, would encourage us to do just that. In her memory, the Maine Humanities Council will offer the annual Dorothy Schwartz Forum on Art, Science & the Humanities, a program rooted at the crossroads of humanities, science, and the visual and performing arts.

*Why Darwin Matters*, the inaugural Forum, will be devoted to Charles Darwin, a particularly apt tribute to Dorothy—or Deedee as she was known—given her Darwin-related printmaking projects. *Why Darwin Matters* will include presentations by scientists and humanities scholars that examine Darwin’s life and theories, illuminate his historical impact, and consider his present-day relevance. The program will feature a musical performance of Elliott Schwartz’s *Darwin’s Dream* and an exhibit of Deedee’s artwork at the UNE Art Gallery.

This year’s Dorothy Schwartz Forum promises a unique opportunity to trace links, actual and potential, between the traditional arts and humanities and the field of evolutionary biology. Combining text-based humanities with the visual arts, the performing arts, science, technology, and popular culture, we’ll take a deep and varied look at the life and work of one of the most influential thinkers in human history. Join us.

REGISTRATION ONLINE: MAINEHUMANITIES.ORG