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.

WORDS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I keep a large map of Maine on the wall next to my desk. From time to time I use it to help figure out my travel plans throughout the state (Recently I spent some time staring at the map trying to figure out how to get from Dover-Foxcroft to Bethel. Answer, apparently: Can’t.), but primarily I use it to trace the scope and reach of MHC activity.

The colored pins on the map you see here (right) give a clear and immediate sense of our work throughout Maine and the overall picture of where we’ve been and what we’ve been doing in 2014. Read on for greater detail about all of this activity—whether a library program in Eastport, a reading group for low-literacy adults in Van Buren, or a Veterans Book Group in Portland. It all hints at the progress we’re making toward realizing our vision: Maine communities transformed by the power and pleasure of ideas.

Also in these pages you’ll see a list of the individuals and organizations who provided financial support for the MHC last year. We could not do this work without the generous support of like-minded friends, and to all of you we extend our heartfelt thanks.

Hayden Anderson
Executive Director
French, English, and Social Studies teachers from Maine and across the nation gathered to explore the historical and contemporary concepts of borderlands by focusing on the particular experience of the Acadian people. By learning about borderlands theory and the history and geography of the region, then by visiting both the St. John Valley (Maine) and the traditional heart of Acadian culture (Moncton, New Brunswick), participants placed the Acadian story into the broader context of how minority groups define themselves and survive in a majority culture. The program culminated with an oral history project in which participants interviewed local residents about their experiences living in a borderland region (with French teachers conducting their interviews in French). Teachers said that this part of the project was the most meaningful.

VETERANS BOOK GROUP

Veteran Peter O’Brien told us afterward: “I heard about this group and I thought, ‘Coming Home, what a concept. I’m older, I’m tired, and I’m ready to get on with the rest of my life.’ I’d never read The Odyssey. Over the course of 13 weeks I was amazed at how contemporary it was, and how much bearing it had on my situation, and, I think, all of our situations. This was telling a story from 3,000 years ago and yet we were telling the same story to each other in class. We became a unit through this, and it felt good. It felt good to be part of something that...the society we live in doesn’t really offer, especially to veterans.”

12 Veterans Reached in Maine
44 Sites Piloted This Program Nationally: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming

A new kind of MHC book group provides an informal, non-military humanities setting for Veterans to connect with each other and see their own stories as part of a larger human experience across time and culture, exploring issues of their military service in a safe environment. Its first year was a pilot for a national model.

Portland Vet Center hosted the Maine pilot: “Coming Home,” a group for combat veterans. “Coming Home” drew participants from wars throughout the decades who discussed the history and geography of the region, then by visiting both the St. John Valley (Maine) and the traditional heart of Acadian culture (Moncton, New Brunswick), participants placed the Acadian story into the broader context of how minority groups define themselves and survive in a majority culture. The program culminated with an oral history project in which participants interviewed local residents about their experiences living in a borderland region (with French teachers conducting their interviews in French). Teachers said that this part of the project was the most meaningful.

LITERATURE & MEDICINE: HUMANITIES AT THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE*

150 Health Care Professionals Reached
8 Maine Health Care Facilities Served

As evidence increases to support the healing power of stories, Literature & Medicine provides medical professionals with a much-needed space in which to take a step back from their intense work.

One doctor reported that the literature and discussions increased his awareness, reminding him of “the need for an approach to each patient as an individual, and to talk more with coworkers rather than assume we all have the same response to a patient.”

Medical professionals have described how Literature & Medicine reduces their burnout—an inevitable side effect of their work—and improves not only their own lives but also the quality of care they can provide their patients.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION GROUPS

100 Participants Reached
8 Sites Served

Created with major input from the Maine Coalition Against Domestic Violence and its member agencies, this reading and discussion group focuses on sharing perspectives of group participants and the people affected by domestic violence in the works they read, including victim, survivor, abuser, family, and community.

A participant in Dover-Foxcroft told us, “Workers in the harsh field of domestic abuse get worn out, worn down, and battered a bit themselves as they strive to do good work. Coming together, with literature as a guide...[we found] friendship, common ground, and alliances in the field.”

Groups included domestic violence prevention agency staff and volunteers, as well as legal, law enforcement, and medical professionals.

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

1,099 Maine Students Reached
65+ Maine Communities Served

This annual national program, in which students grades 4 to 12 write a letter to an author whose work has had a meaningful impact on their lives, is made possible by the David Roys Fund and the Library of Congress. In addition to cultivating critical thinking, this program helps young students find their voices.

Letters About Literature’s effects are clear: though the experiences of students in different regions of the state differ significantly, students connect equally to story and language.
Local libraries build communities of readers and thinkers eager for discovery, and the MHC’s library programming (Let’s Talk About It, our themed reading and discussion series; and World in Your Library, our foreign policy speaker series) does just that, too.

That kind of community was evident at Lovell’s Charlotte Hobbs Memorial Library when Eric Hooglund presented a World in Your Library talk—“The Civil War in Syria”—that drew more than 50 people.

Professor Hooglund introduced the region’s history and the many groups that call Syria home. He described the thousands of years of differing beliefs between more than a dozen religious, political, and ethnic groups as the focal point of the region’s turmoil, a situation compounded by the other countries that have ties to and interests in the nation. He made the point that stability in Syria has never really existed because of this.

This program clearly fed an intellectual hunger in that community, just as our library programming does statewide.

If you’re not in the habit of reading, you may not have much exposure to book groups. That is, unless you’re part of this one, which helps people who never learned to read, who struggle with reading, who are learning to read and speak English, or who just plain don’t read.

Participants go deep in this book group. At the York County Jail in Alfred, that was evident during the final session when one participant said she related not with the young boy in the book like most in the room, but with the absent mother: “I almost left [the room] because I am the mother in this story. That’s how I can empathize with her. I didn’t want to face my own mistakes.” She said she was glad to be in the program; it helped her realize that she wasn’t alone, and “books like these are how we know we can change.”

Maine was far from the front lines in the Civil War, but more than 70,000 Mainers served in Union blue and nearly 10,000 lost their lives. These figures altered the course of not just the war but also life for Mainers who had remained at home.

Local & Legendary, a collaboration between the MHC and Maine Historical Society, gave today’s Mainers an opportunity to discover and share their hometowns’ Civil War stories through partnerships between schools, libraries, historical societies, and other community groups. Towns explored their own community projects on such topics as:

- Life on the home front throughout different wars, starting with the Civil War era—Belfast
- The Gambo Gunpowder Mill’s role in the Civil War—Gorham
- Memorializing Civil War veterans at Portland’s Evergreen Cemetery with a Memorial Day procession that attracted over 400 people—Portland and Westbrook
- Exhibits, a book discussion, and a conversation on war from the Civil War to the present day between eighth-grade students and Veterans (shown above)—Presque Isle
- Students exploring the stories of Union soldiers buried in a local graveyard—Windham
**LET’S TALK LOCAL**

- 226 Community Members Reached
- 8 Communities Served

Eight organizations across the state partnered with others in their areas to organize a broad community discussion around a key question. For Bangor, the question was: “What does community mean to us?” With a team led by Literacy Volunteers of Bangor, the discussion took place in the Maine Housing Authority’s Capehart Neighborhood.

Over 40 people attended: residents of Capehart as well as service providers and a state senator for the town’s district. The text was a children’s book used in the MHC’s adult literacy program, Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch, an insightful story about a lonely man in a close-knit community. We saw participants enter conversations with people they had never spoken with before. Creating an equal field for discussion about such a crucial topic was a goal of this program, and we were thrilled to see it happen so vividly in this setting.

**MAINE AT WORK**

- 1,000+ Community Members Reached
- 23 Communities Served

This Theater of Ideas performance and discussion about the nature and future of jobs in Maine took an interesting twist in Houlton. Many sites that hosted the performance took it as a jumping-off point to discuss youth as central in their community’s future, but rarely did the group assembled include some of the very community they were speaking about. Houlton talked about the challenge of keeping its youth engaged in the community and imagined what young people were thinking—and were helped by the young people in the audience who shared their reasons for leaving (employment and to see the world) and reasons for staying (quality of life, the rural location, the community). Someone then asked: why do discussions around the state focus on drawing back youth who want to leave rather than supporting youth who want to stay? It was a turning point in the conversation.

**THINK & DRINK**

- 200+ Community Members Reached

Holding an event in a popular venue with a nice bar can break the barrier for a new—and young—humanities audience.

SPACE Gallery in Portland hosted this series, exploring race, food, truth, and intimacy. Featured presenters—scholars and practitioners in the area of discussion—shared their thoughts while the audience talked about the issues in small groups before joining an audience-wide conversation with the presenters.

“It was good to talk to new people,” one event participant said. “So smart, so real, so thoughtful,” said another. “[This is a] great way to start this conversation that is so hard.” It was obvious as people filtered out at the end of each program that the conversations were only just beginning.

**SPOTLIGHT ON GRANTS: THE BRITISH ARE COMING! THE BRITISH ARE COMING!**

In a state as large as Maine, the MHC’s grant program can make it entirely possible for organizations and individuals to set their dream humanities projects in action. One such dream was this project, sponsored by the Border Historical Society in Eastport, which held a series of activities commemorating the 200th anniversary of the capture of Eastport by the British.

An eyewitness account from Jeanne Peacock, the project’s lead, included the scene of the Redcoats arriving by schooner and marching through town “all to the strains of the Oromocto Pipes and Drums.” The Fredericton Guard gave demonstrations on the Peavey Library’s lawn, and a panel of scholars helped round out the day. Jeanne described the event’s apt reminder to “our citizens on both sides of the border about our shared history.”
Maine Humanities Council donors make a difference for people across Maine (the scope of which can be clearly seen within the map on page 1). 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 to make a difference in Maine.

The list that follows represents gifts received in the 2014 Fiscal Year (11.1.13 –10.31.14).
URING Fiscal Year 2014, the Maine Humanities Council had operating income of $1,698,946 and operating expenses of $1,655,274. Grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities made up an important component of the budget. This support was supplemented by a diverse range of other income streams, from the State of Maine, the Library of Congress, generous support from private foundations, the individual contributions highlighted in this report, and program income. Both the income and the expense figures reported in these charts and in the Council’s audited financial statements include in-kind contributions of time, mileage and materials, valued at $184,210.

The Maine Humanities Council is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
On March 30, 2015, the Maine Humanities Council presented the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize to Passamaquoddy Tribal Historian Donald Soctomah, whose commitment to a broad vision of Maine history, tireless work to build bridges across cultures, and dedicated civic engagement has made Maine a better place to live for all of its people.