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Maine Historical Society Library Celebrates its 100th Anniversary

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FROM THE COLLECTIONS
MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
LIBRARY CELEBRATES ITS 100TH
ANNIVERSARY

BY SUZI SWARTZ,

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BESIDE THE Wadsworth-Longfellow House on Congress Street in Portland is a gate opening onto a tree-lined brick walkway, which leads to the research library of the Maine Historical Society. As of February 27, 2007, the library has been in operation for 100 years. Before its move to Congress Street, the Historical Society and its library resided at Bowdoin College. Construction on the new library began in 1902, under the direction of Boston architect Alexander W. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's nephew. At the time of the library's initial completion, it consisted of a reading room and lecture hall.

When the library was dedicated in 1907, the president of the MHS was James Phinney Baxter, who also served as the mayor of Portland from 1893 to 1897 and from 1904 to 1905. The librarian was Nathan Goold, whose funeral was later held in the library. Currently the MHS is hosting an exhibit celebrating the library's 100th anniversary. The exhibit highlights the building's construction and early days, notable figures in its history, and various objects used throughout the twentieth century, including several from Collection 110, devoted specifically to the history of the Maine Historical Society. Among the objects in the case is a bean-counter that librarians used to record how many members and non-members came to the library each day. The exhibit also explains the origins of the term "red tape" and demonstrates how cataloged papers were stored in the past. One of the oldest items in the display, from Collection 1969, is a photo album of Maine Historical Society

members dating from 1886 to 1916 and containing the signatures and photographs of famous Maine residents — including Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Several other photographs are on display, including one of Fritz Jordan, who served as MHS Treasurer for twenty-five years and held the office at the time of the 1907 dedication, and Elizabeth Ring, creator of the cataloging system known as the Ring Index. Although the library moved from card catalogs to the Internet, the Ring Index still aids visitors in finding specific people, places, or subjects within the library's collections.

The exhibit itself only displays a sampling of the library's hundred-year history. Most of the library's history can be found scattered throughout the building itself. The library's stacks, for instance, were built in 1907 and were considered state-of-the-art at the time, and the beautiful mosaic tile floor has also been in place for 100 years. The 1950s addition of Nichols Hall to the back of the library, as well as the comput-



ers, copy machines, and printers now in the reading room, attest to the changes the library has experienced over the past hundred years. The library expects to undergo even more changes over the next two years, as it will be moved in the spring and summer of 2007 in order to allow for renovations to the current library, to be completed by 2009.