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News of the Society

Maine Historical Society

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MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume eleven, Number four Spring, 1972

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NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

Summer Hours: New Summer hours are in effect for both the Wadsworth-Longfellow House and the Society Library this year.

The Wadsworth-Longfellow House will be open from 9:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday during the months of June through September. It will not be open Saturdays or Sundays.

The Library will be open 10:00-5:00, Monday through Friday for the months of June through September. It will not be open Saturdays or Sundays throughout the summer. Regular Saturday hours will resume in October.

Manuscripts at Maine Historical: Among public and private institutions in the State of Maine, Maine Historical Society has had the longest continuous tradition of collecting and caring for historical manuscripts. In a printed *Circular Letter* distributed to the public by the Society on May 31, 1824, citizens of Maine were urged to send, "All original letters, manuscripts, and curious records of every kind, which may throw light upon American history."

After 150 years of collecting, the Standing Committee voted unanimously to renew and expand our efforts in this vitally important area. The most apparent need was to acquire additional storage space in order to continue collecting manuscripts in a meaningful way. Happily, owing to the foresight of the architect and committee responsible for the last addition to the Society building, the Nichols Hall Annex, provision was made for adding a second deck of stacks without structural alteration to the building, thus practically doubling present storage capacity.

The Standing Committee's decision to approach the membership for contributions for the project was the result of about three years of cooperative planning by the director and the Committee on Collections, whose membership includes H. Draper Hunt, III, Chairman, Miss Edith L. Hary, Robert G. Albion, John Hakola, William B. Jordan, James S. Leamon, and Karl R. Philbrick. It was felt by the committee that the Society had two principal options: first, since the bulk of the present collection consists of documents from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it would be appropriate to specialize in that time span and ignore documents for later periods. Secondly; although it was recognized that it would be impossible to collect manuscripts *en masse* from mid-nineteenth century onwards, because of the tremendous bulk of such materials, it should be possible to set up an intelligent acquisitions policy which would allow rigorous selection for certain key areas. The second more courageous option was adopted. It was felt that by restricting collecting aims to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the future value of the Library as a research institution would be seriously jeopardized and in turn, the future vitality of this Society. Herewith the final results of the Collections Committee's deliberations as approved by the Standing Committee

*Manuscript Acquisitions Policy
of the Maine Historical Society*

1. *Personal and Family Papers:* The Society will collect personal and family papers vigorously. (Such papers form the fabric of Maine's social history and contain a multitude of links with every aspect of the State's economic and political history.)
2. *Genealogical Manuscripts:* The Society will collect vigorously and be alert for manuscripts pertaining to Maine ethnic groups not represented in the collections presently.
3. *Maine Political Manuscripts:* The Society will collect pre-twentieth century manuscripts in depth and collect twentieth century materials with far greater selectivity "as space is available." (The note of caution reflected in the last clause recognizes the

immense amount of documentation generated by the modern typewriter.)

4. *Business Records*: Collect vigorously for the pre-twentieth century and with caution for the twentieth century. (Again, because of the typewriter.) It is recognized by the committee that in this area, in order to preserve continuity, it will be important and necessary to accept records for firms which, beginning in the nineteenth century, overlap well into the twentieth. (This is an area in which many people, including members, are unaware that the Society collects. The Society has excellent and sizeable collections of business records and it is indeed interested in collecting more, *particularly* in the maritime, lumbering, ice, lime, and other areas reflecting Maine's most prominent business activities.)

5. *Literary Manuscripts*: The Society will not collect literary manuscripts unless "highly appropriate," by which the committee means fiction *which treats some aspect of Maine history*. (Other Maine institutions, Colby College and Westbrook for instance, collect purely literary manuscripts by Maine authors, the subjects of which are not necessarily germane to Maine's history.)

6. *Religious History and Church Records*: The Society will collect in depth prior to 1900 and with vigilance after 1900 to guard against inundation. (Much of the public and many members are unaware that this area is one of the great strengths of Maine Historical's collections.)

7. *Cultural, Fraternal, and Patriotic Organizations and Societies*: Maine Historical is the logical repository for this type of manuscript record and no collecting limits need be imposed if such organizations are willing to allow their records to become an integral, permanent part of the Society's collections, and be made freely available to all historical researchers.

8. *Military Records*: The Society will collect Maine materials without restriction. Since the growth of the military establishment's own Record Centers there is little likelihood that further growth in this category will ever become unmanageable.

9. *Official Town Records*: In compliance with *State of Maine Statutes* Title 33, Section 655 and 656 no

further efforts to collect official town records will be made by the Maine Historical Society.

10. *Local and Town Histories*: Local town histories in manuscript and unofficial records will be collected by the Society with vigor.

Thus, for the first time in many years, the Society has a written policy statement to guide its collecting aims in manuscripts. We hope that all members will be on the alert for such records and notify the director, curator of manuscripts, or some member of the Standing Committee when such manuscripts are available. Far too many records of great historical worth are being destroyed every day -- usually because their owner or custodian is unaware of their value to the historian.

One of the most dramatic incidents of this sort occurred only last year when a dishpan (literally) full of documents was rescued from a nearby city dump and brought into the Society. They turned out to be ships papers of 1812 vintage -- a priceless heritage for the maritime historian. We implore your aid in averting such tragic destruction.

Maine State Archives: Since the building and activation of the Maine State Archives in Augusta the question frequently arises as to why the Maine Historical Society should continue collecting. From the foregoing *Manuscripts Acquisitions Policy* it should be noted that all ten categories concern records in the *private sector* as opposed to *public records*. The State Archivist collects and cares for records generated by the State Government: legislative, executive, and judicial. The State Archives deals in literally tons of documents whereas Maine Historical deals in collections a fraction of the size handled at Augusta. Although the documents cared for by the State Archives represent an immensely important aspect of Maine's history, it by no means reflects a well rounded picture. Unless some institution preserves the papers, business records, and other manuscripts generated by private individuals and enterprises, we shall transmit a very flat, one-sided impression of Maine's history indeed.

NEW MEMBERS

From MAINE *Bangor*: Mrs. Roger L. Averill, Miss Sharon E. Averill, Mrs. Paul E. Husson *Bethel*: Edward Ferron *Boothbay Harbor*: Miss Catherine Sheridan *Brewer*: Miss Xana Hansen *Brunswick*: Joseph M. Odiorne, Miss Gertrude H. Plaisted *Cape Elizabeth*: David E. Williams, III *Cumberland Center*: Arthur A. Poulin, Jr. *Cumberland Foreside*: Mrs. Langdon T. Thaxter *Falmouth*: Mrs. Robinson L. Bidwell, Linwood S. Elliott, C. William Thomas *Freeport*: John R. Rand *Gardiner*: Mrs. Francis X. Ward *Gorham*: Irving L. Vaughan *Hebron*: Mrs. Lloyd Davis *Kennebunk*: Mrs. G. Robert Butler *Kittery Point*: Miss Mary Pike *Nobleboro*: George F. Dow *Portland*: Miss Polly D. Blake, James J. Kelley, Mrs. Martial D. Maling, Mrs. Herbert W. Nolan, Miss Sarita W. Noyes, Miss Katharine F. Stevens *South Portland*: Herbert Adams, Frank M. Coffin, Mrs. Marilyn D. Gorman, Miss Sarah P. Sang *South Windham*: David Worthing *Westport*: Otto W. Siebert.

Other States MASSACHUSETTS *Framingham*: Mrs. Donald F. Prince *Medford*: Paul H. Flint *Weymouth*: Hugh B. Snow, Jr. NEW HAMPSHIRE *Somersworth*: John Ballentine NEW YORK *New York*: Mrs. Theresa Ceruti.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND *Charlottetown*: Mrs. Catherine A. Hennessey.

LIFE MEMBER

Roland G. Ware
Portland, Maine