Making History Accessible –
Five years of Accomplishment at the MHS Research Library

It’s called the information age, and the Internet has changed our lives, but great libraries still preserve our culture and our history, and still provide the testing ground for knowledge. The MHS Research Library is such a place. Its extraordinary collections are at the heart of all MHS does, supporting scholarship, programming, exhibition, education, specialized research, and cutting edge services for young and old throughout Maine. The trick, as always, is access: preserving what’s important; describing it, and helping the greatest number find it. Over the last five years, with help from volunteers, grants, generous donors and a hard working staff, MHS has made its collections more accessible than ever before. This edition of the newsletter takes a look at some of our accomplishments with articles on:

• By the numbers: A statistical look at the collections
• Taking Care: Preserving the heritage of Maine
• Find It Anywhere: MHS library catalogs go public
• Scholarship in Action
• People Make it Happen: staff, volunteers, and interns

By the Numbers (Not That We’re Counting)

It is hard to give a sense of the breadth and depth and potential of the MHS Research Library collection, but numbers help. There are approximately:

• 100,000 printed books, pamphlets and monographs covering every aspect of Maine, New England and family history;
• 6,000 manuscript collections totaling over 2,000,000 pages, ranging from the 15th century to the present;
• 250,000 architectural and engineering drawings;
• 140,000 photographs from the dawn of the medium to today;
• 25,000 examples of printed ephemera;
• 5,000 maps in manuscript and printed form;
• 3,000 broadsides and posters;
• The most comprehensive newspaper collection in Maine, comprising hard copy runs of 550 titles, including Maine’s first newspaper of 1785;
• Scrapbooks, business records, post cards and (inevitably) much more.

Among these materials are astounding rarities, collections of national significance, and collections without which the history of Maine and New England could never be told.
Space is truly the final frontier at the MHS Library, and that frontier is shrinking as collections and staff grow. Preserving Maine’s heritage depends on finding more space, while improving the care of collections within that space. The MHS trustees recognized the seriousness of this problem in their 2000-2005 Strategic Plan, and it has led to the creation of an ambitious long-range capital plan to renovate and expand the Research Library. Scheduled for completion within the next two years, the project will more than double the Library’s current capacity.

But while serious planning has long been underway, other steps have also been taken to produce immediate and essential improvements in collections care:

1) Administrative offices of the Society were moved out of the Library, freeing an entire floor for newly housed architectural drawings, books, manuscripts, and work spaces;

2) Storage areas in every part of the Society were cleaned and reorganized for more efficient storage — indeed every nook and cranny of MHS is being used and reviewed for better utilization;

3) Climate conditions for manuscript, rare books, and photographic negatives were improved.

During this time MHS also launched its Collections Initiative, designed to inventory and properly house fragile collections such as glass negatives, flat paper, and bound manuscripts. With funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) the Society hired new part-time staff, consultants and the Northeast Document Conservation Center to review its collections and help set priorities. As a result all MHS negatives and loose photographs have now been re-housed and properly stored. Bound manuscripts—some 2000 of them—are in the process of being carefully measured, boxed, labeled and re-shelved—a project that will take about a year to finish.

And more conservation work is on the way. The future of our knowledge about the history and heritage of Maine depends on it.

Processing Collections: A Never Ending Story

Many collections that come to the library arrive in a jumble; some are dirty and often packed in terrible cartons. Cleaning these materials, organizing them in logical ways, describing their content in a finding aid, and then shelving them properly is all part of what we call processing. Processing a collection is the key to its usefulness and public value.

Photo collections are particularly time consuming so every processed collection is a triumph. A good example is the collection of 1,000 negatives from the Wight Studio in Portland and Ocean Park. Ethel M. Wight worked at the Kahill Photo Studio in Portland before setting up her own studio in 1934. She was one of the earliest women members of the Portland Camera Club, and her photograph of Charles Lindbergh in front of the Spirit of St. Louis on Old Orchard Beach, taken on July 25, 1927, was the centerpiece at the Club’s 100th anniversary show at the Portland Museum of Art. She took thousands of photographs of local residents, tourists, nurses from local hospitals, and summer camps. The portraits are being arranged alphabetically by last name. Perhaps one of your relatives is among them? Call 774-1822 ext. 217 to find out if your family is included in this extensive collection and to purchase a copy.

Processing work has also been in progress on other important photo collections, including the Lamson Co. collection of portraits and nature scenes, 1860 to 1920; the Carl C. Coffin Glass Negative collection of street-life in Portland, 1900 to 1915; the Portland Press Herald Glass Negatives, covering daily life in southern Maine in the 1920s and 30s; and the Central Maine Power photo collection, documenting rural electrification throughout the state.

Ethel M. Wight; Image courtesy of Karlene C. Osborne

Can you help us identify the people and the location of this group photograph? Ethel M. Wight is standing far right.
Did You Say Maps?

Maps, along with books and manuscripts, are an important part of the collections. MHS holds a wealth of cartographic materials, including printed atlases, charts, and maps from the 16th century to the present, as well as unique manuscript material from the 18th and early 19th centuries. All of this is now being cataloged into the statewide Minerva database for online bibliographic access (http://Minerva.maine.edu). Collections of maps that have recently made their way into this online resource are: The Atlantic Neptune atlases by Joseph F. W. Des Barres (late 18th century); the Plymouth Company (Kennebec Proprietors)1640-1827; Proprietors of the Township of Brunswick (Pejepscot Proprietors)1640-1866; and the Thomas Barclay collection of the Northeast Boundary (1755-1842). And of course, more public knowledge means greater demand. A portion of the Northeast Boundary map collection will be featured in a presentation in Ottawa at the 2007 meeting of the Canadian Cartographic Association: “David Thompson and the mapping of the international boundary in the vicinity of the Great Lakes, 1817-1825.”

Copy of ancient plan from the Plymouth Company Records by Thomas Johnston, 1754

Find it Anywhere: MHS Catalogs Go Public

To find it, you must know it’s there. That’s what Library catalogs are for and why one of the most significant undertakings at MHS in the last 5 years has been the effort to put the Research Library catalog online for the world to see. The Library catalog is the record of all books, manuscripts, and important related collections available at MHS. For many years the only access to this information was through the physical card index in the Library reading room. To know what was available at MHS, you had to be in that room.

Beginning in 2002 all that began to change as the Library’s “retrospective conversion” project got underway. This meant turning physical index cards into digital records and then loading them all into a single library-management database that could be accessed anywhere in the world over the Internet. Initial funding of $100,000 was made possible through the Maine Info Net program of the Maine State Library—the same program that provided the statewide database system called Minerva. Funding and the right tools helped us complete 50% of the collections. A grant of $150,000 from the IMLS’s Museums for America program, in 2005, is allowing us to do the rest, and the whole project is expected to be finished in 2008. You can check out the portion that is already online by going to the MHS website (www.mainehistory.org) and clicking on the Research Library links. We’re extremely proud!

What does the photo curator do?
The answer is, a lot. Fran Pollitt has been in charge of the MHS photo collections for the last two years and it’s a big job. There are over 140,000 photographic items from the dawn of photography in the mid-19th century to the present — perhaps the largest in-state collection of Maine-related photographs available to the public. Just knowing how to distinguish all the kinds — tintypes, ambrotypes, daguerrotypes, cyanotypes, glass negatives, lantern slides, photographic prints, photo-postcards, stereographs, slide collections, digital images, albums and scrapbooks — is a major accomplishment.

Fran thinks it is a little like spinning a mountain of straw into gold. To get the gold from all that photo material it must be cared for and processed. This means at least seven things:
1) evaluating each photograph to decide how best to manage its care and access;
2) resleeving and rehousing each photo;
3) assigning numbers and subject headings for cataloging;
4) entering this information into the database;
5) digitizing some materials;
6) helping library patrons locate images; and
7) consulting with historians, media personnel, and publishers.

That’s how the photographic gold is found, whether the search is online in the statewide Minerva database (http://Minerva.maine.edu), through MHS’ statewide database of historical documents & photos (The Maine Memory Network, www.mainememory.net) or in person at the Library, 489 Congress Street.

Heritage Quest, Ancestry.com. And there are more to come.
Spotlight On: The Pleasure Boat

Researchers give meaning to collections, and new discoveries are being made all the time. For example, in the MHS Library there is a complete run of Jeremiah Hacker’s social commentary newspaper, *The Pleasure Boat* (1845-1862). But we knew very little about this Mainer or his paper until Rebecca M. Pritchard, MHS Visitor Services Coordinator, completed her USM master’s thesis for the New England and American Studies program at USM. Mr. Hacker, publisher-editor and disowned Quaker, enlivened the area scene until his views were swamped by local Civil War attitudes: his strong opposition to the war ultimately led to his paper’s demise. Mainers stopped reading it! Ms. Pritchard’s study is a major contribution to our understanding of a complex and fascinating individual who brought unique insight into the workings of social justice in 19th century Maine.

Scholarship in Action

On average the MHS library receives visits from over 6,000 researchers a year; handles an additional ten thousand direct information requests, and supports over 70,000 users of the Maine Memory Network, world-wide. Visitors include the staff of MHS and other Maine and New England museums, local historians, lawyers, architects, graduate students, genealogists, and hundreds of academic and independent scholars from Maine and throughout the U.S. working on serious extended research projects.

A number of these works in the last few years have been in response to a call for new intellectual and cultural approaches to regionalism, spearheaded by scholars from Dartmouth and the University of New Hampshire. These include:

- Maureen Elgersman Lee, *Black Bangor: African Americans in a Maine Community, 1880-1950*; and

In addition, a number of recent books by Maine scholars have used the collections to explore enduring class, ethnic and gender issues:

- Marli F. Weiner, ed., *Of Place and Gender: Women in Maine History*;
- Michael C. Connolly ed., *They Changed Their Sky: The Irish in Maine*;
- David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America’s Forgotten Institution*;
- Neil Rolde: *Unsettled Past Unsettled Future: The Story of Maine Indians*. Some other interesting projects:
  - Janice Parkinson-Tucker, a professional musician and teacher returned to history in 2001 after a thirty-year career in the public schools. In remarkably short order she researched and wrote three important books, including *A Maine Woman’s Travel Letters: Mrs. Hermann Kotzschmar’s 1897 Grand Tour* (2004), and *Behind the Pipes: The Story of the Kotzschmar’s Organ* (2005). These works give new and unique insight into the careers of the Kotzschmars and the shape of local music history.
  - For the past seven years historians H.H. Price and Gerald E. Talbot have been using the Library collection and in particular the growing African-American Scrapbook to complete their groundbreaking book, *Maine’s Visible Black History: The First Chronicle of Its People* (2006). Mr. Talbot, an eighth generation Mainer and the first Black elected to the Maine, was a key part of the Society’s 1997 African-American Round Table.
These People Make the Difference
A Salute to MHS Library Volunteers, Interns, & Staff

These are just a few of our favorite people working in the library; many others eluded our photographer.

Volunteer Anne Piergrossi, an employee of Tom’s of Maine, which gives employees one day a month for volunteer work in an organization of their choice.

Volunteer Nick Peterson processes Portland Press Herald glass plate negatives.

Tracy Lamaestra volunteers one day a week to process small manuscript collections.

Volunteer Gay Marks processes large manuscript collections.

Volunteer Jeremiah Higinbotham upgrades records and finding aids.

Reference Assistants Stephanie Philbrick (above) and Bill Barry (below) are fountains of knowledge about Maine History – and MHS collections.

Library Assistant Jamie Rice is an important new addition to the reading room.

Head of Library Services, Nick Noyes, directs the work of the library, starting with the clock.

Kevin Voyvodich, Conservation Technician, is transforming the manuscript collection.

Volunteers from Community Partners, which offers support to Maine residents with developmental disabilities, love folding boxes!

Photo Curator Fran Pollitt (center), with MHS Catalogers Sue Flaherty (left) and Ginny Ouellette (right).

Intern Helen York (left) with MHS archivist Nancy Noble.

John Knowlton, retired from the Library of Congress, volunteers three days a week in the Dungeon Basement of 489 Congress, processing organizational records.

Volunteer Gay Marks processes large manuscript collections.
MHS creates Anne Longfellow Pierce Society

The Anne Longfellow Pierce Society has been created to recognize the foresight and generosity of individuals who have included Maine Historical Society in their estate plans. This special recognition society has been named after Anne Longfellow Pierce, who in 1895 decided to bequeath the home occupied by three generations of family to MHS as a legacy to the memory of her brother Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. When Anne died, the house passed on to MHS along with many household items and artifacts original to the Wadsworth and Longfellow families. Because of Anne’s vision, the Wadsworth Longfellow House opened in 1901 as the first historic house museum in Maine – one of the very first in the nation – and has welcomed visitors to this National Historic Landmark ever since. As part of her bequest, Anne stipulated that a permanent home be built adjacent to the house for the Maine Historical Society and its growing collections, previously based at Bowdoin College. Today, this building hosts the MHS Library – now the most comprehensive resource in the state for the study of Maine and New England history.

“Over the years, MHS has received bequests from many members and friends – these gifts have included important historical artifacts, as well as crucial funds that support the work of preserving Maine’s history,” explains Richard D’Abate, Executive Director of MHS. “While we are truly grateful for these gifts, our only regret has been not having an opportunity to thank these individuals for their generosity and foresight. Many have been a complete surprise to us. We hope the creation of the Anne Longfellow Pierce Society will encourage individuals to let us know of their plans in advance so we may express our gratitude.”

If you have made a provision for Maine Historical Society in your estate plans, thank you. To be recognized in the Anne Longfellow Pierce Society, please return the coupon below. Each year, members of the Anne Longfellow Pierce Society will be listed in Maine Historical Society’s Honor Roll of Donors published in November. Members also have the option of being listed anonymously. Individuals who have made a planned gift to Maine Historical Society, which include charitable remainder trusts, charitable gift annuities and pooled income fund gifts, are also eligible for membership in the Anne Longfellow Pierce Society.

Anne Longfellow Pierce Society
MEMBERSHIP CONFIRMATION CARD

__ I/We have remembered Maine Historical Society in an estate plan and wish to be included in the Anne Longfellow Pierce Society.

Name ____________________________
Address __________________________
City, State, Zip _____________________
Phone ____________________________
E-Mail ____________________________

Please list my name as above

__ I/We prefer to remain anonymous.

__ I/We are interested in including Maine Historical Society in a will. Please send information about making a bequest.

Please mail to Maine Historical Society, 489 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101 or call Bonnie Vance in the Development Office at (207) 774-1822, ext. 231.
Searching Your Roots

Heritage Quest is about more than just census records. Members can search via the internet over 20,000 books, over 1.6 million genealogy and local history articles, as well as Revolutionary War Pension Records and individuals involved in The Freedman's Bank (1865-1874).

Books and periodicals related to Maine are in abundance. There are at least fifteen thousand titles, which are presented in full text online. Examples of titles include:

Lawton, R. J., *Franco-Americans of the state of Maine, U.S.A., and their achievements: historical, descriptive, and biographical*

Ridlon, G. T., *Early settlers of Harrison, Maine: with an historical sketch of the settlement, progress and present condition of the town*

Purington, George C., *History of the State Normal School, Farmington, Maine: with sketches of the teachers and graduates*

Titles related to family genealogies are also available by searching with individual names or surnames or the names.

HAMMOCK WEATHER HAS ARRIVED!

Come in to the MHS museum shop and pick up a classic read or try something new!

- Silent Spring, the 40th anniversary edition of Rachel Carson's bestseller, $14.00
- Treehouse Chronicles – One Man’s Dream of Life Aloft by S. Peter Lewis, with color photographs and illustrations throughout this tale of designing and building a two story treehouse, $29.95
- Maine Amphibians and Reptiles comes with a CD of frog choruses, $19.95
- Encourage the creative side of your young friends with the Bug Drawing Book, $6.95
- The Boy Who Drew Birds is the story of young John James Audubon and illustrated by Maine artist Melissa Sweet, hardcover $15.00
- Assorted birdhouses are suitable for outdoor use, $9.95
- The Maine State Bird, the Chickadee, $4.95

Thank you for supporting Maine Historical Society through your purchases at our museum shop, 489 Congress Street OR on-line at www.mainehistory.org!
Have you ever been bitten by the collecting bug? Scoured antique stores along Route 1, stopped at every yard sale you encountered on a spring day, or traveled many miles to trade with colleagues for that perfect addition to your collection? Perhaps over the years, you have become an expert regarding a certain photographer, a particular type of ceramic jug, or some other specialized item. If so, or if you just like “things,” the new exhibit, *Passionate Pursuits – History in the Collector’s Eye* is for you.

Passionate Pursuits will showcase the efforts of collectors who have made Maine materials their focus – and passion. On exhibit in the museum gallery will be selected groups of objects from the holdings of collectors across the state. Miniature models of Maine buildings, yardsticks from Maine dry goods stores, industrial gauges from boiler rooms across Maine, and many other unusual and interesting groups of artifacts will be on view. Separately these collections record historical moments and personal stories. Together they show the changing nature of life in Maine, and demonstrate how individual collectors play a vital role preserving our history.

*Passionate Pursuits – History in the Collector’s Eye* will be on view through the end of 2006.

Everyone is a Collector

As part of a recent exhibit, visitors were asked, “What things do you collect? What stories will those things tell in the future?” Here is a sampling of replies:

“I keep the menus from restaurants where I eat on important occasions…”

– Lizzy G.

“Me and my sister collect stamps…”

– Ariana F.

“I find myself collecting boxes…”

– Margaret B.

“I collect lots and lots of toy horses and Junk.”

– Emily C.

“I collect devilled egg plates decorated with chickens…”

– Joan C.

“I collect antique sewing tools and samplers…”

– Cyndi F.

What do you collect? Let us know about your interest. The passion of collectors of Maine materials will be on view in our new exhibit.