

Letter from MHS Director



Maine's Bicentennial has been a remarkable and challenging year, one that demonstrates how important it is for Mainers to nurture and invest in a robust history community, historical resources and infrastructure, and the practice of history at all levels.

History is essential to helping us understand and address the immediate and lasting impacts of the pandemic, urgent social justice issues, efforts to build a modern economy, climate change, and every other issue critical to Maine's future.

History also reminds us of our resilience, ability to problem solve, and the strength within our communities and in Maine's special sense of place.

The pandemic has created an historic pause, literally stopping Mainers in their tracks, putting work and school on hold, disrupting routines, and forcing a reset in our personal and work lives. We will grapple with the public health, economic, and social consequences for years to come.

The killing of George Floyd has forced Mainers to reflect on our state's relationship to racial injustice. The dual legacies of the removal of Wabanaki people from their homelands and Maine's participation in an international slave economy require us to explore, seek to understand, and acknowledge difficult legacies.

MHS's Bicentennial exhibits *Holding Up the Sky* and *State of Mind: Becoming Maine* place those issues in the context of Maine Statehood. The topics in this issue of *Maine History* inform many of the issues Mainers are focused on currently.

My hope is that these pressing issues will lead to a boon in historical research that reflects, explores, and documents diverse voices and perspectives.

The public is hungry for information, context, perspective, and places to explore, discuss, and address

these issues. This is a unique and invaluable contribution that cultural organizations can make to this historical moment. Efforts to address contemporary challenges should be grounded in access to diverse historical collections; in new scholarship; and in collaboration between historians, archives, museums, the community, and our civic leaders.

History is the foundation on which we will build a path forward as Maine moves beyond 2020.

In this, the year of the Bicentennial, I would also like to recognize two scholars from the University of Maine who have been the keepers, tellers, and analysts of the Statehood story for generations—Ronald Banks (1934-1979) and Liam Riordan. MHS recognized Ron and Liam jointly in June with our Neal Woodside Allen Jr., History Award for their contributions to Maine history.

Ron received his masters and doctoral degrees and taught at the University of Maine at Orono. His enduring legacy is his book *Maine Becomes A State*—the definitive account of how Maine achieved statehood in 1820—which was published by MHS in 1970 as Maine commemorated its 150th birthday. Ron was tragically murdered at a history conference in New Orleans in 1979.

Since coming to the University in 1997, Liam has in many ways assumed Ron's mantle—as a scholar, teacher, and champion of Maine history. Liam tirelessly helped rally State and cultural leaders around the Bicentennial moment and has masterfully told the story of Statehood to audiences throughout Maine. He also did a remarkable job creating and managing the *Maine Statehood and Bicentennial Conference* at UMaine in May 2019.

Steve Bromage