



"Maine: The Summer Playground of the Nation" From *Maine Invites You*, 1933. Courtesy of the Maine State Library.

PUBLICITY AND TOURISM: THE MAINE STATE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

by Jennifer A. Munson

Many of the publicity sources cited in this research note are available digitally through the *Digital Maine Repository* at: <https://digitalmaine.com>. Jennifer Munson is a graduate history student at the University of Maine.

During the Great Depression, Maine joined the rest of the nation in economic crisis. While the Depression affected the entire state in some way, the tourism industry took a harsh blow. The deteriorating economy led the Maine State Government to attempt counteracting the ramifications of the Depression. In response to the Depression, the Maine State Government increased advertising and publicity to promote tourism. This response included several publications that today give readers a glimpse into the history of the tourism industry during a difficult time.

Along the coastline, with its immense summer visitation, the economy struggled to stay afloat. With fewer and fewer tourists, the remaining population slid closer to poverty. For example, in 1924, six years before the depression began, the Maine coastal town of Old Orchard Beach, a popular tourist destination, had only sixty-four arrests for vagrancy, or homelessness. Without a comparison, this number seems high, but nine years later, in 1933, during the Depression, there were 201 arrests for vagrancy. In only a ten year span, the arrests for vagrancy more than tripled. While poverty is not visible in publicity advertisement, town reports, like this one, show both sides of the story.¹

Bar Harbor, another popular tourist destination, also had a difficult time weathering the Depression. During the 1920s Bar Harbor was dominated by tourists and summer residents. However, as the 1930s drew near, that began to decline. In *The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor*, Stephen J. Hornsby writes,

By 1914, the glittering years of Bar Harbor were numbered. The increased burden of taxation, the stock-market crash of 1929, and the Great Depression took their toll of family fortunes. The introduction of air conditioning and a trend away from sedentary vacations also lessened the lure of Bar Harbor. By 1940, many of the large cottages had been sold or were standing empty, their once-lavish gardens overgrown and untended. After years of decline, the end came quickly.



"It's easy and comfortable to get to Maine from any point in the United States." From *Maine Invites You*, 1939. Courtesy of the Maine State Library



Maine Invites You, 1937. Courtesy of the Maine State Library

The Great Depression had a strong impact on Bar Harbor causing it to plummet in wealth and visitation. With the decrease in families able to afford to stay along the Maine coast, the further the region was pushed into economic crisis. With many coastal towns becoming bare and forgotten the Maine State Government have to act in order to regain lost revenue from the tourism industry.²

Visible poverty within the state only expanded as the tourism industry declined. According to *Maine: The Pine Tree State*, "Tourist travel was down 20 percent in 1932, and the state's largest railroad, the Maine Central...sustained a loss of \$63,000." With the entire nation and the majority of the world affected, fewer people traveled to Maine during the 1930s. John Bauman in his book, *Gateway to Vacationland*, records the same percentage as *Maine The Pine Tree State* and discusses the Depression's impact on travel accessibility:

Tourism too, still profitable in 1930 and 1931, edged downward 20 percent in 1932. For the state, tourism decreased from an estimated \$100 million industry in 1929 to under \$85 million in 1934. In 1932, pummeled by truck and automobile competition as well as the Great Depression, Eastern Steamship Lines ceased operation of its once popular night-boat service between Boston and Portland. Steamship service between New York and Portland ended in 1941.

The tourism industry was, and is, entirely dependent on out-of-state visitation. Without visitors to supplement revenue from a lack of manufacturing industries, Maine's economy would collapse. The 1930 Annual Report of the Maine Publicity Bureau stated that, "It should be borne in mind that the tourist business brings \$100,000,000 into the State of Maine every year. This is not money that passes from one pocket to the other of Maine people, but comes to us from nonresident people". While tourism income continued to deplete, Maine was pushed further into the grasp of the Great Depression.³

The Depression soon started to cause lasting problems that did not seem to be going away any time soon. These problems started to affect the majority of the population while the government, both state and federal, was failing to stop it. According to *Maine Memory*

Network, “By 1933, Maine began to feel the effects of the depression. Unemployment rose to an estimated 15 percent; farmers were short of cash for taxes and mortgages; storefronts were boarded up, and tourist travel declined in the coastal villages.” While the rural regions in Maine weathered the effects easier than the urban areas, the rural farmers still face difficulties. Richard Condon notes, “farmers were more dependent on commercial crops, and with the collapse of the market economy, even the hardest work often brought little reward.” With no easy way out of the economic crisis, the state governments sought to counteract the effects quickly. This desperation led to the state’s response to increase advertising and state publicity. The goal was to put a vacation to Maine in the minds of as many potential tourists as possible, to create a, “Maine Conscious” pool of American travelers.⁴

The Maine Publicity Bureau, now the Maine Tourism Association, is a non-profit organization focused on advertising the state of Maine to potential tourists. This organization, established in 1921, took action during the Great Depression in an attempt to counteract the fatalistic effects on the economy. The first major step was taken in 1933 when the Maine Publicity Bureau published the first issue of *Maine Invites You*. This magazine, still published today, focuses on promoting Maine in a romanticized and alluring way to increase tourism. It is no coincidence that it was first published during the Great Depression. With the Depression getting worse each year the government increased advertising and publicity to pull more people towards Maine. While millions were hit by the Depression across the United States, there were still people fortunate enough to afford a vacation in Maine. The *Maine Invites You* magazines advertised not only wealth-oriented resorts and activities but also promoted Maine as a cheaper vacation opportunity. For example, the 1936 *Maine Invites You* stated that, “Round Trip Summer Tourist fares to Maine are LOW this summer.” The Maine Publicity Bureau was entirely aware of the economic crisis and used it to shape their advertisements. In the 1933 *Maine Invites You*, the Boston and Maine Railroad included an advertisement stating, “Make Your Vacation Cheaper and Longer by Traveling by Train.” With the majority of readers affected in some way by the Great

Depression, it was only practical that they cater to lower-income families, who were rapidly increasing in number.⁵

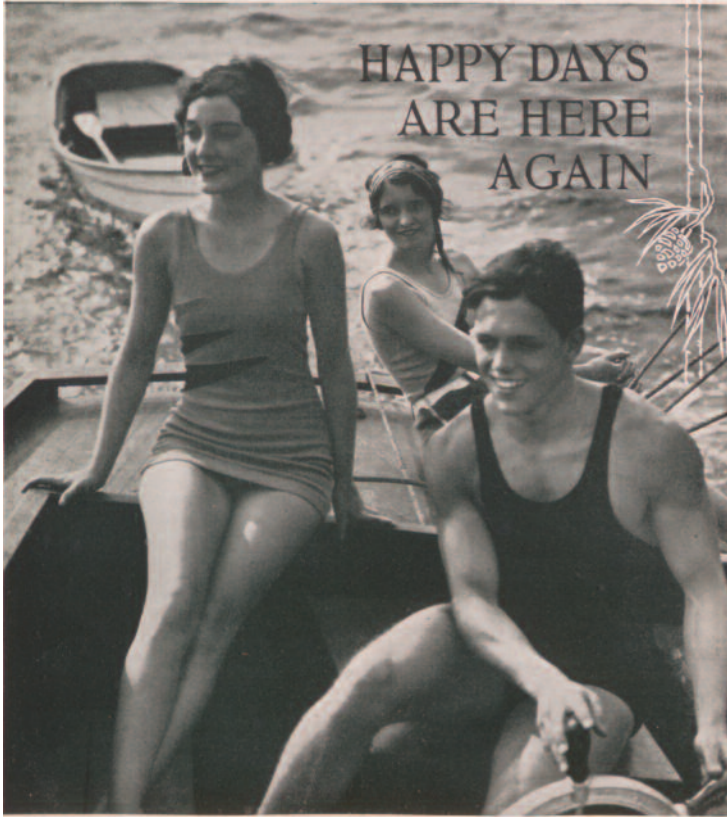
Another example is the 1934 issue of *Maine Invites You*, that directly addressed the popular demand for less costly vacation options. The magazine disclosed that, “We want to help you find just the place, just the accommodation, just the recreations you desire at rates that will suit your vacation budget.” By molding their advertisements to fit their audience, the Maine Publicity Bureau sought to protect the remaining tourism industry and draw in more tourists.⁶

The 1939 *Maine Invites You*, even included this advertisement (figure 1) to promote travel of all types to Maine. The legend of the advertisement, at the bottom right, stated, “It’s easy and comfortable to get to Maine from any point in the United States.” This advertisement showed how accessible Maine was to major cities and urged tourists to make the trip.⁷

Each edition of the magazine included a letter to readers from the Maine Publicity Bureau. In each issue during the Depression this letter discussed their mission and also stated, “We have nothing to sell-our service is FREE-its whole purpose is to help you to have the most enjoyment possible from your Maine vacation.” By offering a free service to aid travelers, the state and private non-profits sought to produce more potential tourists. Incorporating hospitality, friendliness and sincerity within the magazine showed Maine to be an ideal tourism destination full of welcoming people and accommodations.⁸

Along with promoting Maine as an affordable vacation spot, the magazine also promoted the natural resources. For example, the 1937 issue of *Maine Invites You* uses the image in figure 2 to showcase a picture-perfect family vacation as well as the following quotation: “Miles upon miles of clean, shimmering sand-packed at the water’s edge and beyond, spur youthful racing feet Health Giving, sun crested waters to lift spirits and wash away all cares.” *Maine Invites You* highlighted the clean air, natural landscape and crystal-clear waters throughout its issues. These positive attributes gave the government something to boast about, and that boasting was used to create revenue.⁹

The magazine also promoted the healing properties of Maine in the 1934 issue of *Maine*



"Happy Days Are Here Again" from *Maine Invites You*, 1933. Courtesy of the Maine State Library

Invites You by claiming that, "Even two-score years ago physicians said to worn-out and run-down patients, 'Go and get well in the healthiest place in the country, Kennebunkport, Maine. Breathe that air deeply, sleep as such breathing makes you sleep, eat seafood, go fishing, sailing, canoeing and surf-bathing. You'll come home a new man!' The doctors were right and are still right today. Vacation at Kennebunkport of course means good fun, golf, tennis, dancing, sailing, fishing, surf-bathing antiquing and romantic views of sea and coast; but, what's more important, it means good health and rested nerves." The fresh air and escape from urban life seems to be enough to entice most anyone to think about travelling to Maine. By using promises of improved bodily and mental health, the magazine could gain the interest of working folk who were in much need of the time off.¹⁰

The natural, non-industrialized land also drew in permanent residents and even new industries. The 1934 *Maine Invites You* claimed that, "You'll find Maine a state of great natural resources, for the development of industry, a

state with great areas of land of high fertility yielding potatoes, apple, peas and corn that set the world's standard, a slate which after the role of three centuries is still a land of promise and progress." With the national unemployment rate increased during the Great Depression, hunger grew more and more prevalent. Maine's rural areas became a valuable resource to the government, and they advertised it as such. *Maine: The Pine Tree State* states, "for many, rural life was an attractive refuge from the depression; more people actually lived on farms in Maine at the end of the 1930s than at the beginning." Self-sufficiency was an attractive quality to those seeking a new start or temporary escape. While this did not necessarily promote tourism, it increased the appeal of Maine.

The Maine Publicity Bureau also used the *Maine Invites You* magazine to give people hope, in light of their economic struggle. This magazine displayed bright colored covers and beautiful Maine scenery. Figure 3 states: "Happy Days Are Here Again" and is an example of the optimism that the *Maine Invites You* magazine advocated for. This optimism just added to the idea of an "untouched" Maine where vacationers could escape from the hardships they might be facing back at home. The magazine portrayed this escape as being worth the cost and enticed people to make the trip.¹¹

A vacation to Maine was boasted as being worry free and relaxing. The back cover of the 1933 *Maine Invites You* (figure 4) proudly states, "Maine: The Summer Playground of the Nation." The state pushed not only its beauty but also publicized recreational activities like golfing, tennis, boating and hiking. However, as you can see on the back cover there were dozens of activities that Maine used to draw in tourists. Scenery is enticing, but the state needed to show tourists other activity they could enjoy as well.¹²

Libby Bischof's article "A Region Apart: Representations of Maine and Northern New England in Personal Film, 1920-1940" goes into great detail about the way Maine advertised during the Great Depression. Bischof even mentions that "the tourism industry was the fastest growing Maine industry during the 1930s." Although this statement is not surprising since other industries were declining so quickly, it still shows the importance placed on tourism at the time. Maine publicized itself

as the perfect getaway from city life, and still does today. During the Great Depression cities were often hit the hardest, with poverty on display everywhere. For those who could still afford leisurely activities, Maine was a perfect destination.¹³

Along with the *Maine Invites You* magazine, there were several other publications that sought to promote Maine. For example, *A Motor Tour of the Coast of Maine*, created by the Maine Coast Tour Association, advertised Maine's coast as not only scenic but romantic and historic. This publication walked a fine line between boasting well-maintained roads for automobile travel and promoting the preservation of Maine in its natural form. The brochure involved both to entice the readers. For example, the brochure states:

But while all [of] America, and many in foreign lands, know of the Maine Coast, and literally millions have visited its far-famed resorts, only a comparatively few are acquainted with its picturesque peninsulas, its fascinating bays and coves, its charming villages, and it's delightful people to be found off the State's great arteries of regular tourist travel. It is to these quaint and interesting places, many of which are the scenes of never to be forgotten history, as well as to the widely known resorts, that the Maine Coast Tour takes the motorist, and in almost every case over excellent modern highways.

This publication used both the new roads and the idea of an untouched Maine as selling points to potential tourists.¹⁴

The Maine State Government's strategy focused on publication to increase revenue, promoting what they already had instead of spending funds to expand tourist destinations. The majority of park renovations or expansions were privately funded in the early 1930s. The lack of government funding towards expansion correlates with the impact the depression had on the state government. The 1934 *Maine Invites You* mentions that, "A new mountain automobile road in Acadia National Park, dedicated in 1932, extends to a height of about 1525 feet on Cadillac Mountain. The growth of the park is unusual in that its expansion had

been without government expense, due to gifts from the public-spirited people." Without private funding, the Cadillac Mountain auto road may have never been built. The National Park Service and other state-funded agencies often relied on private donations to fund non-essential projects. This reliance is apparent even today during budget cuts similar to those during the depression.¹⁵

Since Maine had a large amount of infrastructure development during the 1920s, the government seemed to put its focus on promoting the recently improved attractions and amenities in many publications. The majority of advertised developments were of roadways and other public spaces built in the 1920s while money flowed freely through the state. For example, the 1933 *Maine Invites You* publicized the bridge leading to the Mount Desert Island as "a modern cement bridge that is a part of the splendid roads." This bridge was completed in 1920. By promoting the existing features of Maine, the government was able to minimize spending and maximize publicity. This strategy was continued when they promoted Old Fort Western in the 1933 *Maine Invites You*, "Old Fort Western at Augusta, built of hand-hewn pine logs in 1754 and restored to its original attractiveness in 1921-22." Without spending additional funds on renovating something new, the government just displayed the recently restored fort to lure in visitors. This strategy saved the government time and money.¹⁶

With the State of Maine attempting to minimize the cost of advertising, they even used license plates as a form of publicity. In 1936, the state added the slogan, Vacationland, to Maine license plates. While this slogan is not large, colorful or flashy it still promotes the state as the nation's vacationland. Every plate that is seen is one more potential tourist.¹⁷

The strategy of promotion was also used by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Maine when creating, *Maine: A Guide Down East*. This book includes maps, tour guides, history, and other interesting Maine related topics. The main purpose of the guide was, "to capture the spirit of Maine life and to highlight the Maine scene for the visitor, without being either romantic or encyclopedic." While this book was federally funded and not governed by Maine, it had direct ties with the Development Com-

mission of Maine and the Maine State Library. This book gives a detailed unbiased approach to the state with a wide range of highlighted attributes. The Works Progress Administration also directly involved Maine people as it often gave employment to local artists and writers. The publication helped generate both state revenue and household income.¹⁸

Along with the state work of the Works Progress Administration and the Maine Publicity Bureau, the Maine Development Commission also published many magazines and booklets to advertise Maine. One example is *Eastward Ho! To Maine*, a publicity magazine published in 1932. The magazine is full of beautiful scenery and picture-perfect vacationers enjoying Maine. It does not include a surplus of advertisements like *Maine Invites You*, but instead displays a large variety of photographs that highlight the state. The introduction includes romantic descriptions of Maine such as, “Maine summers are cooled by health-laden breezes, blowing from sea and forest.” This expressive tone draws in readers and gives them a taste of what a Maine vacation has to offer. The inclusion of “health-laden breezes” goes back to the previously discussed theme of Maine as a place a healing and rejuvenation. The introduction ends with the statement, “Maine is the sanitation of the world; it is a tavern of rest; it is a vast, joyous playground.” This quote outlines the point of the magazine and expresses the relaxed lifestyle many enjoy in Maine.¹⁹

The Maine Development Commission also produced a department report for 1940. This report goes into detail of the state strategy used in response to the Great Depression. The publicity of the state was put at the forefront of the Maine Development Commission’s priorities and used their time and energy to give tourists every reason to travel to Maine. The 1940 report reflects how the state’s efforts were effective in growing the tourism industry in light of economic crisis. The 1940 report stated that,

“Maine’s recreational business increased \$15,000,000 in the past seven-years during the country’s greatest depression and is now Maine’s greatest single industry.” This seven-year time frame directly correlates with the creation of the *Maine Invites You* magazine. The increased tourism advertising helped to soften the blows of the Depression. The report also included that, “While national automobile travel took a tremendous drop, travel in Maine showed a marked increase.” By increasing the efforts of the Maine Development Commission and other tourism related organizations, the state helped to counteract the effects of the Depression and provide much needed revenue.²⁰

This report also compared the efforts of Maine in promoting tourism against other states. The report claimed that part of the reason for their success was that, “Maine was the first in the field, the first to realize the importance of advertising and publicizing its natural advantages.” By holding a lead above other states in advertising, Maine had the advantage to place a foothold within the national tourism industry. By executing this strategy ahead of other state and promoting Maine as the place to vacation, the government was able to make an increase in the tourism industry.²¹

Each magazine that was created and sent out provided more opportunities for the state’s tourism industry to grow. As the years of the Depression went on, the effects began to decrease. John Bauman, author of *Gateway to Vacationland* writes, “More encouraging, Maine tourism, sluggish in the early 1930s, had inched upward by 1936, thanks to a boost in state publicity spending.” Advertising was pulling in tourists who were soon finding more income through government aided programs. The Maine State Government’s strategy to publicize the state and promote tourism helped to counteract the effects of the depression as well as showcase the beauty of Maine for decades to come.²²

NOTES

1. Old Orchard Beach Annual Town Report, (1924) 51; Old Orchard Beach Annual Town Report, (1933) 35.
2. Stephen J. Hornsby, "The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor," *Geographical Review* 83, no. 4 (1993) 466.
3. Richard Judd, Edwin Churchill, and Joel Eastman, eds., *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1995), 514; John Bauman, "The Sunrise Gateway in Depression and War," in *Gateway to Vacationland: The Making of Portland, 140-171* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) 160; *Maine Publicity Bureau Annual Report* (1930) 7.
4. "1920-1945 Countryside at Midcentury," *Maine Memory Network*, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/907/page/1318/print>; Richard Condon, "Nearing the End: Rural Community, 1929-1945," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* (1992) 142; "Report of Maine Development Commission for the year of 1940" (1941), 3.
5. "About Us," *Maine Tourism Association*, accessed December 16, 2018; Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1936), 63; Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1933), 66.
6. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1934), 1.
7. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1939), 6.
8. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1933-1939).
9. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1937) 32.
10. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1934), 16.
11. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1934), 7; Judd, et al., *Maine: The Pine Tree State*, 513; Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1933) 13.
12. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1933) 135.
13. Libby Bischof, "A Region Apart: Representations of Maine and Northern New England in Personal Film, 1920-1940," in Martha McNamara and Karan Sheldon, eds., *Poets of Their Own Acts: The Aesthetics of Home Movies and Amateur Film* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 49.
14. Maine Coast Tour Association, *A Motor Tour of the Coast of Maine* (1939), 2.
15. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1934), 8.
16. Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1933), 75; "Trenton Bridge," accessed November 18, 2018, <http://mountdesertisland.net/bridge.html>; Maine Publicity Bureau, *Maine Invites You* (1933), 125.
17. "Maine License Plates, *Maine.gov: About Maine: Facts*, accessed December 16, 2018.
18. WPA, *Maine: A Guide 'Down East'* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 1.
19. Maine Development Commission, *Eastward Ho! To Maine* (1932), 1.
20. *Report of Maine Development Commission for the Year of 1940* (1941), 3.
21. *Report of Maine Development Commission for the Year of 1940* (1941), 3.
22. Bauman, "The Sunrise Gateway in Depression and War," 140-171, 166;