



## Maine Semiquincentennial Commission 250

### Meeting Minutes

February 14, 2024

3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Location: Maine State Archives offices (17 Elkins Lane, Augusta, ME) and Zoom

**Commission Members Present:** Secretary Shenna Bellows, Kate McBrien, Bernard Fishman, Gregory Pierce (for Governor Mills), Robin Talbot, Abbe Levin, Ekhlas Ahmed, Julia Gray, Richard Labelle, Kirk Mohney, Lori Fisher, Earle Shettleworth, Peter Merrill, Kelli Deveaux, Sylvia de Boer and Sarah Austin (for Speaker Talbot Ross)

**Commission Members Absent:** Marcia Minter, Senate President Troy Jackson

**Members of the Public in Attendance:** Jeanette Watts, Jeremy Hammond, Jeffrey Marlett, Jonathan Bratten, Steve Warren, Kim Smith

### **Introductions**

Secretary Bellows welcomed the Commission and the public attendees and acknowledged a quorum.

### **Approval of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Kirk Mohney made a motion to accept the meeting minutes as written. Earle Shettleworth seconded the motion in favor of approving the minutes with the edits requested.

### **Review and Discussion of LD 2145**

LD 2145 is a bill that aims to expand the membership of the Commission by including representatives from diverse cultural backgrounds. The bill proposes representation from each tribal nation, Franco-American culture, and public members appointed by the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House. An amendment was added to include representatives from the Acadian and Jewish communities. The Legislative Committee passed the bill, but there was a divided report. The proposed per-diem travel rate for meetings hosted by the Semiquincentennial Commission would be \$55 daily. The per-diem rate would only apply to public members of the Commission; state employees would not receive this. The bill still needs to be passed by the State Legislature and signed by the Governor.

### **Director of Special Projects Recruitment Update**

Kate McBrien mentioned that the recruitment update for a civil service position has received high interest from attendees of the meeting as well as others. Applications are being received which Kate McBrien will review initially to identify those meeting the minimum qualifications. Secretary Bellows will appoint an interview committee; she thanked Kate McBrien and Robin Talbot who have offered to conduct the first round of interviews. The finalist will be invited to the full Commission for a second interview and the final hire decision will be made by Secretary Bellows. The goal is to have the candidate onboard ideally in March but no later than April. The position is limited period until December 2026 only. The Director of Special Projects will be a dedicated full-time staff member, ensuring the Commission can continue its work during the America250 celebration.

### **National America250 Commission**

During the previous meeting in December, the Commission discussed possibly partnering with the National America250 Commission. Kate McBrien shared a template state/federal commission partnership agreement with the Attorney General's office for their review and opinion. The Attorney General's office shared concerns about a few aspects of the agreement template, specifically those sections on licensing rights. The federal commission is currently offering webinar discussions about grant funding and program examples, and they are acting as a central resource for state and state-level commissions. Richard LaBelle expressed support for the partnership and suggested that putting it down the road for another 2-3 months may put the Maine Commission at a disadvantage. Julia Gray agreed if the contract is worked out properly it would make it worth it, and Ekhlash Ahmed hoped the Commission will continue to work on their story in Maine.

During the meeting, Robin Talbot agreed with everyone who had already given their opinions and supported having Maine join the National America250. Secretary Bellows suggested a motion to partner with the American 250. Earle Shettleworth made a

motion and Kelli Deveaux seconded. There were 13 votes in favor with no opposing votes; Kirk Mohny abstained.

The Secretary of State office is the official home of the Semiquincentennial Commission and the fiscal agent. Secretary Bellows and Kate McBrien will work with the Attorney General's office to sign the contract on behalf of the Commission.

### **Program ideas and discussion**

The Commission next shared thoughts and goals for programming. They discussed developing programming that encompasses more history than only the American Revolution, focusing on the broader scope of US history before and after the Revolution. Bernard Fishman suggested that the Commission consider replicating the grant program that the Cultural Affairs Council managed during the State's Bicentennial. The Commission currently holds \$50,000 in funding for a program to start and cover travel expenses for the staff position, but a direct appropriation for program purposes has yet to be made. Richard LaBelle suggested that the longer the application period, the better, as it would disadvantage some low-income organizations. Abbe Levin recommended attracting matching funds from within agencies, such as the tourism office.

The Maine State Museum is considering a photography exhibition highlighting early images of Revolutionary War soldiers. Earle Shettleworth shared this project could be exciting and humanizing, and the discussion highlighted the need for more funding and collaboration between various organizations to support this project. Ekhlas Ahmed suggested collaboration within the Education Department or central universities to highlight the history of Maine and encourage teachers to share similar messaging with their students.

The Commission discussed various program options for celebrating America250 anniversary, focused on community stories and oral histories. Kate McBrien suggested a program to allow communities to share their local storytelling experiences, discussing their history, needs, and plans, emphasizing the importance of honoring the contributions of individuals who built the country and the innovations that put the country on the map. The Commission also discussed drafting a state partnership agreement for storytelling, which could involve informal collaborations or more formalized ways of recognizing collaboration. Robin Talbot suggests contacting Maine Writers and Publishers with a vast network of writers, publishers, universities, and English professors. The importance of storytelling in history, particularly during war and displacement, was also discussed. Ekhlas Ahmed suggested collaborating with Massachusetts to explore diversity, equity, and inclusion in Maine. Kirk Mohny presented linking stories and experiences to historical sites or buildings, providing additional meaning to these experiences.

The discussion also touched on the importance of storytelling in buildings like the Abyssinian Church and the potential for accessibility. Robin Talbot suggested

introducing people to the buildings and their stories through various mediums, such as dance or basket weaving. Kelli Deveaux mentioned creating audio-visual aspects of these stories, incorporating pieces from archives and other sources. Shenna Bellows emphasized the importance of tangible representations of history, such as place, dance, art, and music theatre.

The Commission also discussed the importance of the America Bicentennial (in 1976) in kickstarting the historic preservation movement in Maine, highlighting the significance of women's suffrage and the history of Thomas Fraser.

Julia Gray provided information about recent activities of the American Association for State & Local History (AASLH), a national professional organization, working with history museums and similar institutions. They and the National Council for Public History (NCPH) have been developing resources for the 250th anniversary of the United States, providing support for small organizations, and conducting free webinars. While the US 250th Commission leads fundraising and marketing, AASLH and NCPH create content and gather information, providing comprehensive resources for beginners.

Kate McBrien mentioned to the Commission that the State Archives staff had created a landing page for the Maine Semiquincentennial Commission on the Maine State Archives website. This page serves as a holding place until a more prominent and fully developed website is created. It lists meeting dates, appointed members, and announcements. The page will be updated regularly, and an official website may be made when ready.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 4:23 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for April.