



Meeting Minutes

April 9, 2025

3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

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

Commission Members Present:

Secretary Shenna Bellows (Chair), Julia Gray, Kirk Mohny, Bernard Fishman, Richard LaBelle, Abbe Levin, Christian Cotz, Beth Lambert, Libby Bischof

Commission Members Absent:

Marcia Minter, Greg Pierce (for Governor Mills), Earle Shettleworth, Lori Fisher

Staff in Attendance:

Sarah Hansen

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Bertie Williams, Brian Knoblock, Christina Bear, Dave McCausland, Frank Rodriguez, Jeanette Wattses, Marie Yarborough, Pat Claus, Peggy Konitzky, Penelope Hamblin, Christine Campbell, James Jackson, Daniel Glover, Dr. Julie Potter-Dunlop

Welcome

Secretary Bellows called the meeting to order and welcomed members and guests. A quorum was confirmed.

New Member

Dr. Libby Bischof, Professor of History and University Historian, University of Southern Maine and Executive Director, Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, was introduced as the newest member of the Commission.

Approval of February 12, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Legislative Update

Secretary Bellows provided an overview of pending legislation related to the Commission's work. The primary focus was a bill introduced by Representative Nathan Carlo regarding a specialty commemorative license plate. Secretary Bellows noted the Bureau of Motor

Vehicles had concerns over hidden costs, and while the bill initially did not direct funds to the Commission, revisions may include such a provision. The likelihood of passage remains uncertain.

Discussion followed regarding the timeline for potential appropriations, with the earliest availability projected to be 90 days after legislative adjournment (estimated in September). If funded, the Commission could reintroduce its local grants program, previously successful during the Bicentennial. Libby Bischof emphasized the impact of these grants on small organizations.

The Committee discussed several legislative items, including a proposed mobile commemorative education unit, which was rejected due to its cost. The Committee also discussed bond bills and funding requests for state historic sites, such as Fort George and the Benedict Arnold site, even though these weren't directly under the Commission's authority. Members were encouraged to reach out to the Appropriations Committee to support the main funding request.

Event Updates

Sarah Hansen provided the committee with updates on several upcoming engagements. She noted that Secretary Bellows, along with representatives from the Maine Historical Society, will participate in a live segment of Maine Calling on April 16 to discuss Paul Revere's ride and highlight the Commission's ongoing work. She also reported that the Commission will have a presence at the Governor's Conference on Tourism in Bangor on April 16–17, where staff will introduce the Maine Atlas project and begin soliciting public nominations using a QR code, with a full public campaign to follow. Lastly, Sarah provided an overview of Maine's participation in the national "Two Lights for Tomorrow" initiative on April 18. Events will include an 11:30 AM press conference at the State House, featuring remarks by Secretary Bellows and a reading by the Poet Laureate, as well as a 7:30 PM lighting of the Capitol. Communities across the state are encouraged to share their planned celebrations for inclusion in the Commission's press release and social media channels. While outreach has been conducted to municipal clerks and schools, Sarah noted that school involvement may be limited due to vacation schedules.

Report-outs

Sarah Hansen and Julia Gray reported on their participation in the national 250 Con virtual summit, hosted by the American Association for State and Local History. The two-day event featured keynote addresses by Lonnie Bunch of the Smithsonian and Carla Hayden of the National Archives, focusing on the challenges and opportunities of public history work in the current climate. Julia noted that the most impactful sessions included rapid presentations from national initiatives, which offered creative approaches to Semiquincentennial programming. Highlights included new educational resources from Colonial Williamsburg, youth engagement efforts by the nonprofit Made By Us, and the Youth 250 ambassador program, which has a representative in Maine. Julia also shared information on emerging partnerships with platforms like Clio for mobile history tours and

Handwork 2026, a project centered on American craft and artisan history. She emphasized the relevance of these programs for Maine organizations and noted the Wilson Museum's potential involvement. The report underscored the value of national collaboration and the significance of incorporating diverse and engaging tools into local commemorative efforts.

New Website Review

Sarah Hansen provided an update on the Maine Atlas project, which will be introduced during the Governor's Conference on Tourism via a QR code linked to the website. Sarah mentioned that a broader public campaign will follow, pending feedback from the initial launch. The Committee also covered the Commission's expanding online presence, including the new website and new social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram. Members were informed that Maine's events for Two Lights For Tomorrow are being submitted to the Virginia 250 website, which maintains a national directory of programming for that event.

Maine's Connection with the National Stage

The Committee discussed national-level themes and coordination related to America 250 programming, including the recent "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" executive order. Julia Gray shared insights from the national 250 Con summit, highlighting presentations by Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie Bunch and U.S. Archivist Carla Hayden, which emphasized the importance of historical accuracy, civic engagement, and inclusive storytelling in commemorating the Semiquincentennial. The Committee also learned about several national initiatives—such as "Made By Us," the Youth 250 Ambassador Program, and Handwork 2026—that align with Maine's goals of community engagement and youth participation. These conversations reflected the Commission's interest in aligning local efforts with national frameworks and ensuring Maine's representation in broader commemorative narratives.

Public Comment

Several attendees asked questions and contributed feedback during discussions on legislative funding, proposed initiatives, and upcoming events. Their input was acknowledged and addressed by Secretary Bellows and staff.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:28 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for June 11, 2025, at 3:00 PM.