



Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2025
3:00 pm – 4:30 pm
Location: Zoom

Commission Members Present:

Secretary Shenna Bellows (Chair), Beth Lambert, Bernard Fishman, Kirk Mohny, Christian Cotz, Lori Fisher, Abbe Levin

Commission Members Absent:

Earle Shettleworth, Julia Gray, Jamie Rice, Richard LaBelle, Peter Merrill

Staff in Attendance:

Sarah Hansen, Kate McBrien

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Penelope Hamblin, Michael Amico, Kimberly Smith, Daniel Glover, Frank Rodriguez, Sarah Vander Shaaff, Judy Weisman, Steve Warren, Christine Campbell, Julie Potter-Dunlap

Welcome

Secretary Bellows welcomed everyone and mentioned that she was joining remotely while traveling from her appearance at the Maine Municipal Association Annual Conference. To ensure the meeting connection remained stable, she asked Sarah Hansen to facilitate and conduct a roll call. Sarah Hansen confirmed that a quorum was present.

Approval of August 13, 2025, Meeting Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the August 13 meeting. A correction was made to indicate that Jamie Ritter serves as both the State Archivist and the State Librarian. The motion, made by Kirk Mohny and seconded by Christian Cotz. With no discussion, objections, or abstentions, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Project Updates

Mobile Civics Unit

Beth Lambert from the Department of Education reported that the *Civics on the Road* program was successfully launched at Madison Elementary School on Constitution Day.

The event, developed in partnership with the Commission and the Secretary of State's Office, featured student-led journalism and voting exercises with Secretary of State Shenna Bellows. Positive feedback was received from students, faculty, and local officials. Due to strong interest, the Department plans to increase the schedule from one to two school visits per month. The next program will be held at Vassalboro Community School on October 16. Materials have been prepared for elementary, middle, and high school levels. Schools interested in participating are encouraged to contact their local superintendent or principal.

Maine Atlas Project

Sarah Hansen reported that the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Maine Atlas Project closes on October 15. Eleven vendors submitted a total of 123 questions, reflecting strong statewide interest. A vendor is expected to be selected by the end of the year, with project work scheduled to start in January 2026.

Grant Program

The Commission's new grant program, jointly supported by the Maine State Archives and the Maine State Cultural Affairs Council, was launched following its approval at the previous meeting. Five applications have been received so far. Outreach through the Maine Association of Archives and Museums conference and the newly launched Commission newsletter has attracted widespread attention among cultural and historical organizations. Members noted that interest in the program continues to grow across the state.

Federal Updates

Sarah updated the Commission that there were no significant program changes at this time from America250 or Task Force 250. However, she informed members that Ari Abergel, Director of America 250, had recently been dismissed from the organization. No additional details were available. Despite the leadership transition, America250 continues to advance with its national planning efforts. The organization has announced plans to continue the America's Field Trip program, which highlights historical sites through student engagement activities.

Greg mentioned that his office recently received a request from America250 for updated contact details of Maine's state representatives. Sarah affirmed that communication channels between the national organization and the Commission remain open.

State Updates

Sarah updated the Commission after attending the Maine Association of Museums (MAM) Annual Conference, where information about the Commission's programs and new grant opportunities was shared. Participants showed strong interest in the Semiquincentennial initiatives and discussed future collaborations among Maine's cultural and historical organizations.

Upcoming Events

The Commission will participate in two Maine Public screenings of Ken Burns' *The American Revolution* this month, on October 16 in Auburn and October 30 in Portland. The Portland screening will feature a panel with Libby Bischof and other Maine historians. Both screenings are free and open to the public, with advance registration required, and will showcase student videos from the "My Revolutionary Day in the Life" project.

The Commission also highlighted *America from the Ashes*, a public commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Burning of Falmouth on October 18 in Portland. Organized by Spirits Alive, Greater Portland Landmarks, Maine Ulster Scots Project, Maine Historical Society, and other community partners, the event will include family activities, historical presentations, and a self-guided passport tour of key sites.

America's Potluck on July 5, 2025

Sarah discussed America's Potluck, a nationwide community effort encouraging residents to connect with neighbors, local organizations, and families for shared meals and conversations on July 5, 2026, as part of the Semiquincentennial celebration. Planning continues with Community Plate and the Maine Downtown Center. The Maine Arts Commission received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to support six regional potlucks in coordination with the Maine Humanities Council and Community Plate, and the Commission has been invited to be a supporting partner. America's Potluck seeks to offer an affordable and accessible way for communities to participate in the 250th anniversary celebration. National partners, including America's Test Kitchen, will contribute recipes and event materials. The Commission will support the effort through public outreach and by providing guidance and resources for communities interested in hosting local gatherings.

The Commission formally voted to endorse Maine's participation as an official partner in America's Potluck initiative. The motion was made by Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, seconded by Christian Cotz. With no discussion, objections, or abstentions, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comment

During the public comment period, Frank Rodriguez of the Machiasport Historical Society provided an update on recent community activities celebrating early American history in the Down East area. He noted that the Society partnered with the Daughters of the American Revolution to hold a Constitution Day bell-ringing ceremony on September 17 at the local Congregational Church. About 25 people attended, including Representative Will Tuell. Mr. Rodriguez also mentioned that the Society hosted a tea at the historic Gates House, featuring interpretive displays on the Battle of the Margareta and other local Revolutionary War history. A new event, called "Mystery and History Trick-or-Treat at the Gates House," is planned to engage younger audiences through a mix of historical education and local folklore. Sarah thanked Mr. Rodriguez for his report and remarked that

the Commission values updates from local historical societies participating in the 250th commemoration.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:39 p.m. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be on Wednesday, December 10, 2025.