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Maine Bisexual People's Network (MBPN)

Kat Hartford

katelyn.s.hartford@maine.edu

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Maine Bisexual People's Network (MBPN)

Kat Hartford

Pop Up SP2021

Introduction

The Maine Bisexual People's Network (MBPN) was founded in 1986, and was the first organization serving bisexual members of Maine's LGBTQ+ community. MBPN's founder, Ginny LaCrow, gathered and organized with other bisexual Mainers upon seeing a need to address issues faced by bi Mainers, and ultimately give this part of the community a voice.

Some local LGBTQ+ from this time were bi-friendly. For example, Northern Lambda Nord organized weekend conferences that included bi Mainer attendees, as did the Matlovich Society's regular meetings and guest speakers. However, there were no spaces just for bi Mainers.

The MBPN lasted from 1986 until the group disbanded in 1992. However, the interest in bisexual issues that led to the group's founding helped establish a legacy of bi awareness in New England. Moreover, the MBPN plays a role in Maine's history of LGBTQ+ organizations.

Maine Bisexual People's Network Newsletter, November 1991
P.O. Box 10772, Portland, ME 04104

I'm back from my trip and excited about getting more network activity going here. Talking with bis and bi-friendly people from here to Omaha and back raised my hopes and energies. We are everywhere!

Our fall meeting will be on Nov. 24, 1991, from 2 to 4 pm in Portland. If you are interested in attending, call Bobbi at [REDACTED] (Please do not share this phone number with anyone else.) We'll be spending some of the time just getting acquainted and socializing. Then, one of our members has kindly offered to lead us in a brainstorming session to decide what we want for and from our network. Bring your ideas, suggestions, and questions. Also bring something for the potluck snacks.

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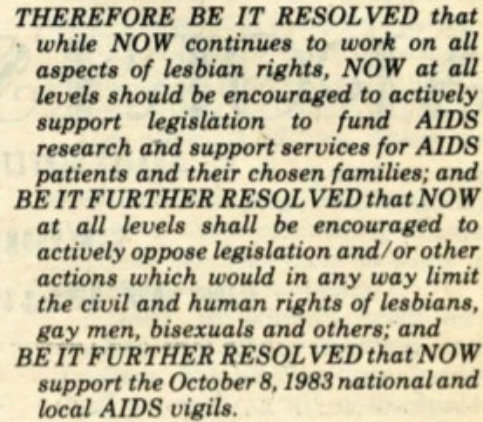
I'm enclosing information about the **BiNet Newsletter**. Some of you may want to subscribe and/or contribute to this interesting national periodical.

MBPN has a loaner copy of **Bi Any Other Name**, a wonderful book of 75 bis' stories. It comes close to being a one volume support group. If you want to bor-

Beginnings

Interest in bisexuality began before MBPN's founding. A notable publication that served this community in Maine was *Our Paper: Serving the Alternative Community*. *Our Paper* documented Maine's queer history during the time of its publication run, with bi history being no exception. The third issue began using the word "bisexual" for inclusivity.

Issue 12 featured the first two events in *Our Paper's* community calendar involving bisexuality. "Bisexuality: an expression of confusion or freedom?" was a panel held by the Gay Political Alliance (GPA), one of USM's LGBTQ+ organizations ("Calendar," 1984). The other event, "Bisexuality and Lesbianism: How does bisexuality affect lesbian relationships?" was held by the local Lesbian Support/Discussion Group ("Calendar, 1984). While information about these two August 1984 events is scarce, the community was showing enough interest in bisexuality to prompt local groups to organize events and start a conversation.



THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that while NOW continues to work on all aspects of lesbian rights, NOW at all levels should be encouraged to actively support legislation to fund AIDS research and support services for AIDS patients and their chosen families; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NOW at all levels shall be encouraged to actively oppose legislation and/or other actions which would in any way limit the civil and human rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and others; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NOW support the October 8, 1983 national and local AIDS vigils.

First appearance of "bisexual" in *Our Paper*
(Torraca, 1983, p. 3)



AIDS
HOTLINE
NEEDS YOU!!

Ad in *Our Paper* for Maine AIDS hotline
volunteers (Anderson, 1985, p. 6)

Around this time, *Our Paper* increased their coverage on the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis. This was also the same year as the murder of Charlie Howard, a gay teen from Bangor who was murdered by three other teenagers for his sexuality. *Our Paper* covered Howard's murder, in addition to other related coverage and even distributing a violence and discrimination survey to assess the frequency of this behavior experienced by Maine's LGBTQ+ community.

In an interview, MBPN founder Ginny LaCrow, who worked on the USM campus for the GPA as a work-study student in 1984, describes how these major events affecting gay and lesbian in turn affected the bi folks. In describing the HIV/AIDS epidemic as an example, LaCrow says: "At that time in the mid-80s, HIV awareness was being pushed in the community. ... I really wanted this to be an important thing. The [LGBTQ+] office was getting materials ... things like rainbow boxes of rainbow condoms and leaflets, talking about safer sex and about being careful with your partner" (G. LaCrow, personal communication, March 23, 2021).

LaCrow, a parent, adds: "There was one other guy in that office who also had kids. He had been married before ... He and I got into some great discussions ... The more I talked with him, the more I said to him ... the time was ripe to start talking about bi stuff" (G. LaCrow, personal communication, March 23, 2021). LaCrow's involvement with the GPA provided her and her colleagues with resources to begin organizing and providing for bi folks in the community, which started as peer counseling and networking, both of which satisfied needs in the queer community.

These efforts led to regular potluck meet-ups where bisexual folks could visit with one another in a space just for them (LaCrow, 1985a). The interest in networking also led to the first-ever event for bisexuals at the 12th annual Maine Lesbian and Gay Men's Symposium ("Symposium XII," 1985). The Symposium was a yearly LGBTQ+ conference in Maine that began in 1974 and was chaired by Stephen G. Bull, co-founder of the Wilde-Stein Club at University of Maine, which sponsored the first Symposium (Coalition of Organizations, 1974).

Saturday 11:00 — 12:30

BISEXUALITY — LET'S CELEBRATE

Room 502

Ginny LaCrow, Gay People's Alliance

Do you sometimes feel like a minority within a minority? Come to this open discussion about the myths, lifestyles, and strengths we have as self-identified bisexuals. *What is our position within the community: heterosexual as well as homosexual.* Interested in a socializing group? Let's Talk!

The first event for bisexual Symposium attendees on the schedule of events (LaCrow, 1985a, p. 9)

Speakers for the 1985 12th Symposium included Dale McCormick, an accomplished activist, politician, and then-President of the Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance, and Doug Strong, the first openly gay Unitarian Universalist minister to be hired by a church with prior knowledge of the minister's sexuality ("Keynote Speakers," 1985). This historic moment occurred at a Maine church ("Keynote Speakers," 1985).

After the Symposium, networking between bisexual Mainers continued, including the potlucks.

Changes, changes. With the changing weather comes changes at the G.P.A. The Gay People's Alliance would like to thank Kim Anderson, formerly a co-ordinator of the G.P.A., for the time and effort she devoted to the G.P.A. in 1984, and we would like to wish her the best of luck in all her future endeavors. We would also like to welcome Ginny LaCrow to the ranks. Ginny is our new graphic artist, and will also be providing peer counseling for gay men, lesbians, and bisexual individuals. As a bisexual woman, Ginny adds another dimension to the dynamics of the G.P.A. She has had several inquiries about bisexual networking, and hopes to pursue this idea further. Anyone who is interested in helping to form this network can contact Ginny at 780-4085.

Update from GPA in *Our Paper* mentioning LaCrow's peer counseling and networking efforts (Smith, 1985, p. 5)

Organizing

Shortly after the Symposium, the second annual Bisexual Weekend Retreat in Greenville, New Hampshire was announced (“Bisexual weekend retreat,” 1985). This August weekend event was sponsored by the Northeast Regional Committee, and families and children of bisexual attendees were welcome (“Weekend retreat,” 1985).

The NRC was just one of the active, bi-friendly organizations in New England. In addition to the organizations mentioned thus far, there was also the Women’s Forum, which advertised their bi-friendly March 1986 Women’s Sexuality Conference in *Our Paper* (“Women’s sexuality conference,” 1986). They also hosted the Third Regional Conference on Bisexuality that same weekend on the USM Portland campus (LaCrow, 1986b).

This was the first time the Conference was hosted in Maine. It had been previously held by the Boston Bisexual Women’s and Men’s Networks, and members of this organization helped organize this Third Conference (LaCrow, 1986b). Attendees included those from across New England and even as far away as Philadelphia and New York (LaCrow, 1986b). The Conference also made local news, introducing the bi community to Portland Press Herald readers (LaCrow, 1986c).

BISEXUAL WEEKEND RETREAT!

Friday, August 2nd to Sunday, 4th

The second annual bisexual retreat for spouses, lovers, families, and friends of bisexuals is being held in Greenville, New Hampshire this year. Children are welcome to come although childcare will not be provided. The cost is on a sliding scale between \$45-\$60 per person with children being charged a small daily fee for meals only. Meals will be vegetarian and some of the activities include discussion groups, workshops, massage, swimming, music, sweat lodge, meditation, yoga, games and more!

For more information and an application write:
NORTHEAST REGIONAL COMMITTEE
P.O. Box 1534
JAMAICA PLAIN, MA. 02130

There are people going from the Portland area and will be interested in car pooling. Call the Gay People’s Alliance to make a connection: 780-4085.

Support
OUR
Advertisers

Second annual Bisexual Weekend Retreat ad
(Northeast Regional Committee, 1985, p. 5)

Friday, April 18

Bisexual group potluck, 6:30 p.m., 59
State St., Apt. 42.

Calendar entry for the bi group potlucks
 (“Calendar,” 1986, p. 18)

The Third Regional Conference on Bisexuality

On March 8th, 1986 the U.S.M. Women's Forum will be hosting the annual northeast regional conference on the Portland campus. This conference is being sponsored by bisexual women and men from Portland, Boston and Providence; most of whom are associated with the Boston Bisexual Women's and Men's Networks. The location in Portland this year reflects the groups interest in maintaining the regional character of this annual event, as well as in reaching out to bisexuals and others in northern New England.

Traditionally, this conference has served as a place for bisexuals and their friends to meet, socialize and affirm our identities as bisexuals. Further, this will be our forum to focus on issues relevant to ourselves and our communities. We are by nature a diverse assemblage of people, and workshop topics are planned to reflect this diversity ranging from a discussion on the coming-out process to the politics of sexuality. We hope you will join us for a provocative weekend. The cost is on a sliding scale and early registration will save you money. The breakdown is \$35 before February 10th, after that date regular admission is \$50 and patrons are encouraged to pay between \$60 and \$120.

Let me give you just a smidgen of what the weekend will look like. On Saturday morning participants will meet in small affinity groups to identify and explore issues of common concern in a safe environment. The three main groups are men, women and mixed, with sub groups in each. The sub groups for women are lesbian women, straight women, women identified women, and mothers. The sub groups for men are gay men, straight men, fathers and feminist men. The mixed group has seventeen sub groups all of which I will not mention here

but a few of them are considering bisexuality, singles, married, friends of bisexuals, pagans, incest survivors, people with AIDS/ARC and friends of people with AIDS/ARC. Following the affinity groups will be a diversity panel which will present the viewpoints of individuals representing the wide variety of experiences and backgrounds within the bisexual community. The afternoon workshops will explore a range of personal and interpersonal topics. In general, these relate to developing a strong personal identity, creating a family, and building healthy relationships. There will be seventeen diverse workshops to choose from. Saturday night there will be a boogie bash held in the gymnasium and a rally for all those who will be catching the bus down to Washington the next day to support the right to choose to have an abortion; it should be a hot time. On Sunday the workshops will be concerned with issues which affect our interaction with society; how we relate to the lesbian, gay and straight communities and ways in which we can strengthen our own community. Sunday is also the Women's Sexuality Conference which will be held on the Portland campus. Those wishing to explore in more depth issues relating to women around personal power, spirituality and politics are invited to attend. There will be a separate registration in Luther Bonney Hall.

The Portland portion of the bisexual conference, which has yet to be completed, is the task of housing some 200 to 250 people who will be traveling from as far away as Philadelphia and New York City. If you have room in your home please call us and join the hospice committee. Our number is 780-4083 and our hours are 10 to 4:30 Monday thru Friday.

Ginny LaCrow

Prior to the Third Regional Conference on Bisexuality, bi folks such as LaCrow who had become active in these networking efforts attended other conferences in New England. LaCrow attended another bisexuality conference in Massachusetts, organized in part by Robyn Ochs, co-founder of the East Coast Bisexual Network (ECBN) and the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (Randen, 2000). Members of both organizations were willing to help LaCrow organize the Third Regional Conference in Maine (G. LaCrow, personal communication, March 23, 2021).

Another active MBPN member, BobBi Keppel, was also an attendee of these New England bisexuality conferences. In her *Bi Any Other Name* profile (an anthology of essays by bisexual contributors that further sparked bi awareness), Keppel describes attending the ECBN's conferences following the MBPN's founding with her partner, Betty: "Betty has joined me in the [MBPN] which provides us with companionship and support for our relationship. We have attended two [ECBN] conferences together, gathering (and spreading) ideas about alternative lifestyles and receiving support ... We even met some other bis who were over 55. One was 80!" (Keppel, 2015).

These conferences originally served as opportunities for networking, socializing, and just meeting others who were like themselves in terms of identity. This proved to be valuable, not just for the purposes of organizing, but in promoting bi awareness and acceptance.

Founding

In the September 1986 issue of *Our Paper*, a retreat for bi folks was announced. This retreat was held in Belfast, Maine during the weekend of September 12th to the 14th in 1986 (LaCrow, 1986c). Attendees included regular participants in the potlucks and Maine-based events such as the Conference. At this retreat, attendees discussed forming an organization to represent bisexual Mainers. While this group of bi Mainers had already been meeting regularly, this weekend retreat led to the formal founding of the MBPN.

By the February 1987 issue of *Our Paper*, the MBPN was listed in the publication's *Lesbigay Network*, a section at the end of each issue that lists Maine's LGBTQ+ organizations with contact information and upcoming meetings ("Lesbigay," 1987). A formal announcement commemorating this new group was made in the March 1987 issue ("People's network," 1987).

The Birth of the Maine Bisexual Network

by Ginny La Crow

Since the Third Annual Conference on Bisexuality was held on the U.S.M. campus this past March in Portland, a small but consistent group of men and women from various parts of Maine have been meeting in the Portland area to share pot-lucks and discussions on a variety of topics relating to bisexuality. We are a diverse group of men and women ranging in ages from twenty-four to forty-four. We are couples and singles. We are feminists, artists, conservatives, computer programmers, parents, health care workers, and homemakers. We are now ready to give more structure to the group and to organize our goals and activities in a more formal way. At our next retreat, which is being held the weekend of September 12th through the 14th in the Belfast area, we will be discussing the

following items: our goals as a group; what kinds of activities we will plan; regional networking throughout the state; whether we are mainly a socializing, support or informational group; who will be coordinating and who will be the regional contact people; what about friends/spouses of bisexuals and how will we reach out to the lesbian/gay and straight communities.

Most importantly, we have created a safe, confidential place where anyone, regardless of their sexual identity, can come and discuss their needs and desires as a sexual human being. Anyone interested in meeting other folks who are involved with the network and/or who are interested in the planning and thinking is welcome to attend the retreat for part or all of the weekend. Call Arlene at 338-1037 for information about the retreat and Ginny at 780-4083 for information about the Maine Bisexual Network.

Details on the bi weekend retreat in Belfast that led to the founding of the MBPN in *Our Paper* (LaCrow, 1986c, p. 10)

Later, the *Lesbigay* (which was later named *Maine Community Network*) listing for the MBPN began to include a mission statement: "Our purpose is to affirm ourselves and others the positive nature of bisexuality and to work toward greater acceptance in the bisexual, gay, lesbian, and straight communities" (Maine Community Network, 1989).

Bi Networking

In 1991, the commemorative first issue of the MBPN's newsletter was circulated to members. These newsletters were used in a similar way as today's Facebook groups -- they contained upcoming meeting dates, both MBPN meetings and meetings held by other bi-friendly groups, group news, upcoming conferences, retreats, and other events. Member BobBi Keppel was the author of these newsletters.

Members like BobBi also served to coordinate other members and interested bi folks to meet, carpool and share housing at events, and other ways to network. Sometimes materials would be enclosed with the newsletters, such as brochures, publications, or meeting information.

The MBPN also offered services such as peer counseling. Members also organized cross-country ski weekends.

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The Bi Experience

As a way to continue inclusivity for bi folks and give them a voice, LaCrow became a regular contributor to *Our Paper*. Her first major article was "Why Is Gay Liberation So Important To Me?" This essay was published in *Our Paper's* March 1985 issue, and discusses LaCrow's personal implications as a self-identified bisexual, as well as a woman and a parent. Her essay from the August 1985 issue of *Our Paper*, "Living a Bisexual Lifestyle and the Dynamics of Sexism," is candid, describing how because of her dual identities as female and bisexual, she experiences simultaneous oppression of homophobia and sexism -- an experience not exclusive to bisexual women and femmes.

LaCrow discusses how this shared oppression is in turn internalized in those of us who are women or femme-identified as well as queer, and how this is especially so as a bisexual woman:

One of the ways I am aware of the internalized sexism we all carry has been the level of homophobia and distrust I have experienced as an openly bisexual woman. The oppression that runs in the gay community about bisexuals are the myths like: "they can't make up their minds" and "I can't trust them because I don't know whose side they're on" or "They're just sex-crazed nymphomaniacs who will fuck anybody." These things just aren't true and what's really going on when someone says these things is that their own buttons are being pushed. (LaCrow, 1985)

LaCrow is describing how the common myths about bisexual people are often reflections of internalized homophobia, sexism, and other forms of oppression that deeply affect us all. This contributes to and exacerbates the same internalized oppression experienced by LGBTQ+ people, including bisexuals.

Dear Our Paper,

As a part of claiming my bisexual identity it's important for me to understand which communities, groups, networks, etc. I am considered a part of (or welcomed to). It has been my experience that as a bisexual I am sometimes not welcomed in either lesbian/gay or hetero community gatherings and the like; much easier for me is to get clear information about who's welcome, rather than risk attack later.

As I was reading Our Paper recently I realized I wasn't sure of the paper's policy, and upon reading it discovered no mention of bisexuals.

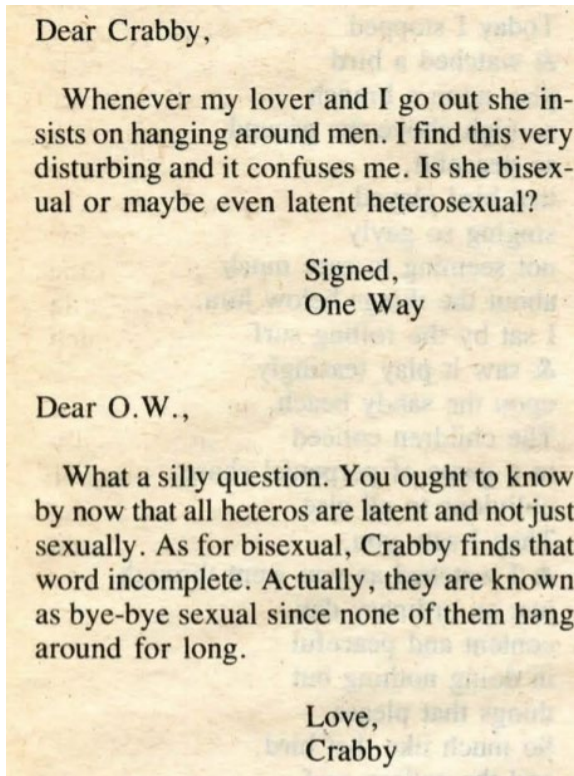
My question is simply: Why is there no mention of bisexuals in the paper's policy? Is it intentional or an oversight? I look forward to knowing if I may consider Our Paper My Paper, instead of just *Your Paper*. Thanks.

With Respect, Lupine

Scholar and writer William Burleson describes how these stereotypes perpetuate the internalized oppression experienced by many bisexuals. "Bisexuals are routinely accused of being 'tourists' or 'half gay'; they 'can't make a choice' and 'only want the best of both worlds,'" Burleson writes, "Indeed, many lesbian and gay people deny bisexuality's very existence. A survey for the Advocate, a magazine targeting the gay and lesbian population, found one-third of respondents did not believe in bisexuality" (Burleson, 2014).

These stereotypes in turn affect the issue of bi visibility. "A lack of public exposure is perhaps the biggest challenge for the bisexual community. Invisibility simply removes bisexuality from the discussion -- any discussion" (Burleson, 2014). A lack of bi visibility can mean little to no voice for the community.

In a recent interview, when asked about these issues facing bi Mainers, LaCrow said:



An excerpt from the "Dear Crabby" column in *Our Paper* ("Dear crabby," 1985, pg. 13)

... It's so clear to me that learning about love, and how to treat myself and other people is the core of it. Everything else that comes falling in, depending on the gender of the person you're with, is the shit you have to deal with, because of the lessons we've learned growing up, and that we still carry with us. ... it's the oppression we learned. So I've also always been an ally to other people who are different from me and learned about how I might have bought into the oppressive messages, and what I needed to re-examine in myself. (G. LaCrow, personal communication, March 23, 2021)

Bringing attention to these issues, recognizing how and why these issues exist, and how they affect bisexuals, can help address them. These were some of the goals of the MBPN alongside normalizing bisexuality as an identity and within family structures.

Sign of progress: a recent ME Lesbian & Gay Political Alliance (MLGPA) mailing included the word "bisexual!" A first!!

Beyond Maine:

Biversity (Boston area bi social organization) **Monthly Bi Brunch** is at 11 am on Sat. 12/19 at the Downtown Cafe, Boston. 1/16 at the S & S Deli, Inman Sq., Cambridge. 2/20 at Blazing Salads, Boston. They sponsor quite a few other social events too. Send a contribution and receive their calendar. Wayne Bryant, Biversity Boston, 95 Berkeley St., Suite 613, Boston, MA 02116.

The National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation takes place April 25 (Sunday.) In conjunction with this event, there will be lots of bi activities as well as zillions of other activities by B/L/G organizations. (see enclosed flyer.) Organizing is already going on all over Maine. There will be cheap excursion fares on buses from ME and trains from Boston.

My bi activism continues in several ways: with the East Coast Bisexual Network as a Board member, writing and learning about fund raising; with the Unitarian Universalist Bisexual Network I co-founded as co-author of our quarterly newsletters; as an ex-officio board member of the Oberlin College GLB Alumni Association - their bi community contact.

Since a Dec. MBPN meeting has already been announced in various periodicals, I plan to be at Powers House at 1 pm on Dec. 20, 92 Bedford St., Portland, on the USM campus. If anyone shows up & wants to talk, I'll stay. (Powers House is a yellow house with brown trim, facing Bedford St but set back from it so that it is actually on Winslow St.)

Thanks to those of you who have attended meetings &/or made contributions to MBPN. And to those of you who are too far away to attend meetings, I hope you'll find ways to get bi support and be bi active. Everyone can read some of the great new bi books and/or the national bi periodicals.

Excerpt from the last MBPN newsletter
(Keppel, 1992, pg. 1)

Legacy & Conclusion

In the December 1992 edition of the MBPN newsletter, Keppel announced the organization's end of the newsletters and regular meetings. However, the organization remained in the Lesbian/Gay/Maine Community Network listing and continued to provide services such as peer counseling. The end of this one organization did not mean the end to the need or interest in these resources for bi Mainers. Ultimately, bi Mainers organized in order to address both issues regarding bi visibility and harmful stereotypes -- both of which contribute overall to the oppression of the LGBTQ+ community -- as well as to network and meet others.

Several organizations like the MBPN have formed and disbanded over the course of Maine's LGBTQ+ history. Many of these small groups led to the formation of a much larger organization, such as EqualityMaine, that can address these needs in Maine's LGBTQ+ community on a bigger scale. The ECBN went on to become the Bisexual Resource Center, and the Transcending Boundaries Conference evolved from the various New England bisexuality events. There are other bi orgs around the US and internationally today. There is also an email newsletter, "binne" (pronounced "bean"), or Bi In Northern New England. This email list was originally created for bi Mainers to keep in touch with one another, but anyone is welcome.

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