
Unpublished Works

Charlotte Michaud

1-23-1973

Speech to the Androscoggin County Historical Society

Charlotte Michaud

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/michaud-unpublished>

Recommended Citation

Charlotte Michaud Papers, Franco-American Collection, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Charlotte Michaud at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Unpublished Works by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

I am happy to be invited to visit with you again, especially in this your Society's 50th anniversary year. It seems an appropriate occasion to reflect upon some of the changing aspects of the heritage movement in Maine, and its expanding new directions. As some of you may recall, when Ada Haggett of the Phillipsburg Society, and I, were here a few years ago, we raised the hackles of the State promotional agency with remarks on the importance of documentation and accuracy in publicizing history. Today, the heritage movement is becoming more widely identified, recognized and understood, so that public attitudes become more sophisticated. O don't think anything I may say here this evening will ^{be} so radical as to cause anyone to take umbrage in the headlines. But then, you never can tell, can you?

I'm also delighted that Marius Peladeau, the League's new project director could be with me this evening to tell you about the League's new programs. I know that those of you who did not meet him when you hosted the League's annual meeting last Fall at Bates College will enjoy meeting him tonight. Since I'm a Lewiston native and Mr. Peladeau was once associated with the Lewiston Daily Sun, this is really a "hometown" gathering.....

I speak of what is going on in the historical field in Maine as the "heritage movement" because that is what your society is all about. The local or regional society of course is of the essence, not only as the custodian of our heritage, but also, and most importantly, as a vital element in our human environment. Without your work at the grass roots, valuable primary sources are unavailable to the scholar, if not lost forever. Without your work, historic sites and buildings are ignored, if not destroyed. Without your work, the community loses its patrimony and its character.

It has been the in-gathering, so to speak, of the many local historical societies within the League that has provided the impetus and sustained the momentum of the heritage movement in Maine. Societies such as yours, representing a diversity of interests, getting together through the League, have led this historical movement, in both the public and private sectors, supporting needed legislation, cooperating with state and national agencies and ^{with} one another, while carrying on your own work.

And so it is heartening to observe the widening interest in our heritage evolving since public expression began to emerge early in the 1960's when, among mobile, restless Americans, increasing numbers began seeking their roots, something more than scenery and recreation in troubled times. In 1961, the State, through the Parks and Recreation Commission, took cognizance by beginning a modest program of refurbishing State-owned sites such as our long-neglected coastal forts. Some archaeological investigation also was undertaken, one result being documentation of the Popham Colony Site of 1607 at Phippsburg. Another is the Pemaquid Restoration where excavations were begun and are continuing under the direction of League trustee Helen Camp of Round Pond. In this meagrely funded program, an Advisory Committee of Historians, who were also members of local historical societies, made recommendations to the Parks Commission whose chairman for many years was Faust Couture of Lewiston who strongly favored the program. Prior to establishment of the State Historic Preservation Commission by the 105th Legislature in 1971, the Parks Commission's Advisory Committee also acted as a review board for the National Register program, recommending 96 Maine buildings and sites that were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. During the planning period for state government reorganization, the State sites program was in abeyance, but has now been reactivated. Under it, the State recently has acquired the Col. Reuben Colburn House at Dresden, associated as you know, with Arnold's March in 1775. ~~Other~~ other familiar State-owned sites of course ^{are} ~~is~~ Montpelier, the Gen. Knox Mansion replica at Thomaston, and the restored Katahdin Iron Works "beehive".

At the same time in 1961, some 35 historical societies in Maine got together through the initiative of Mildred G. Burrage of Wiscasset and the late Ambrose C. Cramer of Rockport, and formed the Maine League of Historical Societies and Museums. Your former president, Harry W. Rowe, whose counsel is so highly valued and widely sought, was one of the founding fathers of the League, continuing as trustee, and this year, as vice president.

League membership now embodies 130 organizations over the State, as well as individual members. Besides supporting history-related legislation, the League holds annual ^{EM} seminars on subjects of special concern to member societies, and through its quarterly MAINE HISTORY NEWS, strives to keep members informed of general developments, X service availabilities and assistance from government agencies and such organizations as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the American Association for State and Local History. The League initiated the first state historic preservation conference at Bangor in 1970 and supports ^S numerous other heritage efforts such as the Maine Old Cemetery Association whose 550 members are engaged in preserving Maine's early cemeteries and compiling and cataloguing valuable data. Leader in this movement has been League trustee Hilda M. Fife of Eliot, who gets out the Association's newsletter.... Speaking of newsletters, one of the great pleasures of my work with the League is in receiving the newsletters of the various societies--they're not only informative, but also entertaining and so warmly human. I wish there could be an exchange among all the societies....

Through the leadership of the League's historical societies and their representatives, in the decade of the 1960's, we have seen in the public sector, the creation of a State Archives, the erection of the State Library-Museum-Archives building at Augusta, and establishment of Commissions for Arts and Humanities, State Museum, and Historic Preservation. These State agencies severally administer programs in records management, conservation and restoration, the National Register, regional preservation and the like. It may be noted that these government agencies offering services and grants to qualified groups and individuals, look to the historical societies at one time or another in developing their programs.

In the private sector, backbone of the heritage movement, among the League's member societies we have seen such a wide variety and surge of activity that it would be impossible to review it all here - in restoration and use of historic houses such as your Knight House in Auburn and the pioneering preservation efforts of Greater Portland Landmarks which is having a strong impact in that city;

in architectural surveys such as those being conducted by the Orono and Richmond societies, to name ^{the Little Red Schoolhouse at Farmington and} but two; in new museums such as ^{the} the Fry Meeker Cramer Museum in the Conway Complex at Rockport where the Camden-Rockport Society maintains an 18th century farm and is restoring an early lime kiln; . There are some 60 historical museums in the State, some general, some specializing in industry like the Latten Lumber Museum, and shipbuilding ^{at} ~~like~~ the Penobscot and Bath Marine Museums. Many of course are small, not having ~~the~~ such large collections as you have here. Then there are the activities in programming, and in curatorial and cataloguing of holdings, a field in which your dedicated Clarence E. March and George C. Garniss of the Yarmouth Society are so exemplary; in publications on local history such as the well-documented and highly readable books on Lewiston and Auburn by Gen. Ralph Skinner; in restoration of paintings and artifacts in the holdings of the Maine Historical Society, the Portland Art Museum, ~~and~~ ^h the Banner Theological Seminary and others; in traveling programs reaching school children such as that of Bangor's Penobscot Heritage. Several museums are programming early handicrafts such as weaving. Many visitors come this summer to the Whipsburg Museum to see a Society member weaving on a 150-year old loom.

Those of you who read the League quarterly know that these are but isolated examples of activities that are going on in all of Maine's 16 counties. Doubtless many new projects will be undertaken in observance of the 1976 Bicentennial. Many of these Society projects have been ~~undertaken~~ made possible through grants from State agencies, and many others have been carried out solely through the efforts of the societies. The American Association for State and Local History has honored 26 League member societies and individuals for their work in local history.

Also on the Maine scene we are seeing interest in the history of Maine's ethnic groups. There is work being done on the Franco Americans by the Centre d'Heritage in Lewiston, and at St. Francis College in Biddeford, on the Acadians in Aroostook by the Madawaska Society, and the Arts and Humanities Commission has a program involving the New Sweden Settlement, the Finns, the Indians and other ethnic groups.

And from the halls of academe, the University of Maine and our other institutions of higher learning, and the Maine Historical Society, are coming an increasing number of scholarly studies in specific areas of Maine history - folklore, lumbering and so forth.

Among the historical societies not only do we have ^{houses} artifacts, documents, records, memorabilia, publications, programs, exhibits and the like. We have many natural sites of historic significance. ~~Right~~ ~~2222~~ that can be preserved and made to enhance our environment. A great one right here - our scenic and historic Androscoggin River falls between the two cities - associated not only with the Indian natives of Maine but also with our early settlement and industrial development. I hope everyone gets behind Gen. Skinner's idea to make this an outstanding point of interest and aesthetic experience in central Maine for the public, residents and visitors alike.

New societies are being formed all the time as groups recognize the value of their local heritage and get together, perhaps to preserve and restore a site or building, to work with town planning committees, to program primary research for exhibits pertaining to a local industry or other phase of community life and its culture. Not motivated merely by haphazard nostalgia, more and more of these groups are seeking the best techniques in seriously carrying out their projects. While we have often futilely deplored the loss of valuable historical material through the depredations of time, neglect--and out-of-state collectors - shouldn't we concentrate on finding the best ways of preserving and utilizing the ^{heritage} ~~things~~ we have, to improve our local environment *and enrich our lives?*

It seems to me that if citizens in all areas of our large state are to have the advantage and benefit of historical perspective and all it can mean to their communities, the time has come for some regional effort - a getting together of societies whose work and interests relate geographically, and can be mutually helpful and stimulating in a given area. One such experiment already is being formulated in the Kennebec area by the Waterville Society. Other are being planned in Washington and Cumberland counties. Your long-established County society seems ideal to initiate such a gathering with outlying community groups in this area - New Gloucester, Poland, Turner, Livermore.

History as the story of mankind is endlessly fascinating. It has been said that far from offering a short cut to clairvoyance, history teaches us that the future is full of surprises and outwits all our certitudes. For the study of history issues not in scientific precision or moral finality, but in irony. Fortunately there is humor as well as pathos in the human condition. There are lessons in the failures and follies as well as the achievements of the past. ^{Those who recognize the reality of the past have the responsibility of preserving the integrity of history from misinterpretation and misrepresentation.} Like many other clichés, the "rapidly changing times" since World War II is a truism. The pace of living has so accelerated that "only yesterday" already becomes history today. Such speedy evolution of manners, morals and life styles telescopes time in the space age, so that the 1950's and 60's seem as remote - or as near - as the earlier decades of the century, depending upon your point of view. Little wonder then that there is confusion of values in community living. Perhaps this is why we see in the heritage movement a turning to the past for some insights and enlightenment in the present, a yearning for the constants on which to build the future.

Historian

Evaluation of recent history has its special hazards. It is often an often startling learning experience when we are reminded that the period of our youth has become "history." I had such a turn recently in reading ^{Jerre Langione's} definitive work on the Federal Writers Project of the 1930's in which I was involved. From the book I learned so much more about what was happening in that era than I had realized at the time.

Since history is one of the humanities, touching upon all phases of our daily lives, before turning the meeting over to Mr. Peladeau, I should like to call attention to the relatively new program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The endowment, which was established by Congress in the 1960's, has emphasized the potential role of the historical society in identifying and unifying the fragmented community of our times. As a catalyst, the historical society, through its membership and programs, can reach all elements of the community in the continuing effort to improve our way of life. In exploring our opportunities, we may still have a long way to go, but the public image of the historical society has changed since the days when there were few such societies and they were popularly regarded as the dusty repositories of moth-eaten stuffed birds and antimacassars. ^{The exclusive domain of a few scholars or} Today's historical society actively relates the past to the present, and its collections and programs can have interest and significance for

EVERYONE IN
~~all segments of~~ our communities, for young and old, in business, industry, the professions, home-making, whatever the walk of life.

Administered in Maine through the Arts and Humanities Commission, the National Endowment for Humanities program is concerned with the relevance of the humanities to current living conditions and public issues of import for public policy. What this glittering generality means is that on the premise that the humanities can be more useful to the general public, an effort is being made to provide the adult public with a context for and an understanding of community-wide issues in order to reach better solutions to today's problems. This again involves history, in the examination of past experiences for cause and effect.

Interested groups such as historical societies may apply for grants to participate in this program; such participation obviously broadens the base of the society in the community.

In this necessarily brief outline pertaining to the heritage movement in Maine, of which you are so important a part, I have tried to convey some idea of how it has been developing. Considering the state of affairs a dozen years ago, much has been accomplished. But there is so much more that needs doing - and that is the challenge which our new project director is taking up with us. If you have questions, perhaps we can deal with them later in the program which I now turn over to President White who will introduce Mr. Peladeau....