
The Midcoast Inquirer

Newsletter of Midcoast Senior College
April 2017, Volume 12, No 2



Letter from the President

Midcoast Senior College is an organization that owes its very existence to volunteers. Certainly our faculty consists of volunteers and many routine tasks are performed by members who offer their time as class liaisons and who assist our two paid employees. But the volunteer members who constitute the Board of Directors are probably the least understood or appreciated.

Our 15-member Board is best characterized as a "Working" Board in contrast to many Boards which are essentially "Rubber-Stamp" Boards or donors. Because there is only one Office Administrator at MSC, many management functions are performed by Board members themselves. Board members oversee the curriculum and faculty performance, negotiate for and lease classroom spaces, conduct all financial activities, purchase and distribute all books and paperwork, operate fund drives, solicit sponsorships and donations from the community at large, maintain licenses and our tax-free status, publicize our College and solicit new members, purchase and maintain our technological equipment, establish policy standards for consistent operations, and set tuition and fees to assure continued high quality operations while keeping costs to students manageable.

Board members are selected primarily based on their enthusiasm for MSC and their willingness to contribute their time. Certainly, Board members are expected to be generous in their financial commitment. 100% of the Board members contribute funds, but their commitment of time is most valued.

Members serve on the Board for a three-year term with an option to renew one additional term. If you are interested in Board membership, please let me or a member of the Nominating Committee know.

Tony Belmont
President
Midcoast Senior College

Researching Nathaniel Bowditch (1773-1838)

Susan Bowditch

After being rewarded a fellowship from the Salem Marine Society, I surveyed the resources we had at home on our shelves of old books -- two early editions of *The New American Practical Navigator* and the original four huge volumes of *The Translation and Commentary of Mecanique Celeste* (originally by Marquis Pierre Simon La Place). I have to admit that I read none of these volumes, nor would I have been able to understand them if I had tried!

But I did read all or parts of books from our collection by Bowditch family members and those who chose to write a memoir or eulogize Nathaniel. They included a genealogical sketch of the Bowditch family celebrating the centennial of their first "annual" Christmas party in 1936, by Harold Bowditch. I don't think there has been another Christmas party since then, but this booklet has been invaluable in understanding the expanding family tree. Bowditch's sons also wrote and published. These include *Memoirs of Nathaniel Bowditch for the Young*, by son, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, as well as *A Memoir of Nathaniel Bowditch* by another son, Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, who also published *Suffolk Surnames* and a *History of Massachusetts General Hospital*.

Continued on Page 3: Bowditch

Mission Statement of the Midcoast Inquirer:

The Midcoast Inquirer articulates the academic spirit and educational mission of Midcoast Senior College to offer lifelong learning for older adults. To this end, we provide a bulletin board that announces course offerings, lectures and special events, and a literary forum (or virtual classroom) of essays, reviews, interviews and commentaries written by faculty and students.

--Robert C. Williams, Editor

The Midcoast Inquirer

is the newsletter of
 Midcoast Senior College
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Midcoast Senior College is one of seventeen Senior Colleges in the State of Maine. We serve the area from Freeport to Waldoboro and inland up to Augusta. Most of our classes are held at 10 Tibbetts Drive, Brunswick, Maine. This past Fall we offered 26 courses and enrolled 540 students. Class schedules and *The Midcoast Inquirer* are available on our web site for each semester. Students may also register on line at midcoastseniorcollege.org.

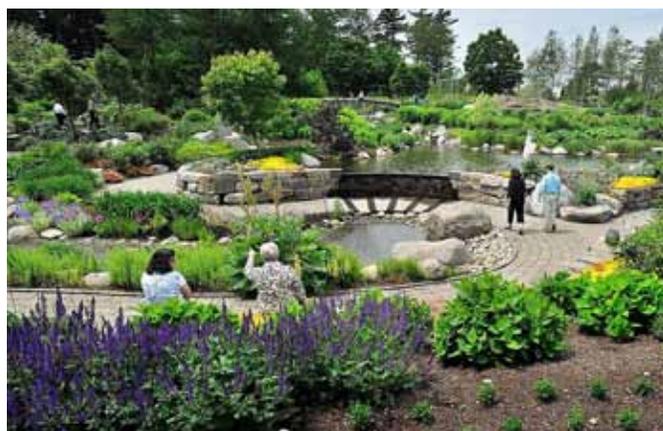
Continued from Page 1: Bowditch

Others have published books about Bowditch from his time period, among them Alexander White, who published *Eulogies on Dr. Bowditch* in 1838. Some biographies written in the 20th century, cannot be considered primary sources, but helped tell his story anyway: *To Steer by the Stars: The Story of Nathaniel Bowditch* by Paul Rink; *Navigator* by Alfred Stanford; and *Yankee Stargazer: the Life of Nathaniel Bowditch*, by Robert Elton Berry.

The best-known modern book is the one for children by Jean Lee Latham, first published in the 1950's. Named *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*, it was a prize-winning book that was commonly used in fifth-grade New England schools. But the most recent book on Bowditch was published in 2016: *The Power of Numbers*, by Tamara Plakin Thornton. We met her in 2002 in Salem at the Bicentennial of Bowditch's publication of *The New American Practical Navigator*. She was beginning her research then and 12 years later we were able to reconnect and hear her lecture on Bowditch – primarily his life as a Boston businessman-- at the Massachusetts Historical Society. She brings new light to what happened after Bowditch left Salem, which very few have focused upon. He actually used his understandings of the reliable workings of the universe to apply to business practices. There he left his indelible mark on trusts, impeccable bookkeeping and mortgages, to name a few.

Continued on Page 3: Bowditch

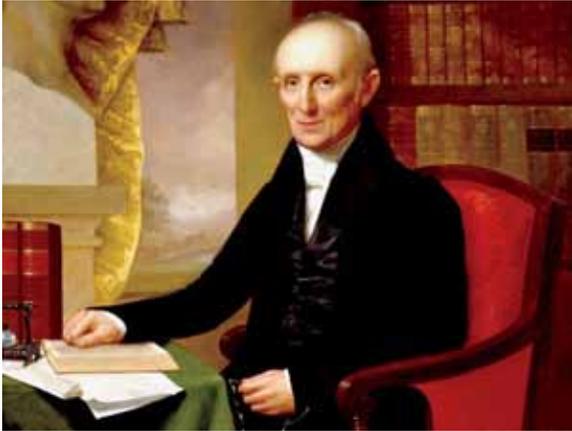
EXCURSION, 2017!! SAVE THE DATE!



We're heading for the coastal Maine botanical gardens in Boothbay on Tuesday, August 22nd for a guided tour, a great lunch, and a special talk on the history of this amazing place. Details to follow!

Continued from Page 2: Bowditch

As I was researching I also sought out and interviewed a number of people who knew more about Bowditch than I did. Mildred Berman, retired professor of geography at Salem State College was very knowledgeable, as was local Salem historian Jim McAllister, and Thomas McLean Griffin, a retired navy man, lawyer and historian obsessed with Bowditch.



The House of the Seven Gables in Salem administered my grant, so I could turn to David Olson Director of Public Programs for assistance, as well as to Thomas Neel, its Executive Director. Neel was very instrumental in getting me into Harvard's Nathan Pusey Library where I read handwritten accounts of Bowditch's dealings with President Kirkland and Harvard's financial problems that Bowditch helped solve, which also led to the controversial resignation of Kirkland.

At the Boston Public Library I was able to look at Bowditch Library microfilm reels in the Rare Books Department. There I saw paperwork which related to his acceptance into the American Academy of Arts and Science; letters from Presidents Jefferson, Adams, and Madison; the list of the cargo on the *Putnam*, the only ship he owned in part; some of his handwritten notebooks; and letters from various luminaries following the death of Bowditch's wife Mary and his own passing, among them resolutions of the Boston Athenaeum, the Salem Marine Society and the East India Marine Society. Unfortunately, I was unable to view original manuscripts in the Boston Athenaeum. Without the proper academic credentials and connections, I was not allowed into the Bowditch collection.

I was given full access at the time to the Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. There I was able to read boxes of family papers, see the original Salem Harbor survey, an 1802 report of the East India Marine Society, as well as two volumes of letters collect-

ed by Bowditch's third son, William Ingersoll Bowditch. I was even able to stand on a stepladder in the library and photograph numerous documents from above!

I was very interested in the location of the houses and workplaces of Bowditch during the course of his life in the Salem environs. I found his birthplace located not far from the Museum, a house the family rented; the tiny house where he lived while his father was away at sea, still visible in Danvers; the huge house where both he and his first wife, Elizabeth Ingersoll lived, opposite the big Common; the location of Master Watson's school (now gone); as is the chandlery where he was indentured. Still in existence is the home of his grandparents, Ebenezer Bowditch and his wife, Mary Turner, the only house left in the parking lot of the House of the Seven Gables. This was originally part of the estate of John Turner, Mary's father, whose home, built in 1668, is now known as "The Gables". Still standing, and owned by Historic Salem, is the large house on North Street where Bowditch and his wife Mary raised their seven children before moving to Boston in 1823.

Perhaps most special of all is the small suitcase my husband received from his parents which holds family trees, the original Harvard graduation certificate of one of Bowditch's sons, an old almanac to which Bowditch added his own pages, and letters to Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch when he was at Harvard. Some are endearing ones from the younger children, Henry and William, written in their childish hand, but also mundane letters from his parents regarding laundry and cash. The most poignant one concerns their ten-year old son, Charles, who had been very ill. It was heart-wrenching to note by the date of the letter, that he died the very next day.

Susan Bowditch is a self-trained cultural historian who has taught several courses in Midcoast Senior College. She is married to a direct descendant and namesake of Nathaniel Bowditch.

Going On Line. Midcoast Senior College has launched two new paperless online platforms: a **Facebook** page (<https://www.facebook.com/midcoastseniorcollege/>) that anyone can "friend;" and a new online **MSC Gazette** (<http://midcoastseniorcollege.org/msc-online-gazette>) where you can find old newsletters, selected articles, book reviews, poetry and letters to the editor. Check out our Website.

Education is the best provision for the journey to old age.

--Aristotle

Sea Chanteys and Fo'c'sle Songs: an enduring heritage of seafaring life in the Great Age of Working Sail, 1815-1915

David V. V. Wood

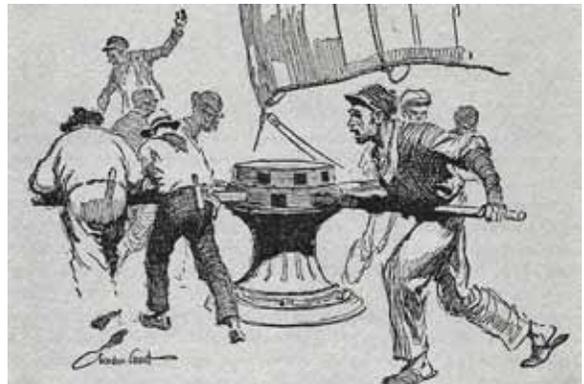
MSC readers who attended Stuart Gillespie's marvelous Winter Wisdom presentation this past January will have enjoyed a fascinating introduction to songs of the sea, complete with music and images that this essay can't hope to match. But we can provide some context to appreciate a great tradition of folk art that has survived for more than a century after the age of sail disappeared—extinguished in fairly short order in the early decades of the twentieth century as technology and the economics of global trade rendered the sailing cargo ship obsolete.

First, a note about the terms in the title: a chantey (often rendered as shanty) was a work song used on sailing ships when the crew had to “pull together” to perform one of the myriad tasks required to work the ship: hauling on lines to set or trim the sails, weighing anchor when getting underway, or working the pumps to keep the bilges dry during a voyage. Different types of chanteys, with different cadences, evolved to suit the tasks at hand. “Capstan chanteys” were used when getting the anchor up preparatory to getting a ship underway at the beginning of a voyage, or after anchoring for any reason. This job could take hours, and involved seamen walking around the capstan pushing bars that turned it as the anchor chain came slowly in. Such chanteys were also used at the pumps, which on wooden ships could be a daily task. In either case, such chanteys have a steady marching cadence, the chantey-man singing out a short verse with the crew then responding with a chorus of similar length; a good example of this is *Away Rio*. And who was the chantey-man? Probably a leading seaman, or the bosun, or anyone possessed of knowledge of the job to be done, a good rousing voice, and a store of verses that would keep the crew working together and engaged until the work was finished.

“Hauling chanteys” were used in most other tasks on board that involved setting or trimming the sails (all of which was done from on deck). Hauling chanteys insured that everyone pulled together, thus making the job quicker and easier. Such chanteys came in two types: “short drag” and “long drag.” Short-drag chanteys were used when (for example) setting the lighter sails such as jibs and staysails. The chantey-man would sing out a short verse, and the crew would respond with a short chorus in unison when hauling. *Whiskey Johnny* is a good example of short-drag, the last two words being

sung as two pulls on the halyard are taken. Long drag chanteys were used for hoisting heavy yards, or hauling taut the heavy sheet of the foresail or mainsail, when a concerted effort needed coordinating. In this case, the chantey-man would sing out a longer preparatory verse, at the end of which the crew on the halyard would shout out a brief response while giving a “long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether.” A good example is *Haul away Joe!*, the pull being taken on the last syllable.

One final example of a chantey for a specific purpose is the “bunt chantey”: one used when the crew must furl one of the square sails. When the sail is to be taken in, its sheets are let go and it is hauled up to the yard from on deck by means of lines known as buntlines and clewlines—but the sail must still be secured to the yard to prevent its being blown out or otherwise damaged



from chafing. To do this, sailors must climb aloft and space themselves along the yard, then reach down together to gather up the heavy canvas until they can lash it down. The supervisor (always at the windward end of the yard) sings out slowly “t’me way, hey, YAH!” while the rest of the crew reaches down, gathers an armful of canvas, and in unison on the last syllable, hauls it up to the yard. The best-known (and perhaps only) bunt shanty is *Paddy Doyle’s Boots*. It should be noted that this job is one of the most physically challenging (and, in heavy weather, frightening) for all crew aboard a square-rigged ship.

And who were the chantey-men who led the chanteys? We don’t really know. There was never any official position for a chantey-man. Most likely he would be an experienced deckhand, perhaps the ship’s bosun, who

Continued on Page 5: Chantey

Continued from Page 4: Chantey

had displayed a talent for making up verses as he went along, “knew the ropes”, and was a natural leader.

Fo’c’sle songs (short for “forecastle”, which designated the raised forward deck of the ship and also the compartment under it in which the crew lived when not on watch) were the means by which the crew entertained themselves, shared stories of their adventures (and misadventures) ashore, griped about the “after-guard” (the ship’s officers), complained about the food, pined for home, and got to know each other. There would almost always be new hands at the start of a voyage—sometimes an entirely new fo’c’sle crew—so there were inevitably new songs to be learned, perhaps a concertina or a banjo to be added, and new stories to be told. Many such songs might be based on folk songs from home, and they often told of famous ships, notorious hard-case mates or captains, or sea disasters.

There is some evidence that chanteys were used aboard European sailing vessels as early as the sixteenth century. Probably something like chanteys were used to coordinate the strokes of oarsmen aboard galleys in the days of the Greeks and Romans. Some of the chanteys used in the nineteenth century had their origins in the work songs of slaves in the American South as they loaded cotton aboard ships bound for Europe—songs that may well have come from an African tradition of singing or chanting while paddling large canoes along-

RAFFLE! RAFFLE!

ANNUAL MEETING LUNCHEON

MIDCOAST SENIOR COLLEGE

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2017

Join us to celebrate another very successful year. Take a chance to win a pair of tickets to one of four of Midcoast Maine’s musical treasures:

- Bowdoin International Music Festival (\$80 value)
- DaPonte String Quartet (\$50 value)
- Maine State Music Theater (\$100 value)
- Oratorio Chorale (\$50 value)

Cash only – 1 chance \$5; 3 chances \$10; 7 chances \$20

Support Midcoast Senior College and its educational mission!

WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN!

shore and in the rivers of West Africa. Thus the chanteys that have survived into the present—and there are literally hundreds of them—have varying origins, but they are predominantly American, with an admixture of English and Irish thrown in. We are fortunate that several individuals with extensive seafaring experience in the great age of sail were inspired to collect and write about the chanteys. Here are two of the best: *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, by Stan Hugill, a Welshman with more than twenty years’ experience in square-riggers during the early 20th century; and *Songs of American Sailormen* (originally published in 1924 with the title *Roll and Go*), by Joanna Colcord, a Maine native who was born at sea on her father’s ship and spent much of her early life on board in the China trade toward the end of the 19th century. And although we will never be able to hear them as they were sung at work, you can go to YouTube, search for “sea shanties” and listen to modern renditions of them to your heart’s content!

David V. V. Wood is a U. S. Coast Guard veteran and one-time commander of the training ship Eagle. An Amherst College graduate, he remains an avid enthusiast of tall ships, the age of sail and singing with gusto.

Annual Appeal Gift. The Board received an Annual Appeal gift in memory of the late T. Perry True, who attended MSC courses for many years, with the following note: “Thank you for offering him intellectual stimulation, social interaction and friendship in his last years.” So may it be for all of us. Gifts in honor or memory of a loved one are always gratefully received, and this one was particularly heart-felt.

Volunteer: If you are a member of MSC and would like to volunteer on any of the board’s committees (finance, administration, public relations, technology, curriculum, development, summer/winter wisdom, or special events), please contact Donna Marshall in the MSC office.

**Try something new, again!
Register on-line.**

Most of you register for courses online now. **We encourage the rest of you to do so.** Registration is secure - It’s as safe as buying a book at Amazon and just as fast; it saves time and paper for us all. We aim to keep up with technology without ever losing our personal touch.

News from the Board of Directors:

2017 WHEELER-THOMPSON FOUNDERS AWARD NOMINATIONS

To acknowledge the contributions of two co-founders of Midcoast Senior College, Nancy Wheeler and Jack Thompson, the MSC Board of Directors established in 2009 the Wheeler/Thompson Founders Award. Presented annually at the Spring luncheon, this award recognizes an individual who has supported the spirit and work of Midcoast Senior College in significant ways.

Nominations are solicited each spring from among past and present members/students, faculty, volunteers and others. The Board makes the final selection. Sitting members of the Board are not eligible. Nomination forms will be distributed to students attending classes later this spring. All nominations are due by April 27, 2017. You may also go to our website, midcoastsenior-college.org and vote on line.

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Where in the Midcoast?

Do you recognize this place?

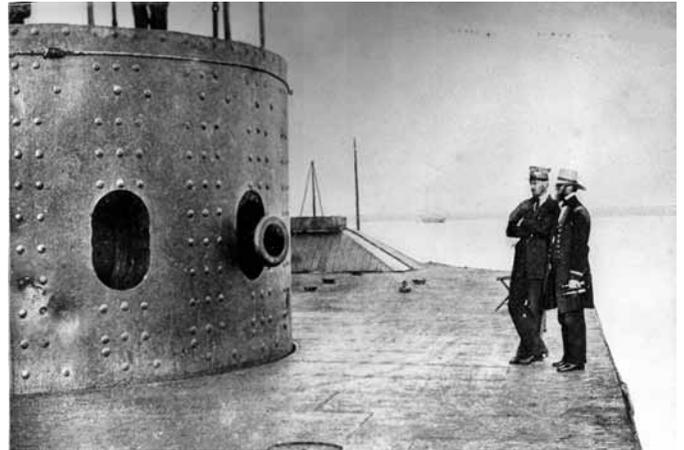


529 Acres to explore, just 15 minutes from downtown Bath. The answer is elsewhere in this issue.

Historical Nuggets from the Midcoast Past

William Flye and the U.S.S. Monitor

Flye (right, with binoculars) on the Monitor a few days after the Battle of Hampton Roads, March 9, 1862.



During my research for a history of Topsham, I came across a logbook for the famous ironclad U.S.S. Monitor, which fought the Confederate ironclad Merrimack (Virginia) at the Battle of Hampton Roads, Virginia, on March 9, 1862. The Monitor was short-lived. Launched in Brooklyn, New York, in January of that year, the ironclad was lost at sea with all hands in December. The donor of the logbook was William Flye (1814-1898) of Topsham, an Acting Volunteer Lieutenant stationed on the Monitor and in October 1862, the vessel's executive officer.

Flye turned out to be a product of Midcoast Maine. Born in Newcastle, he attended Bowdoin College from which he graduated in 1835. After service at sea in the U.S. Navy, he returned to teach mathematics at Annapolis from 1841 to 1857. Already fifty-six when the Civil War began, Flye served as a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy until 1866, when he was put in charge of dismantling or selling off the sixty-four ironclad vessels then under U.S. control. Flye then moved to Georgia and began a business career. He returned to Midcoast Maine in 1872 and became a bank cashier in Damariscotta. In 1879, he retired to Topsham and subsequently died in Ashland, Kentucky, in 1898.

William Flye had a long and distinguished naval career and was involved in the science and design of the first steel-hulled warships. In addition to the logbook in the Pejepscot Historical Society, he left one other artifact in 1896 to Bowdoin College—a commode from the Monitor. Truly a treasure left behind for future generations. RCW

Summer Wisdom, 2017

June 7

The Code Talkers

During World War II in the Pacific Theater, in order to prevent the Japanese from successfully intercepting Allied communications, a novel plan was adopted, using Native Americans speaking in code using their own respective languages. More than 400 Navaho Indians and scores of other Native Americans served as “code talkers” during the War. Because of the secret nature of their role, code talkers were forbidden to discuss their service until decades after the end of the war and even today their crucial service remains largely unknown.

Jan Wilk is a graduate of Wittenberg University with a degree in history and the University of Maine. She taught at Mt. Ararat School, and has been President of the boards of the Curtis Library, Pejepscot Historical Society, and Maine State Music Theater, as well as serving on the board of Midcoast-Parkview Health. She has also been a docent at the Chamberlain Museum and a volunteer for Habitat For Humanity and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust. She was named Brunswick Citizen of the Year in 1998.

June 14

The Future Of Medicare And Obamacare In A New Era

The basic values and structure of how Americans obtain and pay for health care is being challenged by the newly-elected President and the current Congress. The future of Medicare, Medicaid and private health insurance is at stake. The changes produced by the Affordable Health Care Act may be totally eliminated and replaced with a radically different approach. There is substantial uncertainty and disagreement in the U.S. on the direction of health care that is complex and will potentially affect every U.S. citizen. This lecture will present an overview of the issues and attempt to unravel the complexity.

Stephen f. Loebs, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of Health Policy and Management, College of Public Health, at Ohio State University. A graduate of Bowdoin College, he also holds three graduate degrees from the University of Michigan in health management, political science and health care organization and finance. He has been a Distinguished Lecturer at Bowdoin College and has been on the faculty of the University of Maine. His research and writing have focused on the structure and issues in the U.S. health care system

June 21

The Gallows Walk: Executing Justice in 1930s American Film

This talk considers how Hollywood movies in the 1930s depicted the American criminal justice system—specifically in scenes that show the criminal “heroes” walking down the last, long mile to the electric chair. How did James Cagney, Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable bring their star power to movies about career criminals with no time left in their lives, and what lessons did 1930s audiences want from these movies?

Tricia Welsch is Professor of Cinema Studies at Bowdoin College. She earned her undergraduate degree at Fordham University and holds an M.A. and PhD in English from the University of Virginia. Her work has appeared in numerous film journals and in anthologies on the history of film. She is the author of *Ready for Close-up: The Life of Gloria Swanson*.

June 28- To Be Announced

Gary Lawless, longtime MSC faculty member, received the 2017 Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize from the Maine Humanities Council “in recognition of exemplary contributions to public humanities in Maine.” Gary has owned and run Gulf of Maine Books in Brunswick since 1979 and published sixteen volumes of poetry. **Congratulations to Gary!**

Volunteer Recognition and Thanks!!

Bravo! Course Liaisons, Non-Board Committee Members, Bulk Mailing Helpers

Beth Aldenberg, Dorothy Bell, Joyce Bessen, Susan Billings, Nora Bishop, Kay Bournakel, Angela Bournakel, Edgar Boyd, Ingrid Chalufour, Miriam Charette, Patricia Croy, Mary Cuthbertson, Richard DeVito, Joyce DeVito, Lois Dole, Catherine Elliott, David Fluharty, Patricia Galbreath, Bruce Giguere, Elwin Guthrie, Bill Hammond, Nancy Hill, Prisca Kenison, Linda Labaree, Esther Leck, Joseph Lisi, Phyllis Lisi, Cynthia Little, Jose Mas, Susan Mikesell, Lynn Murray, Charles Orem, Esther Palmer, Evie Papacosma, Alicia Pietraho, Jean Pope, Lynn Reese, Karen Rienert, George Sergeant, Susan Sergeant, Barbara Shaw, Deborah Showalter, Deirdre Strachan, Burr Taylor, Anne Thompson, Karen Tilbor, Kelly Watt, Nancy Wilkes, Ann Williams, Judy Woodman, Linda Zingaro, Nancy Zugehoer

Mark Your Calendar!

- April 27 Nominations due for Wheeler-Thompson Award
- June 7 *Summer Wisdom: The Code Talkers*
- June 13 Annual MSC Luncheon at Bowdoin College
- June 14 *Summer Wisdom: The Future of Medicare*
- June 21 *Summer Wisdom: The Gallows Walk*
- June 28 *Summer Wisdom: TBA*
- August 22 Excursion: Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay.

Summer Wisdom Lecture Series

Curtis Library, Brunswick, Wednesdays, 7:30 pm.
Free and open to the public. Sponsored by The Highlands.

Know Any MSC History? Speak Up!

Nora Bishop has kindly volunteered to look into the history of Midcoast Senior College from its earliest days to the present. If you can help her out with documents or your own recollections of past people or events, please contact her at: nora@midcoastseniorcollege.org, or by telephone at 666-3036.

Where in the Midcoast?

Popham Beach State Park

Bordering the south side of the mouth of the Kennebec River, Popham Beach State Park is truly one of Maine’s rare geologic landforms that features a long stretch of sand beach. Sunbathers relaxing on Popham’s sands can see Fox and Wood islands offshore, and the Kennebec and Morse rivers border each end of the beach. Visitors can walk to Fox Island at low tide, but are warned to pay attention to the rising tides not to get marooned. The rolling Atlantic surf draws thousands of swimmers and surfers alike, and shell collecting is a pasttime of many a sea side stroller. Lifeguards are on duty during the summer months, but beachgoers should note that this is a strong surf beach with undertows and occasional rip tides. Swimmers should swim within their abilities and near the lifeguard. Call the Popham Beach State Park’s Hotline during the summer for current tide and parking information: (207) 389-9125. Surfers can visit www.maineharbors.com for tide information and should add 9 minutes to the Portland chart for Popham Beach high and low tide data.



...because learning never ends.

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