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# The Midcoast Inquirer

Newsletter of Midcoast Senior College  
June 2019, Volume 14, No 2



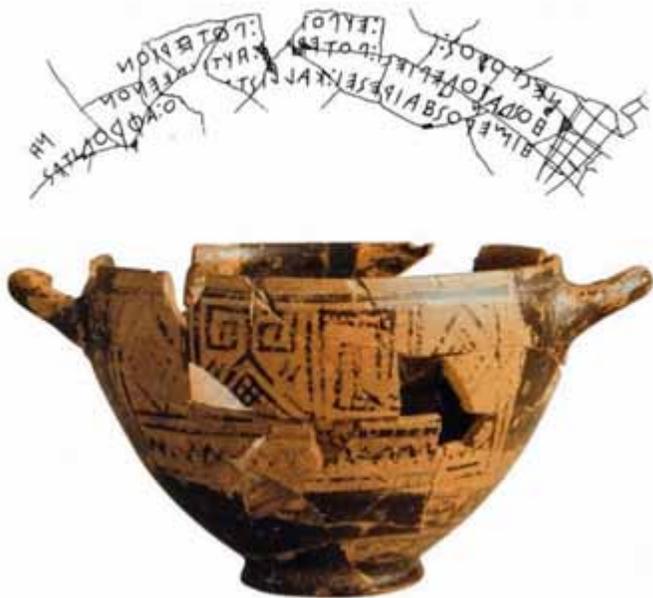
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## How The Greeks Learned To Write — Twice!

*Cynthia W. Shelmerdine*

*[I am] the Cup of Nestor, good to drink from;  
Whoever drinks from this cup, immediately  
the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite will seize  
him.*

This is a translation of the earliest substantial text known in the ancient Greek alphabet. The lines are poetry, not prose, and they make a graceful reference to the Iliad, (Book 11, lines 632-637), where Homer describes a much grander cup belonging to the aged King Nestor of Pylos. That mythical cup was of gold and, when full, hard for most men to pick up--but of course King Nestor could lift it easily!



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## President's Letter

Midcoast Senior College remains a strong and vibrant organization with broad aspirations and plans for the future. The challenges of losing our previous lease have been met despite difficult limitations in our new location. Unavoidably our costs have increased very significantly- rent is now 625% higher than one year ago. President Jim Wilkes' unexpected death in January has been a loss your Board is working to overcome.

Your Board of Directors, all volunteers, have worked indefatigably to uphold the expectations Jim would expect of us: high standards, rewarding opportunities and a socially stimulating atmosphere for seasoned and new members.

Our local retirement communities are fundamental to our success. We are blessed with many and well-educated seniors who are interested in our goals of lifelong learning in a stimulating environment. Our growth is evidence of the fact that our membership has remained very strong and loyal.

In addition to our Board, I acknowledge that our success is reflected in your enthusiastic attendance in our classes and other events such as free Summer and Winter Wisdom lectures. We have well qualified instructors who volunteer their many years of experience with us. We rely on a large group of volunteers who provide extensive administrative support to all of us. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Donna Marshall, our Executive Director- 207-725-4900.

Are you interested in teaching a course? We are always seeking new talent for a broad range of liberal arts subjects.

I would like to recognize the extraordinary service this academic year of Clare Durst, computer wizard extraordinaire, and Dorothy Bell, gracious host, past president, and long- term volunteer. Of course, we also express our gratification to Donna Marshall, executive director, and Sonia St. Pierre, our bookkeeper, for administering MSC and keeping us focused.

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The Midcoast Inquirer

is the newsletter of
Midcoast Senior College
29 Burbank Avenue, Suite 6
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Board of Directors. 2018/19

Officers:

- President: Doug Bates
Immediate Past President: Tony Belmont
Vice President: Annie Miller
Treasurer: Ervin Snyder
Secretary: Lynn Lockwood

Other Board Members and Committees:

- Mort Achter: Curriculum
Doug Bates: Development, Finance
Tony Belmont: Nominating, Summer Wisdom
Bianca Chambers: Development, Special Events
Clare Durst: Administration, Technology
Ron Golz: Development, Finance
Janet Kehl: Development
Lynn Lockwood: Administration, Finance
Ann Miller: Administration, Finance, Development
Victor Papacosma: Curriculum, Development, Summer Wisdom
Ervin Snyder: Finance, Summer Wisdom
Linton Studdiford: Curriculum
Janet Kehl: Events:

Sub-Committees

- Winter Wisdom: Reg Elwell
Summer Wisdom: Tony Belmont
Volunteers: Donna Marshall; Dorothy Bell
Newsletter: Bob Williams; Burr Taylor
Website: Jack Henderson
Current Events Forum: Clare Durst
Executive Director: Donna Marshall

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 29 Burbank Avenue, Suite 6, Brunswick, Maine. Class schedules and The Midcoast Inquirer are available on our web site for each semester. Students may also register on line at midcoastseniorcollege.org.

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We could not exist without the generosity of our community supporters- special thanks for their financial confidence. And YOU, our members. Our annual fund continues to grow which is imperative in addressing our costs which increase each year. We are the second largest senior college amongst the seventeen senior colleges in Maine. Thanks for your exceptional, necessary support.

I encourage all of our members to reread Jim Wilkes' December 2018 comments on our website under The Midcoast Inquirer.

Doug Bates, President

Summer Excursion, August 16.



Maine Maritime Museum Cruise.

On Friday, August 16, we will charter a Maine Maritime Museum Lighthouse Cruise vessel to circumnavigate Georgetown and Arrowsic on the Kennebec and Sasanoa rivers south of Bath. Bud Warren will be our historical guide. The cruise will run from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm, includes a voucher for one drink and hors d'oeuvres. Registration is open to all on a first-come, first-served basis. Cost is \$40 per person, with more details to follow. Plan to be at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath by 3 pm for a 3:30 departure.

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

NOTE: Midcoast Senior College membership becomes effective upon payment and is for one fiscal year only, currently July 1 through June 30 of each year.

Continued from Page 1: Greek

This early text was crudely scratched into a clay cup made around 740 BC. Only a few fragments of stone inscriptions are earlier, still within the 8th century BC. This was when the Greeks first developed their alphabet, borrowed from the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were great traders, living in what is now Syria and Lebanon. Their alphabet (which is also the ancestor of the ancient Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets) had 22 letters, all consonants. The Greeks reworked it to include vowels, so they ended up with a serviceable alphabet of 24 letters.



For a long time, it was assumed that the Greeks did not know how to write before the 8th century BC. The older Homeric epics refer to writing only once, as something mysterious: 'signs' scratched on a folding tablet (Iliad 6.168-169). But the people living in Greece hundreds of years earlier, during the Late Bronze Age (1400-1200) did have a writing system — and it actually did consist of signs scratched onto tablets. These tablets were of clay and could not be folded, but a folding wooden tablet from the same period was preserved in a shipwreck excavated at Ulu Burun, near the south coast of Turkey. Both inner sides are recessed to receive wax, into which signs could be inscribed.

Scholars referred to these Late Bronze Age inhabitants of Greece as Mycenaeans, after the citadel of Mycenae made famous by Homer and by the 19th century excavations of Heinrich Schliemann. Certainly, they could not be Greeks, the thinking went, and indeed their writing system bore no resemblance to the Greek alphabet. It had ideograms to indicate commodities, and used 89 linear signs to write words, far too many for an alphabet; each sign must therefore represent a syllable, not a letter. Scholars called the script Linear B; it was adapted from Linear A, an earlier Minoan script on Crete.

Hundreds of tablets were known from Sir Arthur Evans' excavation of the palace of Knossos on Crete, starting in 1900, but the script resisted decipherment; it was generally assumed that the language written in both Linear A and Linear B was Minoan (whatever that was). Then in 1939, a trove of 600 tablets was found at a new excavation at the palace of Pylos in southwestern Greece. These were the first tablets from the Greek mainland, and they inspired a renewed effort at decipherment on both sides of the Atlantic, during and after World War II.

Most of those involved were Classics scholars, some of whom were also working in intelligence on German and Japanese codes. Also involved was a young British architect named Michael Ventris, whose interest had been sparked at age 14, when he heard Evans lecture about Knossos in 1936.

A key breakthrough was an observation by the American scholar Alice Kober that some pairs and even triplets of words were related, since only their endings differed. Kober realized that the Mycenaeans must have spoken an inflected language — one in which a word's ending changed with its grammatical function. English does not work this way, for the most part, though we do see some grammatical variation, for example in verbs (I work / he works) and pronouns (we / us). In fully inflected languages like Latin and Greek, inflection is much more widespread: for example, nouns can have different endings depending on their gender, number and function (subject, object), verbs have different endings depending on their subject, tense, voice (active, passive) and mood (indicative, subjunctive). It still had not occurred to anyone that the Mycenaean language was Greek. Ventris thought it might be Etruscan, but in 1952, when he began to assign possible phonetic values to some of the syllabic signs, he began to get Greek words. Some related triplets that occurred only at Knossos turned out to be Cretan place-names and related adjectives: ko-no-so (Knossos), ko-no-si-jo (Knossian, masculine), ko-no-si-ja (Knossian, feminine), pa-i-to (Phaistos) and its adjectives, and so on. Applying these same phonetic values to other words produced the Greek words for 'boy' and 'girl', 'tripods' (next to an ideogram showing a tripod vessel), and the names of Greek gods.

So, against all expectations, the language, and the identity, of the Mycenaeans was Greek. They used writing only for administrative purposes like tax collection and keeping track of offerings to the gods. When the

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Mycenaean palatial system ended, around 1200 BC, the need for writing ceased, and the Linear B script went out of use. Their descendants in the 8th century learned to write all over again, this time with an alphabetic script.

*Cynthia W. Shelmerdine is a retired professor of Classics who lives in Brunswick. She taught at The University of Texas at Austin for many years and is now a research associate in Classics at Bowdoin College. She has written extensively on Mycenaean Greek language and culture. This essay is developed from her MSC Winter Wisdom lecture on the Myceneans in January 2019.*

## Annual Fund Reminder

Although the calendar has turned from '18 to '19, the annual fund drive at Midcoast Senior College is nearing its conclusion. As an independently operated 501(C)3 senior college, MSC does not receive support from a college or university as do many other senior colleges. Our budget relies on community sponsorships, individual donations, and tuition and membership fees.

Please consider making a donation to Midcoast Senior College through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). A QCD excludes the amount donated from taxable income and will count toward your required minimum distribution (you must be 70 ½ or older to be eligible). The money must be sent directly to the 501(C)3 by your investment firm. Since many are not itemizing because the standard deduction is more advantageous, this is a way to allow you to lower your tax bill and support the organization. Please contact your broker if you would like more information.

Thank you for your support of Midcoast Senior College!

## News of the Board

The MSC board of directors mourns the loss of its energetic leader, Jim Wilkes, whose death deprives the board of his organization, openness and quiet concern for the college and all its students, faculty and staff. A celebration of Jim's life was held on April 13, 2019 at the First Parish Church, UCC, in Brunswick, Maine.

As a former school superintendent, Jim had the uncanny ability to think strategically, listen carefully and build consensus deliberately. He articulated the mission of MSC to offer a quality liberal arts education to older adult students that would open their minds, encourage their class participation, and build friendships.

Jim combined inexhaustible patience and kindness with amazing leadership skills and keen insight - making him the most impressive Board Chair I've ever encountered, and a superior example of humankind. I miss him every day.

Jim was a fine teacher, excellent listener, fair and thoughtful administrator, nature photographer, fly fisherman, and lover of poetry.





*Along the Saco, in a dell,  
A regal pine stands straight and tall  
It sends its roots that anchor well  
And murmur stories that recall*

*Those fateful days when trees were blazed  
And fashioned for the Navy.*

**Ann K. Williams  
For Longfellow Days, 2019**

Ann K. Williams (left in photo), an MSC poetry student of Mark Smith and Barbara Snapp, is a member of the Writers' Group at The Highlands with a background in science and medical research. She visited the home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's grandparents, the Wadsworths, in Hiram, Maine (between Portland and Bridgton) a few years ago. Her communion with a large white pine tree on the Longfellow property prompted this contribution to Longfellow Days at The Highlands in February 2019. The tree survived the Brownfield fire of 1947, even though flames licked the base of the tree.

## His Grandfather's Tree

*In Hiram, Maine, there stands a tree  
That lacks the King's broad arrow.  
Both straight and tall that tree grew free  
And sheltered many a sparrow.*

*Other trees were blazed for masts,  
Straight and tall and known to last.*

*They cut, they tore, they hauled away  
Its neighbors for the Navy  
While quietly, far from the bay,  
That tree stood steady, branches waving.*

*It stands today, as memories past  
Well up in minds that hold them fast.*

*Under that tree the children played,  
Shared picnics, lolled in summer's heat  
And still in quiet, dappled shade  
That tree sighs deep with its raw grief*

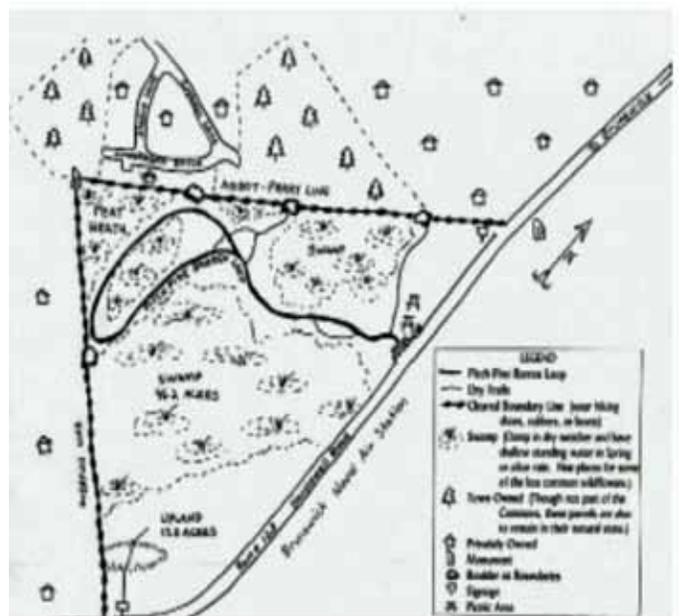
*For all the neighbors cut asunder  
While King's men worked to take their plunder.*

*How Henry loved that noble pine,  
His Grandpa's pride and glory.  
He wrote about it, called it 'Mine!'  
And wove it in his story*

*Of carefree days, his growing wonder  
That it was spared from fire and thunder.*

## Where in the Midcoast?

Do you recognize this place?



You can find a description of this place on page 7. It is a great place to visit.



## The Magic of Making Music with the MSC Singers

*Ellen Bennett*

Do you ever wonder why it is that all of the words to an old song or, perhaps embarrassingly, an old TV ad jingle, come back to you in an instant? But then you can't remember where you put your car keys or if you made that telephone call? Well, scientists have wondered the same. We know, especially among the MSC Singers, there is magic in our making music!

Interestingly, while many animals have the ability to sing, we as humans are the only species that can learn to sing. Why might this be so? One hypothesis is that singing became a way of connecting individuals to groups or communities. For sure, the Senior College choir is a collegial family of sixty musical participants, and for those of us who sing together, that feeling of group and social connectedness is strong.

A recent article in Time Magazine pursues yet another interesting avenue. It begins by reminding us that when we sing, vibrations move through us, and those vibrations effect changes, both physically and emotionally. When you sing as a group and share good vibrations (like the Beach Boys!) the positive effects are even stronger. And group singing is on the rise. 32.5 million adults sing in choirs, an increase of 10 million over the past decade.

So why do we go home after the MSC Singers class in such a good mood, and why does making music have both a calming, as well as an energizing effect on people? Scientists have discovered that singing releases endorphins which are associated with feelings of plea-

sure. It also might be from oxytocin, another hormone released during singing, which has been found to alleviate anxiety and stress. Oxytocin also enhances feelings of trust and bonding, which may explain why still more studies have found that singing lessens feelings of depression and loneliness.

And the benefits of singing regularly seem to be cumulative. In one study, singers were found to have lower levels of cortisol, indicating lower stress. Study after study has found that singing relieves anxiety and contributes to quality of life. There are rich social benefits as well, from widening your circle of friends, to boosting confidence and enhancing communication skills.

And finally, according according to research from the University of Frankfurt, singing strengthens the immune system. Singing is a workout and improves posture. The MSC Singers have a motto: "Hearts High!" We begin every class with 15 minutes of vocal and physical exercises to improve the voice, which also improves our mental alertness by allowing more oxygen to reach the brain.

While science has revealed a host of positive effects of singing, and it may not be "magic", for those of us reaping the benefits in the Senior College chorus, it sure feels like it!

*Ellen Bennett is a singing student in the MSC Singers class that features choral arrangements of folk songs from the British Isles and North America.*

## Where in the Midcoast?

### Town Commons

Brunswick, Maine

Granted by vote of the Pejepscot Proprietors  
May 8, 1719

By their vote of May 8, 1719, the Pejepscot Proprietors "Granted one thousand acres of land to ly in general comonage." Unlike the village green or town common found in the center of many New England towns, the Brunswick Town Commons was a specific grant from the private lands of the Pejepscot Co., and not from town-owned common and undivided land.

Located near the geographic center of town, the Commons has influenced the growth of the Brunswick region. Upon the promise of two hundred acres of land from the Commons, Bowdoin College was established in Brunswick. In the late 1800's the Town appropriated money to plant and cultivate blueberries on the Commons.

Granite monuments placed in 1891 by D. E. Campbell, Civil Engineer, marked all angle changes of the boundaries. Monument E marks the south western corner and is located in the Peat Heath. Five more of the historic granite markers are located within the boundaries of the Naval Air Station.

## THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

*Many thanks to our volunteers who helped in the office, classroom, and with our move and other special projects this past summer and fall. This list does not include all MSC board members or faculty who volunteer their time and effort on a regular basis.*

Ellen Asherman, Brian Barter, Caroline Bean, Dorothy Bell, Susan Billings, Nora Bishop, Sally Broderick, Catherine Buotte, Deborah Cravey, Richard DeVito, Joyce DeVito, Leona Dufour, Clare Durst, Eunice Fraser, Catherine Gibson, Robert Gibson, Carol Gillespie, Stuart Gillespie, Kay Greenwood, Bill Hammond, Laurie Hauptli, Jack Henderson, Carole Johnson, Paul Johnson, Lynn Kay, Janet Kehl, Sue Kennedy, Barbara Laffoley, Daniele Lambrechts, Lynn Lockwood, Ann MacKinnon, Kelly Matzen, Susan Michael, Susan Mikesell, Annie Miller, Susan Montgomery, Lynn Murray, Evie Papacosma, Alicia Pietraho, Karen Rienert, George Sergeant, Susan Sergeant, Deborah Showalter, Sonia St. Pierre, Deirdre Strachan, Bonnie Studdiford, Barbara Swiderski, Patricia Taggart, Karen Tilbor, Kelly Watt, Robert White, Linda Zingaro.

## Calendar of Events 2019

- June 13 Annual Meeting/Luncheon - (registration ends May 31 for luncheon)  
Summer Wisdom - See below  
Summer Seminars - Five seminars in July/August (registration opens July 1)  
Summer Excursion - See page 2  
September 9 Fall Term Starts (registration opens July 29)

### Summer Wisdom:

All presentations will be held on Wednesdays at the Morrill Room of Curtis Library, in Brunswick, and will begin at 12:15 pm. Sponsored by Sunnybrook Village, Brunswick, Summer Wisdom lectures are free and open to the public. No registration is required.

- June 5: Peter and Teresa Fogg, Art Cleaning and Restoration  
June 12: Mark Fogelzang, President, Maine Public Radio, a Community Resource  
June 19: Matt Orlando, Senior VP for Finance and Administration, Bowdoin College; Town and Gown from the College's Perspective  
June 26: Lois Skillings, President and CEO, Mid Coast Health Systems; Community Citizen and Provider

### Thanks to our MSC Sponsors for their Support!

- Atlantic Federal Credit Union
- Bath Savings
- Maine Pines Racquet and Fitness Club
- MW Sewall
- Highland Green
- Just Framing
- Legacy Properties Sotheby's International Properties
- Norway Savings Bank
- Now You're Cooking
- Rhumbline Advisers
- Sunnybrook Village
- The Highlands
- Thornton Oaks Village



*...because learning never ends.*

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