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# ***MIDCOAST SENIOR COLLEGE: THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS***

By Robert C. Williams



*Jack Thompson, Co-Founder, left with students*

*Well, over the past ten years what we have explored together  
has run the gamut from the meaning of existence, faith,  
reason and propaganda, crackpot science, and the spirit of place,  
to the origin of life, biodiversity collapse, the fate of the seas,  
the ecological basis of economics, global climate change,  
and the hidden life of forests.*

*While I have occasionally given courses at other Maine senior colleges,  
I can honestly say that none of our sister institutions can hold a candle  
to our own Midcoast Senior College. Rest assured,  
the life of the mind is in good hands for many years to come.*

--Fred Cichocki, MSC faculty member

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## Preface

Maine's population has been getting older, if not wiser, for decades. Young people leave, retirees arrive. In 1999, Maine Governor Angus King, a staunch supporter of higher education, commissioned a Quality of Life Task Force to explore how the state of Maine might become a "retirement destination" for older adults. Lois Lamdin, later active in Midcoast Senior College (MSC) and the co-author of *Elderlearning: New Frontier in an Aging Society*, became a task force member. Nobody knew at the time what the future of a senior college in Midcoast Maine might be. But they knew Maine had an aging population and was becoming a retirement destination.

The initiative made sense. Young people were continuing to leave the state for more lucrative jobs elsewhere. Retirees in Maine were becoming major consumers and producers of education. Older people were moving into the state to live what promised to be a less crowded and less stressful way of life. Many were former academics and had enjoyed Maine as undergraduates from the University of Maine, Bowdoin, Bates, and Colby colleges. Or they had been teaching faculty in another state. Others were stationed at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the Brunswick Naval Air Station, or the Dow Air Force Base in Bangor. Vacationland was becoming retirement land. Firewood and radiant heat helped fend off winter.

Lifelong learning and continuing education are an important industry for Maine in the new millennium. An aging population hungers for learning. They utilize libraries, television, and the Internet. They read and write books. This history of MSC chronicles the founding and growth of a new and independent educational institution for seniors living in the coastal area of Maine from Yarmouth to Damariscotta. It tells an inspiring story of how a dedicated group of friends forged a college for "elder-learning" in a retirement destination on the Maine coast.

MSC old timers remember the days when the college operated as a part of the University of Maine's University College Bath/Brunswick (UCBB). Newcomers since MSC became independent in 2012 participate in an ongoing effort to achieve financial sustainability and administrative efficiency in higher adult education. Both groups continue to support lifelong learning for seniors emphasizing the liberal arts in an environment of community, conversation, and conviviality. That environment was compelling and contagious in 2000. It remains so today.

*Robert C. Williams*

*Topsham, Maine, January 2020*

## 1. Portland Origins

The story of Midcoast Senior College actually begins in Portland, Maine in 1995 when Terry Foster arrived at the University of Southern Maine (USM) as director of the USM Center for Extended Academic Programs.<sup>1</sup> Foster's extensive portfolio included off-campus programs, study abroad, and continuing education. He was also hired to develop programs for older adult students. In 1996, a senior college, under the auspices of the USM, held its first classes at USM's Portland campus.<sup>2</sup> Among the students was future MSC leader Dorothy Bell, who took Jack Thompson's course on the U.S. from World War II to Vietnam, and Nancy Wheeler, a specialist in childhood education. Terry Foster considered USM's senior college "the most important program I was ever responsible for during my years in higher education administration."<sup>3</sup>



*Terry Foster*

The vision of a senior college, encouraged and promoted by retired Rabbi Harry Z. Sky and supported by USM President Richard Pattenau, featured volunteer faculty and offered no tests, no papers, and no credits, a model that other institutions within the University of Maine system scrambled to emulate. The USM senior college soon affiliated itself with the nationwide Elderhostel program. Terry Foster convened the first Advisory Board meeting that September. Rabbi Sky served as the chair and part-time coordinator. Some board members visited the Harvard University Institute for Learning in Retirement. Rabbi Sky's fundraising efforts produced grants from the Maine Humanities Council, the Davis Foundation, and Biddeford Savings and Loan bank. The mission of a senior college was declared: "to provide a curriculum of intellectually stimulating learning opportunities and special activities for persons 55 years of age and older." "We didn't fit in," recalled Sky of his senior college experiences, "we were not undergraduates and we did not follow a curriculum. Over time we worked out a *modus vivendi*. No one told us what we could and what we could not teach, and our offerings covered a wide range of topics. Nobody censored us."<sup>4</sup> Their common goals were simply learning and friendship. Soon USM's off-campus center in York County opened a second senior college. David Baty, the director of

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Foster was an experienced continuing education administrator with teaching experience in church history, music, and the history of jazz. Raised in Kentucky, Foster was an accomplished pianist and chef with broad interests across the liberal arts.

<sup>2</sup> The University of Southern Maine dates from the Gorham Normal School (1878-1945), a state teachers' college, renamed Gorham State Teachers' College (1945-65) It became the University of Maine Portland-Gorham in the 1970s, then the University of Southern Maine in 1977. USM is now one of six UM branch campuses and serves Portland, Gorham, and Lewiston-Auburn.

<sup>3</sup> Terry Foster email to Robert C. Williams (RCW), November 12, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Sky, *Rabbi in Maine*, 99.

University College, Bath/Brunswick (UCBB), dreamed of starting the third.<sup>5</sup> UCBB would ultimately become the outreach program for adult education in Midcoast Maine, and the host for MSC.



Rabbi Harry  
Z. Sky

Sky, a Jungian and social activist Rabbi from New York, led congregations in Texas, Massachusetts, and Indiana before moving to Portland, Maine, in 1961.<sup>6</sup> Sky had a passion for social justice and civil rights. He marched with Martin Luther King in Selma and Washington DC and campaigned against the Vietnam War. Later he provided pastoral services for interfaith and LGBTQ communities. He took Jack Thompson's courses and soon became Jack's good friend. Because Sky did not drive a car, Jack and Nancy Wheeler frequently drove him to and from various events. So did Terry Foster. Together they helped lifelong learning migrate from Portland to Midcoast Maine.<sup>7</sup>

In 2000, Terry Foster hired Kali Lightfoot as USM's Senior College's first full-time director with the specific goal of spreading senior colleges across Maine.<sup>8</sup> Kali, a poet and veteran employee of the Elderhostel program for seniors, later became the first executive director of the National Resource Center for Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes (OLLIs) and then the first coordinator of the Maine Senior College Network. Lightfoot and Harry Sky persuaded Angus King to support the effort, and the Maine legislature provided some seed money.



Bernard Osher

In Portland, USM's senior college would soon (2001) morph into the first OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), named for businessman Bernard Osher. Osher (Bowdoin '48), a banker, financier, art collector, and quiet philanthropist from Biddeford, and his wife, Peggy, were members of Rabbi Sky's Temple Beth-El. They helped form the USM senior college. Barney Osher's wealth enabled the Portland senior college to become OLLI. Because Osher had no children, he put his vast fortune in trust in 1977 and later used the money to create a network of OLLI campuses across the U.S. There are now some 120 OLLIs providing continuing education for older adult students.

As already noted, several residents of Midcoast Maine were already traveling to Portland's senior college to take, and to teach, classes and seminars. David Baty contacted Jack Thompson who was teaching there. Jack recommended his friend Nancy Wheeler who was still teaching in the public-school

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<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Bell email to RCW, October 12, 2019. Terry Foster, "Timeline for Formation of 'Senior College', OLLI's Predecessor," Portland ME, 1997, and interview with RCW November 13, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Information on Rabbi Sky (1924-2019) comes from his memoir *A Rabbi in Maine* (Quiet Waters Publications, Bolivar, Missouri, 2008). See also the RCW interview with Terry Foster, November 13, 2019, Sky's obituary in the *Portland Press Herald* of December 17, 2019, and Joe Lawlor's article on Sky on December 18.

<sup>7</sup> In 2007, Sky received the prestigious Catalyst for Change award in Portland for his many community projects, including education for seniors. A year later, he published his memoirs, *A Rabbi in Maine*. Then he opted for a richly deserved retirement in Greensboro, North Carolina near his family.

<sup>8</sup> Kali visited Machias in 2001, which established a Sunrise Senior College in spring 2002, supported by the University of Maine, Machias, and its president, John Joseph. By 2019, SSC had 230 members and offered 12 courses each semester. Maureen Hart email to RCW, October 20, 2019.



systems in Boothbay Harbor and Bath, while taking postgraduate courses at USM. The three educators began meeting in Bath to explore the possibility and viability of a potential senior college in their own Midcoast backyard.

Jack Thompson was tired of the I-295 commute. A Russian historian from Indiana University, retired and living in Phippsburg on the Kennebec River, Jack drove down to Portland and back regularly. He soon became a popular instructor at the senior college. His next favorite sport, after tennis, was teaching adult students. Thompson was a broadly educated academic of humane inclinations, a true *mensch* who never met a stranger. He taught at Indiana University from 1959 to 1976, where he was known as an effective and popular teacher and served as Marshal of the Faculty at Commencements. He also published a monograph in 1966 on *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace* and later a textbook on Russia and the Soviet Union that went through seven editions. After retiring to Maine in 1988, he inherited his wife Anne's family farmhouse, said to be the oldest brick structure on the Kennebec River. He once noted that his tombstone should say simply: "He owned an old house." (as if that would explain everything).<sup>9</sup>



*MSC co-founder and teacher, Jack Thompson.*

Jack loved teaching adult students. They were motivated, curious, and outspoken. They brought a lifetime of experiences with them to the classroom. They loved to participate in class discussions, but they would also listen respectfully to lectures. They read books and wanted to learn subjects they had missed in college. Adult students brought knowledge and job experience to the classroom as well. They asked questions and wanted answers. Faculty could often learn as much from their students as the



*MSC Co-founder Nancy Wheeler*

students learned from the teacher. Adult students paid tuition, loved learning, and wanted their money's worth. They were fun to teach, and they made teaching fun.

Nancy Wheeler was an alumna of Connecticut College with a MA from USM. She taught special-needs students in Bath and Boothbay while taking continuing education courses at USM. After retiring to Bath with her husband, Roy, Nancy learned about the USM senior college from a friend before meeting Jack and Anne Thompson who inspired her to enroll at the USM senior college in Portland in 1997. Later she also volunteered at the USM office. Collaborating with Jack and inspired by her experience in Portland, Nancy became the other co-founder of MSC. She later taught writing and children's literature courses at

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Thompson was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1926. He served in the Pacific after World War II, graduated from Amherst College in 1947 and married Anne Fiske in 1949. After study at Yale Law School and Columbia University, he received his Ph.D. in Russian history and served in the U.S. Foreign Service in Indonesia in the 1950s. Jack remained a lifelong baseball fan, first of the N.Y. (later San Francisco) Giants, then of the Boston Red Sox. See his obituary in the *Brunswick Times Record* of March 16, 2017.

MSC and chaired the MSC executive board for four years, while overseeing marketing, publicity, and finances. Nancy's enthusiasm, like Jack's, was contagious.

MSC might have become an OLLI senior college, but it did not. Why?

## 2. University College Bath/Brunswick (UCBB)



*Offices of UCBB at Bath/Brunswick, the first location of MSC in 2000.*

By 1999, the University of Maine in Augusta<sup>10</sup> had opened a branch in Brunswick called University College Bath/Brunswick, directed by David Baty. UCBB provided credit courses toward degrees for all ages of adult students. They also hosted noncredit courses for children on Saturdays in a separate Kids' Academy, managed by Linda Gagne. Now, thanks to the involvement of Jack Thompson, Rabbi Sky, David Baty, and Nancy Wheeler, there was

interest in a full-fledged Senior College in Midcoast Maine. UCBB was generous and helpful. There existed a strong support system in the form of three capable UCBB staff, Arlene Smith, Doreen Sandelin, and Linda Gagne<sup>11</sup>. By combining forces, MSC could piggy-back on the staff, facilities, and resources of UCBB. They soon did just that. The emphasis would be on older adult learning, not on credits, grades, and exams, but there would also be plenty of friendship, fun, and learning. Jack and Nancy would see to that.

UCBB's home was in a building owned by Paul and Kevin Kelly at 275 Bath Road north of Cook's Corner. It was a long one-storied, flat-roofed building, nondescript in appearance. A modest clapboard structure of about six thousand square feet, it held eight classrooms, four of which had televisions to support instruction. Dennis Unger was the dean of student affairs and most students were older adults taking courses for credit. Baty and his staff handled the financial and registration details with Augusta.<sup>12</sup>

The greater Bath/Brunswick area was bustling. Brunswick had a top liberal arts college, Bowdoin, as well as a Southern New Hampshire University branch, and the site of University College, Bath/Brunswick. Additionally, over five thousand people were either stationed or employed at the

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<sup>10</sup> The University of Maine system (aside from the main campus at Orono) had branches at Augusta, Farmington, Fort Kent, Machias, Presque Isle, and Portland-Gorham (USM)). Many received \$5,000 start-up grants from the State of Maine in June 2001; MSC did not as it was up and running by then.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Gagne continued to work for UCBB and the University of Maine in Augusta before retiring in 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Unger served as dean at UCBB since 2004. He received his B.A. from Miami University of Ohio in 1981 and his M.S. in Counseling Psychology from SUNY Albany in 1983.



Brunswick Naval Air Station. Bath was also home to the Bath Iron Works with a work force of about eight thousand employees. Retirees thrived in this atmosphere with a bustling economy, retirement communities, and a growing artistic and cultural scene. The Maine State Music Theater was in its fortieth year, bringing Broadway musicals to Brunswick every summer. The Maine Maritime Museum, in its thirty-seventh year, celebrated Maine's regional and global maritime heritage and culture. Reny's sold goods at a discount at its store on Front Street in Bath, the Lobster Ladies sold lobsters from the back of their truck in the parking lot of Fat Boys for \$3.59/lb. And Danny's sold hot dogs with all the fixings for \$1.50. Life was good!

**B**ath, Maine, on the Kennebec River called itself the City of Ships, a major center of shipbuilding since the early nineteenth century. The native Wabenaki called the area simply Sagadahoc. Bath became a town (1781), a city (1847), and then the county seat of Sagadahoc County (1854). The Patten family produced generations of shipbuilders and sea captains, then established the Patten Free Library in Bath in 1847. The Bath Iron Works (BIW) (1884) became a major builder of vessels for the U.S. Navy after the Civil War. Before then, Topsham and Bowdoinham built and launched dozens of smaller wooden vessels into the shallow Merrymeeting Bay. Brunswick and Harpswell were also major shipbuilding towns oriented to Casco Bay and the Atlantic. The native Wabenaki Indians and early English proprietors from Boston knew this area as Pejepscot. When the British crown made land grants, the grants became townships, owned by the proprietors, then only later towns, run by settlers and citizens.

David Baty, Jack Thompson, and Nancy Wheeler met often over lunch at an area restaurant. Both David and Jack were imposing, over six feet tall, with dark brown hair and steely blue eyes. David wanted the program to be the gem of the University, and Jack wanted the independence of selecting the curriculum, instructors, and members. The ideologies were often in conflict, and it was left to the diplomat, Nancy, to soothe the waters. Dennis Unger, the director of student affairs, and later the director of UCBB, often sat in on these meetings and came away impressed that the participants were all farsighted and focused on developing a program designed to withstand obstacles and to grow and change with the times.

The next step was to get interested people together. Baty contacted Terry Foster at USM who provided a list of USM senior college students who lived in the Brunswick/Bath area of Midcoast Maine. They decided to call an organizational meeting and see who might attend.<sup>13</sup>

An open house was held on October 25, 1999 in the UCBB building. In order to be sure folks knew where it was located, the open house needed to be advertised as located one mile north of Cook's Corner and across from Yankee Lanes, a bowling alley. That is still how the location is described today although the building has added a new front and new businesses.

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<sup>13</sup> David Baty email, November 2018.

On that Monday in October, Rabbi Sky and his wife, Helene, came north to assist Jack Thompson in presenting a vision of what a senior college might look like. The *Coastal Journal* and the *Times Record* both carried notification of the gathering. Jack said they hoped to attract twenty-five people and had to scramble when many more showed up. Even with standing room, the presentation needed to be given three times. The cider and doughnuts soon ran out. Someone made an emergency trip to Frosty's in Brunswick for replenishment. Rabbi Sky and Jack Thompson outlined the possibilities of a senior college for the Bath-Brunswick area, based on their work with senior college in Portland. The audience was enthusiastic and responsive. There were over eighty-nine respondents to a survey outlining desired programs. Dorothy Bell recalls that it was snowing when the meeting ended. Maine did things like that, even before Halloween.

The groundwork had been laid for Midcoast Senior College. The response in Brunswick, Bath, Topsham and Harpswell about establishing a new senior college in the area was positive. There was a growing population of retirees eager to continue their education without the burden of grades, exams and other requirements they recalled from their own college days. The new retirement communities of The Highlands of Topsham and Thornton Oaks in Brunswick were natural sources of students and faculty. Thanks to the continuing support of the University of Maine system, a new senior college in Midcoast Maine would soon be up and running.

### 3. Up and Running

Midcoast Senior College began operation in 2000. Nancy Wheeler became the first acting president and soon added public relations to her duties. Jack Thompson recruited faculty. He enlisted many instructors from his academic contacts, friends he knew socially, or his tennis buddies. David Baty and his UCBB staff handled all the administrative tasks. His secretary, Doreen Sandelin, took notes at the meetings.<sup>14</sup> Libby Irwin had taught mathematics and was an accomplished artist. She and Ed Liston, with a background of lifelong learning, rounded out the academic advisory group that later morphed into an Executive Board (EB) for MSC.

There were Maine natives too. Jack Henderson, another retired academic (Professor of French at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania), whose family had lived in Phippsburg on the Kennebec River since the eighteenth century, joined the academic advisory board. Later, while on the EB, Jack created the role of treasurer to track income and expenditures. He then established an email presence for MSC, and later became the first webmaster.<sup>15</sup>

Informality reigned. MSC administration from the outset was casual, more of an advisory group or think tank than a formal group with titles. Meetings were held, yes, but if a task needed to be done, it was simply taken on by somebody. It was understood that if a meeting went long and tennis matches were scheduled, players would respectfully leave the meeting. E-mails and telephone calls came with new ideas. Everyone involved said they had fun. In the first two terms in 2000, seven classes were offered: Computer Basics, Learning to Draw, the Bible in Western Music, and the first of twenty-four offerings by Jack Thompson: The Maine Experience; Highlights and Lowlifes. MSC paid UCBB 30% of revenues for rent, equipment, and expenses, including honoraria.

It was an auspicious year; MSC was a going concern. By the time the new MSC friends convened again for lunch at The Highlands in November 2000, they had enrolled some eighty-four students in classes. They were committed to lifelong learning, a liberal arts curriculum, and interactive education for older faculty and students residing in the Midcoast Maine area. The Mission Statement read: “The Mid Coast Senior College program is designed to provide a curriculum of intellectually stimulating learning opportunities and special activities for persons 55 years or older...regardless of educational background.” End of semester luncheons brought together MSC members at The Highlands of Topsham, a new retirement community, and Thornton Oaks in Brunswick. Three summer excursions took members and guests to sites significant for Maine’s historical development that complemented Jack’s sold-out Spring class: Old Fort Western in Augusta, Colonial Pemaquid, and the archeological dig at Fort St. George, site of the Popham Colony. These locations were conveniently nearby and laden with Maine history.

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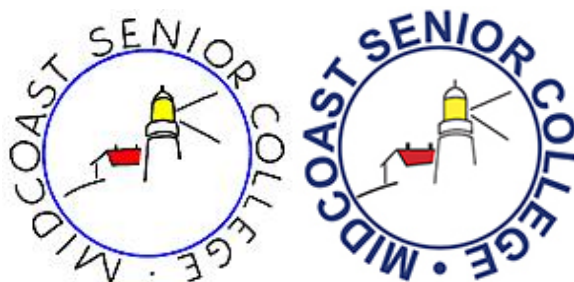
<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Bell email to RCW, October 12, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Henderson email, September 2019.

The college expanded. Older adults wanted stimulating lectures, as well as multiple-week courses. The next year, MSC sponsored its first Winter Wisdom series of lectures for the community at the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick, then in January 2002, another Winter Scholars Lecture Series at the Patten Free Library in Bath. They were hourly lectures, free and open to the public. Attendees at Winter Wisdom were invited to bring a brown bag lunch with the beverage and dessert supplied by Midcoast Senior College. Supplying beverages and fruits continued until attendance did not permit room for the tables. The eight regular courses MSC offered in spring 2001 included: The United Nations: The View from Within (UN retiree Bruce Stedman), God and the American Writer (Bill Brown), and the “sacred geography” of Jerusalem. 162 students—twice as many as the previous term—enrolled in courses. By the end of 2001, enrollment had reached 286 students. The next year, enrollment hit 326, then 405 in 2004, 486 in 2006, and 530 in 2007. MSC now had an Executive Board and a more formal structure.

Summer was a good time for other learning activities. The 2001 summer excursions included Historic York and the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland. The MSC Executive Board expanded to fifteen new members, including Howard Whitcomb, and Dorothy Bell. The Board was committed to growth and expansion in adult learning. But how much growth and in what location? That was yet to be determined.

The second initiative after shaping the curriculum was a contest resulting in the first MSC logo, a simple line drawing of the Seguin Island lighthouse by Jeanne Brooks with block lettering by George Phipps, a combined first-place entry chosen from ten submissions of thirty designs to the contest. The logo still works; only the font has been changed.



The college grew apace. After 2002, Dorothy Bell, a student volunteer from Harpswell, handled all phone calls and voice mail and was known as the “voice of senior college.” If there was a question, people were told to “ask Dorothy.” She had taken classes at senior college in Portland since 1997 and knew the adult student environment. Dorothy also recruited volunteers to share their skills for mailings and administration.

275 Bath Road was alive, convivial, and informal. It was also cramped. By 2004, MSC was dealing with



*One of Dorothy Bell's early volunteer mailing events, always complete with food goodies.*

nearly two hundred students each term. The space problem simply would not disappear and became more acute during each term. At the same time, the old Bath hospital building was empty, and the new Midcoast Hospital was just beginning to function. The City of Bath generously provided funds to improve the hospital facilities to support both UCBB and Southern Maine Community College classes. In 2003, UCBB (and MSC) moved to the former Bath hospital at 9 Park Street. It contained more space including much better classrooms. The facility was described by resident pathologist and longtime MSC student, Richard Leck, MD:

*Historically, the hospital, like many old Maine homes, grew in stages. In 1970 it had three parts: the central or oldest part, built around 1919; a single-story wing, dating from about 1941; and a two-story wing, built around 1961-62. The single-story wing, extending toward Washington Street, later housed MSC. It had a central corridor with the laboratory on the south side and operating and obstetrical rooms on the north side. The laboratory offices, including mine, were in the area of the MSC conference room. This conference room was a sunny, open space where the pathology department secretaries had their desks<sup>16</sup>. It later became a perfect room for lively MSC discussion classes, including those taught by one of our first mentors, Bill Brown. Bill lived not far from the building and was often seen riding his three-wheeler down Washington Street.*

The college thrived and was growing. The MSC board retreat of September 2004, held at Jack and Anne Thompson's Cold Spring Farm,<sup>17</sup> began to develop a five-year strategic plan for the program, structure and mission of a senior college. They ruminated on the qualifications of faculty, the target audience of students, the budget, and the new facilities for a campus.

The first fruit of their labors, launched in August 2004, was a newsletter called the *Midcoast Inquirer*, edited by David McKeith, a combination of calendar and literary magazine that featured articles and reviews by faculty and students. McKeith had just joined the MSC board and volunteered as editor. The newsletter's purpose was to "support and further the interests of the educational mission of MSC." Content was pretty much up to the editor, who constituted a one-person subcommittee under the public relations committee and requested submissions from faculty and students in the form of essays, commentaries, biographies, and reviews. The *Midcoast Inquirer* ran from six to ten pages and appeared three (now two) times a year, printed and on-line.

McKeith operated in the spirit of Socrates' dictum: "Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel." Courses marked the beginning, not the end, of learning. Several MSC courses over the

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<sup>16</sup> Prior to that, the space served as the hospital's main entrance and waiting room in the 1941 wing.

<sup>17</sup> Cold Spring Farm is the name of the farm that Anne Thompson's father and mother, Charles and Marie Blood Fisk, purchased in 1946 and was to be their retirement home. It consisted of 400 acres, a big pond, and a mile-long frontage on the Kennebec River. After the Fisks died, it was divided among their children. Anne and Jack purchased the house and some land. The farm also had the big barn where Jack and Anne had their reception after their marriage ceremony in the Bowdoin Chapel. In the barn are the World War I posters which Anne's mother had mounted on cardboard, some of which Jack borrowed for his classes at Midcoast Senior College and elsewhere.



years have lived on as volunteer meetings of students: Ann Kimmage's course on writing one's memoirs; Bob Bunselmeyer's course on England in 1910; budding poets inspired by the courses of Gary Lawless, owner of Gulf of Maine Books in Brunswick and a widely recognized Maine humanist. A fiction-writing group of former students, an offshoot of Gar Roper's "Writing Fiction Workshop", continues to meet in 2020.

In 2004, Dennis Unger followed David Baty as UCBB director. By then, MSC had an identity, a curriculum, local support, and a logo. UCBB took care of registration, administration, and finances. MSC concentrated on educating older adults and recruiting faculty for a liberal arts curriculum grounded in the faculty's knowledge, experience, and interests. Increasingly the number of classes offered and the members attending were promising. The curriculum concentrated on academic subjects such as United Nations: View from Within, God and the American Writer, and Roosevelt and Hitler: The Great Protagonists. It was this concentration on the liberal arts with an experienced faculty vetted by the curriculum committee that made MSC distinct from the outset.

Teachers continued to volunteer their time and effort. One of Jack Thompson's recruits to the faculty in 2001 was Bruce Stedman. Bruce had joined the fledgling United Nations in 1946 after service in World War II with the U.S. Navy. UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld then tapped Bruce to serve on political missions to the Middle East: Palestine in 1948, Gaza in 1957, and Amman, Jordan in 1958. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Bruce worked as UN representative in Kenya and Ethiopia, then helped establish the UN environment program in Nairobi in 1979. He was admirably qualified when Jack Thompson persuaded him to teach a course entitled "United Nations: View from Within."



*The Maine Maritime Museum in Bath with its teaching cruises on the Kennebec River offers continuing opportunities for MSC students.*

In February 2002, Bruce and Susie Stedman offered a Winter Wisdom talk on global citizenship. That spring, they taught a course together on the same topic. Then they taught another course together on “Pax Americana? Stability in a Unipolar World.” As they saw it:

*The following spring, in the run-up to the 2004 election, Jack invited Bruce to participate in a course on the American electoral system. When he asked Bruce to teach the session covering foreign policy issues in the presidential campaign, Jack admonished Bruce to be sure to adhere to Senior College’s commitment to non-partisanship. As Jack recalled that conversation, “Bruce smiled, and with that famous twinkle in his eyes, said, ‘of course...but I might stress some issues and downplay others.’ ‘That’s exactly what he did,’ said Jack, ‘to the delight of the Democratic-leaning students.’*

By 2005, Bill Brown had become the best-known teacher on the MSC faculty, offering courses every term on Shakespeare, Ulysses, Don Quixote, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Henry Adams, and various poets. After more than forty years teaching at Andover Academy in Massachusetts, Brown retired to Bath, formed his own alternative school, and taught at several others. Brown said his goal in life was to sit down with students and “share the mysteries, the vagaries, and the glory of the English language—and thus open a two-way street” of conversation. Brown also discovered that “the path to illusive truth lay through the mind” and that “the greatest service I could provide was to help students achieve a perceptive and efficient mind by which they could apprehend the truth.” Bill taught twenty-one courses for MSC, exceeded only by Charles Plummer (25), Jack Thompson (24) and Stu Ross (22). In retirement, Bill learned to “pursue humanistic truth with active adult minds, from which I have gained as much or more than I have offered to them—a teacher’s paradise.”



*Bill Brown*

The Fall 2005 curriculum reflected Brown's teacher's paradise: John Bradford on the Wabenaki in seventeenth-century Maine; Susan Beegel on Moby Dick; Stu Ross on printmaking; Richard Neiman M.D. on cancer treatment and prevention; Ronnie Kamphausen on the ecology of coastal Maine; Cliff Olds on Northern Renaissance painters; and Paul and Carole Johnson on minority cultures in China. Some 255 students enrolled in these courses.

Summers remained important. Susan Beegel supplemented the regular courses with a summer 2006 motor coach trip to Monmouth, Maine, where students got to see *The Tempest* at the Shakespeare Theatre, described by Beegel as a "magical feast of language" and a "tale surrounding universal themes of power, redemption and self-discovery."

The growth continued. By later in the decade, MSC was a thriving college attracting ever more senior adult students from the Midcoast area. Nora Bishop joined MSC in 2007 as a volunteer to help Dorothy Bell. Howard Whitcomb chaired the curriculum committee, Nancy Wheeler, finance, Priscilla McKeith, public relations, and Judy Rouillard, special events. New members-at-large included Richard Neiman, Ted Allen, and Jack Thompson. Kelly Watt of Bath soon took over special events: the summer excursion and annual luncheon. When Dorothy Bell became chair of the executive board, she served with Ellen Lebauer as co-chair for several years, then in 2009, she shared the position with Mark Smith for a year. She also handled all aspects of registration and volunteer supervision

Richard Devito described Dorothy Bell's registration process:

*When the class registration forms were returned, UCBB provided Dorothy with the registration forms coded to show the classes. In many cases, the number requesting a class exceeded available class size and Dorothy was responsible in determining who got in the class, and who went on a standby list. The process was initially done manually and involved about twelve volunteers and took several hours. That was eventually replaced by a computer-generated random sort that I located on the Internet and could be completed in a few minutes involving two or three volunteers to ensure data integrity. Once Dorothy formulated the list of names in the class that list was given to UCBB and they used Microsoft Access to register the students and print out the class list. Dorothy maintained the standby list and in the event of any cancellation, contacted names on the list in order, to*



*Registration was by hand, but effective, under Dorothy Bell's watchful eye, with not a computer in sight.*

*offer them the class. Dorothy would coordinate any and all class revisions with UCBB since they maintained the data.*<sup>18</sup>

As noted above, the MSC curriculum was under the oversight of a curriculum committee dedicated to the liberal arts and its carefully screened faculty. Howard Whitcomb, a Brown University alumnus with a Ph.D. in political science, chaired the curriculum committee for eight years and watched student enrollment double during that time. Whitcomb basically shaped the academic strength of MSC for many years. Whitcomb had taught for thirty years at Lehigh University and retired to Georgetown, Maine, in 1999. He edited the papers of Percival Baxter (1876-1969), who served as governor of Maine in the early 1920s and donated large land parcels to form Baxter State Park, along with his Mackworth Island home in Casco Bay.

Jack Thompson ruminated on how MSC reflected the liberal arts tradition and was not simply “hot air from a bunch of Old Fogies,” as one of his former Amherst College classmates dismissed it. Senior College students continued to demonstrate wisdom and good judgment. They could apply thoughtful analysis to U.S. foreign policy in the wake of 9/11 and in the face of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and troubles with Iran. They were “superb conveyors of knowledge, method, and approach to a younger generation born after 1950, whether sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends in their community, or acquaintances in book clubs, church groups, and other associations” that “contribute importantly in a ripple effect to the level of discourse and understanding throughout Midcoast Maine.”<sup>19</sup>



*Dorothy Bell, Nancy Wheeler, Mark Smith, & Jack Thompson at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.*

MSC continued to grow and expand. It was now one of over four hundred retirement-age lifelong learning organizations in the U.S. and Canada and one of nearly twenty senior colleges across Maine. When the college celebrated its tenth anniversary in November 2009, it was offering seventeen courses to nearly three hundred students. MSC was oversubscribed and underfunded. It held classes in the old Bath hospital and the Patten Free Library. It could offer courses, run summer excursions, and provide lectures. It could recruit capable and motivated faculty and students. Student tuition remained low, and faculty compensation remained lower (the faculty taught for nothing but the love of the classroom). But it had to depend on the staff of University College of Bath/Brunswick, directed by Dennis Unger, for financial transactions and registration support. That arrangement, however, caused administrative

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Devito email of October 13, 2019 clarified the registration and administration procedures.

<sup>19</sup> Jack Thompson in *The Midcoast Inquirer*, December 2007, Vol. 4, no. 1, 2.



delays, headaches, and annoyances. There was discussion of possibly hiring part-time administrative support, and yet doing so was impossible as long as MSC remained part of the university system. Lacking its own home and identity, many thought MSC needed to fly on its own. But how?

## 4. Independence.

Going independent was a leap of faith. Independence for MSC meant abandoning the financial and administrative support systems of UCBB. The college would have to handle its own registration, annual fund raising, mailings, financial transactions, and publications. Not everyone was sure they wanted to take on such tasks themselves. At the retreat held in June 2010, in Jack and Anne Thompson's barn, the MSC executive committee proposed the goal of working toward becoming an independent 501 © (3) Tax Exempt Non-Profit Corporation working collaboratively with UCBB but seeking ultimate independence from the state system. The Board voted to do so in December 2010. MSC established a committee (Mark Smith, Dennis Unger, Nancy Wheeler, and Jack Henderson) to study the feasibility of becoming independent. They traveled to other independent senior colleges to investigate their own experiences. Fortunately, Dennis Unger and UCBB were very supportive and helpful in the transition to independence when it occurred.



*Mark Smith*

The process would take two years. The main architects of independence were Mark Smith (MSC president 2009-13) and Nancy Zugehoer, who spent countless hours mastering the details of tax law and corporate financing so that MSC could operate effectively on its own. They were well qualified to do so.

Mark Smith graduated from Williams College in 1963 and received advanced degrees from Columbia and Harvard Universities. He spent forty years in secondary-school teaching and administration in New York and New Jersey before retiring with his wife, Judy, to Brunswick in 2003. Mark was experienced in educational administration and coexisted well with Dorothy Bell as board chair.

Nancy Zugehoer seemed a financial wizard. She attended Manhattanville College (as did Kelly Watt) and Northeastern University before working for six years at Keystone Custodian Funds, then for thirty years as human resources director for Pfizer, Dynatech, Timberland, and Bath Iron Works. She was also a CPA tax preparer and tax-aid counselor for retirees. She brought badly needed financial and taxation expertise, along with personnel knowledge, to MSC at a critical moment.





The mission statement of MSC as amended in September 2010 aimed “to provide non-credit academic courses and other academic events for people of 55 years and older to continue their lifelong learning.”

*Nancy Zugehoer*

Computer technology was evolving. In Fall 2011, MSC offered its first on-line course by Paul Kalkstein on “Classic American Short Stories.” Kalkstein first heard of MSC from the Richard Neiman in 2007 on a cruise in the Greek Islands where Kalkstein lectured on Euripides’ *Oresteia*. Paul also was an old friend and colleague of Bill Brown, who had hired Kalkstein to teach at Andover in 1970. Every year more and more MSC students were becoming computer literate. They communicated with their instructor and each other by email. They registered on-line at home from their desktops. They fact-checked their instructors in class on the Internet. They assisted in computerized classroom instruction. The few students who lacked computers received friendly phone calls and personal attention from volunteers. But being computer literate was a big asset.

More and more faculty volunteered to teach. Retired attorney Niles Schore and his wife, Anne Vaughan, arrived from Pennsylvania at about this time and found their way to MSC via OLLI in Portland. With the guidance of Howard Whitcomb, Niles developed courses on the U.S. Constitution and its interpretation that had broad appeal. Niles and Anne concluded:



*Jack Henderson (l) and Dennis Unger(r)*

*It has been extraordinarily rewarding! Not only for the wealth of intellectual inspiration, and the fellow students. Finding those with intensities of interests, professors who encouraged participation by us seniors whose intense interests with age have expanded and whose self-confidence from our years of work experience ensures we will not easily be silenced...MSC has provided a seamless enrichment, a continuum from our full Pennsylvania lives of studies and friendships that complemented our legal and political lives there.*

After nearly two years of intensive work, Nancy submitted the initial application for 501 © (3) IRS status through MSC’s accountants in Bath. The application was turned down, but on the second try, Nancy worked through a regional supervisor and was successful.

Accordingly, in April 2012, MSC President Mark Smith announced the coveted receipt of 501 © (3) status for MSC from the federal government through the IRS. The college was at last independent, a nonprofit corporation of the State of Maine legally qualified to accept tax-deductible charitable tax donations. Jack Henderson and Nancy Zugehoer became co-responsible for creating a new MSC web site, and Jack became Webmaster, one of the reasons he was awarded the Wheeler/Thompson Founders’ Award in June 2011. Dennis Unger won the next Wheeler/Thompson Award the following spring. Again, becoming independent was a leap of faith. A salaried office assistant of some kind was needed if volunteer committee chairs were not to burn out. MSC was on its own.

In May 2012, UCBB transferred all administrative and financial responsibility to MSC, along with the Microsoft Access data base. Richard Devito assumed the chair of the administrative committee when Mary Ann Gesner stepped down from the post. Richard's wife, Joyce, raised in Topsham, served as volunteer coordinator and avidly recruited more volunteers for the office. Richard devoted untold hours to get MSC up and running. He set up a mailing account with the Bath post office and developed procedures for bulk mailings and address labels. He purchased computers and other equipment to create effective office technology while also fixing any classroom technology in need of repair. He formatted class brochures and registration forms with input from Howard Whitcomb and the curriculum committee. Bath Printing produced the brochures. Dorothy Bell recruited volunteers to prepare each mailing. She also provided the refreshments that made every mailing a tasty social occasion.

Lois Lamdin and later Joyce Bessen succeeded David McKeith as editors of the *Midcoast Inquirer*, which kept students informed and inspired three times a year. It served as a combination of newsletter, bulletin board, and literary magazine. Lois was a highly respected expert on Jewish-American literature and adult education who advised Governor King on continuing education matters. Judy Smith initiated her series of book reviews entitled "Between the Covers." Bob Williams became the current editor in 2014.



*An MSC class in the former hospital building.*

The college had adapted to the modern world and international affairs. In December 2011, MSC launched a new Current Events Forum that convened monthly at the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick. A moderator led discussions of topics of local, national, and international concern in an atmosphere of respectful and civil discourse. The Forum still continues to meet every Thursday. Shortly thereafter, Charles Dunbar, a retired foreign service officer, began teaching courses on American foreign policy and the Middle East. Charlie served thirty-two years in the U.S. Department of State, including posts as U.S. ambassador in Qatar and Yemen, taught at Simmons College and Boston University, and was president of the Cleveland, Ohio, Council on World Affairs.

Some courses just kept going. Bob Bunselmeyer's class on "England, 1910," inspired by Virginia Woolf, decided to continue meeting after the course ended. After a post-class meeting at the Kennebec Tavern in Bath, they decided to continue the class on their own, and invited Bob to join them. Angela Bournakel recalled the event:

*So, in January 2012, eight of us held our first all-day gathering. In addition to our reading discussion, we watched a few scenes from the wonderful Merchant Ivory and David Lean movies based on these two books [A Room with a View and A Passage to India]. Our gathering was such a success that we thought, why stop? Let's continue to do this! So, a reading group was born. We decided to call ourselves the Schlegels in honor of the Schlegel sisters in Howard's End. And so, a wonderful experiment and multi-faceted journey began which has continued over six years.*

New faculty kept arriving. Steve Piker retired to Yarmouth, Maine, in 2009 after forty-four years of teaching anthropology at Swarthmore College. He had taught seven or eight courses at OLLI in Portland and taken three courses himself. Steve has also taught two courses at Lewiston/Auburn Senior College, and three at MSC, where he also serves on the Board. His take on senior college classes:

*We—students and me—come together mainly to converse about what the course is about. I try to provide some focus and direction for this with written (by me) materials circulated throughout the term to students, and orally as well. I try to make it easy for everyone who wants to contribute to class discussion (not all students do so want) to get into the flow, and to keep in-class lecturing on my part to a minimum. You might wonder...what other kind of lecturing can there be? Oft times, there is stuff that I feel I should be sharing with the students, but I don't want to curtail a good free-flowing discussion to do so. In such cases, I endeavor to do the sharing via lecture or by e-mail.*

By 2013, MSC was a well-supported educational institution in the area. Some 157 members attended the college's first annual luncheon in June, held at the Taste of Maine restaurant. MSC By-laws required that the annual meeting approve the budget and elect new trustees for the coming year, which it did.

Growth was the watchword. By September 2011, MSC's Fall enrollment reached 381 in twenty-one classes, a record high for the college.<sup>20</sup> In Fall 2013 431 enrollments, in Fall 2015 522 students, and in Fall 2017 749 enrollments. MSC had grown from 275 students in 2010 to 592 students in 2017. Steady growth in enrollments and students brought new challenges. How large did MSC wish to become? Increasing MSC enrollments added additional pressure to our shared facilities with UCBB. MSC needed a more spacious facility. At the same time, UCBB was moving to a new building in Brunswick Landing which did not have space to include MSC. Where were we to go?

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<sup>20</sup> Enrollments and students are different measures. A course enrollment means one student enrolled in one class. A student may enroll in more than one class, so that the number of enrollments normally exceeds the number of students. The result can be confusing.

The Board found the answer in the town of Brunswick, across the Androscoggin River from Topsham in the area known to the Wabenaki natives as Pejepscot. In June 2014, MSC moved to a new home at 10 Tibbets Drive in Brunswick. The college subleased classroom and office space on the second floor from the private Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), which had provided a large number of technical courses suited to the denizens of BNAS. After the Naval Air Station closed its doors in May 2011, SNHU was glad to lease its classroom space to MSC during the day, while continuing to offer a reduced curriculum itself in the evenings.



*SNHU Building, MSC's home 2014-2018*

Necessity was the mother of invention. As an independent operation, MSC had purchased its own desktop and laptop computers, along with a laser printer, Quicken Book licenses, and Anchor Audio Systems for hearing assistance.<sup>21</sup> When classes filled up, a random computer sort would assign classes to those on the waiting list. SNHU classrooms were spacious with good technology. However, the office was cramped, and minimal storage for books and supplies was provided by “Dorothy’s Closet” on the second floor.

**B**runswick and Topsham had a long history of educating students. Bowdoin College was an elite institution in Brunswick founded by Boston Congregationalists and Federalists in 1796, although classes did not begin until 1802, and much of the initial land and leadership came from Topsham across the river. Topsham, a village of Ulster Scots and Presbyterians tasked to defend Brunswick from the native Wabenaki, became a shipbuilding center. Topsham had its own neighborhood schools, opened a Franklin School for the sons of sea captains after the Civil War, and was even considered for the site of the new University of Maine (Topsham lost out to Orono by one committee vote).

In addition, since World War II, the Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS) had offered continuing education programs and courses for the thousands of U.S. and Canadian service men and their families who lived and worked in the area. The main BNAS mission was to search for and track Nazi and then Soviet submarines and bombers off the Maine coast. But it also sought to educate Air Station personnel and their families. Most children enrolled in the Brunswick and Topsham public schools, tuition and fees paid by the U.S. Navy.

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<sup>21</sup> The Davenport Trust Fund in Bath in June 2015 provided \$5,000 to MSC for the laptops, IT hardware and software, the licenses and hearing assistance. See final report of June 15, 2016 to the fund.



The popular Summer and Winter Wisdom lecture series continued to provide community outreach for a broad public audience in June and January. The first Summer Wisdom lectures were given in summer 2010 on the theme of “Maine and the Sea,” featuring Linda Doherty on lighthouses, Jim Millinger (a Master Mariner and licensed captain for Casco Bay Lines) on the decline of fishing; Don Perkins on sustainable fisheries; and Bud Warren of Bath on women at sea. Summer excursions organized by Kelly Watt included the Portland waterfront, the island of Monhegan, and the botanical gardens at Boothbay Harbor. Richard Neiman, a physician, recruited the Daponte string quartet to offer classical music and lectures at the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick. Many audiences for the Wisdom lectures and concerts numbered well over one hundred attendees. They still do. The college also recognized the need for an award that recognized classroom teaching, as well as longtime service to the college generally. The award was named for Bill Brown, one of MSC’s legendary teachers. After receiving some seventy nominations, the curriculum committee chose faculty members Barbara Snapp and John Beaven as the first winners of the award in 2018.



## 5. Expansion and Sustainability.

The story of MSC features the steady expansion of student enrollment and faculty recruitment. It also shows the constant challenges of developing a business plan and maintaining resources to balance the budget and build an endowed reserve fund. Some dreamed of owning a building, others simply wanted to pay the rent. Beyond expansion lay the second goal of sustainability over time.

Administrative responsibilities continued to grow, straining the volunteer resources available. In December 2013, Agnes Beale, recently given the Wheeler/Thompson Award for her longstanding volunteer support of MSC, was appointed a part-time, salaried administrative assistant. There were 427 students that Fall to be supported in the classroom, no small task for a one-person office with volunteers.



*Agnes Beale*

Bruce MacDougal remembers joining the MSC faculty at about this time with the support of his friend Joyce Bessen and teacher Barbara Snapp. He discovered that teaching a new field was itself a learning experience:

*In December 2014, I decided I'd like to explore the possibility of teaching a course on climate science: what is climate, how does it function, why is it changing, and what are the implications for us. Climate science covers many fields: weather, atmosphere, oceans, the poles, geography, and even some geology, plus a lot of basic science. All of these were out of field for me. I'm a retired plastic and hand surgeon. I had an interest in these areas but nowhere near the knowledge needed to teach them. Furthermore,*



*although I'd mentored medical students and residents throughout my career and given a lot of lectures, I had no idea how to structure a course like this nor how to teach it. I didn't even know how to make slides (that's what I still call them even though they're really power-point presentations). Slides are the backbone of any scientific presentation and they have to be good.*

Bruce taught his climate science class, first with Barbara Snapp, then by himself:

*This vignette illustrates what I've come to appreciate about MSC: the camaraderie, collegiality, and dedication of the faculty and board. I've made some good friends and value the privilege of being on the faculty.*

Bruce MacDougal's foray into climate science was one of many explorations of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Maine. Bud Warren grew up on the Kennebec River, wrote about it for fifty years, and shared his knowledge and experience with students in several courses. Jim Millinger had captained vessels for the Casco Bay Lines and gave lectures, courses, and tours of the Portland and Midcoast regions. Dave Wood had once captained the Coast Guard training ship *Eagle* and now taught courses on tall ships and polar exploration.<sup>22</sup> All these courses helped students realize that they were living in area where rising sea level and warming water brought a range of environmental and ecological threats to coastal Maine.



*Dorothy Bell*

A year later, the Wheeler/Thompson Award went to Dorothy Bell, a volunteer supporter and student at MSC since its inception, as well as past president and membership chair. Jack Thompson once said that Dorothy over two decades was the major figure in creating and sustaining the college as an educational operation. The December 2014 board decision to lower the membership age from fifty-five to fifty meant that MSC was continuing to expand in enrollments and operations. Sonia St. Pierre became the part-time bookkeeper and a vital adjunct to the treasurer, who was a board member. The question was whether or not such

continuing expansion was sustainable.



*Sonia St. Pierre,  
bookkeeper*

Volunteers kept materializing. Bob Williams, a Highlands resident, Russian historian, and author of a history of Topsham, now joined the MSC board, edited the newsletter, and chaired the administrative committee. His experience as dean of a University College at Washington University in St. Louis and dean of faculty at Davidson College in North Carolina both reflected his long-time commitment to the liberal arts, continuing education, and teaching adult students. He also filled in to help rescue Bob

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<sup>22</sup> Jim Millinger, Dave Wood and Bob Williams all reside in The Highlands of Topsham and sing together in a barbershop quartet named the Uncalled Four.

Bunselmeyer's 2014 course on World War I<sup>23</sup> along with John Cooper, an American historian, and (guess who!) Jack Thompson, like Bob, another Russian historian.



*Donna Marshall, MSC  
Executive Director*

In March 2016, MSC hired Donna Marshall as administrative assistant, succeeding Agnes Beale. Within a short time, Donna became the central figure in the operations of MSC, mastering the administrative responsibilities, supervising volunteers, preparing budgets, and helping organize registration and fund raising. She also helped produce the newsletter. Her central and vital contributions to MSC were recognized in May 2018, when her position was upgraded to Executive Director and she became an attendee at all board and executive committee meetings, reporting directly to the president. For many MSC members and students, Donna was now the face and heart of MSC operations. She made MSC run smoothly and on time. If she saw things to be done, she did them, sometimes with her husband, Jim. If she could not do them herself, she delegated tasks to others ("other duties as assigned") with a smile.

In June 2016, Stuart Gillespie and his father, the oldest MSC student at age 100,<sup>24</sup> donated an applewood gavel to MSC. Stuart's "Uncle Haz," his father's older brother, had won a famous law case (*Erie v. Tompkins*), and the Erie Railroad presented him with the gavel as a gift. Stuart saved it from the trash. After the gavel's mysterious disappearance, meanderings, and then its reappearance, the gavel provided a decisive contribution to orderly board meetings. Stuart also developed a course on choral singing that attracted some sixty students each semester, lectured on music history, and helped singers develop voice skills (never pronounce an R and when you sing, lift your body "Hearts High!") The MSC Singers became a fixture at Winter Wisdom every January and at the MSC annual luncheon in June. Kelly Watt assisted.

Clare Durst, a board member from The Highlands of Topsham and a world traveler, made a major contribution to MSC's computer operations that would sustain the college for some time. Clare, a graduate of Rice University, had a long career in information technology and administration, mainly at Brown University in Providence, Rhode



<sup>23</sup> Bunselmeyer had to drop his course at the last moment to take care of his ailing mother.

<sup>24</sup> Mr. Gillespie later took a class on Sea Chanties when he was 103.

Island. She soon implemented a comprehensive software package designed for small businesses and nonprofits by Salesforce, the leading computer support company in the nation. Her technology innovations at MSC made registration a user-friendly desktop task for students, managed class lists for faculty, and maintained a data base of members and annual fund donors. Clare volunteered almost daily. She installed Google Chromebooks in classrooms. Her contributions were technical and behind the scenes. They were also essential to the sustainability of MSC.

Fred Cichocki summed up his thoughts on a decade of teaching at MSC in 2017;

*I began presenting classes at Midcoast Senior College in 2007, shortly after moving to Maine to marry my sweetheart Ginny. Although I'd been a college professor nearly my entire professional life, Senior College offered something brand new—a chance to explore ideas and concepts on the “edge,” together with a mature community of likeminded adventurers with no other motivation than the excitement of seeking new horizons and expanding our world views. And, as I write this, I am reminded of the occasions in which we were so enthused over our intellectual journey that we decided to continue it beyond the scheduled eight weeks!*

*Well, over the past ten years what we have explored together has run the gamut from the meaning of existence, faith, reason, and propaganda, crackpot science, and the spirit of place, to the origin of life, biodiversity collapse, the fate of the seas, the ecological basis of economics, global climate change, and the hidden life of forests.*

*While I have occasionally given courses at other Maine senior colleges, I can honestly say that none of our sister institutions can hold a candle to our own MSC. Rest assured that with MSC, the life of the mind is in good hands for many years to come.*

At about the same time, Diana Gaidos, an MSC student, ruminated more generally on the advantages of continuing one's education as an adult student:

*I started college late in life and wondered at first what in the world was I thinking sitting in a classroom again. It was a turning point for me and changed my life and my whole view of myself and what I could accomplish. I noticed something taking classes too, that most of us older students changed so much before the class was completed. We became more sure of ourselves and gained confidence. It was a wonderful thing to see and experience.*

*One more thought: I received my bachelor's degree at age 65 and marched across the stage so proudly. My husband and grandson were in the audience cheering me on, what a thrill! I wanted to finish my degree and be an example to my grandson that we are never too old to learn, explore and realize our dreams.*

As noted earlier, the SNHU building, also occupied by TD Bank, had excellent classrooms, but in 2018 SNHU shut down its Brunswick operations and MSC lost its lease. Again, the college had to seek new facilities. There were no other educational spaces available from which we could sublease space. That meant going to the commercial real estate market where costs were many times higher than what MSC had paid SNHU.

With a new move would come new expenses, especially a significantly higher monthly rent. In April 2018, the MSC board voted to establish a \$35 membership fee, payable annually. It also set a fixed cost of sixty dollars for all courses regardless of the number of weeks per course. The annual luncheon would now carry a modest fee for all participants, ultimately \$10. Fall registration income was about \$17,000, spring income another \$7,000. The board also voted to discontinue its longstanding policy of purchasing books for students, a policy that carried an annual cost to MSC of more than twenty thousand dollars. Even without paying faculty compensation, running a nonprofit college was not cheap.



*Closing the deal on the MSC Brunswick Landing building, 2018.*

MSC kept traveling on. In May 2018, the college completed another move to 29 Burbank Avenue, Brunswick Landing and took a five-year lease on space in a building owned by Tom Wright, retired head of Wright-Ryan Construction Company. The building, formerly a depository for U.S. Navy personnel records, included three suitable classrooms and offices for the executive director and numerous volunteers. There was also a kitchen facility, display cabinets, and space for a free lending library of books contributed by, and available to, faculty and students. SNHU generously donated tables

and chairs from our old classrooms. Stuart Gillespie and his venerable pickup truck again helped coordinate the move. And UCBB at Brunswick Landing which had renamed itself the UMA Brunswick Center while continuing its thirty-year mission of serving students in Midcoast Maine, continued to be a good neighbor as it had since 2000, donating classroom space to MSC on Fridays.

The board realized that despite expansion, a sustainable business plan would require additional income, cost reductions, and a capital campaign. A five-year lease of a Konica Minolta Bizhub C308 copier allowed for more in-house printing and a savings of more than five thousand dollars in annual printing costs.

Sadly, our president Jim Wilkes, a retired school administrator, fisherman, and nature photographer who engineered the shift to new quarters, died shortly after the move. His wife, Nancy, continues her vital role as the gifted piano accompanist of Stu Gillespie's MSC Singers. But Jim's energy, enthusiasm, and devotion to administrative detail are sorely





missed. Doug Bates has capably succeeded Jim as president and continues his legacy.

## 6. Moving Forward: The Future of MSC.

Time again to take stock. In 2020, Maine celebrates two hundred years of statehood. MSC celebrates two decades as a college for adult learners that depends, as it always has, on the generosity of volunteers. The faculty volunteers teach without compensation. The board of directors of MSC volunteer their time and money while overseeing policy and operations. Committees handle the details of public relations, fund raising, curriculum, administration, and technology. Other volunteers help with periodic mailings, registration, and service as class liaisons to assist classroom teachers. Together, MSC volunteers provide essential support for our two paid employees, the Executive Director and the bookkeeper.

The college continues to flourish. Building on the vision of the MSC founders and Governor Angus King's vision of Maine as a "retirement destination," the college enters its third decade as an established independent member of Maine's network of seventeen senior colleges, coordinated by Anne Cardale. MSC pays no faculty salaries and awards no course credits or degrees. It collects student tuition yet requires neither grades nor exams. It evaluates faculty but not students. And the energy of inquiring and curious minds is contagious.

So, what exactly is our strategy? President Doug Bates in 2018 emphasized financial improvement for a growing institution. He visited and canvassed other senior colleges throughout Maine and produced a strategic plan that emphasized tuition income, endowment, cost savings, and financial stability. He encouraged a business plan. But he recognized the continuing core values of MSC as a college for lifelong learners supporting our overall mission and strategy.



*Donna Marshall, Doug Bates, & Jim Wilkes cut the ribbon to open our new "digs" at Brunswick Landing, Fall 2018.*

MSC is, in a way, an extended family of teachers and learners. Jack Thompson, Mark Smith, and Agnes Beale are gone, but Dorothy Bell, Jack Henderson, and Nancy Wheeler can still tell great stories of the old days. Most MSC members are students, faculty, and volunteers. They also may become friends, neighbors, and caregivers. They support each other in many ways beyond the classroom.

The campus remains nomadic. Despite several moves, the college is still centered in the Bath-Brunswick area. Many of its members also come from Harpswell, Phippsburg, and Topsham, all communities of what the Wabenaki called Pejepscot and Sagadahoc. Local retirement communities provide essential satellite classroom facilities, notably The Highlands of Topsham, Thornton Oaks in Brunswick and Sunnybrook, also in Brunswick. UMA Brunswick Center, located at 12 Sewell Street in Brunswick



Landing, almost adjacent to MSC still provides MSC with one classroom, as it has since 2000. Owning a building remains an MSC dream for some. Only a financial angel or a wildly successful capital campaign can make that dream a reality. In the meantime, we pay the rent and watch our pennies.

Computers play an increasing role at the college. Registration is mainly conducted on-line at home from student desktop or laptop computers. Faculty and students communicate by email. Classroom instruction utilizes interactive Whiteboards to view Power Point and other classroom technology; streaming to large-screen TVs is another option. The newsletter is increasingly an on-line publication with printed copies available on demand in the office. The calendar of events and meetings is also on-line. Committees depend on email. The college website receives an increasing number of hits and inquiries. Many of our students and faculty navigate the new world of Facebook, Google, and Twitter with ease.



*MSC class in action.*

The curriculum, now well over twenty courses each term, continues to offer a broad range of liberal arts courses overseen by a curriculum committee, currently co-chaired by Linton Studdiford, an Episcopalian minister and Master Gardener, and Victor Papacosma, a Bowdoin graduate and European historian from Kent State University in Ohio. Fall 2019 courses included Spinoza's Ethics, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, American Diplomacy, Japanese Culture, Artificial Intelligence, Microbes and Cells, the Chemistry and Culture of Food, Symphonic Music, the Craft of Doing History, Willa Cather, Religion and Science, American Literature, and Presidential Leadership.

Some courses are taught more than once (for example, Stuart Gillespie's MSC Singers choral class and multiple offerings on Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor, who summered in Newcastle). Others reflect the historical events of our time (Donald Trump's unexpected 2016 election quickly spawned a series of courses on the U.S. Constitution, law and justice, and limits on the presidency).

Tony Belmont, MSC past president, U.S. naval officer and physician, remembers that course choice can produce the unexpected:

*I hate opera, always have. Can't understand the words and don't understand the plots. Some music seems familiar, but most just noisy patter. I know that many people really enjoy and appreciate opera, and I just don't understand what they see in it.*

*But, as so many others truly relish and delight in it, I wondered what I was missing. So, I took a course on opera. I learned how and why opera developed, what the difference is between opera and a musical, what an aria is and how that differs from a recitative, and that the three aspects that distinguish an opera are the spectacle, the singing, and the grandeur of the music. My eyes were opened to the history of opera, comic opera, grand opera, opera buffa, and the differences between operas of various*

*countries and centuries. I learned about bel canto and the dramatic lives of various luminaries associated with operas. In short, I learned a lot about opera.*

*Well, I still hate opera. I don't appreciate sitting through extended scenes when various characters make unintelligible dialogue broken only when some familiar melody is presented as an aria, but at least I know what to look for. Thanks to Mort Achter and MSC for providing this insight.*

Enrollments continued to increase as well. There were 543 enrollments (by 448 registrants) in 25 courses in spring 2018, for example. But enrollment income needed to be supplemented, if only to pay a higher monthly rent. In 2019, this was accomplished by the introduction of new summer and winter terms of short courses and workshops that attracted more than one hundred new students.

To sustain MSC requires more than tuition income. The annual fund brings in over twenty-five thousand dollars, and the MSC reserve fund is now well over one hundred thousand dollars. But the never-ending search for eager students to interact with experienced faculty goes on. So does the wandering campus. How else to support one of the jewels of Midcoast Maine, a senior college that builds learning, wisdom, friendship, and conversation based on past civilization and present needs and concerns?

Establishing a Facilities Planning Task Force under the leadership of Bill Haggett, former president of Bath Iron Works, will help MSC project its space needs in a long-range strategic context.

Midcoast Senior College is now twenty years old. Its students and faculty are much older. The college virtually began in Portland and settled in the Bath-Brunswick area. MSC remains one of Maine's key resources that serves an aging population and teaches in one of the most beautiful states in the nation. As the U.S. population ages in an era of climate change, nationalism, health care issues, immigration, and cultural diversity, continuing education at places like MSC will make an ever more important contribution to civil conversation, citizenship under the law, and cultural understanding. We all are curious and intentional about learning, because to age in place without continuing our education and serving others is simply inconceivable.

## **Chronology: Midcoast Senior College, 2000-2020.**

- 1995 Terry Foster arrives at USM (University of Southern Maine) as director of the Center for Extended Academic Programs. Rabbi Harry Sky urges USM President Richard Pattenau to initiate academic programs for seniors.
- 1996 Rabbi Sky, reporting to Terry Foster, chairs Advisory Board for a USM senior college.
- 1997 Senior College approved by USM board. Seven classes begin in Fall. Rabbi Sky named senior college Coordinator. Lois Lamdin named to board.
- 1998 Senior College joins Elderhostel Institute Network.
- 1999 Midcoast Senior College organized by David Baty, director of University College Bath/Brunswick, site of the University of Maine, Augusta, with Jack Thompson, Nancy Wheeler, and inspired by Rabbi Harry Sky. MSC is third senior college in Maine after the USM operations in Portland and York County. Building rented at 275 Bath Road by USM, north of Cook's Corner shared with MSC. Administration, registration, and finances handled by the University of Maine, Augusta.
- 2000 Maine enters the new Millennium with a population of 1.275 million, fifteen percent of whom are over age sixty-five. Kali Lightfoot hired as director of USM senior college network with goal of spreading senior colleges across Maine. First MSC board of directors creates first mission statement based on a liberal arts curriculum for students over age fifty-five. First classes emphasize computer basics, art, the Bible in Western music, and Maine history for 84 students. First summer excursions go by bus to Old Fort Western in Augusta, Colonial Pemaquid, and the archaeological dig at Fort St. George, site of the Popham Colony.
- 2001 Bernard Osher establishes the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) to support financially continuing education for older adults at the University of Southern Maine and then elsewhere across the U.S. MSC launches its first Winter Wisdom series of lectures designed for the community, free and open to the public, at Curtis Library in Brunswick. Student enrollment at MSC reaches 286. 9/11 attack on New York City destroys the World Trade Center and shocks the world.
- 2002 Winter Scholars lecture series held at the Patten Free Library in Bath. Board membership is increased to fifteen, supported by a University College director and administrative assistant from the University of Maine. Governor John Baldacci elected to the first of two four-year terms in Maine, following the two terms of Angus King.
- 2003 MSC at 275 Old Bath Road, shared with USM, but now moves classes to 9 Park St., Bath, site of the former Bath Memorial Hospital. MSC logo adopted by the board. Terry Foster receives USM Excellence award.
- 2004 David McKeith edits the first edition of the MSC newsletter and literary magazine, the *Midcoast Inquirer*. A summer reading series at the Patten Free Library in Bath focuses on the Maine wilderness.
- 2005 Terry Foster retires.

- 2007 Rabbi Sky receives the prestigious Catalyst for Change award, then publishes his autobiography *A Rabbi in Maine* and retires to Greensboro, North Carolina.
- 2008 MSC co-sponsors Longfellow Days at the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick.
- 2009 Tenth anniversary MSC celebration at Bath Middle School. Founders Award created to honor MSC founders and pioneers Jack Thompson and Nancy Wheeler.
- 2010 The median age in Maine reaches forty-three, highest in the U.S. MSC Faculty member Bill Brown receives the first Wheeler/Thompson award for extraordinary service to MSC. A December retreat approves a proposal to work toward 501 © (3) Tax Exempt Non-Profit Corporation, in collaboration with the University College Bath/Brunswick.
- 2011 The Brunswick Naval Air Station closes down, significantly reducing the number of U.S. Navy employees, retirees, and students living in the area. First MSC website designed to assist in registration and administration; financial record-keeping begins using QuickBooks. Summer Wisdom lectures focus on the Maine coast and climate change. First on-line course offered. Fall enrollment reaches 391 in 21 classes, the highest to date.
- 2012 Lois Lamdin edits the *Midcoast Inquirer*, Jack Henderson becomes first webmaster and email coordinator. MSC is awarded 501 © (3) tax status as an independent nonprofit corporation capable of receiving tax-deductible charitable donations. A major effort on the part of president Mark Smith and treasurer Nancy Zugehoer produces good results, including a newly-named board of directors and By-Laws.
- 2013 427 enrollments, Agnes Beale hired as part-time administrative assistant. UCBB continues its relocation to Brunswick Landing, renamed as the University of Maine Augusta Brunswick Center.
- 2014 Maine Humanities Council awards MSC a grant of \$500. The Daponte String Quartet agrees to a four-year contract to perform. MSC moves to 10 Tibbets Drive in Brunswick, a modern bank building subleased through Southern New Hampshire University (private) and fitted with excellent classrooms previously used to teach BNAS students and servicemen. Dorothy Bell, a founding member of MSC, receives the Wheeler/Thompson Award. By-laws lower the membership age to fifty.
- 2015 Sonia St. Pierre begins employment as part-time bookkeeper. Nora Bishop receives the Wheeler-Thompson Award. Stuart Gillespie forms the MSC Singers with some sixty members singing together in a class each semester. Davenport Trust Fund of Bath awards MSC \$5,000 for computer upgrades and hearing assistance.
- 2016 Donna Marshall hired as administrative assistant. Bob Williams edits the *Midcoast Inquirer* and serves as chair of the administrative committee. Howard Whitcomb, former chair of the curriculum committee for many years, receives the Wheeler/Thompson Award. Clare Durst oversees a new on-line system for registration, finances, and annual giving developed by Salesforce, the top national computer services firm.
- 2017 Priscilla McKeith retires after twelve years of leadership on the Public Relations and Marketing Committee. Mark Smith receives the Wheeler/Thompson Award for his presidential leadership, coordination of the move from Bath to Brunswick, and engineer of the transition to independent non-profit status. Jim Wilkes succeeds Tony Belmont as MSC president.

- 2018 MSC is now the second largest of Maine's seventeen senior colleges, with more than 700 students taking courses. MSC adopts a new four-week winter term in January with six courses offered. Jack Thompson dies at age ninety. MSC moves to 29 Burbank Avenue, Brunswick Landing, on the site of the former BNAS. Donna Marshall promoted to Executive Director of MSC, reporting to the president. Kelly Watt retires as chair of the special events committee, having spent many years organizing summer excursions and the MSC annual luncheon. The new Bill Brown teaching award goes to Barbara Snapp and John Beaven.
- 2019 Jim Wilkes dies, and Doug Bates succeeds him as MSC president. First four-week Winter Term sponsors six courses. Summer Seminars offered on Maine topics. Maine Maritime Museum excursion on the Kennebec River. 23 per cent of Maine's population of 1.34 million is over age sixty-five. Bowdoin College is ranked fifth nationally among top U.S. liberal arts colleges and continues to host MSC annual luncheons and provide gifted retired faculty for MSC classrooms. Chromebooks placed in classrooms. Facilities Planning Task Force established to explore future MSC space needs and options. Rabbi Harry Sky dies in December.
- 2020 Midcoast Senior College celebrates its twentieth anniversary at its new home on the grounds of Brunswick Landing, formerly the Brunswick Naval Air Station. UCBB continues to operate at 12 Sewell Street, a block or two away under its new name, UMA Brunswick Center



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## **Author's Note:**



**Robert C. Williams**, who lives at *The Highlands of Topsham*, has been a summer resident of Maine since 1938 and moved to the Midcoast area from Lovell, Maine, in 2013. He is a retired Russian historian (Harvard Ph.D., 1966) who has taught at Bates, Davidson and Williams colleges and Washington University in St. Louis. The author of sixteen books, including histories of Topsham and Lovell, he also serves on the board of MSC, edits the *Midcoast Inquirer*, and chairs the administrative committee.

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