

# MAM'S YEAR IN REVIEW

*Adapted from remarks given by MAM President Jessica Routhier at the Maine Archives and Museums Annual Meeting, October 29, 2013, Collins Center for the Arts, University of Maine, Orono*



*Making it all happen: from MAM's Program Committee, Desiree Butterfield-Nagy, Erin Bishop, Gretchen Faulkner, and Ellen Dyer.*

This past October, Maine Archives and Museums was once again back at the University of Maine's Collins Center for the Arts for its Annual Conference. And we were glad to be back for all kinds of reasons, not the least of which were the great staff members and the fantastic space. But it was also really meaningful to be right back where we were in for the previous year's conference, in October 2012, and think about all the places that we have been in between.

In just one year, MAM has led **get-togethers and professional development workshops** in Camden, Searsport, Caribou, Portland, Hinckley, Newport, and Bethel. We've held board meetings in Augusta, Bar Harbor, Bath, Belfast, Brunswick, Camden, and of course, Orono. We've been at the table at a Cultural Tourism Summit in Northport, we accompanied the Maine Department of Transportation to St. Agathe in the St. John River Valley to help establish a new state Scenic Byway, we participated in the Maine Office of Tourism's Long-Range Planning Forum in Portland, and we have also represented MAM on the advisory committees of Experience Maritime Maine, The Maine Curator's Forum, Northeast Document Conservation Center, and Maine's new **Cultural Emergency Resources Coalition** (see p. 4).

MAM has also reached beyond the borders of the state to participate in conversations about the importance of museums and archives at the regional and national level. MAM was in Washington, D.C. in February for **Museum Advocacy Day**, and in Newport, Rhode Island for the **New England Museum Association's Annual Conference**.

We've also connected with the new **Regional Archival Associations Consortium**, an affiliate of the Society of American Archivists and been asked to play a leadership role in "**Museums United**," a new initiative through the American Alliance of Museums and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), seeking to connect museums nationwide through state and regional professional associations.

But we haven't just been reaching out; we've also been looking within. MAM is a membership organization, so to use an analogy that's appropriate for the year of the **Maine Civil War Trail**, MAM is *of* its members, *by* its members, and *for* its members. So we have continued the work of finding out more about who we all are, what we do, why it's important, and how we can help each other. 2013 was the second year of MAM's grant-funded **Maine Cultural Institutions Outreach Project**, or MCIOP, where our goal, ultimately, is to create a comprehensive public database of all collecting institutions in Maine, if for no other reason than to make us aware of each other's existence—though certainly we do envision broader and more practical applications for that database, as well. The project also includes professional development workshops throughout the state, and I know that you know how seriously we've taken that mandate. MCIOP workshops will continue into the spring before the project wraps up in May.

We have also been working with the Maine State Museum on kick-  
*—continued on page 7*

starting a **statewide values-assessment program**. MAM director Erin Bishop designed and printed a self-assessment workbook that was the centerpiece of a session at the annual conference; she also wrote a grant proposal to the IMLS to fund the continuation and implementation of the project. With funding, MAM will be able to distribute the workbook broadly among Maine museums and launch a program in which trained “navigators” can visit your organization for free to walk you through the assessment process.

We also thought a lot about **advocacy** in 2013—a word that means different things to different people, but that for us is all about being loud and proud about what makes you or your organization special, about all the ways you serve your community, and why people should care about that and support it. To that end, MAM wrote and adopted a new **advocacy policy** and simultaneously launched a new **Advocacy section of its website**, including a toolkit with recommendations for easy and low- or no-cost things you can do with and for your organization every month.

And of course, MAM has been planning. 2013 was the last year covered by our existing Long-Range Plan, and so we spent much of the year writing a new one, including a year-long process of gathering feedback from colleagues and stakeholders, whether they're members of MAM or not. From online surveys, to program questionnaires, to a day-long planning workshop, to a special lunch session at the conference, we looked to the full scope of our community to set our goals for the next five years. MAM's **2014-18 Strategic Plan** was approved by the Board of Trustees at its January 13, 2014 meeting.

As part of the planning process, we conducted another **institutional member survey** this year, with our advocacy initiatives in mind. We approached it with the goal of crafting a statewide **Economic Impact Statement** for our industry, with the added bonus that all those who participated were able effectively to gather the necessary information for their own, individualized Economic Impact Statements, which for most organizations was the first one they had ever created. The survey remains open through February (see p. X), and so we'll be reporting on that in more detail in the next MAM newsletter—but for now, we can estimate that Maine's museums and archives: serve more than 31 million visitors and patrons per year, including nearly 180,000 school children; employ some 690 people; benefit from 387,000 volunteer hours; and pump **\$30 million each year into our state economy**. That's a big deal. As a colleague once put it, “This isn't a hobby, you know.” This is an industry. We're for real. We matter.

And listen, if you are one of those organizations who responded, or is planning to respond, and only have zeros to fill up those little blanks, hear this and believe it: you matter, too. Because when somebody goes to your museum, or historical society, or historic property, or archival collection, they're buying lunch somewhere—they're filling up the gas tank somewhere—maybe they're staying overnight—and they're probably stopping at some other cultural destinations along the way. Data confirms that **cultural heritage tourists stay longer, spend more, come back, and bring friends**. And you contribute to that in a real and tangible way, whether your budget is seven figures or none.

Those who know will tell you that **the best and most effective way an individual organization can advocate for itself is to serve its real-life audience**. To make sure that each person who walks through your door or sits down at your table has a meaningful experience, feels valued, and feels like *you* value your mission and collection. If you've got the energy and the means to put together a marketing

plan and go to trade shows and attend all your city council meetings and get involved on the regional and national level, go for it, absolutely. But don't let it sidetrack you from the core of what you're about, what makes you unique. Maine Archives and Museums is here to do some of that big-picture work for you, and for all collecting institutions in Maine, because that's what *we're* about.

To that end, we're pleased to announce our **new mission statement**, which

came out of MAM's long-range planning retreat in September and was voted on and approved by the Board of Trustees in October: *Maine Archives and Museums actively stimulates the flow of knowledge and support among organizations and individuals in Maine who identify, collect, interpret, and/or provide access to materials relating to history, living collections, and culture, in order to strengthen and promote all collecting institutions in Maine.*

So if you've been following along all these years, you know that we really haven't changed what we're all about—we've just turned our mission statement into something that says it better. And for all of us, I think, the message for the coming year, as we talk about re-charging our missions and getting inspired—is to do what you do and do it as well as you possibly can. **You know what you're about, and why you're important—your job is to make sure that everyone who interacts with you knows it as well.** Give them a reason to get to know you, a reason to come back, to tell their friends and colleagues, to write about you on their Facebook page. Make *them* your advocates. •

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