

4-3-1991

## Maine Arts Commission News, April 1991

Maine Arts Commission

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### Recommended Citation

Maine Arts Commission, "Maine Arts Commission News, April 1991" (1991). *Maine Arts Magazine*. Book 16.  
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## **MaineArtsCommission News**

**April 3, 1991**

### **New Format for News?**

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Given the recent tight budget and staff layoffs at the Commission, this issue of the *NEWS* is presented differently than our normal format. In short, this format costs less and the important information it contains can be sent to you more quickly. This format will probably remain for the foreseeable future. Even though our staff, as you will read later in this newsletter, have been rehired, other constraints will cause us to maintain this format for awhile.

### **Current Year Budget News**

After months of deliberation, the Maine State Legislature and the Governor reached agreement on how to resolve a multi-million dollar shortfall in the current year budget which ends June 30, 1991. As you know the State Constitution carries a balanced budget requirement.

The Maine Arts Commission had serious budget problems during this debate because of scheduled cuts as proposed by the Governor's budget and a salary shortfall that had occurred while the Commission was with the Department of Education. The budget cuts basically removed all unspent dollars from the Maine Touring Artist, Artist in Residence and Regional Arts Programs and caused cutbacks in all travel accounts and on an edition of the newsletter. The salary shortfall amounts were not included in the Governor's emergency budget request to the Legislature. Since neither the efforts to rectify the shortfall within Education's budget, nor in the Emergency Budget succeeded, the Commission was left to an appeal directly to the Maine State Legislature.

The results of testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations were that both the minority and majority budget bills they developed carried a recommendation to restore Commission funds entirely, including both salary shortfall and program dollars.

Unfortunately, as the press reports noted, the budget bills were not passed immediately and fifty percent of the Arts Commission staff were temporarily laid-off. Approximately a month and a half later a budget bill was passed that included the restoration of Commission funds. As a result, the staff were recalled to their positions on March 18.

### **The Biennial Budget**

The Legislature has now turned its attention to the biennial budget, a budget which covers the period from July 1, 1991 to June 30, 1993. Early estimates are that shortfalls in state revenues will reach \$930 million.

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To meet that shortfall all agency budgets have been given targeted cuts. The original Maine Arts Commission request for state funding for FY 92 was \$832,869. The target budget presented to the Legislature became \$671,713. The total proposed cut of \$161,156 represents a 19% cut in the overall agency budget. Similarly, the FY 93 target would cut the overall agency budget by 18.7%.

On March 19, Executive Director Alden C. Wilson appeared before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and delivered the following testimony.

*My name is Alden Wilson. I am here today to speak to the biennial budget and its impact on several accounts of the Maine Arts Commission. With me today are the Commission's chair Susan Hawkes and Lai Orenduff, the newly-appointed chair of the Maine Cultural Affairs Council.*

*Before referring to budget details, I want to thank each of you for your support during the supplemental budget negotiations and for the final resolution. Once again you have made a big difference for Maine's cultural life. Once again you have stepped in during a time of need.*

*By way of overview, I would like to comment, in particular, on the Administration and Commission Sponsored programs, which provide staff and financial resources for a variety of outreach programs. The outreach programs provide arts experiences for young people and adults in areas of the state that often lack such opportunities. I think of taking one of America's best dance companies, the Feld Ballet, to Caribou High School.*

*In Maine, we have had remarkable growth in the arts over the past 15-20 years, and the Maine Arts Commission is proud of the part we have played to encourage this growth. For example, in the early 70's, there was no professional nonprofit theater or dance company in the state, and most important, in my view, little support for Maine's traditional cultures and only a handful of locally based community groups which promote arts activities in their communities and schools. Today there are 45 such community groups located in Presque Isle, Ellsworth, Machias, Lewiston, Bethel, Bath, Kezar Falls, to name a few.*

*Collectively, nonprofit cultural organizations have made a significant impact on our Maine economy. These organizations had a \$92 million impact in 1988, up from \$56 million the decade before. In 1988, these groups generated, through their 2,600 full and part-time employees, \$2 million in state and federal taxes. That same year a total of 1.6 million people attended nonprofit arts events. And these impressive numbers do not include the contributions to this state from commercial operations such as movie theaters, book stores, civic centers, and so forth.*

*However, a number of these organizations are in peril. Mountain Arts in Oxford County and Waldo Theater in Waldoboro are two examples of groups which have*

*closed, we hope only temporarily. Many organizations have reached a level of growth where they need more sophisticated financial management and planning, as well, of course, as resources for arts programming. Maine is turning the corner in its cultural life with many organizations coming of age. There are more organizations delivering cultural services and they are more professional and better at what they do.*

*Yet we have not been able to keep pace with helping established organizations improve their situations or helping the numbers of new groups get on their feet. So then the good news is the growth at the local level of a wide variety of cultural activities, but the bad news is that the Commission is not able to assist at the degree to which communities are requesting support.*

*With this overview, we present our comments about the biennial budget which represents a reduction of two staff positions or \$142,462 (\$68,054-FY 92 and \$74,408-FY 93) in the Administration account, and \$127,043 (\$72,782-FY92 and \$54,261-FY 93) in program dollars in the Sponsored Program account. Regarding Administration, the Maine Arts Commission does not need, require, or want a large staff. But we do need a core staff and, in fact, are short-staffed in one program, Percent for Art in Public Buildings. A cut of two positions, or 20% of our general fund staff, would have a severe affect on our ability to manage the programs of the agency. As an example, one of the positions slated to be cut is the secretary/receptionist, the only person to answer the telephone and handle correspondence and routine office matters for the entire staff of 12, 21 Commission members and 70 volunteer advisory panelists.*

*Regarding the Commission Sponsored Programs, a cut of \$127,043 would mean the elimination of a minimum of 40 Artists in Residence, Maine Touring Artists, and Regional Arts grants. Also, in some cases, particularly with the arts in education, reductions in state funds put federal allocations in jeopardy. We have already been criticized by the National Endowment for the Arts for not providing more state resources for our arts in education efforts which, of course, are central to the Commission's goals.*

*We can report that we will be receiving some new federal funds. However, these funds were set aside by Congress to be used for, among other needs, rural arts support, international exchange, and the promotion of cultural and ethnic diversity. These are flow-through funds for communities and they cannot be used to run the office. They don't begin to meet the demand for programs. For example, in the Maine Touring Artists Program, which brings artists to all parts of the state, we could finance only 50% of the requests submitted, and many groups do not apply because they knew funds were tight. This then is the background for the Maine Arts Commission's accounts.*

The Arts Commission testimony was followed by powerful and moving statements from Lai Orenduff, Chair of the Cultural Council, David Cheever of the Maine Community Cultural Alliance, and Richard Silliboy, a traditional artist and a Micmac Native American. All testimony is available at the Commission Office, but Richard Silliboy's bears repeating here.

Testimony of Richard Silliboy, Littleton

*My name is Richard Silliboy, I am a Native American of the Micmac Tribe, and I reside in Littleton, up in Aroostook County.*

*I am here today to speak on behalf of the Native American population in Maine.*

*I have submitted written testimony, and I would also like to speak briefly of the importance of the Maine Arts Commission from the Native American perspective.*

*The Maine Arts Commission has given some of us the opportunity to learn, to revive and to preserve our cultural traditions that have been passed down through the years, traditions that were gradually being lost.*

*The Maine Arts Commission has given some of us the opportunity to learn, and to realize the importance of keeping our heritage and cultural activities alive, so that we may continue to pass them down to our children and grand children. This is very important today due to the high unemployment rate and the alcohol and drug problems among our people.*

*The Maine Arts Commission has played an important role in the past that has given us recognition of our arts and crafts, like the beautiful Micmac exhibit that is now at Bowdoin College, and the recognition it has given us as Native Americans in the state of Maine, recognition that the Micmac people do not have at the Federal level.*

*I feel that the programs that come out of the Maine Arts Commission are very important, not only for Native Americans, but for all the people in the State of Maine that have a cultural and traditional background.*

## **Maine Community Cultural Alliance Formed**

Key to the above discussion on budget is the presence of a powerful new advocate. Early this year, the Maine Community Cultural Alliance became legally incorporated as a state cultural educational organization. As such, it will be a strong advocate for each of the cultural agency budgets and will argue for no cuts for the four cultural agencies. If you would like to know more about this organization and its activities, contact Sue Finn, President of MCCA, at the Maine Art Sponsors Association Office at 626-3277. Executive Committee members for MCCA are as follows: First vice president, Elaine

Albright of Orono and the University of Maine Fogler Library; second vice president Christopher Crosman, director of the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland; Treasurer, Christopher Glass, Camden architect; past Alliance president Stephen J. Podgajny of the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick; and secretary, David Cheever of Augusta. The Board of Directors includes: Deborah Andrews, Yarmouth; Emerson "Tad" Baker, Dyer Library and York Institute Museum, Biddeford; Martha Deprez, Greater Portland Landmarks; Carolyn A. Hecker, Maine Crafts Association, Deer Isle; Jane Hunter, Portland Symphony Orchestra; Tom Johnson, Maine Citizens for Historic Preservation, Bridgton; Sheldon Kaye, Portland Public Library; Diane Kopec, Abbe Museum, Bar Harbor; Reta Shreiber, Bangor Public Library; Joan Fowler Smith, Portland School of Art; and Jeffrey Zimmerman, Fort Western Museum, Augusta.

### **Other Legislation**

**LD #601**, An Act to Provide for Local Control in the Selection of Artists and Writers for Funding was submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education. The bill was submitted by request which means the legislators who introduced the bill did so without necessarily supporting the proposal. The bill would have eliminated the Commission's peer review process and, if passed, would have removed any administrative oversight of a number of Commission programs. At a hearing on Wednesday, March 20 the Arts Commission testified in opposition to the bill. During a March 21 work session the committee recommended that the bill "ought not to pass" and that a letter be sent to the Arts Commission which will call for a meeting of the concerned parties to discuss the issue further.

**LD #492**, An Act to Declare Western Style Square Dancing as the Official State Dance. This bill is scheduled for hearing before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government on April 1 at 1 PM. The Commission testified neither for nor against. After considerable testimony from citizens who favored recognition of Western Style Square Dancing as the official State dance, several other representatives raised questions about the impact of this notoriety on other forms of traditional dance in Maine. On April 3, the Committee held a worksession on LD #492 and Senator Theriault of Fort Kent agreed to the Committee's recommendation of "Leave to Withdraw" (meaning the sponsors of the bill agree to withdraw the bill) and a motion for a Legislative resolve which would recognize traditional dance in Maine by proclaiming a state folk dance day to be held each year during the Legislative session. The language will be developed and presented to the full Legislature for a vote.

**LD #856**, An Act to Increase the Authority of Municipalities to Levy Service Charges on Certain Tax Exempt Property. This bill was heard on March 21 and has had a work session but no recommendation has been forwarded from the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. The bill basically allows municipalities to charge a service fee for municipal services provided to tax exempt properties. The decision on whether or not to tax is left to the municipality; the tax may not exceed 2% of the gross revenues of the organization. On April 2, the committee reported a "Leave to Withdraw" (meaning the sponsors agreed to withdraw the bill) recommendation to the House of Representatives.

**LD #1305**, An Act Concerning State Education Mandate Waivers. The entire topic of the 1984 Education Reform Act and its resulting mandates has become very confusing. In actions to resolve the current year budget deficit, language was introduced that would eliminate the requirement for schools systems to meet mandates (fine arts requirement for example) if the state aid to schools drops below 1990 budget levels. The Attorney General recently issued an opinion stating that the mandate deferral provision enacted by the Legislature as part of the budget bill is not triggered by the current level of funding.

LD #1305 would allow school administrative units to seek exemptions to mandates when they have financial reasons for seeking delay or elimination of mandates. There is considerable discussion surrounding this bill along with related activities to maintain, or eliminate, the mandates.

### **New Initiatives**

The Maine Arts Commission and the New England Foundation for the Arts have both submitted applications to the National Endowment for the Arts that could bring new money to Maine to support arts in underserved communities. In brief, the new program opportunities are designed to do the following as the Congressional language states: "(1) raise the artistic capabilities of developing arts organizations, or (2) stimulate artistic activity and broader public access to the arts in rural, inner city and other underserved areas." The Maine Arts Commission is seeking \$150,000 and the New England Foundation for the Arts is seeking \$300,000 for these purposes.

The Maine Arts Commission has also submitted an Arts in Schools Basic Education Grant (AISBEG) for a three-year period in the amount of \$150,000. This is to continue programs and services provided in partnership with the Department of Education and the Maine Alliance for Arts Education.

The Commission staff have also submitted two Folk Arts applications to the National Endowment for the Arts. A proposal for \$10,200 is designed to study and present the process Native American basketmakers use to make brown ash baskets, from the selection of brown ash trees to basketmaking. A focus of the proposal will be on the tree as a natural and cultural resource as well as the dying traditional art of basketmaking. The second proposal, for \$9,200 is a continuation of the Master Artist/ Apprenticeship Program. In addition, Kathleen Mundell has been assisting SALT Magazine, the Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History and the Maine Maritime Museum with ongoing projects and new applications to National Endowment for the Arts.

Finally, Commission staff are also meeting with representatives of the dance community to begin the planning process for another Dance on Tour project. Applications for this category are due to the National Endowment for the Arts in early May.

### **May Commission Meeting Scheduled**

On May 17, (location to be announced) the Maine Arts Commission will meet to review and vote on Artist in Residence, Special Projects in Arts Education, Institutional Support and Traditional Arts Apprenticeships grant recommendations. The Maine Arts Commission's budget will also be presented for FY 92. More information and specific details will be announced in early May. Please note that all Maine Arts Commission meetings are open to the public and contain time for public comment.

Maine Arts Commission *NEWS* is usually published quarterly by the Maine Arts Commission. Circulation: 3,500. It is mailed without charge to anyone interested in the arts in Maine. For more information contact: The Maine Arts Commission, Station #25, Augusta, ME 04333. Telephone: 207-289-2724.



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