

Liberty Hall



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The Friends of Liberty Hall

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Liberty Hall is an irreplaceable American landmark. It is beautifully located in the small town of Machiasport in rural Washington County, a rugged and unspoiled area of Down East Maine. Built overlooking the site of the first naval battle of the Revolutionary War, Liberty Hall is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Built in 1873, Liberty Hall served as Machiasport's Town Hall and as its cultural and community center for over a hundred years. The building was closed by the town in 2000 because of declining condition and safety hazards. A spirited and highly effective local campaign has, since 2005, raised almost one million dollars to save Liberty Hall. Phases One and Two of a projected three-phase restoration have now been completed. We are urgently seeking funds to complete the project.

Liberty Hall has long inspired all who saw it. A proud symbol of American history and Maine's distinguished architectural past; a fully renovated Liberty Hall promises to become a vital center for the renewal of community life. Its potential as a focus of historical, cultural and civic activity extends further than Machiasport to encompass Washington County and beyond

On the edge of Machias Bay, Liberty Hall forms the centerpiece of a remarkable cluster of buildings, testimony to Machiasport's more prosperous and famous past. No visitor to this relatively little-known Maine peninsula fails to stop to admire it. Just up the hill stands the magnificent Congregational Church, with its Revolutionary cemetery standing guard over the bay. Diagonally opposite Liberty Hall and directly on the shorefront stand the Gates House and the Cooper House, two stately clapboard buildings preserved by the members of the Machiasport Historical Society. Together with a few remaining domestic buildings from the very early nineteenth century, these buildings form all that remains of the once-thriving town center.

The historical reasons to save Liberty Hall begin, of course, with the significance of its site. It stands as the most notable and impressive marker of the 1775 battle in which the rebels of Machias captured the British ship, HMS *Margaretta*. From the water, from the other side of the bay, and as one arrives at the old center of the town (whether ascending from Machias or descending steep Trafton Hill on the road from Bucks Harbor), Andrew Gilson's building offers a sight of extraordinary beauty. Few town halls in the US could be more reflective of the place for which it was built. Embedded amongst grand maples, and set at the narrow point of a pine-ringed bay, it perfectly mirrors the spirit of the place.

In 2005, a group of Machiasport year-round and seasonal residents established the Committee to Save Liberty Hall. Following extensive discussion, the Committee engaged John Turk of ttl-Architects in Portland, a firm specializing in historic preservation, to conduct a full Building Conditions Assessment. The objective was to define the work required to save the building and to draw up a schedule of priorities necessary for its restoration.

In 2006, a three-phase plan for the restoration of Liberty Hall was launched. Phase One was successfully completed in 2007; Phase Two in 2009. Phase Three is currently in the planning and fundraising stages.

Preserving the building's historical integrity has been the highest priority. All restoration work

has been carefully carried out in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Phase I



The 2006 Building Assessment Report prepared by ttl-architects in conjunction with Al Hodson of Resurgence Engineering identified a number of problems that required immediate intervention. In particular, extensive water damage had created both internal and external decay that without swift action would render Liberty Hall beyond the point of repair.

Phase One of the restoration plan was devised to address the urgent repairs needed to stabilize and protect the building.

- Fragile and perilous belvedere brought to ground level for restoration
- New roof, new chimney and flashing added to building
- Sitework (re-grading of rear and sides of building)
- Drip edge installed, new drainage system
- Gutters removed, new historically correct eaves and cornice installed
- Foundation damage corrected and foundation secured
- Bio-hazard treatment (raccoons and raccoon deposits eliminated)

Phase II



Phase Two, conducted by Consigli Construction of Portland, ME., completed the exterior restoration of Liberty Hall. It included:

- Restoration of belvedere tower and return to top of building

- Reconstruction of historic mansard roof on top of belvedere
- Reinstallation original weathervane
- Repair of belvedere base on roof
- Repair and replacement of two-storey windows
- Repair and restoration of decorative exterior trim
- Repair and replacement of clapboards
- Painting of building

The new belvedere tower and mansard have been named the Knowlton Belvedere, in recognition of Warren D. and Judy Knowlton's gift honoring their parents and grandparents.

Phase III

The Campaign to Save Liberty Hall is now working closely with the project architect, John Turk, to draw up plans for the interior restoration of the building. The work of Phase Three will be divided into two stages:

- Renovation of the ground floor to make the space functional and accessible for meetings, community events and for cultural, artistic and educational purposes.
- Restoration of the upper floor, including the 250-seat theater and backstage areas

A prestigious grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation has enabled the architect to draft a site plan and design for a septic system. He is also providing provisional sketches of the building interior that include the proposed location of an elevator, community kitchen, ADA bathroom, meeting rooms and library.

In preparing the architectural design for Phase Three, John Turk will collaborate with the staff of Earle Shettleworth in the office of Maine Historic Preservation Commission to ensure that the original features of Andrew Gilson's building are properly preserved. This will involve the restoration wherever possible of the original decorative plaster and woodwork. Where repair is not possible, replica details will be manufactured and integrated into the building.

The major tasks comprising the work of Phase Three include:

- Installation of well and septic system
- Installation of storm windows
- Demolition and preparation of interior for installation of heating, electrical, plumbing and fire protection systems
- Installation of elevator and handicap ramps
- Restoration of interior plaster and woodwork
- Installation of community kitchen and ADA bathroom
- Restoration of entry hall double staircase
- Re-creation and installation of front doors and steps

