

FORT WESTERN DISPATCH

Old Fort Western



Winter 2009 / 2010

www.oldfortwestern.org

Looking Backward Looking Forward



The time-honored practice of contemplating the 12 months just completed while looking ahead to the new year has a triple meaning for the fort

this time around.

First, we have just completed our 87th year of providing public history services to the residents of and visitors to Maine's capital city. That's a record to be proud of.

Second, we have launched one and are about to launch a second new initiative that will have the fort looking further back to its 17th-century origins and further ahead to its history in the context of the 19th century.

And third, I, Jay Adams, that is, the fort's director, will be thinking over the past 23 years as I prepare to retire at the end of the year, only to begin a new adventure in another field that also interests me deeply.

This issue of the *Dispatch* will attempt to weave these three variations on the year-end theme together into a single reflective web.

The Year 2009 in Review Something Old, Something New



Like all years, 2009 was one of continuity and change. All the familiar program

elements - the Winter program series, pre-scheduled programming, special events such as Maple Syrup Day and the Fourth at the Fort, and summer tours and programs, including our outstanding Apprentice Program - remained in place. All were strengthened in one way or another thanks to the creative imaginations and teaching abilities of our terrific staff. None necessarily reached its potential thanks in part to broad-based National economic woes that saw visitor numbers fall and to a continuing decline in time devoted in Maine schools to the Social Studies that brought student numbers down to levels not seen for 15 years. The good news is that we were not alone in this. The bad news is there is no immediate end to this in sight.

The other good news is that you the Friends of Old Fort Western stepped up once again. Membership renewal rates remained high. Many of you helped out by renewing ahead

of schedule and/or by responding to our year-end appeal. For that we thank you.

Through all of this, the Trustees and



Directors were not content to let things stay as they are. Looking ahead as they always do, they agreed to the construction of a

much improved blacksmith's forge in the South Watchbox, acquired an important 1809 military order signed by Major Samuel Howard at the start of the so-called Malta War, signed a contract for the design of a new website, and with the City's help oversaw the repair of the picket work and the re-shingling of the out-building roofs.



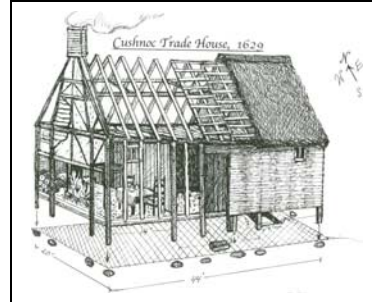
In April, the Trustees also began work on a new long-range plan to guide progress on the mission statement through 2014. A basic outline has been established. Completion of the work will await the arrival of a new director.

Looking Further Back and Further Ahead

Knowing that there are key elements of the fort's and the city's history that fall chronologically before and after what has been the fort's standard interpretive period and understanding that challenging times require bold action, the Director's of the Old Fort Western Fund approved two privately-

funded initiatives designed to capture and hold the public's attention.

The first initiative will result in the



construction of a replica of the 1628 Pilgrim fur trading post at Cushnoc. It was the income from this trading

post that allowed the Pilgrims to discharge the debts they had incurred in coming to the New World. Construction of the replica will permit not only the interpretation of Pilgrim economic activity, but will place that activity within the context of their relations with area Indians at a time when, at least at Cushnoc, Native-American and Euro-American history is about more than people shooting at one another.

The second initiative would have the Directors sign a lease agreement with the City that would allow the privately-funded restoration and eventual



interpretation of the 1870 mill workers house at 25 Bond Street, about three-quarters of a mile north of the fort. If approved, this project will allow a much fuller interpretation of the lives of ordinary and especially newly-arrived French, Irish and other folk than is possible at the fort itself. As an interpretive destination, the Bond Street House would help link the fort to cultural assets on or near Augusta's historic riverfront such as Mill Park, the recently-installed Museum in the Streets sing projects at Canal Street and throughout downtown, a proposed cultural center, and

possibly a restored Colonial Theater - all reached from the fort via the recently re-named Calumet Bridge at Old Fort Western. In short, imagine if you can something called the Museums of Old Fort Western that after so many years help make more of the City's history accessible and relevant to current and future generations.

As of this writing (December 29) City Council has not yet officially heard this proposal. Please watch for further news at www.oldfortwestern.org and on Facebook.

Looking Ahead to 2010

It is too soon to tell what 2010 will look like in terms of programs and opportunities for members and friends. However, it is safe to say that:

A Winter Program Series will take beginning on Sunday, February 14. The details will follow.

Maple Syrup Day is set for March 28.

The fort will open for the summer season on May 29.

The Fourth at the Fort will again be held on July 4th.

The Benedict Arnold Expedition will be remembered on September 18.

A Fall Festival will be held on October 10th.

The second-annual members and friends silent auction will take place on October 23rd.

What new events, opportunities and initiatives will be added to the list remain to be seen. But all should rest assured that it will business as usual all year long.

Looking Still Further Back, and Just a Little Ahead

As I said at the outset, I will be retiring as Director and Curator as of December 31. It has been a great ride.

My first day at work (it seems funny to use the words "I" and "me" in this newsletter but I guess it's ok just this once) on December 1, 1986. At that time, the dream of a restored fort was still two years away, but the plans had been well made. I remember how cold it was that winter as I and the architects marked up a set of measured drawings to indicate exactly what restoration work needed to be done.

How exciting it was to be part of both projects, and later to open the boxes of items that had been ordered to serve as store inventory, military equipment, and household furnishings for the new interpretation. How satisfying when so many Howard family descendants began to donate beloved family possessions that had been at the fort in the 1790s. How fun it was to work with so many talented and dedicated interpreters over the years to design and deliver school and other group programs. It was a continues to be dedication to this kind of programming that is at the heart of doing good public history.

Patti Violette will take my place as acting director on January 1. A search committee will begin its work shortly thereafter. I will take up a new assignment at the Pine Tree State Arboretum, where after having it take second spot for so many years, I will have a chance to let my interest in natural history come to the fore.

Thanks to all who helped make the ride possible. I'll look for you at the Arboretum, and, from time to time, at the fort, too.



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