

The Exhibits

The Museum contains a variety of displays, all relating to Monhegan life. Comprised entirely of objects donated to the Museum, the displays include the following:

- Lobstering and fishing, primary island industries, are illustrated via historical and contemporary equipment, model boats, photographs, charts, and paintings.
- Local history is depicted in a variety of ways. Exhibits relevant to early Indian life, European explorers, early settlers, shipwrecks, and historical island events can be found in several rooms.
- Numerous domestic objects including furniture, dolls, toys, and clothing from Monhegan homes are on display. A complete turn-of-the-century kitchen can also be seen.
- Paintings by members of the important art community that has existed on the island for over 100 years can be seen in most rooms. In addition, a special exhibition of Monhegan art is mounted each summer in the new gallery of the assistant keeper's house.
- Equipment and other objects related to ice cutting are exhibited in an ice house, and fishing gear is displayed in a replica fish house, both on the Museum grounds.



The Museum at the Lighthouse

M O N H E G A N
HISTORICAL & CULTURAL
M U S E U M
A S S O C I A T I O N
Monhegan Island Maine 04852

The Monhegan Museum



photo by Richard Farrell

Lighthouse Hill, Monhegan Island, Maine

Open daily

11:30 to 3:30

July 1 through August 31

12:30 to 2:30

September 1 through September 30

The Monhegan Museum displays a wide variety of exhibits relevant to the natural, social, industrial, cultural, and artistic history of Monhegan. It is the creation of many dedicated volunteers with a commitment to preserving, documenting, and exhibiting materials that convey the unique and appealing life of Monhegan Island. The Museum is housed in the historic Monhegan Light Station.

The Museum's History

In 1822 the U.S. Congress appropriated \$3000 to be used in constructing a lighthouse and keeper's dwelling atop a hill on Monhegan Island. The light, rising 170 feet above the high-tide line, had ten lamps with 16-inch reflectors, a Welsbach mantel fired by sperm oil, and a weight-powered rotary mechanism. Thomas B. Seavey, the first keeper of the light, moved into the keeper's house with his family on July 2, 1824. In the period from 1850 to 1890 the light tower was rebuilt, a kerosene lamp with a second-order Fresnel lens was installed, an assistant keeper's house was constructed, and the keeper's dwelling was renovated and expanded. The light was tended by resident, civilian keepers from 1824 until 1956 when Henley Day vacated the position of Monhegan light keeper. The Coast Guard then tended the light until, in 1959, the lighthouse was automated and powered by an electrical generator at the Fog Signal Station across the harbor on Manana. Because the keeper's house and outbuildings were no longer necessary, the Coast Guard declared them surplus property.

For many years people had dreamed of a Monhegan Museum, and these vacant buildings, themselves historically significant, represented an ideal solution. The Monhegan Associates, founded by Theodore Edison in 1954 to conserve the wildlands of Monhegan, spearheaded the effort to establish the museum. In 1960 the Associates established the first Museum Committee to develop plans for the proposed museum, and at a sealed-bid, public auction, held on June 1, 1962, the Associates purchased the buildings. The Museum Committee organized the extensive renovations of the buildings, which had fallen into considerable disrepair; solicited historical materials; and created the displays.

When donations of materials related to Monhegan's rich and varied history were sought, generous islanders and visitors responded enthusiastically. Donations of photographs, documents, furniture, equipment, Indian artifacts, and memorabilia began to pour in, and continue to do so. Increasingly in recent years the Museum has received paintings and other art works by members of the art colony that has flourished on the island since 1890.

By July 1, 1968, renovation of the main building and preparation of the dis-

plays had progressed to the point that the Museum was able to open to the public on a daily basis for the summer season. The response was positive and enthusiastic, and has continued to be so as the display space has been expanded and the exhibits refined.

The large bell made famous by the Jamie Wyeth painting, "Bronze Age" was cast by Henry N. Hooper & Co. in 1855 and employed as a signal bell by the Manana Fog Signal Station for about 15 years until it was replaced by a steam driven trumpet. The bell was acquired by the Monhegan Associates in 1969 and moved by helicopter to Lighthouse Hill in 1972. It now hangs from its stanchion on a permanent base outside the entrance to the Museum.

In 1970 one outbuilding was renovated to display ice cutting equipment and other materials relevant to the history of ice cutting on Monhegan. The following year another outbuilding was converted into a replica of a Monhegan fish house. In 1974 the first of the special, season-long Monhegan art exhibitions was hung in the gallery space on the second floor of the keeper's house. In 1980 the lighthouse and the Museum buildings were placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

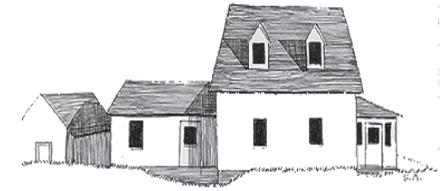
In 1983 the Trustees of the Monhegan Associates, which had been supporting and overseeing the Museum since its inception, decided that the Museum would be better served if there were a separate organization dedicated exclusively to the Museum's well-being. Consequently, a new organization, the Monhegan Historical and Cultural Museum Association, was incorporated in 1984. It was granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service the following year, and during its first six months of operation in 1985, nearly 300 people became members of the organization. The Museum Association now owns and operates the Museum, having received title to the buildings and displays from the Monhegan Associates in 1985. Once the new Museum Association had been established, a major restoration of the buildings was begun, thanks in part to matching grants from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission with funds from the National Park Service.

By the early 1990s, the museum's collections had grown to the point where additional display and storage space was sorely needed. An assistant light keeper's house and accompanying storage shed had been built on the property in 1858 but were torn down in the 1920s when they were no longer needed. To rebuild the assistant keeper's house as an art museum and the storage shed as a storage vault for the collections seemed like a

perfect solution to the space problem. From old photographs and drawings obtained from the Coast Guard files, a design was worked out that duplicated the exterior of the buildings almost exactly as they had been. The interiors were designed to provide optimal display and storage space. Parts of the old foundation were still in place, making it possible to position the new buildings on the spots where the originals had been.

On July 5, 1998, the Monhegan Museum had a gala celebration to open the new replica buildings. The special exhibition in the new art gallery showed the works of Rockwell Kent who first painted on Monhegan in 1905. Each summer since, a different season-long art exhibit has been mounted in the new assistant keeper's house, continuing the tradition that was started in the keeper's house many years ago.

In 1996, the United States Congress passed a bill outlining a plan to divest the federal government of nearly three dozen navigational-aid



properties along the Maine Coast. The Monhegan light tower, which was retained by the Coast Guard when the rest of the property was sold to the Monhegan Associates in 1962 and was converted to solar-voltaic power in 1995, was among the properties slated to be given away to a worthy recipient. In 1997, the Monhegan Museum applied for receipt of the light tower, and in June of 1998, the tower was deeded to the Monhegan Museum Association. The actual light mechanism is still operated by the Coast Guard, but the Monhegan Museum owns the tower and opens it to the public on various occasions each season. In 1999 the covered walkway was rebuilt connecting the light tower to the keeper's house. With this completed, the Monhegan Light Station was recreated as it had been 100 years earlier.

From the time the Museum was conceived, countless people have volunteered their time and skills and have contributed valuable objects related to Monhegan's history. They number well into the hundreds, and while too numerous to mention individually, their support is greatly appreciated. From the beginning, the Museum has relied heavily on donations made at the door by visitors, who number about six thousand per year. Modest dues from Association members now supplement contributions made at the door.

