

## History of Maine Poets Society

Maine Poets Society (MPS) is a statewide literary network associated with notable Maine writers. The Society originated in 1936 with the merger of The Waterville Poets Club and the Dover-Foxcroft Poetry Circle to form the Poetry Fellowship of Maine. In 1993, the Fellowship's name was changed to Maine Poets Society.

Former “constitutions” provide a glimpse of an organization that has evolved yet stayed true to its roots. The mission then as now was to bring working poets together, “promote the interests of poetry in general,” and “create a high standard of creative poetic work in Maine.” In the early days, however, poets had to apply for membership, submitting three poems that would “meet the standards of the Board of Review.” By the mid-1970s, “any person with...resident status...whose work shows promise but does not yet meet the standards of the Fellowship” was “eligible to become an Apprentice Member,” and apply for full membership after one year. Currently, Maine residency is not required for membership. Any writer or lover of poetry is eligible for membership in Maine Poets Society through payment of annual dues and adherence to the Society's objectives.

Early on, the city of Saco, Maine, was the hub of the Fellowship's activities. Poetry by Grace Kerry McNally, a children's librarian at Dyer Library for 35 years, was published by the Fellowship. The late Earlene “Kitty” Ahlquist Chadbourne, an author who wrote about Saco and who served on the board of the Dyer Library, also served as president of Maine Poets Society.

In 1950, the Poetry Fellowship of Maine planned to launch a periodical, to be edited by a Daniel Kelly. It is not known whether that project came to fruition. Over the decades, the organization has published several anthologies of work by member poets:

*Juniper and White Pine* (1962)

*Rock Ledge and Apple Blossoms* (1971)

*Salt Spray and Pine: the Voices of Maine* (duographics, 1978)

*Soundings* (1981)

*Coming Home Twice* (Just Write Books, 2005)

*Maine Taproot* (Encircle Publications, 2010)

Members prominent with the Fellowship (Ina Brown, Mary Palmer, Mary Childs Jane) are listed with the Maine State Library. Records of other Fellowship members are also highlighted in the Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England. Nationally recognized prize-winning writers—such as Richard Foerster, Betsy Sholl, and Jeri Theriault—have each enjoyed affiliation with MPS.

Throughout its history, in an effort to encourage statewide participation, Maine Poets Society has held meetings in different locations, including Portland, Lewiston, Bangor, Waterville, Wilton, Augusta, Hallowell, and Brewer. During the covid pandemic, MPS introduced virtual gatherings on Zoom. These evolved into hybrid meetings, with attendees joining in person and online.

Readings and members-only competitions have been consistently popular activities over the decades. The newsletter, *Stanza*, issued three times a year, publishes the competitions' winning poems along with accounts of activities and publications by members. MPS offers Opportunity Grants to help member poets defray the costs of attending poetry workshops or conferences. It also makes a membership fee waiver available to those facing financial hardship. Traditionally, the Society has annually underwritten the prize for the Youth Competition in Poetry presented by Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance as part of the Maine Literary Awards.

The archives of the Maine Poets Society are housed in the Dyer Library and Museum in Saco, Maine.

### **Noted Past Presidents**

#### Poetry Fellowship of Maine

Sue McKonkey, author of three collections; founder of Star Hill Poetry Day; noted speaker.

Ina Ladd Brown, playwright; author of several volumes of poetry.

Anita Liberty, member for 38 years; teacher of poetry.

Mary Palmer, author of seven books for children.

Mary Childs Jane, author of 16 mystery books for young adults.

Margaret "Maggie" Rockwell, skilled dollmaker and artist; author of four volumes of poetry.

#### Maine Poets Society

Carol Bachofner, former poet laureate of Rockland, Maine; author of eight poetry collections.

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