

\$350,000 to help restore Machiasport landmark

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BDN Staff 06/18/09



Liberty Hall, built in 1873, is being restored in Machiasport. When the building is fully restored, the town plans to use it for community and cultural events.

MACHIASPORT, Maine — A \$350,000 Community Development Block Grant means that the \$1.1 million restoration of the town's historic Liberty Hall can move forward.

The Maine Department of Community and Economic Development made the award in April. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development distributed the money.

"We are really thrilled," First Selectman Michael Murphy said in a press release. "The restoration of Liberty Hall is central to the economic revitalization of Machiasport."

"Liberty Hall is one of Maine's most treasured landmarks," added David Freedberg, who has led the town hall restoration effort in partnership with the town. "We have made incredible progress in restoring Liberty Hall, and this generous grant is key to our continuing success in returning the building to the center of community life," he said in the release.

The CDBG funds will be matched in part by funding from the town, the Belvedere Fund for Historic Preservation of the Maine Community Foundation, the New Century Community Program Historic Preservation Fund, and funds given for the restoration by local contributors to the Friends of Liberty Hall.

"The continuing strong support this project has received from our community and others throughout Maine and across the country is inspiring," Freedberg said.

The building, which overlooks Machias Bay, was built in 1873. Machiasport was prospering, large schooners were tied up at its quays, cargoes of lumber and fish were loaded and unloaded, and the Whitneyville-Machiasport railway also had its terminus there.

At the time, the goal of the townspeople was to create a space for town meetings and cultural and civic affairs. "The building was built to look like a temple, to symbolize the importance of cultural and civic life," Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, said in an earlier news story.

Several years ago, the building was nominated for inclusion in the preservation commission's list of Maine's Most Endangered Historic Properties.

For many years, Liberty Hall was the center of the town's social activity. There were town meetings, vaudeville shows, political rallies, roller-skating, basketball games, silent movies, and community suppers and festivals.

Liberty Hall is being restored in a public-private partnership by the Committee to Save Liberty Hall.

The first phase, completed in 2007, of the three-phase project included a new roof; new carved eaves trim fashioned to duplicate the old trim, and a new drainage system, among other improvements.

Also that year, the ornately carved belvedere tower was removed from the building's top and hoisted by crane to ground level.

The CBDG funding will be used to complete the second phase of the restoration, which will include restoring the belvedere tower; removing and repairing damaged clapboards; removing, repairing and reinstalling decorative wood trim; painting and restoring windows; repairing and restoring the original doorways; and exterior painting of the structure's wood surfaces, the release said.

Phase two work will begin this summer, and will be overseen by TTL-Architects, a Portland firm specializing in historic preservation. The firm has worked with the town and the Committee to Save Liberty Hall since 2006, when it completed a building conditions assessment of the historic structure to map out a three-part restoration plan.

Photographs of the removal of the tower may be seen on the Liberty Hall Web site at www.libertyhallmaine.org. As the restoration work gets under way this summer, photographs charting the building's changing facade will be posted on the Web site.

Last year, residents of Machiasport held a townwide celebration of the beloved community landmark's 135th anniversary with several special gatherings, an open house, a student art contest and exhibition, and a raffle.

Contributions for the restoration of Liberty Hall may be sent to: Friends of Liberty Hall, P.O. Box 22, Machiasport 04655. Requests for a publication describing the history of Liberty Hall and plans for its restoration may be sent to the same address, or obtained by calling the Machiasport Town Offices at 255-4516.