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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sheri Leahan, director, Washburn-Norlands Living History Center, 290 Norlands Road, Livermore, ME 04253 | Phone: 207-897-4366 | Email: norlands@norlands.org | www.NORLANDS.org

Steeple Restoration Underway at Norlands

Livermore, Maine – When people travel North on Norlands Road, they are oftentimes surprised to see a lovely steeple rise above the landscape on this rural road in Livermore. It is the first clue that something special is about to happen. That “something special” is witnessing a place where the past lives on in a setting virtually unchanged since the 1800s and a time when the remarkable Washburn family called the place home.



These days, those passing by now see the oldest building at Washburn-Norlands Living History Center (Norlands) encased in modern-day steel scaffolding – a sure sign that a remarkable transformation is about to take place.

Norlands, now a museum offering an authentic view of 19th-century life in rural Maine, is pleased to announce that a full restoration of the meeting house steeple and bell tower has begun. The restoration includes strengthening the framing with new posts, building and installing a new bell wheel, and repairing or replacing the upper and lower railings, decorative lattice work, clapboards and other deteriorating woodwork. The weather has not been kind to the structure over the past decade. The flashing will be repaired where it meets the roofline. The entire steeple, from the roofline up, will be scraped, sanded, primed, caulked and painted. When finished, it will be more structurally sound and weather tight. It will shine bright once again – harkening back 1828 when Israel Washburn Sr. and his neighbor, Otis Pray, raised money to build the church. The work is expected to be completed in October.

Norlands has been able to start the restoration, thanks to recent grant funding awarded to the Center. The Maine Steeples Fund, a component fund of the Maine Community Foundation, awarded a \$60,000 matching grant. Norlands is halfway to meeting the match. Earlier this year, the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) donated \$10,000 to the preservation project. This grant funding was made possible through the sponsorship of Mary Dillingham-Burnt Meadow Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, based in Lewiston, Maine. To date, three individual donors have given a total of \$25,000. This project, like most major restoration projects, is not inexpensive and will cost upwards of \$136,000. Norlands is seeking cash donations and gifts-in-kind to finish meeting the match and the expense of the project.



“The steeple is a beacon that contributes to the quality of place at Norlands and in the greater Livermore community. To think that more than a thousand people

attended the dedication of the meeting house in 1829 and we are seeing the same view as the Washburns enjoyed is just incredible. We are doing everything we can to preserve the structure”, commented Harry Simon, president of the Board of Trustees.

Sheri Leahan, Norlands’ director, remarked “We are thrilled to have the support of the DAR, an organization that supports historic preservation and education, as well as the Maine Steeples Fund, a fund that supports historically and culturally significant buildings. Both funding opportunities fit within our mission. We’re so grateful that they have included us among the many organizations they champion.”

For more information about Norlands and the Steeple Preservation Project, please contact Harry Simon, President of the Board of Trustees, at harry.simon@norlands.org. **Community members interested in donating** to this project can do so securely online via Norlands’ website – www.norlands.org or by calling 207-897-4366. Contributions of all sizes make a difference.

ABOUT THE MEETING HOUSE



Built in 1828, the meeting house is the oldest building at Norlands and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It was the first church in Livermore to have a steeple. The spire is 105 high. Israel Washburn, Sr., and his neighbor, Otis Pray, donated the land and raised money by selling pews. The church is a Federal Style meeting house with distinctive Victorian changes, first designed by Martin Cushing, a prominent architect and builder of the region. More than a thousand people attended the dedication service on June 18, 1829. The church remained in regular use until 1869 when a new church was built in the new population center of Livermore Falls. The Norlands’ church continued to be used for summer services. In 1872, Israel Washburn hired George Harding to remodel the church. Harding was one of Maine’s most prominent architects. The singers’ balcony was eliminated, new windows installed, and new interior trim completed. The high pulpit was removed and a front platform installed. Another significant change was the frescoes and decorative trompe d’oeil (painting to fool the eye) painted on the plaster walls and ceiling. Artist Valentine L. Keiler was active in Portland, Maine, between 1869 and 1873. The Washburns were pleased with his work, writing in their family journal “Keiler the fresco man went home today. The Church looks finely.” (October 15, 1873).

Today, the meeting house remains a fascinating combination of a late Federal Style church, with early Gothic Revival details and decorative overlay of Victorian elements. While summer services stopped sometime in the early 20th century, the meeting house is used today to explore the history of rural Maine life, religion, and the Washburn family. Programs, and sometimes historical church services, take place in the building during special events. The meeting house is also rented for wedding ceremonies and other special functions.

NORLANDS’ CONNECTION TO THE DAR

Norlands is the ancestral home of Israel Washburn and Martha “Patty” Benjamin, whose 10 children became prominent in national and international political and business affairs during the 1800s. No other American family has produced an equivalent level of political leadership in a single generation than that of the Washburns from Livermore, Maine. Patty Benjamin (1782-1861) was the daughter of Samuel Benjamin, a lieutenant during the American Revolutionary War. In 1999, the DAR honored Norlands’ founder, Ethel “Billie” Gammon, with a DAR History Award. The award was made to recognize Billie’s original and significant contribution to the understanding and promotion of American history. The Mary Dillingham – Burnt Meadow Chapter nominated Billie for the award and presented her with a medal at the state DAR fall conference in Waterville on September 11, 1999.



ABOUT DAR

The DAR grants program was started in 2010. Funding is awarded to support projects in local communities which promote the organization's mission areas of historic preservation, education and patriotism. The DAR receives hundreds of grants applications each year, making competition high for the funding through the non-profit organization. Interested groups must be sponsored by a local DAR chapter, submit a copy of their public charity 501(c)(3) IRS documentation, and include a narrative describing the need and urgency of the project as well as planned activities and benefits to the community which will result from the grant. The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution was founded in 1890 to promote patriotism, preserve American history, and support better education for our nation's children. Its members are descended from patriots who won American independence during the Revolutionary War. With 178,000 members in approximately 3,000 chapters worldwide, DAR is one of the world's largest and most active service organizations. To learn more about the work of today's DAR, visit www.DAR.org. For more about applying for a Special Projects Grant from DAR, visit www.dar.org/grants.