

attendance up," Harris said.

In some cases, Seymour said paranormal programs held at the fort have helped to start some pop-culture trends like the widespread fascination with ghosts and extraterrestrial life, evidenced by shows that now routinely air on the SyFy and History channels.

"When we were first doing it, it wasn't being shown on the History Channel," said Seymour. These days, the fort is the regular stopping ground of East Coast Ghost Trackers, a local group that donates its time and offers guided ghost tours for \$10 per participant, all in the name of supporting the fort. This year, Seymour said diehard ghost hunters will have the chance to join the cast of the SyFy Channel's Ghost Hunters, thanks to the help of a special event company out of Massachusetts.

Weddings, company parties, family reunions and other gatherings are also welcome at the fort. "We've already got four weddings booked for this year," said Seymour.

FOFK also plans to continue planting educational gardens all around the grounds, which Seymour said have produced potatoes, tomatoes and gourds, just to name a few items.

And with the new lease agreement in place, Seymour said he hopes it will allow FOFK more flexibility in terms of responding to requests from various local groups to use the site for a wide range of purposes. Seymour also hopes to have the fort open for next year's spring school vacation, something he said he'd like to do annually.

"We'll still be operating within the rules, but we hope to be able to respond a little more quickly to opportunities that present themselves," he said.

Now, Seymour said FOFK will consider enhancements such as additional picnic tables, benches and barbecue grills, and the group is now in negotiations with MDOT to increase the amount of time the state illuminates the neighboring Penobscot Narrows Bridge.

"Now, the bridge is illuminated from July until Labor Day," said Seymour.

"It's an \$85 million bridge, why do we want it in the dark?"

FOFK wants the lights to come on for the first day of summer in June and remain illuminated through Halloween to coincide with the park's season. Tuesday morning, MDOT spokesman Ted Talbot said the department would keep the bridge lights on for the additional time because FOFK agreed to pay the state the extra \$500 cost of doing so.

At the end of the day, though, Seymour said the aim of FOFK is, and has always been, the continued restoration and preservation of the site. "The board is fully aware of how important Fort Knox is to the local community and the state. People here have been coming to the fort for generations," he said. "We take our new responsibility very, very seriously and we will continue to care for the fort as we always have."

Reporter Tanya Mitchell can be reached at 338-3333 or at [tmitchell@villagesoup.com](mailto:tmitchell@villagesoup.com).



*Pirate Day always draws a crowd to the Fort. The "Must Roos" pirate ship fires off a volley at the Fort, in 2011, during Pirate Day.*

Bucksport, ME 04416  
P.O. Box 456  
America's First Fort Knox

*Shop local, Maine*

Friends of Fort Knox  
Fort Knox Child Observatory

Non Profit Org  
US Postage Paid  
Permit 46  
Bangor ME

# FORT KNOX TIMES

[fortknox.maineGuide.com](http://fortknox.maineGuide.com)

Spring 2012

## Fort Knox becomes first privatized state park

By Tanya Mitchell | Apr 17, 2012 | Belfast Republican Journal

Prospect - Fort Knox Executive Director Leon Seymour likens a lease agreement between the nonprofit group Friends of Fort Knox and the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands to those that commonly exist between a tenant and a landlord.



*Maine Department of Conservation Commissioner, William Beardsley, signs lease agreement at FFK Board meeting, in April 2012.*

"Our view is that the State Department of Conservation Bureau of Parks and Lands still has the ultimate responsibility to take care of this property," said Seymour Monday, April 16.

For the last several years, Seymour said, FOFK has honored a contract with the bureau that calls for the local organization to take on tasks the state typically handles at other state parks. Those tasks have included fee collection, providing interpretive tours, staffing the gift shop, completing the bookkeeping, tracking park attendance, conducting special events, handling all marketing and undertaking restoration projects.

"Now what we'll be doing is tending the grounds and insuring that all state park rules are adhered to," said Seymour.

As is the case with a tenant-landlord arrangement, the state still retains ownership of the property and would be responsible for any major needs at the historic site. "We will continue to work in partnership with them on various projects and we will actively seek their participation," Seymour said.

### THE BACK-STORY

While FOFK has taken on more of the day-to-day operations at the fort in recent years, Seymour said the lease agreement was not something that FOFK actively pursued. "It began with a conversation with Representative Michael Celli," said Seymour. Celli, R-Brewer, who formerly served as the chairman of the FOFK Board of Directors, had previously submitted a bill aimed at transferring management of the park over to FOFK, but the Legislature rejected that bill in 2009.

"In the late fall of 2010 there was some discussion with the top representatives in the incoming administration about [Celli's] desire to do this again," said Seymour.

Seymour and members of the FOFK Board continued discussions with bureau officials about the possibilities for additional management responsibilities, and those talks continued through all of 2011. The FOFK board formally voted to accept the lease agreement April 3, and officials with DOC and the bureau have since signed the document as well. The term of the lease, according to the agreement, is from Sunday, April 15, 2012, and will remain in effect until Dec. 31, 2015.

Bureau Director Will Harris said the agreement does no more than add a couple more layers to the responsibilities FOFK has already taken over in recent years.

"The Friends have already taken over a lot of the work there; the collection of admission fees, giving tours of the fort, running the gift shop, as well as raising money for the fort," said Harris.

The yearlong discussions between FOFK and the bureau, said Harris, helped the parties arrive at the terms of the lease agreement that took effect Sunday. "I think this is the best we can do for both sides."

### THE FIRST OF ITS KIND

While the agreement has made Fort Knox State Park and Historic Site the first

*(continued on page 2)*

## Friends' and Parks Bureau Dedicate Reopening of Fort Powder Magazine

A space dedicated to providing the explosive power for massive cannons which once ringed the Fort Knox State Historic site, was reopened to the public, Saturday, May 12th. In a dedication ceremony marking the reopening of a key powder magazine for public viewing, Friends' of Fort Knox Board Chair, Carol Weston and Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands Director, Will Harris, cut a red ribbon marking the occasion. The Friends funded the restoration project that cost in excess of \$28,000 and was completed earlier this year. A State parks official noted that the powder magazine had been closed to the public for fifty years due to safety concerns.



*Powder Magazine before restoration*



*Powder magazine completed with interpretive materials*

The restoration project involved the removal of decayed wood throughout the magazine and reconstruction. An original wood wall, from original construction in the mid-1860s, was able to be retained during the restoration project. Electricity was brought into the powder magazine to illuminate it for public viewing.

Interpretive materials line the restored powder magazine and include replica gunpowder barrels, ammunition boxes, cannon balls, before and after project photos and interpretive plaques. Maine Historic Site Specialist, Tom Desjardin, was responsible for the development of the interpretive plaques for the powder magazine.

The powder magazine would have stored gunpowder for the massive Rodman cannons, 24-pound flank howitzer cannons and rifles. Soldiers would have had to be very careful when entering the magazine to ensure an errant spark from a belt buckle or shoes did not ignite the powder. Ordinance manuals from the period had exacting standards that were to be employed to prevent gunpowder explosions.

The Fort Knox State Historic site and Penobscot Narrows Observatory are open each day, starting at 9 AM, up to and including Halloween. The Friends of Fort Knox sponsor numerous special events throughout the season and a list of the happenings may be found on their web site [fortknox.maineGuide.com](http://fortknox.maineGuide.com)

The mission of the Friends of Fort Knox is to preserve the Fort and enhance its educational, cultural and economic value for the people of Maine. The Friends manage Fort Knox on behalf of the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, who own the site for the people of Maine.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Fort Knox becomes first privatized Park
- 1 Powder Magazine Restoration
- 2 Building a Local Attraction

- 3 Membership Form - Fort Knox Needs Friends
- 4 Schedule of Events 2012
- 5 ANNUAL REPORT 2011



(continued from page 1)

privatized state park in Maine, Seymour said it's not the first time the state has turned property over to other groups and entities.

"The Friends of Montpelier were given the Knox Mansion," said Seymour of the organization charged with operating the General Henry Knox Museum in Thomaston.

Another example, said Seymour, is the management of Lake George Regional Park in Skowhegan by the Lake George Corporation. In that case, Land For Maine's Future and DOC provided the funding to purchase the land for the day-use park, according to the LGRP website, and the state-owned land is leased through an inter-local agreement that includes the towns of Skowhegan and Canaan.

In Richmond, Seymour said, the state turned over the duties of overseeing the public's recreational use of Peacock Beach State Park to the host town. According to the bureau's website, the town of Richmond took on that responsibility in May 2010. Harris said in the case of Peacock Beach, the state employed two people to help operate a park that was largely used by residents of the town.

Under the arrangement with the town, Harris said the local recreation department took over the day-to-day duties. The deal the bureau forged with FOFK, said Harris, differs due to its size and scope. "This is a bigger operation that is much more publicly used," noted Harris.

Another difference with the arrangement between the bureau and FOFK, said Seymour, is that FOFK is a nonprofit organization. That said, Seymour and Harris both stated there are no intentions on the part of FOFK to change any of the existing rules or fee structures. And since FOFK has done so much to make structural improvements to the fort and enhance the educational value for its visitors over the last two decades, Harris said the bureau was willing to make an exception when entering into the agreement.

"That's why we thought this might be something worth taking a chance on," said Harris. "Normally we would not be leasing out state parks. This is a unique situation involving a private group."

#### A WORKING ARRANGEMENT

An upside to the lease agreement, Harris said, is no state staff will lose their jobs as a result of its existence. Tom Moore, who Harris said served as the chief operations manager at the fort on the state payroll last year, will return to serve as the park's operation manager for FOFK this season, and Seymour said another staffer will be hired to help Moore. Since the agreement was being discussed through the 2011 season, Harris said all staff hired last season was placed on the payroll in an acting capacity. One of the state employees who worked at Fort Knox last season has since been promoted to serve as manager of another state park, and another was reassigned to fill a position at a different state park.

Overall, Seymour said the site will employ between 16 and 18 part-time staff in addition to himself and a part-time seasonal administrative assistant. And aside from keeping local people working, there is an additional positive that Seymour said would make life easier for the park staff, and by extension, visitors.

"The beauty of this is, even though we worked very well with the local staff here, is now we'll be able to integrate all staff functions," said Seymour. "There's going to be a lot of cross-training."

That means if an employee who normally mans the gift shop is out sick for a day or two, all other park staffers will have the training they need to step into that role. The same goes for the staff at the entrance gate, the visitor's center and the Penobscot Narrows Bridge Observatory, an attraction that is under the ownership of the Maine Department of Transportation but uses park staff for its every day operations.

To that end, Seymour said the bureau has done all it can to make the training go as smoothly as possible. "The bureau has been extremely helpful putting together information about the day-to-day operations at the fort," Seymour said.

Under the terms of the lease, FOFK will now be able to keep 85 percent of all gross admissions revenue aside from season passes. Each season pass admission that exceeds 10 percent of the total annual admissions will return \$3 to the state. That differs from what has been the case in past years, Harris said. FOFK formerly split admissions income with the bureau, 50-50, with FOFK keeping its share for continued improvements to the fort and the bureau's share going into the state's general fund. "That percentage increase will help the Friends cover paying for staff for the maintenance operations," said Harris.

Under the new arrangement, Harris said the state could save up to \$40,000 this season, a figure that depends on 2012 park attendance. But with the mild weather already showing up in the Pine Tree State, Harris hopes visitor numbers - which last

season totaled about 69,000 - will be on the rise.

"We're hoping for at least that many this year," said Harris.

#### THE FORT, IN THE FUTURE

Special events like Fright at the Fort, the annual Medieval Tournaments, the Paranormal and Psychic Faire and Pirate Days will continue at the historic site, but Seymour said locals should expect to see some diversity in the programs each year. "We're doing a tribute to Elton John concert here in July," said Seymour.

"Some people say some events that have been held here seem inappropriate, but we'll have to do what's popular... These kinds of special events attract a diverse group of people, and you just can't do the same thing weekend after weekend."

Harris said the bureau also sees the value of keeping the fort experience fresh, whether someone has visited once or 100 times.

"We've encouraged the Friends to talk a lot about continuing to do things like re-enactments and other activities to help keep the interest up, and keep the

(continued on page 6)

#### Building a local attraction, and a partnership

FOFK was officially formed in 1991 with the goal of addressing needs at the aging fort, which at that time had reached critical condition. During his interview with The Journal Monday, Seymour looked back at all the local organization has done since then to reopen portions of the structure that had been closed to the public for years.

In 1995, the group worked with the bureau to come up with a three-phase action plan to complete roof repairs within a two-year timeframe, and by 1996, FOFK had played a major role in the passage of a \$1 million bond to help cover the costs of the repairs. FOFK raised \$314,759 in private donations to support the project, according to the timeline posted on the Fort Knox website.

In 1997, FOFK opened the site's first gift shop, and in 1998, the organization worked with the bureau to develop plans for what is now the visitor center, a structure that once served as the fort's torpedo shed. That project alone, Seymour said, cost nearly \$1 million to complete.

In 1999, FOFK hired Seymour as the first full time executive director, the same year the work began on the visitor center. In 2000, a website dedicated to the happenings at the historic site, as well as its lengthy history, went live.

Turning into the new century, FOFK did anything but lose momentum. In June 2000, the group sponsored a season-long series of special events, the pre-cursor for the modern favorites such as Fright at the Fort, which Seymour said drew about 9,000 people last October.

By March 2001, FOFK and the bureau signed on to a formal partnership agreement. In 2001, the new gift shop was opened, as was the visitor center, which was immediately filled with interpretive panels containing dates and facts about the fort's history as well as artifacts that were found on the grounds over the years. In 2002, the visitor center grew to include a multimedia system to be used for educational programs.

April 2003 brought the first management contract between FOFK and the bureau, which Seymour said included the collection of gate fees on behalf of the state. In the summer of 2003, FOFK added interpretive panels throughout the fort grounds as a way to offer self-guided tours, and in September of that same year, volunteers completed the re-pointing work at the Battery B hotshot furnace.

In 2004, the long-closed officer's quarters were reopened to the public with the help of FOFK. As the years went on, Seymour said, FOFK pressed on with its mission, completing the restoration of the Battery A powder magazine roof in 2005, illuminating the exterior of the fort in 2006 and restored four 24-pound flank howitzer cannons and carriages that are original to the fort. A masonry program was established to continue repairing the brickwork at the site, which resulted in the reopening of the enlisted men's quarters in 2008. That part of the fort had been closed for the previous 20 years due to safety concerns. FOFK went on to rebuild a nearly collapsed wall at Battery B and last summer, the organization launched plans for the restoration of the northern interior fort powder magazine, which is set to reopen next month.

"That really represents the last closed piece of the fort," Seymour said.

Reporter Tanya Mitchell can be reached at 338-3333 or at ttmitchell@villagesoup.com.

## FRIENDS OF FORT KNOX • ANNUAL REPORT • 2011

### OVERVIEW

The following is an annual report for the Friends of Fort Knox (FFK) reflecting the organization's activities in 2011. This report will highlight the restoration of a powder magazine and an up tick in two of four income sectors. The largest income increase was registered in our gate income percentage. The Bureau of Parks and Lands reverted back to our original Fort Knox contract gate split at 50% (all observatory fees go directly to the Maine Department of Transportation).

Overall FFK gross revenue was down 12.4% for 2011.

The Friends of Fort Knox Board of Directors and staff continued to work hard to contain expenses, work with community groups, maximize resources, diversify income streams and complete projects at the Fort. The success of the organization would not have been possible without the outstanding cooperation of our partners, the Bureau of Parks and Lands, and especially park manager Mike Wilusz.

At the end of 2011, all FFK combined available unrestricted funds were \$147,861; in addition, a total of \$31,063 was restricted for restoration projects.

The FFK partnership with the Bureau of Parks and Lands continued to involve contracted management services. FFK staff worked the fee collection booth, provided interpretive tours for school children and visitors, traffic/parking control and provided staff for the Penobscot Narrows Observatory. In addition, FFK provided bookkeeping, marketing and special event management services for BPL.

The total operational season visitor attendance at Fort Knox and the Penobscot Narrows Observatory was 70,420, during 2011. Attendance totals were down 13% from the previous year. Adding in Friends' sponsored special events such as Fright at the Fort boosted overall attendance to 80,784. Interesting Fort/Observatory attendance statistics for 2011 are bulleted below:

- Over all exempt use (non paying admission) was down 17%. Exempt use includes Maine senior citizens; children under age 5, school groups, social service programs and season pass holders.
- Non-resident adult visitors were up 3% for the observatory while non-resident seniors dropped 2%.
- Observatory attendance was down 17% over 2011.
- Exempt school student visitation decreased by 17%.
- Special event visitor attendance increased by 5%.

Information in the report will be contained under general headings listed below.

### RESTORATION/PRESERVATION

This year's major project involved the restoration of the northernmost interior Fort powder magazine.

The magazine, which has been closed to the public for decades, required extensive wood replacement and is being prepared for an educational exhibit. Unfortunately, due to the pervasive wood rot throughout the powder magazine, we were only able to retain one original wood wall.

The powder magazine has been illuminated and displays replica gunpowder barrels that would have been stored there during the 1860s. An official dedication ceremony for the new exhibit will take place this spring when the Fort reopens.

### VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a crucial component to Friends of Fort Knox activities. A breakout in the number of volunteer hours for 2011 is listed below:

#### Estimated Volunteer Hours 2011

- FFK Board and Committees: 512 hours
- FFK Gift Shop Volunteers: 640 hours
- FFK Tour Guide: 420
- FFK sponsored special event volunteers includes Park Day, Scottish Tattoo, 20th Maine, SCA, Fright at Fort: 2,800 hours

#### Total estimated Fort volunteer hours documented by the Friends:

4,372 and 303 volunteers.

### VISITOR SERVICES

**Interpretive Tours**- Another bright spot in this year's annual report are the interpretive tours provided by Friends' staff during 2011.

- # of school group tours - 30 - 1,102 students
- # of general public tours - 304 - 1,957
- # of non school group tours - 36 - 959

**Total # of tours - 370**

**Total # of individuals receiving a tour -4,018**

**Gate Staffing**- Friends of Fort Knox personnel greeted visitors throughout the operating season, providing guidance and collecting admission fees. Gate personnel provided services seven days a week, 8 hours a day for the operating season (9 hours a day July/August).

**Observatory Staffing**- Beginning May 1, 2011, FFK provided two staff people, seven days a week, at 8.50 hours a day (9.5 hours July/August), to operate the observatory. FFK staff was trained by BPL personnel in CPR, first aid, emergency evacuation procedures and in the use of a defibrillator. Staff performed exceptionally during several emergency evacuations of the observatory due to elevator malfunctions.

**Special Events** - Friends sponsored special events continued to please visitors with a variety of entertainment and educational demonstrations throughout the season. Notable special events included a Park Day cleanup, Maine Foster Care Family Day, Paranormal/Psychic Faire, Scottish Tattoo, Pirate Day, Medieval Tournament, 20th Maine Company 'B' Civil War reenactment, cannon firings, Civil War medical demonstration, Shakespeare, Fright at the Fort and a granite cutting demonstration.

This year's Fright at the Fort was particularly successful, attracting 9,134 guests over four-nights of Fright. In addition, the Fort is increasingly becoming a destination for wedding ceremonies and other group functions.

Building on the notoriety that the Fort garnered in the SyFy Channel's Ghost Hunter TV program and with the volunteer help of a local paranormal investigation group, The East Coast Ghost Trackers, ghost tours were offered on four different occasions. These tours, which were held during early evening hours, provided a special event income boost.

### PROMOTION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Friends of Fort Knox distributed over 8,000 newsletters to visitors to Fort Knox. The newsletters contained information on the history of the Fort, Friends' restoration priorities and event schedules. Ongoing radio and television ads encouraging visitors to visit Fort Knox and the observatory aired throughout the season.

The Friends received a large amount of electronic and print media coverage throughout the year. The reopening of the observatory, restoration efforts and special events drove media coverage.

### FUTURE RESTORATION/PRESERVATION PROJECTS

The Friends of Fort Knox Board working in partnership with the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands have identified the need to repoint masonry of the granite blocks throughout the Fort. This project differs from our recent repointing efforts that focused on the bricks throughout the Fort. We are waiting for the Bureau to provide us with specifications and cost estimates on this new initiative prior to commencing work and seeking additional funds.