PRESERVATION ON ISLAND

HOW HISTORIC PRESERVATION CAN PROMOTE THE VITALITY OF MAINE'S ISLAND COMMUNITIES

Christopher Brazee

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
Columbia University
May 2007
Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore how historic preservation can contribute to the vitality of Maine’s 15 year-round island communities. On one level, this means determining how existing preservation planning tools—such as tax incentives—can protect the islands’ historic resources while also providing financial benefit to island residents. On a deeper level I hope to demonstrate that the island communities survive in large part because people are willing to forego certain modern conveniences in order to live in a community that has a compelling and unique sense of place. It is my argument that preserving this sense of place is largely the province of the historic preservation discipline, and is fundamentally important if the islands are to remain vital communities.

The first chapter introduces the general significance of Maine’s island communities and lays out the planning issues that are most likely to confront preservation efforts on the islands. The second chapter outlines the most common preservation planning tools that are available in the State of Maine and briefly describes how these tools can be applied to Maine’s island communities. The chapter has been organized according to who is most likely to implement the tool: legal actions at the federal, state, and local levels; then actions available to private and non-profit entities.

The remaining chapters explore how historic preservation can be implemented on three of the 15 remaining year-round island communities. These case studies are presented in geographical order, beginning from the south: Chebeague in bustling Casco Bay; Vinalhaven at the mouth of Penobscot Bay; and remote Frenchboro on the outer edge of Maine’s archipelago. The discussion of each island includes a brief summary of the community’s history—especially as it relates to the development of the island—and outlines the significant historic contexts and associated building types that characterize the
island's built environment. A summary of the preservation planning issues unique to the community is then presented, followed by an exploration of existing historic preservation efforts and suggestions for future work. Each case study ends with a summary of recommended actions for the local community and invested third parties.