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Muskie, Edmund S., "Viewpoint Article on Preserving Local Heritage" (1971). *Congressional Records*. 46. <https://scarab.bates.edu/mcr/46>

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VIEWPOINT

By Edmund S. Muskie

Edmund S. Muskie is familiar to Americans as the United States Senator from Maine and the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in the 1968 campaign. On November 1, 1970, Senator Muskie took time from his successful campaign for reelection to the Senate to welcome the representatives of New England's historical societies and museums who were meeting in Portland, Maine, for the eighth annual Conference of New England Historical Societies. In the text of his speech which follows, Senator Muskie tells the historians of the importance he sees in their efforts to preserve their local heritage.

Almost a century and a half ago—when Maine was enjoying its first years of statehood—a distinguished French observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited these shores. He was to write that, "America is a land of wonders . . . no natural boundary seems to be set to the efforts of man; and in his eyes what is not yet done is only what he has not yet attempted to do."

That description, I believe, captures the underlying spirit of this nation . . . of New England . . . and of Maine itself. It is a spirit of hope, of potential, of new directions. It is a spirit which is still valid. It is a spirit we cannot afford to lose.

That spirit has beckoned to men and women from the seventeenth century to the twentieth—men and women of different cultures; of different languages; of different beliefs.

They came not as oppressors, but as people oppressed. They came not to practice violence, but to live in peace. They came not to destroy a country, but to build—first a home, then a community, and finally a nation.

The work you are doing—to preserve, to teach, to discover our history—is of vital importance. In a period of history such as this, in a time of ferment such as this, in a world of change such as this, we need to be reminded of our

origins as a nation; of the distance we have traveled; of the progress we have achieved.

We are by no means perfect. But we can still take pride in the problems we have solved; in the barriers we have overcome; and in the hardships we have weathered, ever since Pemaquid was a mightier town than Boston.

That is why I co-sponsored Historic Preservation legislation, including Titles VI and VII of the Model Cities Act, designed to expand and maintain the national register of historic places; and to provide matching assistance to state and local authorities for the acquisition of historic sites and buildings.

As a consequence of that legislation, this year alone some twenty-four properties of historic significance in Maine have been added to the National Register. They include: the Kennebec Arsenal in Augusta; the old Custom House in Wiscasset; the Spring Street Historic Project in Portland—all places which have felt the surge of the American spirit.

Of course, that spirit has not always been tranquil. Since the English collided with the French on Mt. Desert more than 350 years ago, America has known controversy and confrontation and conflict.

There have been disputes—many of

them bitter—over territorial boundaries; over foreign allegiances; over fundamental human rights.

But they have never destroyed the promise of America. What is that promise? It is the promise of a free society governed by the rule of law. It is the promise of the right to vote and the right to be secure from extreme conduct. It is the promise of progress through peaceful political means.

That promise has come under attack in recent days from those who provoke violence and from those who abuse the truth. And it is our collective responsibility to make certain that neither attempt succeeds in dividing us—either from the promise of America—or from each other.

We have developed values of freedom and independence and equality—values which have made America the best hope of a troubled world; values which convinced my grandfather to send his son to America, to build a better life for his children than he could build in Poland.

If we preserve those values, then I think we can still shape a better future. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Not long ago, I met with a group of young Americans in one of our schools in Maine. The headmaster of that school had asked me to come; to speak with his students; to answer their questions as best I could.

A week or two after my visit, he wrote to me and he said the single impression that his students had carried from our meeting was one simple statement I had made to them. I had made it without any special emphasis, and without realizing that it would have any particular impact.

The comment they remembered out of all I had said to them in the course of an hour and a half was this:

"Don't give up old values until you are sure you have new values that are better."

I think it is significant that young Americans should seize upon that kind of a philosophy as having meaning for them.

Why is that significant?

Because those of us who are older sometimes tend to forget that our children *do* have a sense of heritage, a sense of continuity, a sense of something beyond the immediate present. They do not always talk about that heritage, or think about it, or form their attitudes in direct response to it. Yet the overwhelming majority of them cling fiercely to the fundamental values which our heritage has delivered to them—values of compassion, and tolerance, and cooperation.

We have taught our children the very beliefs of those who first tamed the coast and the woodlands—a belief in peace; a belief in opportunity; a belief in personal dignity.

We have taught our children to want precisely what the Separatists and the Puritans and the Huguenots wanted—to be safe; to be respected; to be left alone. Those lessons are not reflected in the clothes they wear, the vocabulary they invent, or the music to which they listen. They are instead reflected in the traditional American commitment that one generation can somehow *improve* on its predecessor.

In order to do so, however, we must make certain that our children learn one lesson more—a lesson of historic preservation. That means not only protecting the historic places we have identified but also preserving the values we have inherited—values we must hold in trust for generations still to come.

It was another New Englander who said,

"While (History) does not give us a key to the future, I think it does give us a sense of confidence in the future."

Thank you for all *you* are doing to make John Kennedy's words meaningful.