

State of Maine
House of Representatives
124th Legislature
Second Regular Session
HOUSE ADVANCE JOURNAL AND CALENDAR
<http://www.maine.gov/legis/house/hcalfr.htm>
Wednesday, April 7, 2010
SUPPLEMENT NO. 20

ORDERS

(4-1) On motion of Representative ADAMS of Portland, the following Joint Resolution: (H.P. 1327) (Cosponsored by Senator GOODALL of Sagadahoc and Representatives: KENT of Woolwich, PERCY of Phippsburg, WATSON of Bath, WEBSTER of Freeport, Senators: BLISS of Cumberland, DAMON of Hancock, GERZOFSKY of Cumberland)

**JOINT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE TRAGIC EXPULSION OF
THE RESIDENTS OF MALAGA ISLAND, MAINE IN 1912 AND
REDEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE MAINE IDEALS OF
TOLERANCE, INDEPENDENCE AND EQUALITY FOR ALL PEOPLES**

WHEREAS, Malaga is a small rugged island of less than one square mile situated in Casco Bay off the shores of the Town of Phippsburg in Sagadahoc County and the Town of Harpswell in Cumberland County; and

WHEREAS, from about 1870 to 1912, Malaga was home to a mixed-race Maine community of people of Scots, Irish, Anglo, Native American and African-American ancestry, among others, struggling to survive as boatmen, fishermen, carpenters and laundresses, as did many rural islanders of that era; and

WHEREAS, in that era, for fear of being taxed to support alleged "chronic pauperism," nearby towns denied that Malaga existed within their town waters, and amid lawsuits actual ownership of Malaga lay in dispute for decades; and

WHEREAS, in that era, the now-disgraced Eugenics Movement claimed poverty and intemperance were genetic traits due to "impure blood," using pseudoscience to reinforce racial and social stereotypes, holding Malaga and other isolated Maine communities up to ridicule in the national press, including the sensational "Queer Folk of the Maine Coast" in *Harper's* magazine in 1909; and

WHEREAS, in that era, prime island real estate, including Malaga, suddenly caught the eye of speculators and developers eager to build resort hotels for Maine's booming tourist trade; and

WHEREAS, in 1911, amid such tensions, Maine's Governor Frederick Plaisted and his Executive Council personally led an expedition to investigate conditions on Malaga and thereafter paid \$417 to clear title to the island in the name of the State of Maine, which took possession; and

WHEREAS, in 1912, as public policy, the State of Maine evicted all Malaga islanders from their homes, paying token sums for the structures, ordered the Malaga schoolhouse, wharves and houses removed or destroyed, dug up the island graveyard, jumbling all remains into common caskets, and forcibly relocated many islanders to the Maine School for the Feeble Minded at Pownal, where some spent the rest of their lives and where the deceased of Malaga lie in mixed graves to this day; and

WHEREAS, in 1925, the State of Maine by law allowed forced eugenic sterilization of many residents of the Maine School for the Feeble Minded in order to, in the words of one Maine State Senator, "permanently improve the human race . . . and enforce sound, decent and efficient human beings"; and

WHEREAS, with Malaga deserted and the islanders dispersed or institutionalized, for almost 100 years the true story of Malaga disappeared into mystery and myth, a half-remembered legend deeply tinged with heartbreak, loss and shame, rarely referred to openly even by the scattered descendants of the Malaga islanders themselves; and

WHEREAS, the last known living former Malaga islander died in 1997 at the age of 103; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the story of Malaga has been rediscovered and has been the subject of books, national publications, television productions, university studies and a prominent Maine Public Radio production, "Malaga Island: A Story Best Left Untold," and will be the subject of a Maine State Museum special exhibition for the centennial in 2012; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust purchased Malaga Island, which now serves as a nature preserve, a University of Maine archeological site, a landmark on the Maine Underground Railroad and a place of education, reflection and renewal; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Legislature now assembled in the Second Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, do recognize with profound regret the tragic displacement of the Malaga islanders in 1912, in the name of the disgraced Eugenics Movement, with its overtones of prejudice against poverty, racism and stereotyping; and, while rebuking this past, rededicate the future to the ideals of tolerance, independence and equality of all peoples in our ever-changing world, which are the birthright and heritage of all proud Mainers; and rededicate ourselves as lawmakers to the social and economic justice that is the right of all peoples; and be it further

RESOLVED: That suitable copies of this resolution, duly authenticated by the Secretary of State, be transmitted to the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Maine Historical Society and the NAACP.