

A History of the University of Maine at Presque Isle: 1903-2020

For more than a century, the University of Maine at Presque Isle has been helping people find their path to a great career. From its earliest days, that has meant preparing the next generation of school teachers, but nowadays, it also includes everything from accountants and law enforcement officials to scientists, social workers, and artists. There have been so many milestones along the way – the school has grown from a small teacher’s school that served two dozen students to a much larger university serving about 1,200 students each year. Over the last hundred years, the school has changed its name four times, significantly expanded its programs, acreage, and buildings, and become an educational and cultural center for the area. Read on to learn about the University’s roots and its growth over the last century. We hope it will bring you back to your own days on campus, and the memories you made during your time here.

BEGINNINGS

In the 1890’s, Presque Isle residents began working toward an important goal – to establish a school in their town that would offer educational opportunities to the people of northern Maine. Presque Isle had been incorporated as a town about 35 years earlier, and by 1895, the community boasted a railroad, lumber mills, and several factories, and was the trade, shipping, and tourist center for Aroostook.

Around that time, a handful of community leaders, led by the vision of Rev. George M. Park, began more than six years of work coordinating with the town and the state in order to make their educational goal a reality. In 1902, the Town of Presque Isle purchased the old St. John’s Episcopal Secondary School for Boys (which closed in the 1890’s after the establishment of public schools) along with five acres of land for \$2,500, and then donated the property to the State of Maine so that a normal school could be established. At 12:40 p.m. on Friday, March 20, 1903, the Maine State Legislature passed a bill that established a new normal school in Presque Isle. Governor John F. Hill then signed the bill that authorized the establishment of the Aroostook State Normal School. It was the seventh such school estab-

lished in the state, and was part of a national movement begun in the 19th century to train teachers.

The Aroostook State Normal School was dedicated on August 18, 1903 and opened its doors for classes on September 15, 1903, just 44 years after the town was incorporated. The new school was composed of a small group – Principal Irving Orison Bragg, two teachers – Mr. Alonzo J. K. Knowlton and Miss Ardelle Tozier – and 17 students (16 women and one man). These students were admitted into a two-year teaching program and their institution was made up of two buildings – Central Hall, which held the classrooms where all the courses were taught, and a second building that served as the principal’s home and office. All of the students commuted as there was no dormitory space available.

A year and a half years later, on January 3, 1905, the institution’s Training School opened. The Training School, the equivalent of the student teaching that college students do today, consisted of local students in grades 1-6 who occupied two rooms of Central Hall in order to give Aroostook State Normal School students the opportunity to get experience teaching children. Miss Florence M. Hale served as principal

and Miss Nellie W. Jordan served as assistant. Eventually, the Training School moved into the old wooden high school in Presque Isle, which burned down in 1927. In cooperation with the City of Presque Isle, a new brick building was constructed for the Training School and remains on Academy Street to this day.

The spring of 1905 marked the first time a class graduated from the Aroostook State Normal School. Twelve students earned their teaching degrees. Also in 1905, with the growing need for a dormitory at the normal school, Governor William S. Cobb signed a bill appropriating \$20,000 for the construction of a dormitory. The town of Presque Isle did not feel that this amount was adequate to appropriately build and complete the dormitory they wanted, so once again showing their strong support for their educational institution, town officials also gave \$20,000 to help fund the construction of the new dormitory. The work on this building – which included rooms, a dining hall, and a small gym – continued through the winter of 1905. School began late that fall in order to allow the building to be completed to the point of livability. Miss Mary

E. Kelley, matron of the dorm, and Miss Tracy, her helper, came to the dormitory on December 4, 1905, in order to get the dorm ready for 24 students to move in. Eight days later, students moved into the new dormitory, which, at the time, was still incomplete on the inside – walls were not painted, there were no window shades and there were no doors on the rooms, but **Normal Hall** officially became a part of campus.

In 1907, the Aroostook State Normal School bid farewell to the retiring Principal Bragg and welcomed Mr. San Lorenzo Merriman, who was appointed by the Board of Trustees, and would serve the institution for 33 years. Under his tenure, two buildings were added, ten additional acres were purchased, and, in 1934, the two-year program developed into a three-year program. In 1907, the school also hired its first assistant principal, Mr. William D. Hall. Merriman had a profound effect on the development of the school. He was known to care deeply for the students, importing fresh meats and growing fresh vegetables in a garden to enhance the dietary offerings, and personally paying expenses of several students so they could attend school. Students affectionately



Normal Hall

referred to him as “Pop.”

The year 1909 marked the beginning of the production of the *Salmagundi*, a school newspaper that eventually evolved into a school yearbook. The students chose the name to mean ‘a little bit of everything’ – Salmagundi was an “old Dutch dish which consisted of a mixture of spices, chopped meat, pickled herring, oil, vinegar, pepper and onions.”

In order to provide more training with youngsters, the Aroostook State Normal School offered its first summer session in 1910. The six-week term began on July 10, and allowed student teachers to increase their knowledge of and experience with the teaching profession, and to offer student teachers a proper Normal School training.

The Aroostook State Normal School adopted its first seal and motto – *Education for Service* – in 1913. The Class of 1913 also started an important campus tradition that lasted for many years. They planted a tree and dedicated it to Miss Ardelle Tozier. After that first tree planting and dedication, each graduating class for some time would dedicate a tree to someone and plant it on Arbor Day.

In 1918, the normal school closed its doors for a short period when the influenza epidemic ran rampant through the town of Presque Isle. Dorms were emptied, classes were suspended, and parts of the old school building were used as a hospital where many of the townspeople were cared for.

A year later, an important expansion began for the school. Governor Carl E. Milliken stated that Aroostook State Normal School could have a new building if it could guarantee a large growth in student enrollment during the next five years. However, his council did not want to make that promise to the school. It was when the State Senators and Representatives visited the normal school that year and saw the limited

space and poor heating conditions – they had to keep their coats on during their visit because of the cold rooms – that things really changed. As a result of their visit, the state government appropriated funds toward the construction of a new building completed in 1921 and commonly called the Administration Building. It was renamed **Preble Hall** in honor of Mr. Sanford Preble, a sub principal beginning in 1922.

In 1921, Principal Merriman built an off-campus home for himself, and what had been the principal’s home as well as part of Central Hall were converted into 16 dormitory rooms for women. The building that had been the principal’s home came to be called South Hall, as it was the southern-most building on campus at the time.

During the winter of 1921-1922, the normal school began its tradition of hosting Winter Carnivals. The carnival allowed students to compete with each other in a number of events. For that first year, the events included a flag relay race, a snowshoe dash, and basketball games between the Seniors and Juniors.

In 1923, the original St. John’s School facility burned down. The following year, a new building was erected in place of the original buildings and was named **South Hall**.

In 1940, when Principal Merriman retired, the school welcomed its third leader, Dr. Clifford O. T. Wieden. Three years later, with World War II in full swing, the federal government decided to close down the normal school so that the Federal Public Housing Authority could use it as military housing for women workers at the airbase. However, the school did not provide enough space for housing purposes, so two barracks were built behind what is now Preble Hall. These barracks were later used for school purposes and eventually torn down to make way for Folsom and Pullen Halls. For the duration of the war, Principal Wieden, fac-

ulty and students went to Washington State Normal School in Machias to continue their education.

On September 23, 1946, Aroostook State Normal School reopened its doors with Principal Wieden, four faculty, and three staff members, and welcomed 52 students. That same year, Miss Caroline Gentile was hired to teach health and physical education. She would become the University's longest serving faculty member.

GROWTH AND EXPANSION

In 1947, the Maine State Legislature gave the normal school Junior College status and soon after, in 1950, Aroostook State Normal School upgraded its curriculum to a four-year program. In 1952, the institution was renamed the Aroostook State Teacher's College in order to reflect its baccalaureate status. Dr. Wieden became the college's first president. Before his retirement, he would witness two more name changes for the institution, watch the student body increase from 140 students to 600, and see the campus grow from 27 to 150 acres and expand from three to 10 buildings. Also in 1952, Mr. Jan Kok was hired as a music instructor. He remained at the school for many years and greatly impacted the music program and the appreciation that students at the teacher's college had for music.

A change in athletics came in 1954 when Aroostook State Teacher's College became a charter member of the Northeast College Conference, giving students more teams to compete against in intercollegiate athletics. Also in 1954, the college became the first state-sponsored school of practical nursing. Training for this program was held in the barracks that remained on campus from war-time. The nursing program moved to the Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute (now Northern Maine Community College) in 1962.

The year 1958 marked the beginning of the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation programs at the Aroostook State Teacher's College. Since that time, the Physical Education program has been recognized as an excellent program, and it continues to be a strong program to this day.

In 1960, a new multi-purpose building was added to the Aroostook State Teacher's College campus. This new building was completed and dedicated as **Wieden Hall**, in honor of Dr. Clifford O. T. Wieden. This facility was the first new building (not including the barracks from the war) since 1924 when South Hall was rebuilt after it burned to the ground.

In 1962, the Aroostook State Teacher's College bought the Ben Marks Farm for \$60,000. This purchase added 123 acres of land to the size of the campus, giving the campus a total size of 150 acres. The purchase was important in the years to follow, as it was in the late 1960's that many more buildings were added to the Aroostook State Teacher's College. Without the purchase of the Ben Marks Farm, this much-needed expansion of the physical body of the college would not have been possible.

In 1963, a new dormitory, **Emerson Hall**, was added to campus. Emerson Hall was originally built with the purpose of being a woman's dormitory. As a result, it was named after Miss Leah Crabtree Emerson, the first female member of the State Board of Education.

With the expansion of educational programs at the college, the focus of study was no longer only on teaching; therefore, in 1965, the school was once again renamed. This time, there was only a small change. The new name of the institution became Aroostook State College.

It soon became evident that there was a need for more residence halls, so in 1967 a new men's dormitory, **Merriman Hall**,

was completed. This dormitory was named after the second principal of the Aroostook State Normal School, Mr. San Lorenzo Merriman, in honor of his dedication and contributions to this school.

Also in 1967, **Kelley Commons**, the dining hall, was completed. This building was named in honor of Miss Mary E. Kelley, the first matron of the school.

Aroostook State College became a part of the University of Maine System in 1968. As a result of this affiliation, the school was renamed again, this time to the Aroostook State College of the University of Maine.

Another new facility was completed in 1968. This time, it was a classroom building that was needed, and the new facility was dedicated as **Folsom Hall**, in honor of Miss Ida Folsom, a long-time science teacher at this school. Folsom taught at Aroostook State Normal School from 1912-1935, and had a significant impact on the school's science program.

Also in 1968, the Aroostook State College of the University of Maine joined the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Collegiate

Athletic Association (NCAA). That year, by popular vote, the students adopted the Owl as the team mascot.

The year 1969 proved to be another important year for the addition of buildings to the campus, as two more were added. Park and Pullen Halls were finished and dedicated in 1969. **Park Hall**, a dormitory, was built where the Reverend George M. Park's home stood. Park Hall was named in honor of his efforts in making Presque Isle the site of the new normal school in 1903. **Pullen Hall** was named in honor of Miss Marguerite Pullen, a long-time teacher.

Also in 1969, President Clifford O.T. Wieden retired. His position as president was filled by Dr. Stanley F. Salwak who, as the institution's fourth leader, served for 11 years.

A UNIVERSITY AT LAST

In 1970, the institution received its final name change – the University of Maine at Presque Isle. During Dr. Salwak's tenure, the University experienced an expansion of programs, buildings, athletic assets and the development of the Foundation of the University at Presque Isle, a private fundraising arm of the institution. Also in 1970, the Norton Museum was donated and moved to the University campus.

In 1971, Normal Hall was renovated. The change was a significant one, with the rooms being changed from residential dormitories to faculty offices. There were curriculum changes in 1973 with the addition of the Bachelor of Arts degree, as well as program study in the subject areas of Criminal Justice and Soviet Studies. Also in 1973, the student-run radio station, WUPI, was built. In 1974 the Smith House was purchased and 1975 marked the completion of the **Library**, a greatly needed addition to campus. When it was completed, students, faculty, and staff moved the books and periodicals from



The University has been located in the same place for over 100 years but has operated under five different names: 1903 Aroostook State Normal School; 1952 Aroostook State Teachers College; 1965 Aroostook State College; 1968 Aroostook State College of the University of Maine; 1970 University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Preble Hall to the new library.

After Dr. Salwak's retirement in 1981, Dr. Constance Carlson served as interim president for one year before being hired permanently as the University's fifth leader. She was the first woman president in the University of Maine System and remained in the position for six years. During her administration, there were further additions to program offerings, including accounting, liberal studies and fine arts. Also in 1981, the student newspaper, the *University Times*, began operations. In 1982, the Special Collections Room was added to the basement of the Library.

When President Carlson retired in 1986, she was succeeded by Dr. James R. Roach, the University's sixth president. President Roach witnessed further expansion of the curriculum, three more buildings, and a major Title III grant which funded a learning center and greatly increased the University's computing capacity. President Roach felt that it was important that the President's House be located on campus, so in 1987 the Smith House, which then served as a Student Services facility, was transformed into the **President's House**, where Dr. and Mrs. Roach lived the remainder of his time as president of the University of Maine at Presque Isle. In 1990,



The new Library was completed in 1975 and the books were moved from Preble Hall via a chain of faculty, staff and students linking the two buildings. Not a book was lost.

the Facilities Support Building was also constructed, providing space to house the crew and equipment needed to maintain the growing campus.

President Roach advocated for the addition of another building. This new facility was to be a student center with offices for student organizations, and meeting spaces to fulfill the needs of campus groups wishing to hold meetings, workshops, banquets, and other social gatherings. The work on this building – the **Campus Center** – was completed in 1992, the same year that President Roach retired from UMPI.

In 1993, Dr. W. Michael Easton became the seventh president of the University of Maine at Presque Isle. Under his leadership, the University continued its commitment to strengthening programs, establishing a distinctive mission, enhancing ties to the community, and increasing the University's endowment. During President Easton's tenure, many of the school's buildings underwent some major renovations. Many offices in Preble Hall were renovated. The first floor of Normal Hall was renovated to include three additional classrooms. Each of the dormitories was renovated to include carpets in each room and in the hallways, making the atmosphere more friendly and comfortable. In 1996, the school became home to the Northern Maine Museum of Science, located in the hallways of Folsom Hall.

In 1999, Dr. Nancy H. Hensel came to the Presque Isle campus as an interim president following President Easton's retirement. She became the University's eighth president. During her tenure, the University established the **Houlton Higher Education Center**, where students in southern Aroostook County can receive work training, complete their GED, or earn a college degree. President Hensel also worked to secure funding for **Gentile Hall**, the University's health

and wellness center named after legendary faculty member, Caroline D. Gentile. The facility features a climbing wall, pool, multi-purpose gym, workout facilities, and classroom space. Construction on the facility began in August 2004, a month after President Hensel resigned in order to serve as Executive Director of the Council for Undergraduate Research in Washington, D.C. Gentile Hall opened on January 21, 2006.

Also in August 2004, Dr. William A. Shields was appointed to serve as acting president while a search was conducted for a permanent replacement for President Hensel. In July 2005, Dr. Karl E. Burgher was appointed as the University's ninth president. During his tenure, President Burgher undertook several initiatives, including implementing a new academic structure, formal collaborations with other universities within the state system, and student recruitment initiatives intended to reach underserved populations. President Burgher stepped down in August 2006 to return with his family to the Missouri Ozarks.

In September 2006, Dr. Donald N. Zillman was appointed as the University's tenth president. President Zillman led several major initiatives during his time at the University: more than \$4 million in renovations to UMPI's major classroom buildings, Pullen

and Folsom Halls; the establishment of several renewable energy systems on campus, including a 600 kW wind turbine, solar panels, and a biomass boiler; the four-year, Nellie Mae Education Foundation-funded Project Compass effort to develop and improve culturally responsive retention strategies for UMPI's Native American students; and the addition of a state-of-the-art GIS laboratory. President Zillman announced in fall 2011 that he would return to his position as the Edward S. Godfrey Professor of Law at the University of Maine School of Law in Portland the following year.

The University welcomed its eleventh president, Dr. Linda K. Schott, in July 2012. President Schott established UMPI as a national leader in personalized education; the New England Board of Higher Education recognized UMPI's achievements in this area with its 2016 Maine State Merit Award. President Schott also led efforts to develop early college offerings for local high schoolers and ensure several campus improvements, including the transition of the Library to what is now known as the Center for Innovative Learning and the creation of a Student One-Stop area, with Student Financial Services and the Registrar's office co-located on the second floor of Preble Hall. Under her leadership, UMPI was



The Campus Center was completed in 1992 and serves as a conference and meeting center for the campus and community.

selected as one of 20 institutions nationwide to participate in the Lumina-funded Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN). President Schott left in 2016 to serve as the President of Southern Oregon University.

UMPI's Provost, Dr. Raymond Rice, was appointed interim president in June 2016. He became the University's twelfth president. Under his leadership, the University garnered a top 5 Most Innovative Schools ranking by U.S. News and World Report, was named a 2020 Great College to Work For, and established several new spaces on campus, including the MMG Center for Professional Development, state-of-the-art

Nursing Labs and an MLT Training Center, and the Zillman Family Greenhouse. UMPI also received a \$1 million gift to establish its first-ever endowed chair and was awarded a \$2.2 million Title III grant to create two new degree programs—Computer Science and Health Administration. Through his leadership with the YourPace program, UMPI became the first bricks and mortar public university in New England, and one of a small number across the country, to offer fully accredited Competency Based Education degrees. With his guidance and the support of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, the future for the University of Maine at Presque Isle is limitless.

FOLSOM, GENTILE AND OTHER GIANTS – THE FACULTY

Many talented and dedicated faculty members have graced the halls of this institution. Miss Mary F. Kaufmann was one of the first, hired to teach music and music methods. Miss Ida Folsom joined the faculty in 1912 and remained for 23 years, penning a school song and incorporating plays – many of which she wrote – into the curriculum. There was the gracious home economics teacher Miss Marguerite Pullen; Miss Virginia Ames, who taught physical education; Miss Evangeline Tubbs; and Mr. and Mrs. Sanford Preble, to name only a few. In 1946, when the school reopened after



Zillman Family Greenhouse interior



Caroline D. Gentile Hall



Women's basketball team, 1927-1928

the war, perhaps the most notable giant of them all, Miss Caroline Gentile, came to the school and stayed for 59 year, becoming the institution's longest serving faculty member. Through her extraordinary long range planning abilities and her more than a half-century as a classroom teacher, she created a physical education program that continues to serve the County, the State, and regions beyond. In 1952, Mr. Jan Kok arrived to take over the music program. Long after retirement, Jan and his wife Evelyn still came to the campus for cultural events and get-togethers. Of those retired or passed on, no one will forget the contributions of Nan Amodeo, Reta Graham, Royal Goheen, George Hall, Gil Moreau, Warren Horton, John MacLeod, Guy Gallagher, Clifton Boudman, Bill Lothrop, Chad Loder, Becky Wanbaugh, Ken Taylor, Dick Ayre, Ken Petress, Bill Davidshofer, Claire Davidshofer, Christine Standefer, Sue Beaudet, Kim-Anne Perkins, and Malcolm Coulter. Today, the faculty number more than 60 and continue to dedicate themselves to the service of teaching.

EDUCATORS AND OWLS – ATHLETICS

Athletics and physical training have always had a place on the Presque Isle campus. As early as the late 1920s, there were official

male and female basketball teams, a baseball team, and even a short-lived football team, which took to the gridiron twice a year from 1936-1940 for a rivalry with Ricker College in Houlton. In 1954, the college became a charter member of the Northeast College Conference, and the men's basketball team called themselves the Educators. In 1968, the school funded intercollegiate sports; prior to this, the students funded athletics. The institution joined the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and cross-country and wrestling were added to the men's teams, which already comprised soccer, basketball and baseball. The women competed in individual sports such as tennis, archery, fencing, bowling and badminton. By a popular vote that year, the students adopted the Owl as the team mascot. Currently, the University is a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, Division III, and there are 12 intercollegiate teams: men's sports include soccer, cross-country, golf, basketball, track and field, and baseball; and women's sports include soccer, cross-country, volleyball, basketball, track and field, and softball. Many of the teams are very competitive and have earned honors and championships. In 1988, the Owls Athletic Hall of Fame was established to honor the accomplishments of the school's many great athletes.

MANDATORY CHAPEL TO STUDENT PROTESTS – STUDENT LIFE

In 1903, students were required to pay an incidental fee of \$1.50 to help support social activities on campus. Although that fee has increased over the years, so, too, has the breadth and variety of extracurricular activities. The Student Christian Association, the Literary Club, and the Orpheum Club (organized for the purpose of giving occasional concerts in the community) were among the first student organizations established on campus. The beginnings of the yearbook, the *Salmagundi*, started in 1909 with three publications a year featuring literary works, jokes, and photos, with the graduating class featured in the spring edition. Other student activities in the early years included picnics, canoe trips, snowshoeing, plays, musicals, concerts, straw rides to Haystack Mountain, candy pulls, and mandatory chapel services each morning. The school also had its own garden and kept cows and pigs to supply food for the table. Today, there are more than 30 student organizations that are either profes-

sionally oriented, service focused, or fun seeking. Food service is contracted out to Sodexo, and, although they provide a wide variety of fresh and tasty fare, none of it is raised on University grounds. There are still canoe trips, dances, cultural events and outdoor adventures, but, alas, no candy pulls. Dramatics on campus has taken many forms over the years – from Miss Ida Folsom’s plays in the 1930s, to the Hudramics Club in the 1950s, the Pioneer Playhouse in the 1970s, and now the University Players. The first fraternity chapter, Kappa Delta Phi, was established in 1953; a school newspaper, *The Northern Lights*, was established in 1955; and the first student protest was recorded in 1968 reflecting the times of the day. WUPI, the student-run radio station, was built in 1973, and the student-run newspaper, the *University Times*, began publishing in 1981. Activities such as movies, Frozen Frenzy, and Spring Ball have eclipsed activities of the past, and other University programs such as cultural events, the Reed Art Gallery, University Day, and the University’s Libra Distinguished Lecturer Series provide students with enriched opportunities to have fun, learn, and grow. As much as things have changed over the years, many have remained the same – extracurricular activities will always play an important role in the life of a college campus, no matter the place or time period.



This outdoor wooden owl sculpture, created by the late Bernard Langlais, was erected on campus in 1976 as the result of a grant.

For the University and Presque Isle, it has been a most exciting 100 years and counting. The dream a small group of dedicated community members fought for – establishing a school in their town that would offer educational opportunities to the people of northern Maine – has been realized. To be sure, the results have far exceeded what anyone in the 1890s might have expected. And now, well into the 21st century, the University of Maine at Presque Isle is poised for what comes next.

Sources: The History of the U of M at Presque Isle: A Narrative, created by Lynda C. Stawasz; materials from the University’s Centennial celebration in 2003; and other University records.