

## MAINE-AOMORI SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP A Brief History from the perspective of one participant



Torii, beach and surf, Shariki-mura, Tsugaru-shi, Aomori-ken,  
site of the wreck of the Chesebrough of Bath, Maine, October 31, 1881

### ***The Maine-Aomori link began with a shipwreck, October 31, 1889.***

The bark Chesebrough, out of Bath, Maine, was caught in a fierce storm off the coast of the Tsugaru Peninsula in Aomori Prefecture at the northern tip of the Japanese main island of Honshu. Powerful westerly winds drove the ship onto the shoals near the village of Shariki. The ship was destroyed, but some of the crew and passengers were saved, brought to shore and cared for by villagers, who then sought help from the Aomori government.

The memory of the rescue and the enormous efforts of those who sheltered the survivors and those who made the journey for more assistance remained vivid in the isolated community through the Russo-Japanese War, World War I and World War II. As the 100th anniversary of the wreck of the Chesebrough approached, Shariki Mayor Narita and his colleagues decided to seek a sister-city relationship with the City of Bath, Maine, and to institute the Chesebrough Cup swim meet. The Chesebrough Cup combines races with the goal of accumulating a total distance equal to that of the distance between Shariki and Bath, 10,200 km.

### ***From Shariki-Bath to Aomori-Maine***

The Shariki-Bath linkage led to efforts in Aomori and in Maine to form a sister-state relationship. Governors McKernan and Kimura signed the sister-state agreement in 1994. Aomori prefectural and business leaders marked the years of exploration and negotiations with several visits. In 1995 Governor Kimura led a large delegation in a visit to Maine, hosted by Governor King. Governor King led a delegation to Aomori in 1999, as part of a trade delegation to Japan.

Trade possibilities, particularly with leadership from the Aomori Bank (principally bank vice president Kunei Takebayashi), dominated the early sister-state public events. In 1995 the legislature enacted a statute establishing the Maine International Trade Center (MITC), which assumed responsibility for the State's international trade activities. The State Director of International Trade was to serve as president of MITC. MITC started operations in 1996.

Aomori started a practice of sending a junior member of their International Affairs Division staff to Maine for a September-March internship. Bath Mayor Michael Kiernan, who had spearheaded the sister-state program, arranged the first internship through the Maine State Housing Authority. In subsequent years MITC took over responsibility for basing the intern in its office.

The sister-state relationship stimulated several cultural and education exchange programs. Husson College arranged an exchange agreement with Aomori University and The University of Maine entered into a similar agreement with Hirosaki University. A number of school districts and individual schools started k-12 exchanges. Hall-Dale High School was the leader in the exchanges, starting under the direction of principal Suzanne Olson and continuing with principal Stephen MacDougall. The Hall-Dale program benefited greatly from the Japanese language program, taught by Naoto Kobayashi. Other school districts in the exchanges were Camden, Greely (Cumberland), and Mt. Ararat (Topsham), as well as Maine Central Institute in Pittsfield.

The Maine State Museum and the Aomori Prefectural Museum initiated a series of substantial exchange activities, highlighted by the State of Maine exhibit in Aomori (1997), the Aomori Prefecture exhibit in Maine (2000) and the "Apple and Pine Tassel" joint photographic exhibit (2004),

The Aomori Foundation For the Advancement of International Relations (AFFAIR) made a significant contribution to people-to-people relationships for six years by sending an annual delegation of artists to Maine to present programs, primarily for children. Led by AFFAIR senior staff member Reiko Goto and including Sato-sensei (kites, calligraphy and dance), Kidachi-sensei (tea ceremony, calligraphy and koto) and other artists, the group engaged

Maine children in learning techniques of Japanese arts and absorbing the culture of Aomori. The culminating visit was the one in which the artists created models of Nebuta Festival (Aomori-shi) and Neputa Festival (Hirosaki-shi) floats.

In 1996 and 1997 the Hachinohe Jaycees sent delegations to Portland on a Japan Foundation sponsored study tour. Their original plan called for visits to three different United States cities, Federal City, WA, Portland, ME, and Gilroy, CA. In each of the cities they planned to study volunteerism, care of the elderly and intergenerational education for children. They went to Federal City the first year and came to Portland the second year. At the end of the second visit they decided to scrap the California visit and return to Portland. This is the foundation of the on-going links with Hachinohe. A couple of the Jaycees were members of the Enburi dance group who later made several trips to Maine.

### ***Sag and Dissent***

About 2000 the Aomori commitment to exchange programs began to wane, primarily as a result of the sagging Japanese economy. It took several years for the effects to be fully felt, with the termination of some planned exchanges between the Maine and Aomori museums and the end of the AFFAIR program. Maine was also feeling the economic pinch and changes were taking place in the management and oversight of the exchange program.

In the late 1990's MITC launched its "Clipper Program" aimed at using a shared space arrangement in containers for Maine manufacturers to ship goods to Japan. The center negotiated an agreement with the Hachinohe Port Center to handle importation of the Maine goods, dealing with customs, etc. MITC also negotiated an agreement with a Tokyo area broker to handle distribution and sales of the Maine products. Within a year the Hachinohe trade center concluded the agreement was not in its best interest: Hachinohe was bearing the cost of managing import arrangements and the Hachinohe community was gaining no discernible economic benefit.

About the same time there was a change of leadership at MITC. The Center's president, Perry Newman, resigned to start his own consulting business and was replaced by Richard Coyle. Mr. Coyle arrived on the scene (2001) just in time to face a revolt over the handling of the Maine-Aomori Sister-State program.

When the legislature created MITC it assigned "foreign policy" responsibilities to the International Trade Director (*cum* MITC President): "**2. Duties.** The International Trade Director shall implement the State's policies with respect to development of international trade opportunities for the State's businesses and citizens. The director shall serve as the State's diplomat and shall advocate

within the State and abroad on behalf of the State and the State's international community.” The director/president of MITC understandably focused on trade, not the other aspects of the State’s international interests. Dues-paying MITC corporate members expected leadership and support for expanded export trade. The governor and legislators, who supported appropriations for MITC’s operating budget, looked for economic development results from MITC’s activities. The less tangible and longer term benefits of other forms of international engagement were not high on the priority lists of governors, legislators or business leaders. Furthermore, funding for the agency was limited and staff was stretched thin in promoting and providing assistance for international trade efforts.

In the period following the Maine Exhibit at the Aomori Prefectural Museum (1997) and during the arrangements for the Aomori Exhibit at the Maine State Museum, the chairman of the Friends of the State Museum (Margaret Kelley) became very unhappy with what she regarded as a lack of interest and support for cultural and education exchanges within MITC. Others shared her unhappiness. She pushed for legislation (2001) that would explicitly remove Maine-Aomori Sister-State responsibilities from MITC. State Senator Beverly Daggett of Augusta sponsored the legislation, modified to establish an advisory body for the relationship.

The pressure for changes in responsibilities for non-trade aspects of the Maine-Aomori Sister State relationship emerged during the transition from Mr. Newman to Mr. Coyle. MITC Board and staff saw the Senator Daggett initiative as a threat to its existence, a fear with roots in the bureaucratic and legislative battles that had led to the creation of the Center.

The hearing on the legislation was Mr. Coyle’s baptism of fire. He did not fare well at the hands of the legislators, nor did his board chair, Jeanne Hulitt, a Key Bank vice president. Governor King, not eager to have the issue resolved by legislation, agreed to create by executive order an advisory body for the Maine-Aomori program. That marked the beginning of the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council (MASSAC).

### ***MASSAC and Evolution of the Relationship***

MASSAC was established to advise the governor, the executive branch and MITC on educational, cultural and public policy aspects of the Maine-Aomori relationship. Membership on the Council was to include representatives from the Maine Humanities Council, the Maine Arts Commission, the Maine State Museum, the Japan America Society of Maine, a municipality with a sister community relationship in Aomori, school districts with exchange relationships in Aomori, the University of Maine System, a private college, another sister-state program, a non-Japan sister-city program and the general public. MITC

was designated to provide staff support to the Council. There was no provision for MITC membership on the Council. Don Nicoll of Portland was appointed chair of the Council.

The Council voted to ask Governor King to modify the executive order to add representation from MITC on the Council. His office declined to do so and the issue carried over to the Baldacci Administration. When Governor Baldacci updated the executive order MITC representation on the Council was included. Governor Baldacci also appointed Lisa Adams to succeed Don Nicoll as Council chair. In 2009 Ms. Adams was succeeded by Stephen MacDougall.

Following creation of the Council there was a revival of interest in the exchange of delegations between the two states, although the numbers of delegates never approached those in the period immediately following the formation of the sister-state relationship. The established pattern of official delegation visits had the Aomori delegation coming to Maine in the odd numbered years and the Maine delegation going to Aomori in the even numbered years.

In 2002, Richard Coyle led a small delegation that included University of Southern Maine Provost Joseph Wood, Council chair Don Nicoll, JASM board member Hilda Nicoll and MITC staff liaison Jacolyn Bailey. The trip included meetings with Aomori government officials, a meeting with Hachinohe Port Authority representatives, a cultural program, tours of the Aomori City area and Lake Towada, and a dinner sponsored by the Hachinohe Jaycees. We were able during that visit to renew ties with several of the AFFAIR volunteers and with officials and business leaders who had been involved in the original sister-state development.

A small delegation of Aomori officials visited Maine in 2003.

In 2004 a two person MITC delegation, Janine Bisailon-Cary and Cory Crocker, visited Aomori and presented the official gift, a commemorative granite bench that now stands in the center of the city.

After the 2004 delegation trip, which had been limited by the difficulties of organizing a Maine group in an election year, the Council recommended that the rotation of delegations be modified so the Maine delegation went to Aomori in odd numbered years (non-election years) and the Aomori delegation comes to Maine in even numbered years. The Aomori and Maine state governments agreed and the new schedule was implemented starting in 2005.

Maine First Lady Karen Baldacci headed the 2005 delegation to Aomori, which focused on education and cultural programs, in addition to calling attention to the Maine-Aomori joint children's book Mrs. Baldacci had proposed. Maine artist Scott Nash and Japanese artist Toshiki Sawada joined the delegation.

The group visited several schools, observing students in classes and talking with students, teachers and administrators. There were visits to several museums, in addition to the Sannai Maruyama archaeological site in Aomori city. The group also met with Governor Mimura and Mrs. Baldacci met with Mrs. Mimura to discuss the book project. One group member visited a pottery center to explore exchange possibilities and another member went to Hachinohe to participate in a Rotary Club meeting. Mrs. Baldacci and three delegation members talked with government officials and representatives of a company interested in establishing a product distribution center in Maine. Information from that discussion was given to MITC and the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. While in Aomori the delegation was able to go to the site of the wreck of the Chesebrough, pay a condolence visit on the late Shariki Mayor Narita's widow and family, and explore the Hakkodate Mountains and the castle city of Hirosaki.

Subsequent to the 2005 delegation visit, Mr. Sawada and his daughter Aiko came to Maine in a Council-sponsored visit and worked with Scott Nash on their proposed book, "Hello from the Other Side of the World." They shared their unfolding bi-lingual text and illustrations, featuring the different styles of the two artists, with contributors to the project. Sadly, Mr. Sawada became ill in 2009 and died in early 2010, before the joint work could be completed.

The 2007 Maine delegation visit was a combination of a Council-sponsored group of representatives from Maine cultural and educational institutions and members of the Maine trade delegation to Seoul and Tokyo. Council Chair Lisa Adams organized the Council group and Governor Baldacci led the trade delegation. The Aomori visit included meetings with Governor Mimura and Mrs. Mimura, discussion sessions with government officials, visits to museums and cultural centers and extensive tours of the Tsugaru and Shimokita peninsulas. In Aomori, Maine recognized the opening of the new Aomori Art Museum with the presentation of a photograph by Scott Peterman, which had been commissioned and selected by the Maine Arts Commission. The closing highlight of the visit was an evening folk dance and music performance presented for the delegation in Hachinohe.

The 2005 and 2007 delegations made substantial recommendations for expanded and strengthened education, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Complete reports on the two trips are available.

Aomori delegations to Maine since 2002 have been limited to government officials. Their times in Maine have included discussions with Maine executive and legislative branch officials on matters of mutual interest and visits with students and teachers involved in the Maine-Aomori K-12 exchange programs.

In August 2008 Vice Governor Ebina led a delegation to Maine that focused on promoting Aomori's concentration on promoting energy conservation and the

development of alternative energy related industry. That visit laid the groundwork for subsequent discussions of possible cooperative efforts by Maine and Aomori in energy and conservation.

That September MASSAC hosted a visit by members of the Aomori UNESCO Association, who expressed their interest in further exchanges with Maine citizens with an interest in the UNESCO program and conservation. They were particularly interested in encouraging visits to Shirakami-Sanchi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring a primeval beech forest in the mountains bordering Aomori and Akita prefectures. The Aomori UNESCO Association will be hosting a the Maine 2010 delegation when it visits Shirakami-Sanchi as part of its trip to Aomori.

Economic difficulties and the H1N1 flu virus epidemic combined to put many of the planned sister-state exchanges on hold in 2009, but communications between the k-12 programs and between the Council and the prefectural government continued.

The Council stimulated the formation of the Friends of Aomori, a Maine non-profit citizen group dedicated to fostering and enhancing the sister-state relationship and direct relations between citizens of both states. Exploratory conversations and plans were undertaken for a Maine delegation to Aomori in 2010, focusing on energy and conservation issues and potential areas of collaborative work on fisheries questions..

### ***Expanding visions***

The City of Bath and Shariki marked a new milestone in 2009, when a renewal of the sister city agreement was signed, this time an agreement between Bath and Tsugaru City, which had incorporated the village of Shariki within its newly expanded boundaries.

2010 promises to be a banner year in the Maine-Aomori relationship.

Akira Tonosaki, now senior chief of the Child and Welfare Division of the Aomori Department of Health and Welfare and formerly a senior staff member of the Aomori Prefectural International Relations Division, was selected to be a participant in the U.S. Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program. During his time in the International Relations Division, Mr. Tonosaki had been the liaison with the State of Maine and had been in charge of arrangements for the 2005 Maine visit to Aomori. He was selected for the ILV program in large part because of his work as staff support for the G8 Energy Ministers meeting in Aomori, preparing for the 2008 Hokkaido G8 Summit. Mr. Tonosaki asked that his tour in the United States include Maine. He and his associate for the visit, Mr. Yosuke Toyota, senior researcher and acting director

of the Kyoto office of the Kiko Network (a public private group dedicated to implementation of the Kyoto Climate Change protocols), came to Maine where they participated in a number of meetings on energy conservation, alternative energy production and environmental protection.

In June the Hachinohe-based USN (United States Nippon) International Friendship Group came to Maine for a Council-sponsored intensive series of Enburi dances and other musical and folk art performances in schools, at the Children's Museum and Theatre of Maine and LL Bean, charming audiences of all ages. The Council also helped arrange for the group to perform at a community folk festival and in a public school in Brooklyn, New York.

Now, as we approach the end of summer 2010, a Council-organized group of State officials and community leaders are making final preparations for an October delegation visit to Aomori, concentrating on energy, conservation and fisheries areas of potential collaboration between the two states. Plans are underway for a tribute to Mr. Sawada and "Hello from the Other Side of the World" in conjunction with the visit.

*-- Don Nicoll  
August 2010*

NOTE: The history needs to be updated to include details on the highly successful 2010 delegation visit to Aomori and the follow-up joint planning work being undertaken in connection with the energy, conservation, fisheries and environmental protection studies, site visits and discussions that took place in the course of that exchange. The report on the delegation visit is to be published soon.

Efforts are also underway to organize a Maine response to the terrible twin disasters of the March 11 and subsequent earthquakes and tsunami that hit the east coast of Japan and caused particularly severe damage in the city of Hachinohe and smaller communities along the Aomori Pacific shore.

*-- DEN  
March 14, 2011*