



## The Basics of Online Exhibits

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- Choosing a Topic
- Online Exhibit Formats
- The Gallery Tool
- Organizing Images and Text
- The Exhibit's Title (and Byline)

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*On the fateful day of October 12th, 1937, the Brady gang car pulled up to the Dakin Sporting Goods Company store. James Dalhover exited the car and sauntered in. He was obviously on a mission, but he had no clue of the danger that lay ahead.*

- From the introduction to “Bangor Man Rats Out Brady Gang,” 7<sup>th</sup> grade Maine Studies Students, William S. Cohen School, Bangor

One of the best ways of drawing the public into the depths of your historic society’s or museum’s collections is by creating an online exhibit on Maine Memory Network. Exhibits allow you to showcase your collections through stories. You can highlight your strongest items—photographs, letters, artifacts—with compelling narratives that explore important topics in your community’s history. Exhibits also bring attention to your organization’s contributions to Maine Memory Network.

Maine Memory Network exhibits appear in the Exhibit section of the MMN website and can be linked to from other websites, shared via the exhibit's web address, or e-mailed to others.

## CHOOSING A TOPIC

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### 1. ADAPT A PHYSICAL EXHIBIT

One way to create an exhibit is to scan or photograph images or items that you have used in a physical exhibit. Since you already have the text and an interpretive theme, the online exhibit is already on its way.

You might, however, have to limit the number of items you use, and might want to write additional or slightly different text to explain your exhibit to online viewers.

For a few examples of physical exhibits that were converted to online museum exhibits, see:

- *Of Time and Eternity: The Shakers in Nineteenth Century Maine*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/183/page/442/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/183/page/442/display?use_mmn=1)
- *Art of the People: Folk Art in Maine*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/355/page/631/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/355/page/631/display?use_mmn=1)

- *La St-Jean in Lewiston-Auburn*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/216/page/475/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/216/page/475/display?use_mmn=1)

## 2. TELL A STORY

An exhibit is a story about a person, a group of people, an event, or an issue. It should have a relatively narrow focus and a thesis or argument at its core. Historians like to ask "so what?", encouraging the storyteller to go beyond a recitation of facts to an explanation of why this matters or what we should take away from it.

For instance, you could write about a prominent citizen or interesting character in your community. Rather than trying to tell the chronology of the person's life in order, you might choose something specific, for example, how the person affected the recreational opportunities in town, the person's notable charitable activities, or examples of how the person became the town "character." The possibilities are endless; narrower topics are more compelling for the viewer/reader and often easier to write and put together.

Examples:

- *Clean Water: Muskie and the Environment*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/330/page/601/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/330/page/601/display?use_mmn=1)
- *Father John Bapst: Catholicism's Defender and Promoter*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1392/page/2044/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1392/page/2044/display?use_mmn=1)
- *Lillian Nordica: Farmington Diva*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/190/page/449/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/190/page/449/display?use_mmn=1)

Often, the most interesting and important things about a person are not his/her parents, birth and death dates, or other genealogical information. You should start your story with the most interesting information, and then, if appropriate, include some genealogical details later in the story.

Let's say your story is about the economics of the town. You might choose to tell it in parts, with separate sections (see below) on mills, downtown businesses, workers, entrepreneurs – or other divisions that work for your story. OR, you might choose to tell only one of those stories and add a few sentences of context to help the viewer/reader put your story into the larger context of economics in

the town. With this approach, you can write a number of different exhibits, perhaps interrelated, that focus on different aspects of the larger topic.

Examples:

- *Biddeford, Saco and the Textile Industry*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/760/page/1169/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/760/page/1169/display?use_mmn=1)
- *Educating Oneself: Carnegie Libraries*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1425/page/2089/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1425/page/2089/display?use_mmn=1)
- *History in Motion: The Era of the Electric Railways*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1199/page/1757/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1199/page/1757/display?use_mmn=1)

### 3. FEATURE A COLLECTION

If you have a collection that is special to you, exceptionally visual, or important, you could choose 10-20 items from the collection to build an exhibit that would discuss the collection, its provenance, its importance, and the details of the items chosen.

For example, you might have a collection that features Civil War materials but isn't necessarily from one donor. It might contain numerous uniforms from different soldiers, or several rifles and other artifacts. It might be a collection of *cartes de visites* collected by a particular soldier. With this type of collection, you could present images of the artifacts or letters, discuss the person who collected them, and discuss what each tells us about the Civil War experience.

Examples:

- *Capturing Arts and Artists in the 1930s*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1416/page/2080/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1416/page/2080/display?use_mmn=1)
- *Colonial Cartography: The Plymouth Company Maps*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/168/page/427/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/168/page/427/display?use_mmn=1)
- *A Handwritten Community Newspaper*  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1432/page/2096/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1432/page/2096/display?use_mmn=1)

## ONLINE EXHIBIT FORMATS

There are two basic online exhibit formats: an introduction with a slideshow (individual images accompanied by text), and an illustrated essay.

When to use an illustrated essay:

- A lot of text and not many images – on average, between 6 and 15 (but there is no hard and fast rule).
- These exhibits are created using the MMN tool *ExhibitBuilder*.

When to use the slideshow format:

- A lot of images – perhaps 12-15 or more – and not a substantial amount of text.
- These exhibits are created using the MMN *Album* tool.



The two formats also can be combined by creating an illustrated essay with slideshows in a sidebar. An example is *Among the Lungers: Treating TB*

[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/286/page/549/display?use\\_mmn=](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/286/page/549/display?use_mmn=)

## THE GALLERY TOOL

Although not a true exhibit format, the *Gallery* is another tool at your disposal when working with exhibits. The Gallery is a component available in ExhibitBuilder. This component is for a collection of images for which there is little to no accompanying text in the presentation window, except titles.

Since the gallery option does not allow for sharing any narrative about the images (other than what is in the cataloging record for each image—if the viewer takes the time to click through to it), galleries should be used judiciously. They are best used as an addendum to a main exhibit (on a second page, via a link, in a sidebar, etc.) as a way of highlighting additional examples you weren't able to use in the exhibit proper.

Galleries are also a great way for beginner groups to try out the online tools and organize their collections.



One example is the “Historical Buildings” page on Presque Isle’s Maine Community Heritage Project website at:

<http://presqueisle.mainememory.net/page/1087/display.html>.

When you click on an individual image, you are presented with a larger version of it; you then click on “Return to Gallery” to once again see the entire selection.

While this gallery happens to have only six images associated with it,

the gallery tool allows you to add up to 12 images. Another Presque Isle gallery on “Agriculture” features a dozen images. That can be viewed by going to <http://presqueisle.mainememory.net/page/967/display.html>.

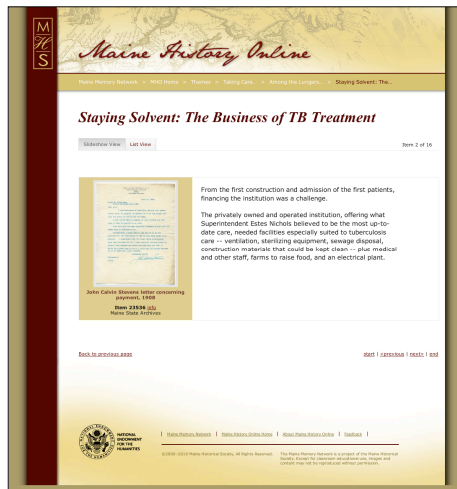
## ORGANIZING IMAGES AND TEXT

The items you choose for your slideshow or essay-type exhibit all must be part of the MMN database. These can be items that your organization has contributed or items uploaded by other contributing partners. (To be courteous, you should inform them of your plans to use their items in your exhibit and ask if they have additional information or objections.).

After you have selected your items, you need to decide which type of exhibit to create: an essay-type exhibit or a slideshow. Both formats resemble an essay with a thesis, or argument, at the beginning.

**In the essay-type exhibit**, the essay remains in one piece but is broken into short, easily readable paragraphs, and the images are placed at appropriate locations within the text--similar to a magazine article. Images do not have to be next to related text, but it is helpful to have them close. (See details about how to use *ExhibitBuilder* for specifics of how to place text and photos.)

**In the slideshow-type exhibit**, the first four or five paragraphs of your essay will constitute the introduction. This introduction should inform readers of your argument (the "so what" of historical writing) and give a little background.



The rest of your essay will, essentially, be broken into paragraphs or several paragraphs accompanied by an image. See how to use the *Album tool* for specifics of how to construct a slideshow.

We suggest you lay out your slideshow ahead of time in a storyboard format. On a storyboard, you break your essay into parts and add the images that go with each section, or write the MMN item number next to the paragraphs that it illustrates. For more information, consult our *Storyboarding* resource.

The text in a slideshow or an essay does *not* need to describe the image (the MMN item). As in a physical exhibit, the image relates to the text, but is not necessarily an exact visual of what the text describes. For instance, your exhibit might be about the corn growing and canning industry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Your text might discuss farmers in your community and also canning operations. Your images can be of farms in your community (and elsewhere) and of canning operations, even if they are not the specific canning plants or farms your text describes. Remember, images give the reader a sense of what the text is describing – the physical features, the clothing of the time, and so forth – but not necessarily an exact representation of what you are describing.

If appropriate, your text (in slideshow or essay type exhibits) can include a few details about a particular image. However, in Maine Memory exhibits, your viewer can click on that image to get the catalog description. Because of this function, you can save your space to provide other types of information that help tell your story.

## THE EXHIBIT'S TITLE (AND BYLINE)

Your exhibit title should be relatively short, but descriptive enough to capture someone's interest in the subject. If the exhibit is about the business in the example above, avoid making the title just the name of the business. Perhaps add a descriptive phrase after the name of the—e.g. “Walker Shoes: Making Their Mark on Maine.” The best titles are catchy and/or slightly provocative—they might be clever plays-on-words, raise a question, excerpt a quotation, etc.—all of which leave the reader wanting to know more. Spend some time reviewing the exhibits on Maine Memory to get a feel for title variety. General exhibits

can be accessed here: <http://www.mainememory.net/exhibits/>. Maine Community Heritage Project exhibits can be accessed via the community websites here: <http://www.mainememory.net/mchp/>.

Give credit where credit is due. The author's or authors' names should appear below the title as a byline. Also include a list of the owners of the images or collections used in the exhibit. This list appears at the top of the exhibit just below the author's name.

For example:

**PORTLAND'S CHANGING WATERFRONT**

*Text by Mary Smith*

*With images from Maine Historical Society, Portland Public Library, and the Maine State Library.*

## MORE INFORMATION

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Visit the [Share YOUR Local History](#) section of the Maine Memory Network website, [www.MaineMemory.net](http://www.MaineMemory.net).