Sebago Historical Society Maine Memory Online Exhibit Grant Application (Fall 2011)

Narrative Portions Only

B. Project Summary.

Our project will be an on-line exhibit on Sebago during the Civil War. We plan to include information about the soldiers from Sebago and also about the families who stayed home working and farming. We have letters, stories and memorabilia from four Sebago families and hope to find more as we include the community in our research. The Sebago Historical Society and Spaulding Memorial Library will collaborate to create this exhibit. We plan to complete the exhibit by Memorial Day 2012 so that our kick-off presentation can be part of the town's Memorial Day events.

E. Narrative.

a. Project Description

1) Our project will be an exhibit on Sebago during the Civil War. We plan to include information about the people who served in the war and about life at home. We hope to feature stories about the soldiers from Sebago and also about the families who stayed home working and farming. As the next four years are the 150th anniversary of the war we believe it is a timely exhibit and will be of interest to the Sebago community, Mainers and beyond. Since Maine had the largest percentage of soldiers to serve in the war we think our exhibit has the potential to attract a wide audience. As part of our project we will search for stories, photos and artifacts which we hope families will loan to us for our exhibit.

2) Our team is made up of three core members: Sherrill Brown, Treasurer of Sebago Historical Society, Sue Cummings, member of the Historical Society, and Susan Gassett, Treasurer of Spaulding Memorial Library and also a member of the Historical Society. Sherrill and Sue are long-time residents of Sebago and their family roots here go back many generations. We also have ancillary members of the team who we will call on for information and advice including the Director of the Library, Sue Newton, the President of the Historical Society, Ann Burns and other members of the Society.

Sebago is a small town located on the northwestern shore of Sebago Lake. First settled in 1750 and incorporated on February 10, 1826, Sebago was originally part of the Town of Baldwin, with parts of Denmark and Naples added later. About 1700 permanent residents live here amid the rural beauty of 50 square miles of mountains, lakes and ponds. In the summer the town's population swells to nearly 6,000 as seasonal residents, campers, and visitors come to enjoy the beauty, serenity and recreation that Sebago has to offer. The many large inns and hotels that once dotted the landscape, along with summer cottages, attracted vacationers and tourists from all over the United States. Their families continue to call Sebago their summer vacation home. The principal settlements of Sebago are: Hillside, Convene, Sebago Center (known as Mud City), East Sebago, North Sebago and Long Beach. Sebago's town offices are located in Sebago

Center, the Elementary School and Library are in East Sebago and the Historical Society is at the Free Will Baptist church (built in 1844) in Convene.

3) Our goals include: Introduce Sebago's Civil War history to the web community, excite Sebago residents about their town's history and use modern techniques to do so, discover and collect information from Sebago residents and share it with the greater Sebago community and beyond, broaden membership and participation in the Sebago Historical Society, and encourage people with stories and artifacts to come forward and share and record them before they are lost. The Library's mission is to be a resource to the community and through this project the library will be able to increase access to local history. The Library and the Historical Society have been interested in collaborating in some way and this project would be an opportunity to accomplish that goal. A final goal is to increase the visibility and use of both the Library and the Historical Society.

b. Historical Collections

1) The Historical Society has information about four Sebago families during the Civil War. We have 22 letters from the William Haley family, most from William Haley who drove an ambulance during the war but also some from his wife and children. They have been transcribed according to the standards used by the Maine Historical Society. The Haleys were residents of Sebago, their farmhouse still stands and they are buried in the Haley cemetery. We also have one photograph of William. We have copies of letters to and from Charles Cole who joined up when he was 18 and who died of disease 3 months later. We have a manuscript compiled by the descendants of Joshua L. Usher who served for three years in the 10th and 29th Maine Regiments. The manuscript contains letters, his regimental history and other memorabilia. We have access to an oral history including personal stories and anecdotes about the Martin family.

2) The Haley letters are in good condition. They have been transcribed and scanned. They are kept in plastic sleeves in a notebook. They have been catalogued. The photograph is in an envelope in the notebook. It has not been catalogued. The Cole letters are photocopies of the original documents. They have not been transcribed or catalogued and are kept in a manila file folder. The manuscript on Joshua Usher is in a file folder. It has not been catalogued. The oral history and research on the Martin family belongs to a member of the historical society who delivered a presentation to the society on the topic. It has not been recorded or video-taped yet.

3) One member of the team created a website on Civil War veterans from Sebago. Another member catalogued, scanned and transcribed the Haley letters. The team has a working knowledge of the Society's collections and knows about Sebago and some Sebago families during the Civil War years. The team hopes to learn more through this project and more about Maine's role in the war.

c. Partners

1) Spaulding Memorial Library is partnering with the Sebago Historical Society on this project. The library is eager to offer its patrons information about local history. Both agencies have a supportive relationship however this is the first time they will have worked together on a project.

They often share resources and information. The library has been helpful in supplying information for the historical calendar created by the society. The library is in a unique position to provide access to the completed project since it is open year-round and can offer Wi-Fi and computer use to those who don't have computers or internet. The library also has excellent technology resources to devote to the project. It has long been interested in having a local history exhibit on the premises but has no space for one. It does have room however for a computer dedicated to the exhibit and a display about it.

d. Outreach and Evaluation

1) We plan to advertise that we are looking for contributions to the project through newspapers, posters, the Historical Society newsletter, "Echoes," the town newsletter, flyers to the elementary school students and families, and emails to other local historical societies and libraries.
When the exhibit is completed we plan to have a celebratory event at the library with a speaker which will coincide with the town's Memorial Day celebration. We will use the same ways to advertise that as we used to search for contributors. We will also send invitations to all the Sebago Veterans to attend. The Library with its computers and Wi-Fi will be able to provide access to the on-line exhibit and it will have a station dedicated to the exhibit which will include a computer and a display of information about the project and the Historical Society.

2) The project will be successful if at least 5 people contribute information to the exhibit and at least 50 people attend the kick-off event. We will ask attendees to take a short survey at the celebration. Questions will include: List something you like about the exhibit. What is something new you learned about Sebago History? What would you change about the exhibit? We plan to keep this survey at the project display station at the Library and will encourage users to continue to give us their impressions. Another indicator of success will be if use of the library increases and if membership in the Historical Society increases.