The Story
Completed before the end of the Civil War but obsolete before it saw service, Fort Gorges is an imposing structure in Casco Bay, easily visible from downtown Portland. Constructed under the guidance of chief stonemason Ruben Smart and modeled on Fort Sumter, this granite fortification was intended to protect the mainland from naval attack, but served largely as a storage facility until it was deaccessioned by the federal government and acquired by the City of Portland in 1960. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 for its significance as an excellent example of mid-nineteenth century fort construction, the fort is also recognized as a local landmark. Since 1960, the fort has been in use as a city park and is a popular seasonal destination for thousands of kayakers and boaters. Friends of Fort Gorges continues volunteer efforts to clean up the site and work with city officials to develop a viable preservation plan.

The Threat
Fort Gorges’ exposed location has subjected it to punishing weather for more than 155 years. Decades of deferred maintenance mean there is a pressing need for stabilization and repair of the masonry walls and the crumbling wharf. Most critically, there is no strong, committed or funded vision for this irreplaceable historic site. If action is not taken the fort could become unsafe for visitors, and more of the historic fabric will succumb to the elements.

The Solution
This summer, new interest from a developer has focused attention and energy on the Fort’s future. This comes at a fortuitous moment as the Friends group embarks on a $250,000 fundraising campaign to address immediate preservation needs. Maine Preservation believes it is imperative to capitalize on this opportunity and forge a shared vision and master plan by creating a working group of stakeholders to identify the best ownership structure, operating policies, funding needs and stewards for the fort in the 21st century.