The Story
The Readfield Union Meeting House is significant both for its architecture, which is unusually refined, and for its key role in the Readfield community. When the Meeting House was built in 1828, the rural area surrounding Readfield Corner had several congregations, but they lacked the numbers and resources to construct their own church buildings. These congregations came together to build the Union Meeting House as a multi-denominational meeting place, with each congregation using the building some of the time. The meetinghouse continued to serve this purpose until the mid-20th century, when the local congregations were finally able to build their own buildings, and the Union Meeting House fell out of regular use.

Built by Richard Mace, Jere Page, and Francis Hunt without an architect, the building is the second-oldest brick church in Maine, with a frame and clapboard tower that includes a clock and an octagonal belfry. Several of the sanctuary’s arched windows have stenciled stained glass, which is only found in one other church in Maine. The building’s most striking, significant, and famous feature is its incredible tromp l’oeil decoration, which was added in 1866-1868 and covers all four walls and the ceiling of the sanctuary. This work is considered to be the finest example of tromp l’oeil in Maine. The painting is attributed to the artist Charles Schumacher, who is known to have painted about 51 other buildings in Maine. This may be the only remaining, intact example of his work.

The Threat
The Union Meeting House has suffered from years of disuse. Despite ongoing maintenance efforts, the building remains threatened due to its age, the fragility of the murals, and the steep expense of rehabilitation and maintenance.

The Solution
Today, the building is owned and maintained by the Readfield Union Meeting house Company which has been rehabilitating the structure and needs to raise $600,000 to complete its five-year restoration project. The nonprofit’s plan includes replication and resurrection of the spire. With sufficient financial assistance, the Readfield Union Meeting house Company will be able to continue efforts to stabilize and maintain the Union Meeting House, with the goal of using the building for concerts, events, and community meetings.

2019 Maine Most Endangered Historic Place