



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ryan Klink
Director of Marketing and Communications
rklink@themusichall.org
603.766.2194

THE MUSIC HALL PURCHASES THE HISTORIC KEARSARGE HOUSE IN DOWNTOWN PORTSMOUTH

Preserving Portsmouth's History and Ensuring a Permanent Home for the Members Club

Portsmouth, NH – The Music Hall, Portsmouth's premier nonprofit arts and entertainment organization, proudly announces its acquisition of the historic Kearsarge House, a landmark property in downtown Portsmouth. This purchase reflects The Music Hall's enduring commitment to preserving local history while securing its ability to serve as a steward of cherished historical buildings.

The Kearsarge House, constructed in 1866, is an architectural gem that has long been a part of Portsmouth's vibrant cultural and commercial tapestry. The building has been a cornerstone of the community for over a century. By acquiring this property, The Music Hall ensures its preservation and protects it from potential redevelopment by out-of-town developers whose vision may not align with The Music Hall's mission.

"This acquisition represents a once in a lifetime opportunity for the Music Hall's past and future," says Tina Sawtelle, President & CEO of The Music Hall. "The Kearsarge House's historical significance and central location make it a natural addition to our downtown campus. We are excited to safeguard its legacy while exploring how it might support our organizational goals in the years to come."

The purchase of the Kearsarge House solidifies The Music Hall's footprint expansion in the recently launched Members Club and Ticketing Hub, which opened in 2024 thanks to a generous donation made by Jessica Hulseman McKeon and Paul McKeon. The Members

Club, located within the Kearsarge House, has quickly become a favorite space for members and sponsors to enjoy a speakeasy-style atmosphere with direct access to the Historic Theater. Owning the building ensures that the Members Club will remain a permanent fixture in The Music Hall's portfolio of venues, elevating the patron experience for years to come.

"The success of the Members Club has been a testament to the community's enthusiasm for spaces that blend historic charm with modern amenities," says Jay McFarland, Chair of The Music Hall's Board of Trustees. "By purchasing the Kearsarge House, we are securing this new asset and maintaining our commitment to offering exceptional experiences for our members and guests."

While The Music Hall's immediate plans include retaining the Kearsarge House's commercial tenants and ensuring their comfort and safety, the organization will also conduct a thorough inspection to identify future repair and preservation needs. Long-term, The Music Hall will evaluate how the building might align with its operational needs and mission.

"We are committed to protecting the building's integrity and exploring its potential as part of The Music Hall's ongoing growth and evolution," Sawtelle adds. "For now, we're thrilled to provide our tenants with a safe, welcoming space while maintaining the building's historical character."

After talking with many local banks, the Music Hall has selected BankProv as its commercial banking partner. Joe Reilly, CEO of BankProv, stated, "We are proud to support The Music Hall in their efforts to preserve and protect one of Portsmouth's historic treasures. This type of strategic acquisition reflects their unwavering commitment to our community and its cultural heritage."

The Music Hall also extends its gratitude to David Brown of Colliander & Brown for providing expert legal guidance throughout the acquisition process. Special recognition goes to The Headlands Foundation, led by Lawrence Spera, Executive Director, for facilitating the short-term financial support that played a pivotal role in making this acquisition possible. The Foundation's ongoing commitment to support The Music Hall, a flag-ship institution in the Arts, as well as housing initiatives in New Hampshire, continues to leave a lasting impact on our community.

Designed by notable 19th-century master builder Benjamin Franklin Webster and serving as a historical centerpiece of Congress Street, the Kearsarge House stands as a symbol of Portsmouth's resilience and architectural beauty. The Music Hall's acquisition is a continuation of its legacy as a steward of historic landmarks, including its work to preserve the 1878 Historic Theater, designated an American Treasure by the National Park Service.

Sawtelle added, “We’re inspired by the rich history of this building and the stories it holds. Its preservation and integration into the Music Hall’s stewardship ensures that these stories will continue to be told, enriching our community in the process.”

For more information on The Music Hall, its ongoing efforts in historical preservation, and opportunities to learn more through community engagement initiatives like educational talks on the history of its buildings, visit <https://www.themusichall.org/about/history/> or follow on social media:

Facebook: /musichall | **Instagram:** @musichallnh. Interviews are available by request.

ABOUT THE MUSIC HALL

The Music Hall, established in 1878 as a Vaudeville theater, has become a cornerstone of Portsmouth’s vibrant arts scene. Over nearly 150 years, it has evolved into a premier performing arts center, featuring two distinct venues: the landmark Victorian-era Historic Theater, designated an American Treasure by the National Park Service, and the modern Music Hall Lounge, an intimate 116-seat cabaret-style space. Together, they host over 130,000 patrons annually, offering a diverse array of live performances and on-screen programming that foster creativity and community.

In 2024, The Music Hall expanded its cultural offerings by taking over the New Hampshire Film Festival (NHFF), the state’s longest-running film festival, which attracts thousands of visitors each fall with independent films, panels, and networking events. That same year, it opened a new Members Club with McKeon’s Bar and the Box Office & Ticketing Hub, housed in the historic Kearsarge House on Congress Street. This exclusive speakeasy-style club allows members and sponsors direct access to the Historic Theater.

Since 1987, The Friends of The Music Hall, a 501(c)3 nonprofit, have upheld its mission: to present diverse, high-quality arts programming as a vital cultural hub for the Seacoast community. Today, The Music Hall continues to enrich Portsmouth’s cultural fabric with world-class entertainment by generating over \$15M in economic impact to the downtown economy.

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