

A Maine Fair Housing Hero Salute to Gerald Talbot by Denise Hardy February 2024



I remember the day I met Gerald Talbot, an unsung hero of fair housing in Maine. I had no idea who he was, but he was one of those humans who lights up a room when they enter. His eyes sparkled with that glimmer that seems to only come from a combination of wisdom, humility and lightness of spirit. As I got to know him more, I found him to be friendly and quick of wit. He always seemed to have something to say that mattered.

I came to learn that my new acquaintance was born in Bangor, Maine in 1932, where “His family traced their history in Maine back to the mid-18th century and the black Revolutionary War veteran Abraham Talbett. Talbot worked for some time with his father, W. Edgerton “Edgar” Talbot, the head chef at the Bangor House Hotel, and graduated from Bangor High School in 1952. After serving in the army from 1953 to 1956, he moved to Portland and wed Anita Cummings of Portland, with whom he raised four daughters.” Mr. Talbot’s wife, Anita, is also a force of nature with grace, but that is a topic for another day.

I was fortunate to meet more members of Mr. Talbot’s family and each one reflected devotion and a spirit of strength, I have encountered few times in my life.

Like other African-Americans in mid 20th Century Maine, the family faced job and housing discrimination, but Talbot eventually secured steady work in 1966 as a compositor with the Guy Gannett Publishing Company.

Mr. Talbot was one of several Mainers who attended the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington. Inspired by that event and informed by his own experiences, he brought home to Maine the ideals and commitment to the work of advocating for fair housing for all. In 1964, Gerald Talbot was one of the founders of the Portland Chapter of the NAACP and served as the organization's initial President.

Celebrating Black History month, we remember the legacy of hard fought initiatives and acts of courage, and the trail blazers who have led the way. Gerald Talbot has earned his place in Maine history when he served in Augusta as Maine's first African American legislator. One aspect of that legacy is his instrumental leadership in the passage of the Maine Fair Housing Bill in 1965 which preceded comprehensive federal fair housing legislation by 3 years.

Housing discrimination was a significant struggle for Mainers in the 1960s and NAACP chapters statewide advocated for Fair Housing legislation. That fight continues as the Maine legislation wrestles with our housing inventory in 2024 and the incredible challenges to entry level first-time home buyers - especially for our state's increasingly diverse population. I am grateful for the leadership of Gerald Talbot who was instrumental in addressing this issue more than half a century ago. That legacy continues as his daughter Rachel Talbot Ross now serves as the Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives.

[The National Fair Housing Act](#), prohibits discrimination by direct providers of housing, such as landlords and real estate companies as well as other entities including municipalities, banks or other lending institutions and homeowners insurance companies whose past discriminatory practices have made housing unavailable to persons because of:

- [race or color](#)
- [religion](#)
- [sex](#)
- [national origin](#)
- [familial status](#), or
- [disability](#).

In 2024 we are fortunate to have even greater protections in Maine. Building on the foundations of that Maine Fair Housing Statute of 1965 – Maine’s current statute prohibits unlawful housing discrimination, as enumerated in the law:

Regarding the sale or rental of housing and other prohibited practices. For any owner, lessee, sublessee, managing agent or other person having the right to sell or rent or manage a housing accommodation, or any agent of these, to:

A. Make or cause to be made any written or oral inquiry concerning the race or color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, familial status or any previous actions seeking and receiving an order of protection under [Title 19-A, section 4007](#) of any prospective purchaser, occupant or tenant of the housing accommodation;

B. Refuse to show or refuse to sell, rent, lease, let or otherwise deny to or withhold from any person the housing accommodation because of race or color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin or familial status or because the person sought and received an order of protection under [Title 19-A, section 4007](#);

C. Make, print or publish or cause to be made, printed or published any notice, statement or advertisement relating to the sale, rental or lease of the housing accommodation that indicates any preference, limitation or discrimination based upon race or color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, familial status or any previous actions seeking and receiving an order of protection under [Title 19-A, section 4007](#) or an intention to make any such preference, limitation or discrimination;

D. Discriminate against any person because of race or color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin or familial status or because the person sought and received an order of protection under [Title 19-A, section 4007](#) in the price, terms, conditions or privileges of the sale, rental or lease of any housing accommodations or in the furnishing of facilities or services in connection with any housing accommodations;

E. Evict or attempt to evict any tenant of any housing accommodation because of the race or color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin or familial status of the tenant or because the tenant sought and received an order of protection under [Title 19-A, section 4007](#)

Black History Month is a celebration of our past and points us toward the challenges of our future. Our ongoing work as REALTORS® is built on the accomplishment of housing heroes like Gerald Talbot. I am thankful that I was able to tell Mr. Talbot how

much of an impact all that he has fought for and accomplished has made on our state, even as it has touched me personally. One of the sweetest parts is being able to see his legacy and gifts in so many tangible ways.

As REALTORS®, even as we face these turbulent times, we can be proud of our Maine history of leadership in Fair Housing and a man I call a champion in that ongoing effort. Next time you walk the halls in Augusta, or advocate for your clients in the changing landscape on the path to home ownership and the building of generational wealth, think of Gerald Talbot and the sparkle or hope in his eyes. The work for Fair Housing must continue for all of us.