



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
WEST POINT, NEW YORK 10996

September 23, 2020

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

Department of History

**Maura Murray Disappearance Historical Marker
Letter of Support**

I write to endorse with great enthusiasm the proposal to install a New Hampshire state historical marker on Route 112 in Haverhill at the site of Maura Murray's 2004 disappearance. This missing person case drew national attention and intensive news coverage. Even today, more than 16 years after Maura's disappearance, this unsolved mystery continues to inspire intense interest—as well as television specials, podcasts, and blogs.

As a historian, it strikes me that there are two factors giving this missing person case special significance. First, there is the blockbuster nature of the event, which captured the attention of the American people like few others. Indeed, Maura Murray has been ranked alongside aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart as one of the [fourteen most famous missing persons](#) in American history. One reason for this is that Maura's disappearance coincided with the blossoming of the "24/7 cable news cycle." Her car crash and subsequent status as a missing person earned consistent coverage on CNN as well as MSNBC and Fox News, both of which debuted only seven years earlier, in late 1996. Second, there is the fact that this has been dubbed the "[first crime mystery of the social media age.](#)" Facebook, which launched on February 4, 2004—just five days prior to Maura's disappearance—has been an indispensable tool for people seeking to pool their knowledge in the effort to resolve the unknowns of her disappearance. So have similar destinations on the internet, which have made possible the sort of "crowd sourcing" that perpetuates an investigation long after police have exhausted all of their leads.

All this said, I will not attempt to hide my personal interest in this matter. As a West Point professor, I knew Maura, a cadet who transferred to U.Mass. to pursue a career in nursing. I also knew her boyfriend, Bill Rausch, who at the time of her disappearance was an Army lieutenant and West Point alumnus stationed at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. My wife and I were fond of both Bill and Maura. We had hosted them at our house for dinners and weekend gatherings. When we heard from Bill that Maura had disappeared we immediately drove to Haverhill to help in the search. Although our efforts proved fruitless, we were glad to be there to assist and support the Murray and Rausch families.

The location of Maura's car accident on Route 112, the last place she is known to have been seen, has become hallowed ground for those who loved her.

It is also a place of great significance for countless others who have since learned of her life and taken an intense interest in the mystery of her disappearance. It is without a doubt a historic place as it was the location of an historically significant event. The proposal to place a historical marker at this spot has my strongest possible support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. McDonald". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert M. S. McDonald
Professor of History