

Vermont Historical Society

Founded by Act of Legislature 1838

The Vermont Historical Society engages both Vermonters and "Vermonters at heart" in the exploration of our state's rich heritage. Our purpose is to reach a broad audience through our outstanding collections, statewide outreach, and dynamic programming. We believe that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities.

Quick Facts

- Serves as Vermont's Museum and Research Library
- Currently, museum in Montpelier and research center in Barre
- Governed by Board of Trustees including Secretary Of State and State Librarian
- Per statute, all employees are to be treated as if they are State employees
- ED is appointed by the Board but serves at the pleasure of the Governor



Impact of History on Community

- Study conducted summer and fall of 2019 by VHS and Castleton University
- Explored interest in history, consumption channels, correlation to community activity
- 84% of those reporting high interest in history felt it was important to be informed on local issues compared to only 59% of those reporting lower interest.
- Those reporting interest in history were almost twice as likely to vote, volunteer, donate to charity, and run for office.
- Prefer documentary or video and museum visits for consumption. Very low preference for in-person lectures and reenactments.



COVID Impact and Response



Immediate Impact on VHS Operations

- Closure of Vermont History Museum and Vermont History Center
- Staff transition to work-from-home
- Cancellation of over 5,000 student visits/programs in spring of 2020
- Cancellation of all in-person events and outreach programs
- Cancellation of large spring 2020 fundraising event and all fundraising events for FY21
- Over 190 historical societies and small museums turning to us for guidance.



VHS Response

1. Provide Vermonters and Vermonters-at-heart the resources to access Vermont's rich historical Collections from anywhere in the world.
2. We will recognize and support local history efforts; understanding that local societies are an integral part of sharing and preserving Vermont's story.
3. Vermonters will increase their knowledge of our state's past and understand how their unique experience impacts and shapes this ongoing narrative. Guests will enrich their visit through deeper understanding of Vermont and its people.
4. To build resilient and connected communities, students will understand Vermont's history and its place in the broader world.



Collecting, Documenting, Access

- COVID-19 Digital Archive
- Expansion of DigitalVermont.org digitized collections repository
- Retroconversion of paper catalog records to digital
- Creation of online portal for museum object collection access
- Rebuilding of the Vermont Women's History Database
- Creation of the Vermont Black History Database
- Converted publications such as Discovering Black Vermont and The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont to eBooks for greater access.



Support for Local Societies and Museums

- Created dynamic web resource for museums to understand best practices and guidance for operating during the pandemic
- Hosted numerous "round tables" on pandemic-related topics, bringing experts and museums together
- Curated informational resource on appropriate supplies and trusted service providers
- Hosted a virtual League of Local Historical Societies and Small Museums conference focusing on pandemic response and celebration of resiliency
- Provided technical support and platforms for local societies to communicate, present, and carry on their work.



Programming

- Moved in-person program online when possible
- Created classes such as Museum Studies, Collections Care, Genealogy, and History through Food
- Adapted Vermont Pub Trivia program to a very successful online format
- Created new short-form video exploration of collections and continued This Place in History weekly news program with local ABC/Fox affiliate.
- Created VR tour of the Vermont History Museum in conjunction with other Vermont Museums.



Content for Students and Teachers

- Redesign and updated Vermont History Explorer, an online portal for the study of Vermont History written at a middle-school level. Used by schools throughout the state.
- Expansion of the History for Home Schoolers to any students learning independently during the pandemic.
- Distribution of history learning kits to schools and children statewide.
- Transition of National History Day program from in-person to virtual.
- Support to teachers and school districts in curriculum and content changes posed by the events of 2020.



Select Outcomes

- Thousands of Museum and Archival collections made available online.
- Over 650 submissions to COVID-19 Archive
- Average program attendance increased ten-fold, with greater observed age, racial, and geographic diversity.
- Patrons willing to pay for programming, opening up a new revenue stream.
- Round table participation went from a hand-full in-person to regularly over 50 local societies virtually.
- History program for independent learners participation grew three-times that of prior years (at capacity, need is much greater).



FY22 Activities

- Transition staff, where appropriate, back to in-person working environment.
- Reintroduce in-person programming and fundraising events
- Retain popular and effective online programming – ideally during the winter months
- Working with partners such as State Archives and State Library to create a universal state-wide portal to digital holdings across Vermont institutions.
- Continue to roll-out curriculum support and materials for schools as the social studies landscape changes.
- Prepare for the influx of school visitation!



FY22 Pressures

- Limited staffing, currently holding two vacant positions
- Upward pressure on salary and benefits per the VT State system
- Will donors return to fundraising events at previous levels?
- Will the overall economy continue to allow donors to maintain current level of giving?
- Will traditional funders continue to provide support to arts and humanities at the same or increased levels?



Further Information

www.vermonthistory.org

If you have any questions,
please contact Steve Perkins at
steve.perkins@vermonthistory.org