

Vermont Historical Society Munters Unit Replacement

Purpose

The Vermont History Center houses tens of thousands of artifacts and thousands of linear feet of archival materials in climate-controlled storage areas specifically designed around the needs of the collections they contain. The most sensitive materials, primarily historic documents, film, and photographs, are stored in a secure, climate-controlled space that we call the Vault.

The Vault is regulated by a specialized system called a Munters Unit, which maintains precise and stable humidity levels. This level of control is essential for preservation and cannot be achieved through standard temperature control alone. In addition to Vermont Historical Society collections, the Vault also houses the most sensitive materials under the care of the Vermont State Library.

The existing unit exceeded its useful life in 2023. Although it continues to operate due to consistent maintenance, critical replacement parts are no longer available. Funding for proactive replacement is necessary to mitigate the risk of a prolonged system failure that would jeopardize the protection of the collections.

Significance of Collections at Risk

Among the thousands of linear feet of materials housed in the Vault, the following items and collections are especially significant due to their historical importance, fragility, and irreplaceability:

- **The James Whitelaw Collection**, documenting the work of Vermont's second Surveyor General
- **"A Vermont Romance,"** the first motion picture ever filmed in Vermont
- **The only known copies of dozens of early Vermont films**, including newsreels and home movies dating back over 100 years
- **Hundreds of oral histories** capturing Vermonters' firsthand accounts of events such as the 1927 flood, the 1918 flu epidemic, World War II, agricultural change, and legislative reapportionment
- **Personal papers of prominent Vermont figures**, including Matthew Lyon, Justin Morrill, Deane Davis, Percival Clement, Ralph Flanders, Peter Smith, and Stephen Rowe Bradley
- **The Act of Congress admitting Vermont to the Union (1791)**, signed by Thomas Jefferson
- **Original town charters and proprietor's deeds (1761–1792)** documenting early settlement and land ownership
- **A rare Vermont-printed slave narrative**, *The Blind African Slave*, recounting the life of Jeffrey Brace
- **Over a century of Long Trail "end-to-end" hiker journals** and Green Mountain Club records
- **The Coolidge family papers**, including correspondence, photographs, films, and records related to the Coolidge presidency
- **Glass plate negatives, daguerreotypes, tintypes, and ambrotypes**, including the only image of the second Vermont State House and unique images of Civil War soldiers
- **Business records of major Vermont companies**, such as Vermont Marble Company, Fairbanks Scales, Howe Scale Company, and CVPS

These materials are unique, irreplaceable, and central to Vermont's historical record.

Improper or unstable humidity poses a serious threat to these collections. Excess moisture promotes mold, fungi, corrosion, staining, and insect damage, while overly dry conditions cause cracking, brittleness, and tearing. Once damage occurs, it is often permanent and irreversible, risking loss of public assets and noncompliance with archival preservation standards.

Proposed Solution

The scope of this project includes the complete design, furnishing, and installation of a replacement system by Vermont Heating and Ventilation Company (VHV). This project replaces the existing, aging Munters unit with a modern, energy-efficient system of equal capacity. Due to the unit's location, the existing equipment must be removed in pieces, and the new system will be delivered and assembled on site. Lead time for the new unit is approximately 20–25 weeks.

Scope of Work

- Removal and disposal of the existing Munters unit
- Safe disconnection of gas, hydronic, electrical, and duct systems
- Installation of a new Munters unit
- New LP gas piping, hydronic piping, and insulated ductwork meeting current Vermont energy and building codes
- Protective sheet-metal covering to prevent damage from falling ice
- Electrical work coordinated by Benoit Electric
- Standalone control system with future capability to integrate into a Building Management System

Cost: \$566,724

Outcome

Replacing the Munters unit is a necessary investment to protect Vermont's most valuable historical records, ensure compliance with preservation standards, and prevent costly and irreversible damage. The project safeguards materials of statewide and national significance while using an energy-efficient and cost-effective climate control solution.