
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2026 Annual Report

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026



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We appreciate the contributions of these former staff members:

Daphne Kinney Landis



*The Vermont Historical Society was chartered in 1838 by an act of the Vermont Legislature.
It is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization, governed by a board of trustees.*

VHS *by the numbers...*



2,000 Objects on exhibit

1,790 VHS member households

691 Reference & scanning requests

3,100 Objects inventoried or acquired

1,076 Students in History Day programs

115,702 Pageviews on Vermont History Explorer

229 Hours onsite with Activating 21st Century History cohort members

4 Immigration history grants for LLHSM

13,161 Visitors to Vermont History Museum

2,264 Copies of VHS books sold

867 Newly catalogued library items

President's Report



Welcome to the Vermont Historical Society's Annual Report for 2026. This one is special, because we are all living our part in America's 250th birthday.

I've heard people expressing nostalgia for the unity there was at the time of the Bicentennial in 1976. Memory is a tricky, or merciful, thing. In 1976, America was deeply divided over Vietnam, Watergate, and civil rights, with many families finding their own generations torn apart. It is in our power to ensure that whatever is happening today will also pass. We came together after that fractious era, and we will come together after this one.

I am here to argue for history as a uniting force. America is a nation founded on ideas and ideals—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Here at the Vermont Historical Society, our staff works every day to protect, preserve, and share the stories that make us Vermonters and Americans.

Our Activating 21st Century Local History Training Program, under the guidance of Program Coordinator Hannah Fitzpatrick, works with local historical institutions teaching the principles of Active Collections, so they can make better decisions on what donations they should accept and what they should keep. They also learn to prioritize and deaccession in a way that does not alienate their communities. What feels better than a sensible clear out that can help a collection breathe? The program has been very popular all over the state.

The exhibit staff made a permanent addition to our core Freedom and Unity exhibit with a major new section on Vermont's maple industry. There are new panels explaining the importance of maple in Vermont, as well as objects, interactives, and a replica maple tree. Stop in to see it the next time you are in Montpelier.

What is Vermont's story and how is it woven into the greater story of America? Our capstone project for the country's 250th birthday is called 50 for 250 and consists of a book and exhibit featuring images and stories about 50 of the most important, representative, and arresting objects from our VHS collections. Many staff, scholars, and experts have worked to select, research, and write about these extraordinary pieces of the Vermont past. Executive Director Stephen Perkins and VHS Director of Collections and Access Amanda Gustin spearheaded this enormous project from the unwieldy first stages to a fascinating final product. It reminds us that objects have stories to tell, and many are stories of people who have made Vermont into today's Vermont and point to where we want to head in the future.

The chosen objects themselves are now featured in a major exhibit at the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier. It will be part of next year's annual report, but you can be a part of it by going to see it any time this year. While you are there, you can pick up a copy of the very special 50 for 250 book.

On our 250th birthday, Vermont still feels like one of the more united cultures in our big country. What does this story have to tell us about why that might be? Let's hope that our history can help Vermonters find ways to play a part in creating a warmer, happier, more unified American future.

Wishing you a happy year,
Jan Albers, president

VOLUNTEERS

Our unending gratitude to the volunteers who make our work possible:



Jan Albers
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Director's Report



As our nation prepared for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the American Association of State and Local History developed a set of themes to help our field navigate our work. Vermont Historical Society utilized four of the five themes in designing our Research and Exhibition Gallery and our newest publication and exhibit, 50 for 250. The fifth theme, “Doing History,” seemed self-evident and part of our DNA.

However, the practice of “doing history” seems to be under attack these days. At our annual meeting in October of 2025, I set aside my regular remarks and reflected on the VHS mission and what “doing history” means to us. It seems that now, in our 250th year as a nation, these spoken remarks still ring true. Please find the transcription of my speech below:

Vermont Historical Society believes understanding the past changes lives and builds better communities. Our purpose is to engage Vermonters and Vermonters-at-Heart with outstanding collections, state-wide outreach, and dynamic programming.

Let's repeat the first sentence of this statement: Vermont Historical Society believes understanding the past changes lives and builds better communities. This single statement is incredibly powerful and so very important to our communities, our state, our nation, and our world.

In crafting this statement, the Vermont Historical Society, and you, the Society members, made a very specific word choice: “understanding.” We purposefully did not use celebrating, vilifying, complicating, simplifying, or any of the other words flying around today.

Why? Because “understanding” truly defines the role of the historian, be they professional, amateur, or enthusiast.

Understanding has a number of meanings that all apply to this statement. It can mean, at its simplest, comprehension. To tease comprehension out a little, it's the power to make experience intelligible by applying concepts or knowledge.

Understanding can also be an adjustment of differences to create a harmonious relationship.

As an adjective, understanding can mean being tolerant or sympathetic. To be historic – the 18th century definition of understanding is learning or being informed.

History is not neat and tidy with one dominant narrative. It's a continuum of human experience interpreted and understood by diverse people with diverse worldviews. This is ok, and in fact, the power of our work.

When our youngest learners visit the museum in Montpelier, we start every visit by asking them to “be historians.” As they move through the museum or special program, we ask them to think about what they see, what they don't see, and what they would add.

I recently received a statement from the National Council for the Social Studies in response to a proposal for federal funding to be withheld from schools that do not adhere to a “patriotic” social studies curriculum based on “Western Civilization” and “Judeo-Christian” values. This statement was cosigned by almost every major legacy history association in the country. “The teaching of U.S. history should invite discussion, encourage inquiry, and reflect the diverse people, places, and events that shape our shared human experience. A strong social studies education helps students develop the ability to analyze information, engage in meaningful discourse, and contribute thoughtfully to their communities.”

So – in more concise words – we believe understanding the past changes lives and builds better communities.

The American Historical Association – our nation's historical society as created by an act of Congress makes the following statement: “Words matter. Precision matters. Context matters. Expertise matters. Democracy matters. We can neither deny what happened nor invent things that did not happen.”

The Vermont Historical Society will continue to support the understanding of history - as we truly believe this understanding changes lives and builds better communities. We will do this through our actions, not just our words.

Thank you so very much for indulging me and thank you for your unwavering support.

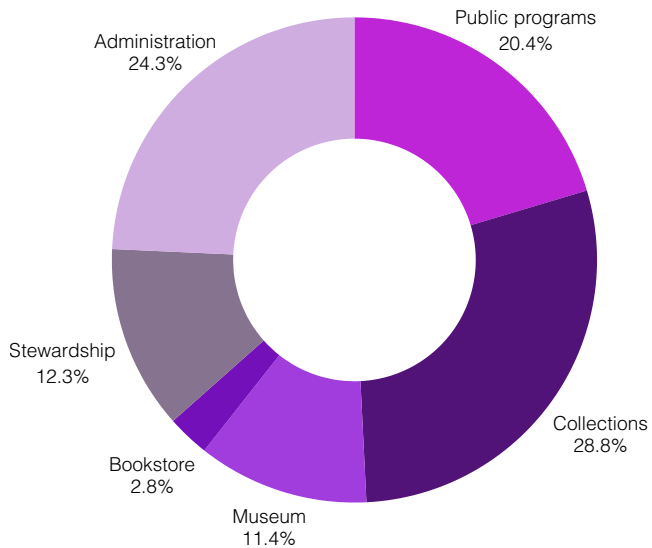
– Steve Perkins, executive director

*Online sections:
Members and donors
Award and fellowship winners
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STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

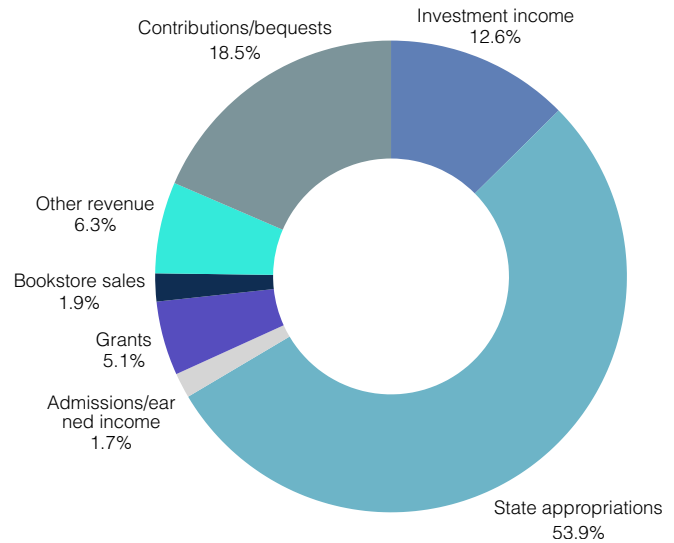
Expenses

\$2,802,079



Revenue

\$3,593,999



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

Assets	FY 2026	Liabilities	FY 2026
Cash	\$921,060	Accounts Payable	\$291,569
Other Current Assets	\$216,551	Short-term Liabilities	\$292,777
Investments	\$3,306,228	Mortgage Payable	\$830,137
Property Plant and Equipment	\$10,739,678	TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$1,414,483
Depreciation	\$(4,492,965)	NET ASSETS	\$9,276,129
Total Property Plant & Equipment	\$6,246,713		
TOTAL ASSETS	\$10,609,612	TOTAL LIABILITIES + NET ASSETS	\$10,690,612

Local Historical Societies

The principles of Active Collections are at the center of the Activating 21st Century Local History Training Program, a pilot program concluding its second cohort year. Not all local historical societies have paid staff, easily maintained facilities, or robust funds, but they have passion for history and a desire to do the best they can for the objects that tell the stories of their communities. Cohort members are encouraged by working with other collecting institutions and seeing others face the same challenges, and they appreciate the opportunity to problem solve together.



Every organization that participated has changed their approach to new donations. Some paused donations while they work through backlogs and develop exciting new exhibits with objects that have been tucked away in storage for years. Others now only accept and formally accession new objects after they have had a chance to carefully assess the meaning and story that the object brings to their collection. “There were some decisions that needed more time, thought, or research, and we had to embrace that,” said one participant.

Cohort members found that open communication eased community worries about deaccessioning. One organization explained, “Many folks have appreciated that we are taking bold steps to shore up our buildings, collections, and organization to better serve the public.” This project has positioned Vermont as a leader in Active Collections work. We contributed an article to Museum magazine, spoke about the project at a forum in Maine, led a webinar, and connected with colleagues from all around the country.

When the Institute of Museum and Library Services terminated grants in March 2025, VHS was told this program would lose federal funding. Many other organizations were forced to lay off staff members and cancel programs. Since a permanent injunction in November 2025, all IMLS grants have been reinstated, but we are grateful for the generosity of Marilyn Blackwell, and Lola Van Wagenen and George Burrill, who stepped forward to fill the gap.



Collections



Born and raised in Vermont, Hester D. Rice (1919-2015) was known for leading Sunday school and helping to organize community and church events in Newport. That all changed in 1952. Hearing from the candidates for presidency, Rice came to believe wholeheartedly in Dwight D. Eisenhower's ability to lead the country toward a better future. Much to her dismay, initially no one in Vermont seemed interested in his campaign, so she began organizing and building support. Vermont traditionally sent uncommitted delegates to the Republican National Convention, but Rice's determination and belief in Eisenhower's potential led the state party to send 12 delegates, all in support of Eisenhower.

In a hotly contested convention, those 12 delegates proved important to Eisenhower's eventual nomination.

Donated to VHS in early 2026, this collection of delegation memorabilia speaks volumes about the power of representation in Vermont. The straw hat with "IKE" taped to the crown, "I LIKE IKE" patriotic and holographic buttons, and delegation ribbons were Rice's prized possessions until the day she died.



Rice never participated in politics to this degree again—but to those who knew her, this was no surprise. She believed not in party politics, but in the capability of one man campaigning for president. She believed in the power of community, and her ability to enact change on any level from neighborhood to national.



2026.6, collection of political ephemera: hat, political buttons, delegation ribbons from the 1952 Vermont Republican Convention and Republican National Convention all worn by Hester D. Rice.

Gift of William Rice

Exhibits

For years, the Museum's portrayal of the Green Mountain State was conspicuously missing an exhibit on the maple sugaring industry. The industry is pivotal to the character and economy of our state, and this year we added a section reflecting the importance of maple.



This exhibit explores the long history of maple syrup. Informational panels and interactive activities frame the centerpiece replica maple tree, produced by Arcana Workshop of South Barre. The exhibit features nineteenth century maple industry items from the VHS collection: maple sap spouts, a maple sugar mold, a maple sap bucket and yoke, and a sap boiling tub. It also showcases changes in the industry with a patent model of Soule's Evaporator from 1915.

Longtime VHS member, Emma Marvin, co-owner and co-CEO of Butternut Mountain Farm, spoke at the opening. "Maple isn't just a product in Vermont," Marvin explains. "It's a living link between people and place that has

endured for centuries. The story of maple is one of ingenuity and perseverance — where methods have evolved, but the fundamentals remain the same: people going into the woods each spring to harvest sap for transformation into syrup or sugar."

The new maple exhibit allows visitors to step into that enduring story.

This expansion was made possible by generous sponsors: Butternut Mountain Farm, Skinny Pancake, Hunger Mountain Coop, Bragg Farm Sugarhouse, and Capitol Grounds & 802 Coffee Roasters.



Education

The Conversation Stations at the Vermont History Museum were originally added during updates to the Freedom and Unity exhibit in 2001. In collaboration with Vermont Folklife, staff collected interviews from state representatives, artists, farmers, and lifelong Vermonters.

These oral histories are an intimate recollection of a person's lived experiences, shared with visitors to the museum. Recently, the great-granddaughter of Abenaki artisan and educator Mali Keating heard her great-grandmother's voice for the first time in a recording, speaking of growing up on a farm and her family history in the Connecticut River Valley. Oral history interviews like Keating's allow visitors time for reflection and a different level of interaction with the past. However, many visitors were skipping this part of the Museum, so this year we have updated the exhibit.



Mali Keating in tribal regalia, from the personal collection of Lynn Murphy

To strike a balance between existing interviews and new scholarship, VHS staff moved the interviews to a website and divided the in-person exhibit into four different themes: Politics, Counterculture, Immigration, and Change. Staff reuploaded the existing interviews into videos, allowing visitors to explore archival photographs while they listen. Keating's family also graciously contributed photographs for the station update. Due to the new video format, the station is fully accessible through open captions.

With the new themes, we had the flexibility to update the station. We added material from our 2015-2016 project that documented the counterculture movement of the 1970s, including striking images collected by interviewees of life on Maple Hill



French Hill Commune in Saint Albans, Vermont, from Susanna Bowman

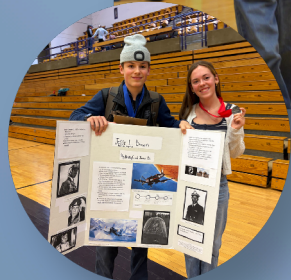
commune, Bread and Puppet, anti-war demonstrations, and early Pride festivals. There is so much material that the counterculture section is divided into two sections, focusing on social activism and the back-to-the-land movement. VHS will also add interviews from our COVID-19 project over time.

Vermont History Day 2027

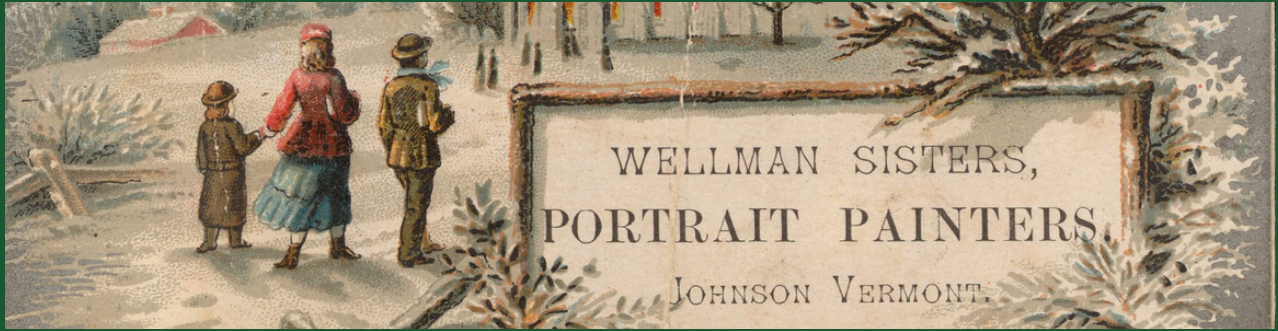
Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History



23 schools
324 students attending the state contest
225 projects
95 judges
38 winners traveling to National History Day

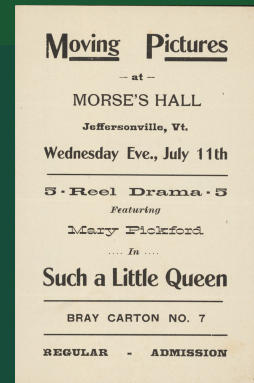
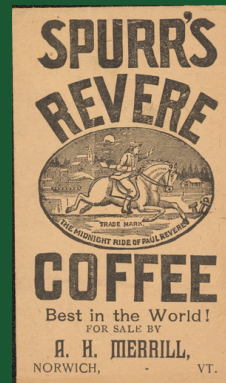


Library



Advertisements, dance cards, receipts, and train tickets, unlike books, are items designed to be discarded after one use. When ephemera survives, however, it offers valuable clues to our picture of what it was like to live in Vermont in previous decades and centuries.

With generous support from donor James Pizzagalli, this year the Vermont Historical Society purchased over a dozen boxes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Vermont ephemera that had been collected by rare book and manuscript dealer William Parkinson. These boxes teem with brochures that reveal the history of Vermont's tourism industry.



Fliers and advertisements for movies, plays, concerts, and other entertainments evince the way that Vermonters have gathered and enjoyed their time together. School commencement booklets show the pride that the people of the state take in education. And an appointment card from a dentist's office, which promises "NO COCAINE USED," paints a

distinct picture of earlier medical practices. That these small and fleeting slips of paper survived, were collected, and have found a home at the Leahy Library of the Vermont Historical Society is a boon to researchers and to anyone curious about what day-to-day life was like for our predecessors.



DR. FOOTE
Will be at Hotel in
Hardwick

Graduate and Registered
 OF
 BURLINGTON, VT.
Thursday Mar 10
Friday " 11

DENTIST


Full Upper or Lower Plates | Bridge Work | Gold Crowns | Painless Extraction

I EXTRACT TEETH WITHOUT PAIN. NO COCAINE USED

NO BAD AFTER EFFECT. GOLD TEETH and GOLD FILLINGS PUT IN PLATES

LOOSE TEETH, SORE GUMS, BAD BREATH are Symptoms of Riggs Disease or Loose Teeth

FREE EXAMINATIONS
 Silver Fillings
 Cement Fillings
 Cleanings

Gold Fillings
 Porcelain Fillings
 Porcelain Crowns

Abscesses, Sore Gums,
 Neuralgia Treated

TOOTHACHE STOPPED AT ONCE

SAVE YOUR TEETH, IMPROVE YOUR LOOKS

1921
 IN TOWN FOR
 DAYS ONLY

Publications



Rather than focusing on Vermont 250 years ago, VHS decided to commemorate the semiquincentennial by telling the story of Vermont for the last 250 years. We invited scholars, students, and local historians from around the state to choose one object from our collection and use it to unpack a part of Vermont's story.

This project was more than a year in the making. VHS staff put together a list of possible objects and reached out to writers, who selected one to research and write about. Just the task of editing and compiling essays took months. Meanwhile, we were photographing the objects and related items from the collection while curating a companion exhibit.

The result is a book of 50 essays with lush photographs inviting the reader to consider our state's multilayered history. A desk inspires an essay about women in politics, a chairlift begins a discussion of the ski industry, and a haori unfolds the richness of immigration to Vermont.



The companion exhibit will be up for all of this semiquincentennial year, offering visitors a glimpse of 250 years of Vermont history. The book, however, will be around for years to come, welcoming readers to consider Vermont's varied and complex history, one object at a time.

Vermont History Center

Built in 1892 and renovated a quarter century ago, the Vermont History Center is a magnificent building that requires continual attention and restoration. During fiscal year 2026, we focused on water mitigation, window restoration, and several smaller projects, all led by our Director of Finance and Operations, Jennifer Blair.



Our French drain system was severely compromised, resulting in water incursion in the basement – right where our collections are stored. Contractors excavated the ground around the building and replaced the damaged drains, installed waterproof sheeting onto the stone foundation, and covered the ground with crushed stone and topsoil. The improved drainage and waterproofing will help protect our museum collections from water, moisture, and mold for decades to come.

When we began repointing the beautiful brickwork on the History Center, we learned that not only was the mortar largely eroded by time and the elements, but that the building is actually stick-built with a brick façade. Many of the bricks were in disrepair and in danger of coming dislodged. To provide the warmth needed to dry the mortar, the front of the building was wrapped and heated as masons painstakingly replaced the mortar.



A good roof is essential to water mitigation, and this year we repaired the roof over the core portion of the building.

Thanks to a grant from the 1772 Foundation in cooperation with the Preservation Trust of Vermont, we also repaired 27 of the most damaged windows: reglazing, repairing frames, replacing cracked panes, and replacing sealant. In all of these projects, we worked closely with the Preservation Trust of Vermont to ensure that we were using contractors who could maintain the historic integrity of the building.

There are many more bricks, roof sections, and windows to attend to, and this is one phase in a multi-year project to address our aging building. We are grateful to the State of Vermont for continuing to include the Vermont History Center in the Capital Bill, as we could not properly care for the building out of our operating budget, and we are always seeking additional sources of funding. This year, we applied to be included on the Central Vermont Regional Project Priority list, and we are pleased to report that the History Center is now considered a regional project priority.

We also added signs to improve wayfinding, replaced some lighting and card readers, and repaired the emergency phone system. In addition, Jennifer did one project for some very special users of our building: bat house installation. Our building is inviting to bats but isn't the best long-term home for these guests, so we've put up bat houses on the lawn to provide more suitable accommodations.



The Vermont Historical Society is a nonprofit organization that operates the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier, the Vermont History Center in Barre, and the Leahy Library, also in Barre. The VHS educates Vermont's schoolchildren, provides support to Vermont's local historical societies, publishes books of historic interest, and offers programming throughout the state and beyond

Chartered in 1838 by the Vermont Legislature, the VHS's 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.



The utmost care has been taken in preparing this report. However, errors occasionally do occur. We apologize if this happened and ask that you notify us.
