

Active Collections Activity Pack

This Active Collections (AC) card pack and associated activities aim to help you work, especially as a group, on different components of the AC process using real collections objects. You have two options for the activities:

- Using the VHS created Object Card Pack
- Creating your own Object Card Pack

The option you choose could depend on the activity or the group you are working with. The VHS created card pack works best in mixed groups, if you don't have your own collections, or if you want to remove some direct emotional decisions from the deliberations. Creating your own card pack is useful if you want to best align the activities with your actual decision-making needs, or if you are from an institution with different types of collections than what is represented in the VHS card pack. Use the separate "Card Template" Word document to create your card set.

There are currently 3 AC activities you can do with a card pack: Tiering, Deaccessioning, and Exhibit Building. Instructions and options for each activity are provided, but we encourage you to use the cards and adapt the activities in ways that work for your group.

Questions or Feedback? Contact director.outreach@vermonthistory.org

Thank you to these organizations for sharing their collections for the VHS Object Card Pack:

- Colchester Historical Society
- Estey Organ Museum
- Greensboro Historical Society
- Hildene
- Lincoln Historical Society
- New York State Bureau of Historic Sites
- Pownal Historical Society
- Shelburne Historical Society
- Waterford Historical Society
- Williston Historical Society

Find more resources on our Active Collections Resource Center:
https://vermonthistory.org/resource-center/

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Active Collections Card Deck Activity- Tiering

Tiering your entire collection can be a long and difficult process. It may be hard to decide where to begin, or how to establish your tiers. This activity is aimed at helping you practice tiering, get more comfortable making assessments, and work towards tiering frameworks specific to your organization. It is often best done as a group.

This activity can be done using either the VHS created Activity Card Deck or your own object cards.

Directions:

1. If you are using the VHS Card Deck, select one of the sample organizations provided here as "your" organization. You could also create your own.

2. Working individually or in small groups, look through the object cards in the deck. Your goal is to assign the objects to one of four tiers. Ask yourself:
    - How well does this object reflect the scope of the collection and the mission of the museum?
    - Would this object have great significance to the community?
    - Is the object well documented, with its origin/provenance?
    - Is the object in good condition? And/or could it be used in exhibits or applicable programs?

3. Create card piles or areas for each tier. Provide an opportunity for discussion amongst the wider group to reach consensus on what tier an object should be assigned to. They should generally represent:
    - *Tier 1*: The objects with the best connection with your mission and collecting scope. They should have high community significance, be well documented, and be in good condition.
    - *Tier 2*: Objects that have some connection to your mission and collecting scope. They may be less significant or have less documentation. They should be in good to fair condition.

- *Tier 3*: Objects that have minimal connection to your mission and collecting scope. They may have less significance and/or documentation. They may have condition issues.
- *Tier 4*: Objects without connection to your mission or collecting scope. They are probably minimally significant and have little to no documentation. They may have significant condition issues.

You should have piles for **ALL FOUR** tiers. If not, go back and reassign objects in your largest pile into some different tiers.

4. At the end, ask yourselves:
    - Was it easy to come to an agreement on the items? Why or why not?
    - Were there certain types of objects that were difficult to tier? What made them difficult?
    - What information was missing in making your decisions?
    - What are some criteria or traits you discussed that could be used in a more specific tiering system at your organization?

Notes:

- The cards represent real objects in real collections. For this exercise, you can think about the objects as representing more generic versions of items and make adjustments in details (like specific locations) if helpful.
- If you are short on time, you can limit your selection of objects. We recommend choosing at least 15 randomly.
- There are Wildcards available in the deck. You can use those if you want to identify a sample Tier 1 or Tier 4 representative object.
- Your biggest card pile should not be Tier 1.

Sample Museums: Mission & Collecting Scope

- The Northeast Museum of Music History's mission is to collect and preserve the history of music in the Northeastern United States in order to foster a greater appreciation of music's role in building a better society.
    - Collecting Scope: Music composed or performed by individuals or groups in the Northeastern United States. Musical instruments made in the Northeastern United States or those used by prominent musicians from the Northeast. Of primary importance are materials created in the 1700-1800s.
- The Vermont Town Historical Society's mission is to collect and preserve the history of the Vermont town, believing that local communities are the heart and soul of our shared humanity.
    - Collecting Scope: Materials from Vermont towns. Priority is given to items from rural communities or that represent rural landscapes. Items that best represent "community spirit" are prioritized.

- The Museum of Innovation & Industry's mission is to inspire people to celebrate and explore industry and technology from the past, present, and future.
    - Collecting Scope: Materials that represent the history of technological change and its societal impact; creative processes for individual inventors; and unique or quirky items that can represent equally realized or unrealized innovation.

- The Museum of Fun Stuff wants you to have fun.
    - Collecting Scope: Fun stuff. Does it spark joy? Does it make you laugh? Would you like to share it with others? If it's not fun, we don't want it.

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VERMONT HISTORY



Active Collections Card Deck Activity- Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning items from your permanent collection can be difficult. There are multiple factors at play, a variety of approaches, and often many opinions. This sample activity is intended to help introduce the concept, think about criteria, and discuss disposal. Please note that this is a simplification of the deaccessioning decision-making process. Real deaccessioning decisions should be made with policies and procedures in place.

Directions:

1. If you are using the VHS Card Deck, select one of the sample organizations provided here as "your" organization. You could also create your own.

2. Place all the cards mixed up in a pile or box. Try not to read the information on the card beforehand. Going around the table, each person will select a card and read the information about the object out loud. They will then decide its deaccessioning fate from these options:
    - Deaccession
    - Keep in the Collections
    - Discuss

3. The person who selected the card should make the initial decision. If it is "Deaccession" or "Keep" any of the other players can immediately challenge that decision. If a decision of "Keep" is accepted by the group, then the player holds that card in their Keep pile. If a decision of "Deaccession" is accepted by the group, then the player holds that card in their Deaccession pile. The first person to have 4 "Keep" cards and 2 "Deaccession" cards is the winner.

4. If the player holding the card wants to discuss, or another player challenges a decision, then group discussion should take place to ultimately decide a Keep or Deaccession on that object.

5. In making the decision to keep or deaccession, consider the following general factors:
    - How well does this object reflect the scope of the collection and the mission of the museum?
    - Is the object well documented, with its origin/provenance?
    - Is the object in good condition?
    - Are there other factors (legal, ethical, aesthetic) that might impact keeping the object in your collection?

6. At the end, ask yourselves:
    - Was it easy to come to an agreement on the items? Why or why not?
    - Were there certain types of objects that were difficult to decide on? What made them difficult?
    - What information was missing in making your decisions?
    - What are some criteria or traits you discussed that could be used as deaccessioning criteria in your own organization?

Disposal

The choice to deaccession is only half the equation. You will also have to decide how to "dispose" of your objects once deaccessioned. If you have time, you can also choose your method of disposal for each object you are deaccessioning. Here are some of the more common disposal options:

- Public sale or auction
- Transfer to another institution or repatriation
- Transfer to your own education or use collection
- Destruction

When deciding on the best disposal method, you may consider some of these questions:

- Does the item fit the mission of another known institution?
- Is the item hazardous or damaged beyond repair?
- Is the item ethically harmful?

Notes:

- The cards represent real objects in real collections. For this exercise, you can adjust some of the information provided if desired to better fit your chosen mission or to make a decision.
- This activity is best in a group size of 2-4 people. If there are more than that, you can create teams. Individuals/teams can either choose to be different organizations or the same organization.
- If you are short on time, you can try a “speed round.” Take all the cards and divide into 3 Deaccession piles- Yes, Maybe, No. Take no more than 30 seconds to decide on each card. With any remaining time, go back and make decisions for your “Maybe” pile.
- There are Wildcards available in the deck. We do not recommend using them in this exercise.

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VERMONT HISTORY

ACTIVATING 21ST CENTURY LOCAL HISTORY TRAINING PROGRAM

Build an Exhibit Activity

This activity aims to help you work, especially as a group, on some aspects of museum exhibit creation. This includes:

- Establishing a theme
- Object selection
- Interpretive text and label writing

It utilizes the object card packs to create your own mini-exhibit while honing your skills in exhibition development. In addition to the card pack, a display board or surface where you can arrange the cards is recommended.

1. Spread out all the object cards in your pack. As a group, start to look for connections or items that spark interest or draw your eye.

2. Start to move the object cards into groups that could be centered around a common theme. This could be by any variety of objective or subjective connections. Potential connections to explore include:

    - Physical Attributes (What material is it made out of and why?);
    - Available Themes (What was this made or used for? What broader aspect of your community/world does it represent?);
    - Uniqueness (Why is this specific object important?)

3. Finalize a group (5-10 items) of objects you'd like to then develop into your exhibit. Utilize your "Wild Cards" if there is an object that is missing that you think would be essential to expressing your theme.

4. Finalize your exhibit theme. You may want to start with a broad theme (i.e.- Agriculture) then focus it down to fit what is unique or most applicable to your intended exhibit audience (e.g.- time period, type of farming, who farmed, change over time, etc.). Write your theme sentence or sentences (max. 3)

5. With your theme in mind, write down 1-3 goals or takeaways you would like visitors to have after viewing the exhibit. Use these prompts to start:

    - What are the most important stories to tell?
    - What are visitors most interested in?
    - What do we want to communicate?

6. With those pieces in mind, write an introductory paragraph for your exhibit. The paragraph should utilize interpretation and a thesis. Good interpretation works to:

    - Present multiple/diverse points of view
    - Treat the audience as intelligent people, but does not assume specific knowledge. For example- do not assume people know about a specific historic figure or event.
    - Encourage dialogue and illuminate relevance. For example- pointing out specific features of an artifact and their meaning, or drawing parallels between something in the past and today.
    - Connect audience to meaning, but allows audience members to have and maintain their own perspective

7. Place your objects, title/theme, and intro paragraph on a display board in a manner that might mimic how it could be organized in a three-dimensional space.

8. Come up with a short list of additional materials or interactives you think would help in reaching your exhibit goals that could be added to your exhibit. This could include things like audio/visual materials, interactive elements, or programming.

9. If working with multiple groups, share-out information on your exhibit with the other groups. Discuss some of these aspects of creating this exhibit:

    - What was the easiest part of this? What was the hardest part?
    - How did you choose objects to tell the stories you wanted?
    - What information was essential to include?
    - How did you come up with your goals/takeaways?

Notes:

- The cards represent real objects in real collections. For this exercise, you can think about the objects as representing more generic versions of items and make adjustments in details (like specific locations) if helpful.
- If you are short on time, you can limit your work to steps 1-5.

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Globe (1810-1819)



Sap Bucket (19th Century)



Steam Engine (ca. 1793)



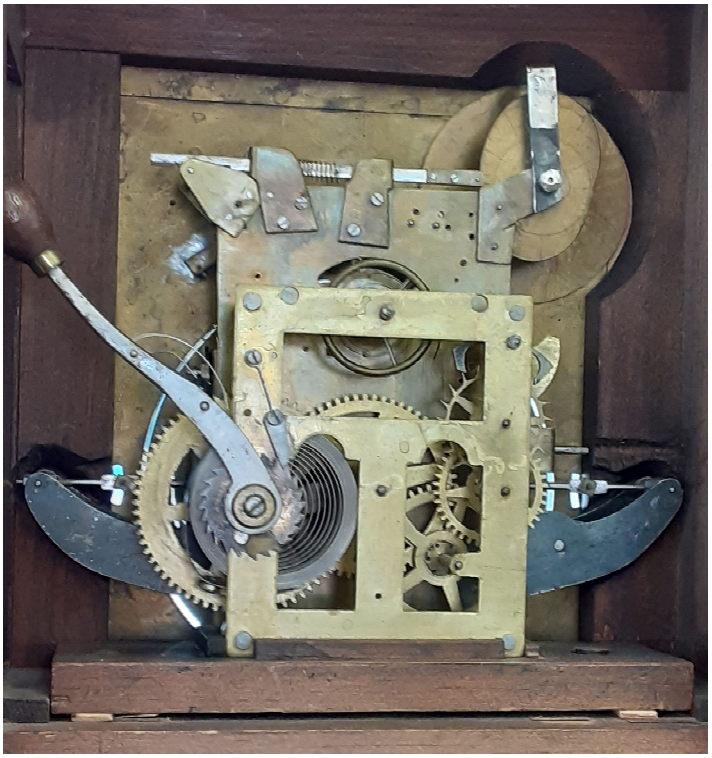
Butter Churn (1877-1900)

The cultivation of maple in Vermont began with the Abenaki, the region's original inhabitants. This birch bark sap bucket, also called a "quick basket," would have been attached to a wooden spile stuck into a maple tree and left hanging to collect sap as it ran in early spring. (Vermont Historical Society)

James Wilson of Bradford, VT grew particularly enamored of globes, and set out to make his own. His globes were the first to be manufactured in America, and found a ready audience in schools in particular. The company continued to produce globes in Vermont and New York for nearly fifty years. (Vermont Historical Society)

The Vermont Farm Machinery Company, based in Bellows Falls, patented this "swing" churn in the 1870s,, helping to mechanize production of larger quantities of butter. The churn appeared in a number of sizes, holding between 4 and 50 gallons of cream. Model No. 5 could hold 13 gallons. (Vermont Historical Society)

Samuel Morey was an inventor from Fairlee, VT and Orford, NH. In the early 1790s, he began to develop a steam engine. But, he was slow to patent his ideas and others have been credited with inventing the first steam ships instead. This is a model of Morey's original steam engine donated by his family. (Vermont Historical Society)



Universal Time Indicator (c. 1860)



Stovepipe Hat (ca. 1860s)



Snowshoe Form (19th Century)



Portrait (ca. 1836)

This silk stove pipe hat was made by Seger & Nichols, a New York City based hat maker, and belonged to President Abraham Lincoln. The hat was cherished by the Lincoln family for many generations . (Hildene)

Rear view of the Universal Time Indicator built by Russell Munson, a Williston farmer, c. 1860. While keeping track of the date and day of the week, this time piece indicates the time at select cities in the Northern Hemisphere the Lunar phases and The Solstice or Equinox. (Williston Historical Society)

Ellen Kinsman (b. 1833) was the daughter of Barre lawyer, Newell Kinsman. This portrait by an unknown artist is part of a family group that includes her parents and two brothers, and illustrates the talent of itinerant portrait painters of the day. (Vermont Historical Society)

This snowshoe form was made by Aaron Hill. Brown ash for the frame was soaked in water or steamed, set into the snowshoe form, and allowed to dry permanently into the proper shape. Leather bindings with wooden crosspieces were mortised into the frame. (Greensboro Historical Society)



Quilt (1932)



Violin (ca. 1908)



Squeaker Toy (Date Unknown)



Crock (19th Century)

Forrest Gray of East Calais was a tinsmith and self-taught musician. He made the body of this fiddle from the tin he was using to make water pails. If you look closely you will see other repairs he made using any materials that were convenient. (Vermont Historical Society)

This handstitched quilt by Frances Slater Russo of Rutland is a "Grandmother's Flower Garden" pattern, one of the most popular patterns of the early 20th century. Frances worked as a seamstress during the Great Depression, and it is estimated she spent a thousand hours working on the quilt. (Vermont Historical Society)

Stoneware crock decorated with a hand painted design of a bell flower. Made by Lewis & Cady in Fairfax, VT who were one of three potteries in that town in the 19th century (Vermont Historical Society)

Carved out of wood and sitting atop a cloth bellows, when you push the cat figure down, it opens its mouth and meows. It's not clear whether this toy was made for a child or simply as an attention-getting example of the maker's ingenuity. (Vermont Historical Society)



Beam Fragment (c. 1733)





Piano (1864-1873)



Sleigh (c. 1820)



Bicentennial Vinyl Record (1965)

Square “Behning & Klix” piano. Henry Behning worked under this company name from 1864 to 1873 in New York City. The donor claimed this piano belonged to “Senator Foot of Vermont” (likely Solomon Foot, 1802-1866). At some point in the instrument’s history, it was disassembled and never reassembled. It is unclear whether all pieces remain present. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, Fort Ontario State Historic Site Collection)

Beam fragment removed from Philadelphia’s Independence Hall during renovations in 1897. Pieces of the structure that exhibited rot were removed at the time and the removed pieces were sold as souvenirs. This fragment was on exhibit for years, exposed to the elements and pests, causing further deterioration. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, New Windsor Cantonment Collection)

Cinema ’76, Songs of the Continental Soldier was originally presented by The Continental Insurance Companies at the New York World’s Fair. It was arranged and conducted by Tony Mottola with words and music by Ray Charles. The songs are inspired by Revolutionary War figures. The record includes an illustrated booklet with lyrics. All parts are in good condition. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, Steuben Cabin Collection)

Sleigh donated to the collection by a prominent local family. It is a fairly common style, but the a pastoral scene painted on the back of the sleigh is a significant and unusual feature. It is in fair condition, although it has been stored in a barn with a pest infestation for many years.
(NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, John Jay Homestead Collection)



Wine Bottle (c. 1850)



Coverlet c. 1880)



Musket (c. 1763)



Clay Bowl (date unknown)

Coverlet with no known provenance or donor. It was found in the collection and accessioned in 1972. It is woven cotton and linen threads in shades of blue, cream, and brown and has fringe on three sides. It is in poor condition and appears to be only a portion of a larger coverlet. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, Herkimer Home Collection)

This wine bottle belonged to John Jay's son, Peter Augustus Jay. It was donated to the site by descendants of the family. The label says "March & Benson, Constitution", likely referring to the importers and ship connected to this bottle. It contains wine and is closed with a cork and wax. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, John Jay Homestead Collection)

Clay bowl painted black. A stylized bird head is sculpted on one side, with a handle on the other. It was donated to the collection by a local resident who only identified it as "Native American" with no additional information or provenance. It is in fair condition. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, Letchworth State Park Collection)

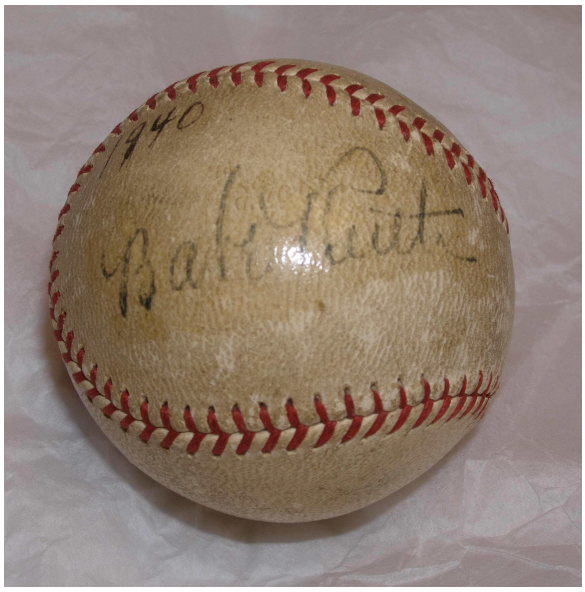
French flintlock musket, Model 1763, the most common pattern musket supplied to the United States by France during the Revolutionary War. It was found in the collection and has no known donor. It is one of several flintlock muskets in the collection. It appears to be in fair condition. (NYS Bureau of Historic Sites, Washington's Headquarters Collection)



Chair (c. 1700s)



Medal (1897)



Baseball (1940)



Potato Rock (ca. 1920s)

Medal worn to the inauguration of William McKinley as President of the United States in 1897. Duplicated within the collection (Vermont Historical Society)

This chair, formerly the property of Prince Victor Napoleon was bought by Mrs. Stewart Campbell on July 12, 1927 at the sale of the effects of the Empress Eugenie's effects at Christies, London. (Vermont Historical Society)

Smooth round rock collected as a petrified potato. The rock is accompanied by a paper note reading, "Not a petrified potato". (Vermont Historical Society)

In 1940 Harry Loyzell, of Fryeburg, Maine, traveled to North Conway, New Hampshire, where Babe Ruth was playing golf. Loyzell's uncle had previously acquired this ball from Fenway Park during a Red Sox game, and Loyzell asked Ruth to sign it. (Vermont Historical Society)



Household Cleaner (1912)



Dunce Hat (19th Century)

The heyday of the dunce cap seems to have been the Victorian era. The classic image is of a sullen child in a basic cone hat adorned with the word “dunce” or simply a large letter “D,” who is sent to a stool in a corner of the classroom. It was as much a punishment as a warning to other children thinking of potentially acting out. (Colchester Historical Society)

The Myrlite Company in 1912 made “Jim Dandy Cleaner” from chalk they hauled from the Pownal Chalk Pond. The Company was housed in the old Solomon Wright Mill Site by the Covered Bridge that crossed the Hoosic River in Pownal. Their slogan was, “Where Others Fail Let “Jim” Do It - He Will”. (Pownal Historical Society)



Bookmark (ca. 1900)



Band Uniform (19th Century)

This late 19th Century Band Uniform was found in a home in Shelburne . Designed similarly to military jackets, uniforms like this one was very popular for small town bands in the post Civil War period. (Shelburne Historical Society)

The Estey Organ Company produced numerous marketing and promotional items over the years. The back of this bookmark describes the value of owning one of their organs and declares that “An Estey is a Home Necessity.” (Estey Organ Museum)



Aeolion Pipe Organ (1908)



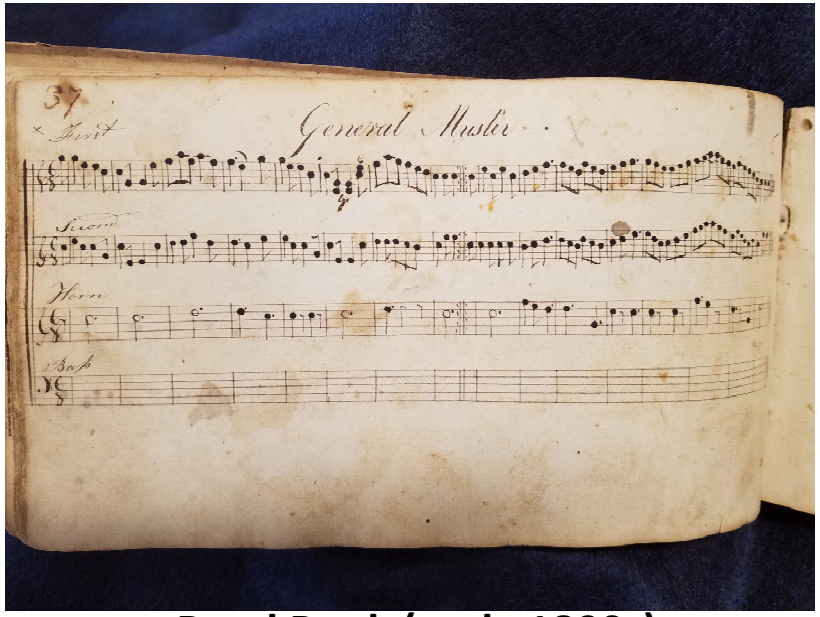
Music Box (1880)

In 1908, Robert Lincoln installed this 900 pipe Aeolian Pipe Organ. His wife, Mary Harlan Lincoln, was a very talented musician and could play the organ manually, but the family could also use the player attachment which would automatically play music from a player roll. After a complete restoration in 1980, staff are still able to use the player mechanism to play music for our visitors. (Hildene)

The Russell Munson music box. It is a 19th century folk art music box built by Russell Munson, a Williston Farmer, at his home in 1880 at 71 years of age. (Williston Historical Society



Bobbins (ca. 1920-1970)



Band Book (early 1800s)

Bobbins are cylinders or spindles on which yarn or thread is wound. The Lincoln Center Mill, established in 1890, converted to making bobbins in 1919 and continued in this business until 1972. Until the late 1950s the blanks were shipped south for finishing by the textile mills to fit their individual preferences. (Lincoln Historical Society)

Armies during the period of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 used musical instruments to disseminate battle information and orders. This handwritten music book dating from the early 1800s is marked in pen as the "Washington Band Book, Shelburne, VT". It is quite possible that this book was used by the town's militia members in the War of 1812. (Shelburne Historical Society)



Archaeological Collections (20th century)



Trunk (ca. 1950)

These materials were collected in 2018 during an archaeology project at the the Hale-Bonnett-Koeppl Farm in Waterford, VT. The main barn at the site dates from the late 1800-early 1900s, but these remains came from 20th century use and include glass and metal items. (Waterford Historical Society)

Dr. David Fukuda served as an anesthesiologist at Barre City Hospital and the Central Vermont Medical Center for over thirty years. He and his family used this trunk, one of seven, to move from Japan to Vermont in the 1950s. (Vermont Historical Society)