Introduction

This collection contains the records of the Vermont Theater Curtain Project which was under way in the state from 1996 through 2010. The collection was given to the Vermont Historical Society by Christine Hadsel, director of the project in 2011. It is stored in three document storage boxes and consumes 3 linear feet of shelf space.

Agency History

The Vermont Painted Theater Curtain Conservation Project began in 1996 as a project of the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance (VMGA) with a survey to find and assess the condition of Vermont’s collection of historic painted curtain scenery. The total number of historic painted curtains in Vermont stands at 185, including two owned privately. Conservation work began in November 2002 and by September 2009, 160 pieces had been cleaned, mended, and judiciously in-painted. 120 of these were then installed on their home stages in town halls, grange halls, community theaters, and opera houses. By 2011, about another 8 curtains were ready to be installed once their home stages were ready for them and an additional 25 were put into “deep” storage because they were too fragile to be displayed.

Between 1880 and 1940, painted scenery (primarily roll drops, with a few “fly” scenes) was especially popular in northern New England and the upper Midwest. Unfortunately, many were discarded as they became worn and dirty, as tastes changed and as many theaters became movie houses. However, in Vermont, curtains were often bundled up with baling twine, stashed in ceiling crawl spaces or shoved under the stage. By bringing the scenery back into public view and giving it new life with stabilization of the fabric, paint and support systems, the project hoped to encourage the continued use of Vermont’s cultural, social and political centers.

The conservation team for the Vermont Painted Theater Curtain project consisted of three professional Vermont conservators from different disciplines (textiles, painting, and paper), a pair of technicians, the project director who doubled as another assistant, and a professional rigger. The project was designed to incorporate local volunteers and teach them the basics of care and handling of their curtains as they work along side the professional team. The project required a financial contribution from every community, although grants paid for three-fourths of the total cost.

The primary financial support for the Vermont project came from the National Endowment for the Arts and “Save America’s Treasures” through a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Park Service, and the Department of the Interior. There were been important contributions from the Vermont Legislature, the Vermont Community Foundation, the Walter Cerf fund, the Windham Foundation, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Vermont Historical Society, and the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance.
Freeman Foundation, the Preservation Trust of Vermont, the Connecticut River Valley Commission, the Bay and Paul Foundations, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Vermont businesses, and generous individuals. The project was also assisted by numerous volunteers from all over Vermont.

**Scope and Content Note**

The collection consists of the working files of the Vermont Theater Curtain Project, maintained in the organization in which these records were originally accumulated and used. The collection is highly visual and photographic in nature with photos documenting each of the curtains before, after and during conservation treatment. The majority of files correspond with specific curtains and are identified by town or other place name. These files include prints and negatives as well as digital photos (some on CD and some on 3 ½ inch floppy disk). Records on the electronic media may also include treatment reports and other written documentation. A separate series of CDs is included in the collection and appears to contain a final compilation of relevant photographs and written information for each curtain conservation project. Also included are slides documenting each individual curtain.

**Additional Information**

The project is further documented in the pamphlet *Scenic Artists in Vermont: Theatrical Scenery, 1900-1940* by Christine Hadsel and Wylie Garcia (2012).

**Inventory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doc 676</th>
<th>Town</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Albany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Andover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ascutney – probably gone</td>
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<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Bakersfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Barnet</td>
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<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Barre – gone</td>
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<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Barton</td>
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<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Berlin Grange</td>
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<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Bethel</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Bradford – gone</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Brandon – gone</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Brattleboro Masons</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Brattleboro Opera House – gone</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Bridport</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bridgewater Corners</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Brownington</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Brookfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 (a)</td>
<td>Burlington City Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 (b)</td>
<td>Burlington Howard Opera House – gone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20 Cabot
21 Cambridge/Jeffersonville
22 Canaan
23 Cavendish/Perkinsville
24 Chelsea
25 Chittenden
26 Concord
27 Cornwall/Whiting
28 Craftsbury
29 Danville
30 Derby Line
31 Dummerston
32 East Bethel Grange
33 East Braintree
34 East Randolph
35 East Topsham
36 Enosburg Falls
Doc 677.01 Fairlee
02 Ferrisburgh
03 Fletcher
04 Franklin – Town Hall
05 Georgia – gone
06 Glover
07 Grafton
08 Granville
09 Guilford
10 Hardwick
11 Hartland
12 Huntington
13 Hyde Park
14 Irasburg
15 Jamaica
16 Johnson
17 Leicester
18 Ludlow
19 Lyndon
20 McIndoes Fall
21 Middlebury – gone
22 Milton
23 Montpelier – Blanchard Opera House
24 Moretown
25 Newfane
26 North Hyde Park
27 Northfield
28 Passumpsic Grange – Barnet Town Hall
29 Pawlet
30  Perkinsville
31  Putney
32  Reading
33  Richford
34  Rochester

Doc 678.01  Rutland
  02  St. Johnsbury
  03  Salisbury
  04  Saxtons River
  05  Shelburne
  06  South Londonderry
  07  South Royalton
  08  Springfield
  09  Starksboro
  10  Stowe – gone
  11  Sudbury
  12  Sutton
  13  Townsend
  14  Tunbridge Grange
  15  Vergennes
  16  Vershire
  17  Waterbury Center
  18  West Barnet Grange
  19  West Burke
  20  West Fairlee
  21  West Hartford, Vt.
  22  West Haven
  23  West Rupert
  24  West Windsor
  25  Westford
  26  Westminster
  27  Westminster – Institute
  28  Wheelock
  29  Wilder
  30  Williamstown
  31  Williamsville (Newfane)
  32  Woodstock
  33  Worcester
    _____: Chittenden – Huntington
    _____: Huntington - Richford
    _____: Reading – Sudbury
    _____: Townsend – Wilder
    _____: Condition Slides
  40  CDs, 1-4: Albany – Derby Line
  41  _____, 5-8: Dummerston Center – Northfield
42 _____, 9-12: Passumpsic Grange – West Barnet
43 _____, 13-15: West Fairlee – Worcester (Middlesex)

Ruth Finn & Paul Carnahan
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VermontTheaterCurtainProject.doc