



Friends of the Vermont State House

# TRUSTEES' HANDBOOK

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## **WELCOME!**

**The Friends of the Vermont State House is excited to welcome you to the board of trustees. You join the organization at a pivotal time, as we are in the process of enlivening the organization and addressing important issues and opportunities facing the State House and its various associated communities.**

**A dedicated governance and nominating committee has worked hard to find talented and passionate nominees and we are confident that you will help us propel the organization to new heights! We look forward to working with you on important initiatives that affect the State House and civics education in Vermont.**

## **WHO WE ARE**

### **FRIENDS OF THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE MISSION STATEMENT**

The Friends of the Vermont State House celebrate, advocate for, and help steward the Vermont State House. The Friends work to ensure that the State House is recognized for its central role in our democratic institutions, as a living museum where Vermont's rich and complicated history can be interpreted and understood, and as a source of pride where everyone feels welcome.

### **TRUSTEES, OFFICERS AND ADMINISTRATOR**

The organization is made up of three officers (Chair, Treasurer and Secretary) and a group of trustees. The number of trustees changes and currently we have about 20.

The Friends of the Vermont State House 501c3 has a single employee who is the administrator of the Friends. The job of the administrator is to handle all business issues, including managing finances, executing the Annual Appeal and working closely with the executive committee and other committees on Friends' initiatives.

### **AFFILIATES**

Friends of the Vermont State House works with the State Curator's Office, the Sergeant at Arms and other organizations to accomplish our mission and carry out special initiatives and programs.

The activities section of this document outlines some of our many initiatives, projects and services and other groups we align with.

# TRUSTEE RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Each Trustee of the Friends of the Vermont State House embraces the heart of the organization's mission which, most essentially, seeks to create the spirit and reality of inclusion within the capitol.

Specific responsibilities include:

- Attending all meetings of the Board of Trustees and advising the Chair if an absence is necessary;
- actively serving on at least one committee of the organization;
- financially supporting the organization according to individual means;
- reaching out to community circles to promote wide public awareness of the Vermont State House and civic participation in its functions;
- advocate for ongoing improvements to the State House in both the cultural and physical sense;
- attend and host Friends' events and consider an active role as a State House volunteer.

## **FRIENDS' STANDING COMMITTEES**

The following standing committees operate in service of the organization's mission.

### **VISITOR SERVICES COMMITTEE**

The Visitors Services Committee focuses on serving visitors to ensure they feel welcome and engaged with the living museum that is the Vermont State House. It stewards the operation of the State House gift shop; builds capacity for a robust team of volunteers, including recruitment, training, and celebration; advises the Visitor's Services Coordinator; helps the curator and Curatorial Task Force develop educational resources related to the building; and facilitates initiatives that support the visitor experience in line with the Friends of VT State House mission.

### **GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

The Governance and Nominating Committee focuses on the Friends of the Vermont State House organization itself. Major responsibilities include recruiting and orientating new board members as well as stewarding bylaws governed by the Friends' Mission and Vision. Leadership is exercised for creating and nurturing policies and procedures supporting ethical and effective operation of the organization.

### **OUTREACH AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Outreach and Development Committee focuses on promoting the Friends and fundraising. The major standing charges of this group are development, regular and special communication to constituents, and advocacy.

### **EXECUTIVE**

The executive committee will continue to consist of the organization's officers per the organization's bylaws. It may also elect an at-large member at its discretion. It acts on behalf of the full board in cases where timely action is needed or authority is otherwise delegated by the full board.

*Please note that the committee structure is new as of 2023, and committees are encouraged to evaluate these descriptions on an annual basis and update them as appropriate.*

## RESOURCES

### WEBSITE

- Friends of the Vermont State House: <https://friendsvtstatehouse.org/> (managed by Friends of the Vermont State House)
- Trustee List: What We Do – Trustees <https://friendsvtstatehouse.org/what-we-do/>
- Board Meeting Schedule: What We Do – Board Meetings <https://friendsvtstatehouse.org/what-we-do/>
- Friends’ News and Events: <https://friendsvtstatehouse.org/news-events/>
- Also includes online shopping and online donation pages

### VERMONT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- <https://legislature.vermont.gov/>
- State House Map: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/the-state-house/visiting-the-state-house/state-house-floor-maps/>
- The Official Vermont State House Website: <https://statehouse.vermont.gov/> (managed by the Vermont State Curator’s Office)

### GOOGLE DRIVE

All files pertaining to Friends of the Vermont State House are archived on a Google Drive. Invoices, schedules, committee minutes and most other documents are available for trustees on the organization’s Google Drive. Contact the administrator, Gail Carrigan, for details.

## **FRIENDS' PURSUITS AND ACTIVITIES**

### **STATE HOUSE RESTORATION**

The Friends of the State House was formed as a 501c3 organization originally to restore the Vermont State House. Since 1981, the Friends' have assisted the State Curator with restoration, conservation and interpretation of the State House and its collections.

### **STATE HOUSE TOURS**

Volunteer docents lead State House tours for school children during the legislative session. They also host tours during the tourist season, generally from July through October. There is no charge for tours, but we recommend that bus tour companies pay the Friends a nominal fee per head when visiting the State House. There is also a donation box in the State House Lobby for visitors to pay as they wish.

The docents are recruited and managed by the Tours Coordinator, who works for the Sergeant at Arms in conjunction with the State Curator's Office.

Friends of the Vermont State House hosts volunteer appreciation events three times a year: a volunteer lunch in May, a full-day field trip in the fall and a holiday decorating party in December.

### **UNDER THE DOME GIFT SHOP**

Friends of the Vermont State House operates a gift shop that operates on as a gift kiosk on select days during the legislative session and as a full- size gift shop on days that the State House is open for tours during the summer and fall.

The gift shop is overseen by the Visitor Services Committee.

### **INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION**

The Friends of the State House and the State Curator's Office created a self-guided audio tour for the State House and have been working jointly toward the creation of a new interpretive plan for the State House—a chance to evaluate the stories the building currently tells its public—and to further identify the stories we feel ought to be told.

In addition, the Friends has worked jointly with Vermont Humanities and the Center for Cartoon Studies to create a booklet, *Freedom & Unity*, create a graphic guide about the past, present, and promise of democracy and civics in our brave little state. Freedom and Unity is the answer to that challenge.

<https://www.cartoonstudies.org/css-studio/cartooningprojects/freedomandunity/>

## **STATE HOUSE PORTRAITURE**

A portrait Of Alexander Twilight has recently been installed in the State House. The Friends of the Vermont State House and the National Life Insurance Company joined the Vermont State Curator's Office in commissioning a portrait of Alexander Twilight, the first African-American legislator in the United States.

Other portraits are currently under consideration.

## **FARMERS' NIGHT**

The Friends of the Vermont State House hosts one Farmers' Night at the State House during the Legislative session. We work in conjunction with Legislators and the State Curator's office to offer the Farmers' Night Performance.

## **HISTORY DAY PRIZES**

The Friends of the Vermont State House works with the Vermont Historical Society to award prizes to two winners of the essay contest for Vermont History Day.

The Freedom and Unity Civics Prize sponsored by the Friends of the Vermont State House awards prizes to two projects that best express the spirit of the Vermont motto - Freedom and Unity - as practiced in an open government and with civic engagement for all people.

This prize is awarded in memory of two civics education advocates, Bill Haines and Jack Carter.

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Friends of the State House hosted a journalism symposium a few years ago and looks forward to pursuing similar ambitious projects moving forward as time and resources permit.

## FRIENDS OF THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE

### TRUSTEES, STAFF AND ASSOCIATES –2023

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# AT A GLANCE – BOARD MEETINGS FOR 2024

## Friends of the Vermont State House Board Meetings

2024

### Friends of the Vermont State House Board Meetings

Friends' board meetings will take place every other month on a Monday at 2:00 pm.

Meetings will be hybrid, but trustees are encouraged to attend in person if they are able.

Specific meeting details will be shared in advance of the meeting.

**January**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

**February**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

**March**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

**April**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

**May**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

**June**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

**July**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

**August**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

**September**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

**October**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

**November**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

**December**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

print-a-calendar.com

## **2023 Revision**

### **BYLAWS OF THE FRIENDS OF THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE, INC.**

#### **ARTICLE I**

##### **Mission and Vision**

- 1. Mission:** The Friends of The Vermont State House (“The Organization” or “The Friends”) celebrate, advocate for, and help steward the Vermont State House. The Friends work to ensure that the State House is recognized for its central role in our democratic institutions, as a living museum where Vermont’s rich and complicated history can be interpreted and understood, and as a source of pride where everyone feels welcome.
- 2. Vision:** The Friends of the Vermont State House envision Vermont’s capitol as a welcoming, active, and educational resource for all. The building serves as the seat of state government where Vermonters can observe and participate in their democracy. It is a classroom in which the public explores and is challenged by our State’s rich history. It is a building that reflects Vermont’s diversity, ongoing civic discussion, and decisions. It signals to young people and new Vermonters that this is their house as well. The building is cherished, and a point of pride for Vermonters.

#### **ARTICLE II**

##### **People and Process**

- 1.** The Friends of the Vermont State House shall be open to all those who are interested in, and who contribute to, the objectives of the organization. Such individuals shall have the right to attend any meeting and/or program of The Friends.
- 2.** The Friends of the State House shall maintain an accessibility and inclusion plan to ensure its openness to all interested parties. The Friends of the State House shall work in partnership with the Vermont State Curator’s Office, the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Vermont State House, the Legislative Advisory Committee on the Vermont State House, and other entities with similar interests in service of The Friends’ mission and vision. Representatives of such partners are welcome to attend meetings and programs of The Friends.
- 3.** Primary activities include but aren’t necessarily limited to: assisting with the acquisition of new works of art for the State House; organizing programming consistent with the Organization’s mission; promoting the State House, the Organization, and associated programming; advocating for the State House, especially as a cultural institution; assisting with the administration of volunteers related to the Building; administration of the Under the Dome

Gift Shop; assisting in the creation of relevant publications; and assisting with exhibit design and interpretation as appropriate.

4. The Under the Dome Gift Shop provides funds to support The Friends' commitment and emphasizes Vermont products to thousands of tourists.

## **ARTICLE III**

### **Trustees**

1. The affairs of The Friends shall be managed and controlled by the Board of Trustees. The Trustees shall have the power to engage in any and all lawful activities which may be necessary, desirable, or useful for the furtherance or attainment of any or all of the purposes for which the Organization is organized. Specifically, the Trustees shall have the power to make all determinations with regard to the use of the corporate funds for the support of the corporate purposes. The Trustees shall have the ability to elect officers from among its members.

2. There shall be at least eight (8) Trustees. Those Trustees shall constitute a Board of Trustees.

3. At each annual meeting, the Board may elect additional Trustees, as may be necessary.

4. An elected or duly appointed Trustee shall serve a term of three (3) years with no term limits, as long as he or she continues to participate in the activities of the organization and in meetings of the Board. New Trustees shall be appointed and elected by vote of the Board.

5. Any Trustee's resignation will become effective by giving written notice to the Chair or Co-Chair.

6. Trustees are expected to attend meetings of the Board and should notify the Chair or Co-Chair if they must miss a meeting. A Trustee may be removed from office by a majority vote of the Board of Trustees if he or she fails to attend three consecutive meetings without notice.

7. No Trustee shall receive any compensation for services as such, but may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred in such service.

## **ARTICLE IV**

### **Meetings**

1. The Organization shall hold its annual meeting of the Board for the election of Trustees, and the transaction of such other business as may come before the meeting. The date, time, and location of the annual meeting shall be determined by the Trustees.

2. Regular or special meetings of the Board of Trustees shall be held at such times and places as the Trustees, or Chair or Co-Chair, may determine.

3. Notice of meetings of The Friends of the Vermont State House, whether annual or special, shall be prominently posted on the organization's website at least 14 days prior to the meeting and shall include the purpose for the meeting. Notice shall also be delivered to each Trustee by electronic mail at least 7 days prior to any meeting.

4. All meetings of the Trustees shall be open. At any meeting, a quorum is presumed unless challenged, and if challenged shall exist if a number of Trustees equaling one-half plus one of the duly appointed Trustees are present.

5. All Trustees present via in-person, video, or telephonic attendance at any meeting of the Trustees may vote on business presented at that meeting.

## ARTICLE V

### **Officers**

1. The officers of the Organization shall consist of a Chair or Co-Chairs, a Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer, who shall be elected by the Trustees at the first meeting after the annual meeting. In the event of Co-Chairs, a Vice Chair shall not be required. Said officers shall constitute an Executive Committee of the Organization. Subject to any limitations established by them, the Trustees may delegate authority to the Executive Committee.

2. All officers shall hold office for a period of one (1) year, or until their successors are elected.

3. The officers of the Organization may choose to elect one at-large member from the Board to serve on the Executive Committee until the next election of officers. An at-large member will be considered a full member of the Executive Committee.

## ARTICLE VI

### **Honorary Trustees**

1. Individuals may be elected as Honorary Trustees. Nominations for election as an Honorary Trustee may be made by any member of the Board of Trustees. Nominations shall be in writing, and may be presented to the Trustees at any scheduled meeting. Upon approval of the nomination by the Trustees, the nominee shall be presented to The Friends for approval and election at an annual meeting.

2. Honorary Trustees may participate in and vote on the business of the Organization.

3. Honorary Trustees are appointed for life.

## **ARTICLE VII**

### **Committees**

1. The Board may establish and disband standing and ad hoc committees in furtherance of the Organization's mission. The Organization shall maintain a document articulating each of the standing committees and their respective charges.
2. Each committee will elect its own chair, who shall each be a member of the Board.
3. Trustees may choose the committee(s) on which they serve.
4. The Chair or Co-Chairs of the Board shall have ultimate authority of oversight to support the health of each committee. If, in the opinion of the of the Chair or Co-Chairs, a committee or its chair is unable to execute its charge, the Chair or Co-Chairs is authorized to intervene with regards to membership and leadership. The Chair shall be considered an ex-officio member of all committees.
5. Committee membership shall be open to interested members of the community at large.

## **ARTICLE VIII**

### **Amendments**

1. These bylaws may be amended in whole or in part by the Board, in each case by a majority vote at any duly warned meeting of the Organization, provided the proposed amendments are posted on the Organization's website for review at least 14 days prior to the meeting at which they are to be considered.

# HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE

*Written by Arthur F. Williams, a Friends of the Vermont State House Trustee, 1993*

*Document retyped exactly as the original exists and reformatted for electronic distribution to the Friends of the Vermont State House board.*

*Mary H. Leahy. November, 2014*

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Title 29.Ch.154. V.S.A. is very clear where the ultimate authority for care of the State House rests—with the legislature.

However, in 1960 with the creation of the Division of State Buildings, the Director was given responsibility for care of the building.

In 1967, Governor Hoff and others became concerned with the quality of paintings being accepted for the State House by any official and how they were displayed. Also, Cedar Creek and other works of art were in poor condition. The Legislature then added Chapter 155 to Title 29, creating a State House Preservation Committee composed of the Chairs of the Senate and House Institutions Committees, the Sgt. At Arms and the Director of State Buildings and the Director of the V.H.S.

In 1969, the Capitol underwent a modernization of convenience. The cafeteria was moved from the Card Room to the annex, modern globes and dropped acoustical ceilings were installed with climate control systems, glass doors replaced old House and Senate entrances, carpeting was laid and the building interior was painted. One problem, all portraits were removed and no one had a record of where they had been hung! Also historic furnishings were auctioned for the V.H.S.

State Buildings then turned to the State Arts Council for help and since I had just come from the Legislature and was in charge of Fine Arts programs at VCA, and was Chairman of State Board of Historic Sites, I was selected as the one to rehang and arrange to restore the collection and I became de facto administrator for the new preservation committee.

From '69 to '79 all major paintings were restored, including Cedar Creek but the job on Cedar Creek was poorly done and large paint bubbles began to appear with change of climate and

moisture content. In 1979, I met Dan Robbins who was visiting the Arts Council, he was Professor of Fine Arts at Dartmouth and was very concerned with the State House modernization and its historic deterioration. He received a N.E.A. and V.C.A. Grant to do a study of the State House and how it could be preserved. I believe it was 1979 when we hired David Schutz to work on this study and subsequent book with Dr. Robbins.

One of Robbins' recommendations in the study was the formation of an association of citizens to give tours and serve as guardians of the building.

## **BIRTH OF FRIENDS**

In the summer of 1980, Dan Robbins gave a talk on the architecture of the State House to the Vermont Harvard Club. Mrs. Snelling attended and offered her services in starting a new association. That fall, Robbins, Williams and Schutz visited Mrs. Snelling at UVM and asked her to Chair this proposed organization. By-laws were written, incorporation papers were filed and we used the State Treasurer's Office for contributions until we received our 501 ( c ) 3. Hazel Leland's first minutes in November of '81 and second in December outline the following goals and objectives:

## **PROVISIONAL OBJECTIVES**

1. Help develop a master plan for restoration of the Vermont State House and its collections of fine and decorative arts.
2. Obtain appropriate professional staff to implement an adopted master plan.
3. Coordinate goals with State House Preservation Committee efforts.
4. Promote historical interpretation of the building and its contents.
5. Engage in fund-raising for special projects such as:
  - a. Restoration of the Senate chandelier;
  - b. Commissioning portraits of past and future governors;
  - c. Obtaining appropriate furnishings for rooms;
  - d. Issuing publications pertinent to the State House;
  - e. Replacing the chandelier in the main lobby area;
  - f. Purchasing works of art of historical significance;
  - g. Providing guides for tours.
6. Receive gifts of historical significance.
7. Sponsor and encourage social events in the State House.
8. Enlist members.

In 1984, we petitioned the Senate Institutions Committee to add the position of Curator for the State House to the Division of State Buildings. Opposed by the Sgt. at Arms in a jurisdictional dispute, our efforts failed but the Legislature amended Ch. 155 to create a new committee,



## TRUSTEE HANDBOOK FRIENDS OF THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE

called the State House Advisory Committee, composed of 11 members---3 Senate, 3 House, Chair of Friends, Director of VCA, Director of Historical Society, Sgt. at Arms, Director of State Buildings.

This legislation stated that no major changes except in emergency cases, could take place without Sgt. at Arms or Director of Buildings first conferring with Advisory Committee. However, the ultimate authority still stayed with the Legislature. This legislation, to placate the Sgt. at Arms, said the Committee was to be advisory only to his office and that of State Buildings.

### **ADMINISTRATION AND MAJOR PROJECTS 1985 – '93**

In 1986, I retired from the Vermont Council on the Arts. From 1981 to that time, the Council, for a stipend of several thousand dollars, had supplied secretarial and bookkeeping services for the Friends and my services. With my leaving, they felt they could not afford to do this and I was very interested in keeping involved with the State House, so I offered to take the administrative responsibilities with me and opened an office in Waitsfield.

Our first Treasurer, Irwin Park, had kept the books, and funds were limited to dues. When Mr. Park left the State all books ended up in our office in Waitsfield. With increased bookkeeping responsibilities for several major fund drives and more accounting responsibilities, I engaged a part time bookkeeper and secretary and the services of an accountant to do our tax work which had become complicated and cumbersome. Also, thanks to Lola Aiken and John Zampieri, we were given an office at 1 Baldwin Street.

In 1985 under Mrs. Snelling's leadership and fund raising acumen, the Friends launched a major fund drive to help restore the Executive Office to the 1860 period. John Mesick from Albany was hired by the State with Burley Associates to do architectural study and plans. In the neighborhood of \$75,000. was privately raised and the room was beautifully restored. At the same time the Friends were also active in planning a new cafeteria that did not intrude on the historic Building.

This meant rejecting several plans put forth by Burley Associates. In 1988, David and I with Jay White from Burley's office set about to semi-restore the Old Supreme Court room vacated by the Legislative Council to simulate an historic rendition of the original room. Not having much state money and using about \$5,000. of Friends funds, we reupholstered old couches, moved 1920's sofa from the Governor's Office and used that office's 1920's light fixtures, reupholstered two original Supreme Court chairs, and purchased appropriate carpet, draperies and painted room in historic colors. The room, I think was a great success for a small amount of money.

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**CURATOR**

In 1988, thanks to John Zampieri, we were alerted to the fact that with a change in the Sgt. at Arms office and willing Chair of Senate appropriations, Senator May, we should retry for Curator's position. We did, and this was established on a project basis with Curator's pay coming from each restoration budget. The Friends also retained David as a consultant.

**CEDAR CREEK ROOM**

1990 saw us restore the Cedar Creek Room. I was lucky enough to engage Bill Gilbert to head the fund drive not knowing Bill had a Civil War interest and he asked Larry Riley from Union Mutual to Co- Chair and a whopping \$20,000. came with his commitment. Under their leadership we raised \$90,000 to match a Legislative challenge! The room was smashing success with a great dedication at opening of Desert Storm campaign. With Civil War music and Vermont Hemlocks we outdid Ken Burns, and Governor Kunin was escorted into the music of the *Battle Hymn of Freedom*. In the meantime, thanks to the hard work of many of you here today and Legislators we continue to raise funds and run a superb guide program and our gift shop has supplied us with enough income to carry 2/3 of our administrative budget. We also acquired 2 major Civil War paintings by the artist of Cedar Creek—Julian Scott. Private funds were raised for that purpose.

In 1991 we sponsored and helped produce “*Our State House*”, a video to enhance visits by our school children who could not visit enough of the State House when occupied by General Assembly. In the fall of 1992, the Development Committee under strong and persuasive leadership hosted a fundraising gala dinner with a great performance by Civil War singers from Randolph.

1993 finds us now with the major restoration of House of Representatives, Lobby and Committee Rooms. Our role in this project was to recommend the Mesick plan to the Advisory Committee and to monitor the program.

**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

That's what you are here for today. I feel our organization has been very successful in meeting its early goals without an expensive administration and, without compromising architectural integrity and getting a great deal of satisfaction from doing so. I won't dictate the future. Perhaps I have done too much of that in the past but my advice is to keep our administration simple, keep our goals focused, involve our Board as much as possible and be satisfied that we are doing the best possible job for the State without overstepping our authority.

Arthur F. Williams  
1993

## FRIENDS OF THE VERMONT STATEHOUSE ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 12, 2015

REMARKS, PETER A. GILBERT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VERMONT HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Thank you for the invitation to be with you this afternoon, and special thanks to Mary Leahy for her warm introduction. I am honored to be here.

This building, this state treasure, couldn't function in the way it does – and be the civic and educational resource it is -- without you and your support. And so thank you for all you do to make this the special place that it is, and for all you do to steward this building and its legacy, and to pass on the lessons it has to teach -- lessons that it actually embodies, that it makes tangible in its granite and gilding, its desks, and dome, portraits and sculpture.

What are those lessons? There are many, but I want to mention three.

The first lesson that we might learn from this building and from history generally is that we are living history. By which I mean we are ourselves living the process of history AND we are ourselves part of history. Today's events are tomorrow's history: 25 years from now, when more is known than we know now about how things will play out, a child or grandchild may ask us, how it was to live in the pre-9/11 era, and in the days immediately after 9/11. What was it like to be there when the United States invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein? We may be asked, "How could we be so blind or obtuse, or willfully ignorant in the late 20th century and the early 21st century and do so little in the face of climate change? Didn't you even hear when the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that climate change was the greatest threat to national security, greater than all the other very real and terrifying military and strategic threats?"

In future years we will know whether Ferguson turned out to be a fulcrum moment, like Rosa Parks's protest, or Little Rock. We will know how it felt to be here. Maybe we will be asked about some incident that none of us can even name today – that in future years we will recognize as a tipping point for history.

Those of you who work and volunteer in this building are literally living in history. Not only because history gets made here, but also because what our state is about is sugared off here, reduced to its essence in a civil society's legislative process. And also because Abraham Lincoln resides downstairs in the main corridor outside Room 10 in that magnificent bust. Others reside here, too – former governors and (and here I am thinking of the terrible recent events in Paris) an early hero of free expression, Mathew Lyon (who was jailed for accusing the President of the United States of bullying and for calling the Senate "stupid") . His portrait is here, as is that of a man of faith and peace and love and tolerance -- Methodist minister George

Fox from Thetford, one of the Four Chaplains of different faiths who died together arm in arm in prayer during World War II when their overcrowded transport ship was torpedoed and they gave their life jackets to others).

This lesson of history, like all lessons of history, requires continuity: History, stewardship, and legacies are like batons in a relay race. They are passed on from person to person, through time. They continue to enrich our lives, our understanding, and our society unless the baton is dropped. If it is dropped, someone has to pick it up, get back in the race, and make up for that lost ground, which, as you well know, isn't always possible. The worst is when no one picks up the baton for so long that no one knows where it is, or remembers what it was or how to pick it up. Or why it matters. That, fortunately, has not happened in the Vermont State House, not in all these many decades, in part due to you, as well as to people like David Schutz, Tracy Martin, John Dumville, Sergeant at Arms Francis Brooks, the Vermont Historical Society, and others, including, importantly, your predecessors. We have simply picked up where they left off; we are all part of a narrative that is still ongoing.

The second lesson of history and of this building that I would point to today is that history – the past – isn't so long ago. Particularly as I've grown older, I've noticed how important historical events or eras that I've thought of as being remote from each other are often more closely linked than I might have imagined.

I don't feel like I graduated from college a super long time ago, and yet the span of time between when I graduated from college and today is longer than the span of time between Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 and my college graduation. (I invite each of you to torture yourself with a similar calculation; I think you will be struck by your conclusion.)

If you line up end to end just three life-spans of eighty years each, you get back to January 1775! Some older people who are still with us today remember meeting Civil War veterans and former slaves and remember where they were when they learned that Lindbergh had "made it!!" My father was born into an America in which women weren't guaranteed the right to vote! When I mentioned that to my feminist high school and college-age Montpelier daughters, I think it kind of blew their minds.

Last November the Vermont Humanities Council hosted a conference on the ongoing effect of the American Civil War on civic and cultural life in America. Suffice it to say that the Civil War continues to resonate in profoundly important ways today, even 150 years later.

A few of you may have heard me mention before a wonderful example of the past being not so long ago. It comes from a memoir by Alger Hiss's son, Tony, entitled *The View from Alger's Window*. As you probably know, Alger Hiss was a lawyer and an official at the U.S. State Department and the United Nations; he and his family used to summer in Peacham. In 1948 he was accused of being a Soviet spy and later convicted of perjury in relation to that allegation. It

was that investigation led by a young member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities named Richard Nixon that first brought Nixon to national attention.

As a young lawyer, Alger Hiss had clerked for the great Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. Holmes had been wounded three times in the Civil War; decades later, in a speech describing the experiences of Civil War veterans he said, “Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire.”

Hiss’s favorite story about Justice Holmes was that when Holmes was a little boy, his grandmother, whom he revered, told him how she remembered looking out the front window of her father’s home on Beacon Hill in Boston and watching rank after rank of Redcoats march by. Later, the house became headquarters for the British commandant, Lord Howe. Holmes had an old mirror that used to hang in that house, and he told Hiss, “Sometimes when I look into the glass, I think I can see Lord Howe’s bewigged face staring back at me. Can you see it, sonny? Can you see it?” When Holmes died, he left the mirror to Hiss.

There it is: in one moving story, one man’s narrative about his old boss and the boss’s grandmother, we have the arc of American history, beginning even before the American Revolution, through the Civil War, to the twentieth century’s Supreme Court and the Cold War and Red Scare. Alger Hiss called this kind of connectedness “the Great Span,’ a sort of bucket brigade or relay race across time, a way for adjacent generations to let ideas and goals move intact from one mind to another across a couple hundred years or more... [I]ts purpose, [Hiss wrote,] was to keep unifying memories alive.”

That’s one of the important things history does, that you do, and that this magnificent building does –it preserves the memories and stories that connect us; it links the present with the past. It reminds us that often what we think of as the distant past was really only yesterday. It causes us to see ourselves and our heritage in new ways, and inspires us to think boldly about what the future might look like.

Third and finally, there is what I think is the most profound and potentially powerful lesson of history, and that is that things were not always as they are now. It sounds odd, but we forget that. It doesn’t take long before the current state of affairs is taken for granted, for people to assume that it has always been that way – whether it be the hyper-partisanship we now see in Washington (which in its current form only goes back, many experts say, twenty years), or to think that our nation has always been at war. The war in Afghanistan started in 2001 (nearly 14 years ago), and so that means that some students in college today have, alas, no memory of America when it was not at war. Being at war is the norm they know. For years, some of them have gone to baseball games to hear at least some announcers ask people to stand and honor our men and women in uniform for their service by singing our national anthem. Clearly the men and women our military warrant our heartfelt thanks; indeed I think, frankly, they deserve

better treatment from our nation than they now get, especially upon their return from combat. But I have always thought that we sing the national anthem not to honor our men and women in uniform, but to honor our country -- our country as a whole. But that's not, I fear, the impression that many young people have today.

Frustrated with the way things are, we often forget that things have changed and do change. History reminds us of that. Things sometimes get better in some ways, and sometimes they get worse. Sometimes what happens is out of our hands, but often, we can influence what happens next – in ways big or small – at least collectively. And sometimes those small changes contribute to cultural or social change that makes it possible for big change to stick, the changes that may have started in legal decisions or legislation (like *Brown v the Board of Education* or the 15th and 19th Amendments, which gave African Americans and women the right to vote). Those enormous changes for the better can only be made real when they are embraced by society.

Some people think of history as dusty, irrelevant or perhaps merely academic because it deals with what was and not with what is. It is sometimes seen as reactionary because it looks to the past, or is seen as conservative because it looks at a past that is no more. History is in and of itself neither conservative nor liberal, reactionary nor progressive.

But when students come to understand deeply that things were not always like they are now, they can be inspired to imagine how things should be, and empowered to work to make them that way. If you know a student who wants to change the world, tell them to read history – and the newspaper! -- to learn the stories of important change and to learn about important leaders (good and bad) – famous and not so famous – to learn of successes, and disappointments, and partial successes. It is true that change is often exasperatingly slow, but change is, for better and for worse, inevitable. And I believe that the record shows, as Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, said, that “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

It takes people like you and organizations like the Friends of the Vermont State House and the Vermont Historical Society to help students and the public generally keep things in perspective, to remind them of these very simple sounding but nonetheless profound lessons of history –that history, like life, is what we are doing now, that continuity is critical, that the past wasn't so long ago, that things were not always the way they are now, that tomorrow will not look like today, and that to a significant degree what tomorrow will be like is up to us.

Thank you very much.

## VERMONT STATE HOUSE INTERPRETIVE THEMES

*The Friends Curatorial Committee was expanded by the committee chair in January, 2019 to include additional community members representing a wide variety of experience and skills. The newly formed group of volunteers comprised a new Curatorial Task Force dedicated to proposing inclusive imagery and storytelling in the State House. The Task Force worked together with the Curator's office to identify people and events reflecting Vermont's diversity as expressed in the life and doings of the State House. The need to develop an Interpretive Plan to guide the effort was first named by Task Force members and became the group's priority. Ultimately, the idea of such a Plan, with inclusion and diversity at its center, was acknowledged as valuable by relevant legislative committees and completion of an Interpretive Plan was made a legislative expectation. Theme areas for the Vermont State House Interpretive Plan described by the Curatorial Task Force are outlined below. Draft of the Plan itself will be presented for public review and comment before final adoption.*

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### INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretive themes answer the questions “What is this place about?” And, “Why is this place important? Who Cares? and What Difference Does it Make?” The themes hold the most important ideas and stories that over time hold meanings for visitors about this place. This interpretive plan builds on these themes and provides recommendations about how to incorporate them into the building's Collections Policy, exhibitions, publications, tour-guide training, and other educational experiences and public programming throughout the building.

Interpretive themes create connections between the place and its audiences and hopefully provide visitors with deeper meanings that are useful to them in their daily lives. Interpretive themes do not embed the site only in the past, but in the present as well. The Vermont State House focuses on the legislative and executive processes of our state government, and provides citizens with tools to understand the nature and mechanisms of our democracy. It is a place where we learn what citizenship means and it helps us to understand our role as citizens.

#### OVERARCHING INTERPRETIVE THEME

The Vermont State House is a place where Vermonters have breathed meaning into the building since its beginning. It reflects a dynamic, evolving expression of the attitudes and beliefs of all Vermonters as we participate in the processes of democracy.

**SUPPORTING THEMES**

- In the tradition of New England Town Meeting, the Vermont State House and its grounds serve as a gathering place for all of the state's residents. It is truly the People's House. The accessibility of the Vermont State House reflects an enduring value to be continued, protected and expanded as we welcome the wide diversity of all Vermont's residents.
- Vermont's legislative history includes debates and decisions concerning slavery, LGBTQ rights, formal recognition of the Abenaki as the state's Indigenous People, and the centrality of landscape and the environment. The legislature's own history reveals growth in gender and racial representation. Vermont legislative history is one of ongoing reckoning with injustice and inequity.
- The story of the present State House and the two preceding it traces the transition from a unicameral legislature to a bicameral arrangement for governing the state. Architecture in service to the construct of governance has not been static nor is the imagery reflected in the State House collections of art and artifacts.
- The Vermont State House adheres to the traditional role of state capitols to memorialize its state's military stories featuring engagement with national efforts. Importantly, the impact of such engagement on the life of the state's people and legislative activity has always been part of State House storytelling.