

PROTECTING HISTORICAL RECORDS: SURVEYING COLLECTIONS CARE NEEDS IN VERMONT

The Vermont Historical Records Program (VHRP) started in May 2017 with funding from the Vermont Secretary of State and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. A program of the Vermont State Historical Records Advisory Board and based at the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, the VHRP serves to improve public access to and engagement with Vermont's historical records and to facilitate collaborative efforts among the state's historical records repositories.



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The VHRP has increased from one part time employee to two FTE, and we wanted to better gauge the needs of our constituents through a survey. We based our survey on the work previously done through the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Heritage Preservation's 2005 and 2014 *Health Heritage Index* surveys and Vermont's *Connecting to Collections* survey in 2008 to see what has changed in Vermont between then and now.

Survey Goals

1. Identify what assistance Vermont historical records repositories want and need, and how best to deliver that support.
2. Better publicize the VHRP and its services.
3. Get a snapshot of the state of Vermont's cultural heritage organizations in 2021 to compare to the Vermont *Connecting to Collections* 2008 data and findings.

Creation

The survey was based upon the questions from the Vermont *Connecting to Collections* 2008 survey, with some revisions and additions. Some questions gathered facts, some ranked choices. The survey instrument was loaded into Microsoft Forms, which gathered responses and stored the data.

Distribution

We compiled a master contact list, split into four groups for more targeted communication. Institutions that had no prior contact with the VHRP were introduced to our services, and institutions who had participated in the 2008 survey were sent copies of their responses.

Analysis

Some initial analysis was done by Microsoft Forms, and staff compared responses with national survey data and 2008 Vermont data. Staff drafted a final report, created infographics, and developed a presentation to share findings.

23.5%

Response rate—
lower than our
target.

Survey Takeaways

Slight increase in environmental control and long-range planning

Respondents with preservation plans and disaster plans have increased by 19% and 15% respectively since 2008, and respondents making some effort to control light, temperature, and humidity has increased by an average of 6%.

Disaster planning is still a big concern, but has improved

Only about a quarter (28%) of respondents have disaster plans that address collections, up from 13% in 2008.

Most damage to records is being caused by the same two causes

50% of respondents reported damage from physical or chemical deterioration, and 41% reported damage from improper storage, the top causes as reported in 2008.

Cataloging and intellectual control needs are at the same level

59% of respondents have less than half of their holdings cataloged or don't know how much is cataloged, a 1% increase from 2008.

Digital collections have dramatically increased, along with other online content.

Respondents with the responsibility for digital collections has increased by 30% since 2008, and in 2021 half or more offer online access to materials, host a website, and use social media.

Volunteers are still biggest source for labor

Nearly two-thirds of respondents rely on volunteers for some aspect of their organization's functioning.

Program Priorities

Emergency preparedness and disaster planning

Causes of deterioration and information about preservation management & conservation treatments

Proper housing and storage

Cataloging, inventories, and intellectual control

Digital preservation

Services Offered



Environmental Monitoring Program

Mobile Digitization Unit



Workshops and webinars

Online resource library and training modules



Virtual office hours

On-site visits and follow-up

<https://sos.vermont.gov/vsara/partner/historical-records/vhrp-survey-2021/>