



Incorporated in 1921, the **Fall River Historical Society (FRHS)**, a public charity, is the oldest cultural institution in the city that is dedicated to collecting and exhibiting artifacts and archival material relative to the history and multi-cultural people of Fall River. We serve the public through guided tours, exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and cultural events, and frequently partner with the city and other non-profit organizations in presenting events for the benefit of the community. The FRHS is recognized in the Greater Fall River area as a leading provider of innovative historical and cultural programming.

The FRHS was founded in 1921 by a group of individuals intent on preserving the history of Fall River, once an important textile center with the distinction of being one of the world's largest producer of cotton cloth. Since its incorporation, the organization has been actively acquiring material pertaining to the city's history and has amassed a vast collection, the majority of which is accompanied by detailed provenance.

A tragic set-back occurred on the evening of February 2, 1928, when a devastating conflagration destroyed a large section of the Fall River business district. Among the victims, and situated almost in the center of the burned out area, was the supposedly fire-proof Buffington Building, which housed the office and exhibition room of the FRHS. The entire collection was lost, except for a selection of important items stored in a safe, which survived the inferno unscathed. Undaunted, the organization immediately resumed gathering material, thereby forming the nucleus of the collection as it exists today.

The diverse collections of the FRHS continue to grow in all categories, and include: Americana; Costumes and Accessories; Decorative Arts; Ephemera; Fall River Textile Industry; Furniture; Local History; Manuscripts; Maritime; Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture, 19th Century; Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture, 20th Century and Contemporary; and Photographs. Items from our collections have been loaned for exhibition at institutions nationwide.

The vast majority of the FRHS's holdings are acquired by gift. In addition, we seek out and purchase items of historical importance through the generosity of private donors and donations made to our Acquisition Fund.

The FRHS has been collecting archival and library material pertaining to Fall River history since its incorporation, with examples dating from the late-seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century; the holdings, which are ever-growing, constitute the largest collection of its type extant in the city. In 2009, the library and archive was designated The Charlton Library of Fall River History in recognition of the Ida S. Charlton Charity Fund, which sponsored the expansion and refitting of the facility and the conservation of a portion of the Society's holdings. The Fund made an additional contribution in 2012, allowing further expansion and, in 2016, a generous grant from the Earle P. Charlton Jr. Charity Fund made advanced development possible.

The library, which is non-circulating, houses an important research collection of books, pamphlets, periodicals, and reference materials. Published material includes biographies, *Fall River City Directories*, local authors, genealogy, family histories, memoirs, municipal documents, periodicals, and regional histories pertinent to the city of Fall River, as well as city, county, economic, ethnic, industrial, maritime, military, Native American,

political, and social histories. Select baptismal, business, church, and probate records are available, as are a large number of unpublished papers and manuscripts. Materials are added to the library on a regular basis.

Holdings include a microfilm collection containing in excess of 100,000 issues of 19th and 20th century Fall River newspapers, with the earliest dating to 1858, as well as scrapbooks compiled by private individuals and organizations. The Society's manuscript collection contains thousands of documents, including family and personal papers, corporate and legal documents, business records, church records, diaries, and journals. Also available is the most extensive collection of Fall River textile mill records and manuscripts in existence.

The photograph collection contains thousands of examples, and is widely recognized as the most comprehensive assemblage of its type pertaining to Fall River. With images dating from the dawn of photography to the mid-20th century, the collection documents the changing landscape of the city's public and private spaces, its cultural development, and the faces of its inhabitants.

The FRHS is recognized, world-wide, as the central repository for material pertaining to the infamous 1892 Borden Murder Case and the life of Lizzie Andrew Borden (1860-1927), who was tried and acquitted for that heinous crime. The Borden collections, which are unsurpassed, include original trial exhibits, photographs, and the most significant primary source material extant.

The FRHS operates Fall River Historical Society Press, dedicated to publishing works on a wide range of historical topics, with all proceeds benefiting the organization.

For more information about Fall River Historical Society, visit our website at [fallriverhistorical.org](http://fallriverhistorical.org), or contact us at 508-679-1071.