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IN FOCUS



NEWS BRIEF

A MAJOR GRANT FUNDED HVAC SYSTEM INSTALLATION

If the Fall River Historical Society's (FRHS) walls could talk, what a series of tales they could tell. If they could speak to us in 2023, they would probably say "thank you" for the welcome infrastructure upgrades to the building currently underway.

The 180-year-old mansion was constructed on Columbia Street for millowner Andrew Robeson Jr. in 1843. Only twenty-seven years later, in 1870, prominent industrialist, Robert Knight Remington, had it dismantled and reassembled, granite block by granite block, at its present site on the Highlands' corner of Rock and Maple Streets. Location, location, location.

In the interim, the house served as a station on the Underground Railroad, helping spirit runaway slaves to freedom through northern New England and Canada. A false bookcase, that once led to a secret safe room, remains a feature of the house.

After several generations as a private residence, in 1935 the mansion was donated to the FRHS by David Anthony Brayton when his unmarried aunt, Elizabeth Hitchcock Brayton, passed away. Since then, it has been home to the FRHS and open to the public, functioning as its headquarters and archival research library. The museum is the central repository for material pertaining to the history of the city of Fall River and its multi-cultural people. The remarkably preserved building and the myriad collections are historically significant and must be preserved for present and future generations.

To address this issue, the FRHS created a Preservation Master Plan and site survey in 2021, detailing a phased approach to the maintenance and restoration of the museum building and its critical systems. This grant-funded project was guided by Michael and Ann Keane of Civitects, a full service architectural and planning

firm based in Fall River. The completed document was then used to secure funding for priority projects that it had identified as worthy of immediate support.

The installation of a modern heating, ventilation, and cooling system (HVAC) was identified as a pressing need and, therefore, made a top priority.

The existing heating system, with many components dating from the 19th century, is hopelessly antiquated and outmoded. Of a total of twenty-five radiators in the building, only ten are currently functional and, of those, three are leaking; only two radiators service the entire second floor and none are in operation on the third floor.

Because there are no cooling, dehumidification, or humidification systems in the upper levels of the building, the internal atmosphere poses a potential threat to museum collections. The only means of controlling

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ventilation available to staff is to open windows when weather conditions permit. This risky practice has the potential of encouraging harmful micro-climates, introducing airborne pollutants, and allowing damaging ultraviolet light to attack fragile museum collections. It was important that this be addressed.

In 2022, Phase I of the proposed HVAC system was underwritten through a generous grant. This included the time-consuming process of creating the complicated mechanical, electrical, and plumbing engineering design, hazardous materials inspection, and consulting services for the bidding process/contractor vetting.

Upon the successful completion of Phase I, a proposal was submitted for grant funding for the actual installation.

The FRHS is pleased to announce that Phase II of the project, which encompasses all aspects of the HVAC system installation, is also being made possible by a very generous grant. The modernization of the Society's HVAC systems is the largest and most complicated infrastructure project ever undertaken by the museum. This work will be carried out by a team of

highly qualified professionals in various trades.

The contractors will require access to every part of the museum building, from the basement to the roof. Precious paintings must be removed from the walls, publications and documents must be securely locked away, and everything from historical statues to vintage clocks to antique furniture will be covered, moved, or safely boxed. Not even the more mundane administrative areas of the building will be spared, as everything from desks to filing cabinets to ceiling tiles will be moved to facilitate the installation.

Preliminary work is currently underway and progressing rapidly. During the installation period – estimated to stretch from July through December 2023 – the FRHS will, of necessity, be operating on an extremely fluid schedule. Because of storage of contractor supplies, vehicles, and equipment on the grounds, it will be impossible to conduct some popular events such as our Saturday Evening Serenades or our widely popular Christmas events. Although no research activities will be possible in the archives and library during the installation, every effort will be made so that the gift shop and museum first floor will remain open

for visitors and tours as long as possible.

Preparations by museum staff and volunteers for Phase II - the actual installation of the new HVAC system - are extensive and have been underway for several weeks. The work involved is exhaustive and will affect every aspect of museum operations, it being imperative to safeguard artifacts and collections.

This transformative grant is the largest received by the FRHS in its 102-year history. The FRHS is indebted to the Trustees of **The Manton Foundation** for partnering with us and generously providing funding for all phases of this impactful project. For their generosity and their interest in the work of the museum, the FRHS is extremely grateful.

Further details about this and other grant-funded projects will be detailed in an upcoming issue of our IN FOCUS newsletter. Stay tuned!

Thank you, all, for your patience as we work in creating a better FRHS!

**Board of Directors,
Fall River Historical Society**