

SPECIAL INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUE

A MESSAGE FROM THE CURATOR

It has been a cause-and-effect situation: Actions have consequences, and a positive outcome very often results in subsequent positive events. I know this to be true, and over the past several months have had the privilege of witnessing it firsthand.

A grant awarded to the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] for the installation of the HVAC system and funds received for the creation of The Douglas Hills Borden Jr. and Joan Louise (Godoreau) Borden Gallery were the catalyst. They set into motion a positive series of events that resulted in other grants from various donors, providing funds to undertake additional infrastructure projects. Many were long overdue.

I am pleased to report that as of this printing the FRHS has been the recipient of over \$2.2MM in restricted grants, designated specifically for infrastructure. As a result of this funding, several of the major projects that were identified as critical needs and prioritized in the Preservation Master Plan and Site Survey (2021) have already been completed.

In addition, unrestricted funds donated for operating support have provided the FRHS with the means to navigate during this period when our usual sources of income generated in-house are curtailed. In fact, reliable,

unrestricted operating support for small institutions – integral for day-to-day operations – is extremely difficult to secure. The FRHS has, indeed, been fortunate to have been awarded this essential funding, without which it would be impossible to meet day-to-day expenses.

For their generosity, the FRHS gratefully acknowledges each of the donors. Personally, I have been humbled by the support received and can never sufficiently convey words of thanks. I hope a heartfelt “Thank You,” sincerely delivered, says it all.

In many ways it has been a renaissance.

I freely admit that successfully managing these multi-faceted projects, most of which have been underway simultaneously, has been challenging. Every aspect of FRHS operations has been affected in some way; our small staff has been juggling many balls and to the best of my knowledge has not dropped one – at least not yet. Kudos to them for a job well done.

As is detailed in this issue of *In Focus*, the FRHS has been using the time during which it has been closed and empty of most of its contents to maximum effect by undertaking myriad projects that it would be impossible to safely complete with the facility open to visitors.

So, when will the FRHS reopen? The question is simple enough. The answer, however, is a bit more involved.

In short: Contractors require space in which to work and areas to store equipment and materials; construction is disruptive and noisy. Dust infiltrates every space in the building, making abatement impossible until all the interior work is completed. Only then can rooms – there are 29 of them, not including hallways, stairwell, or closets – be thoroughly cleaned to prepare them for the time-consuming work of unpacking and installation of period room settings, rare artifacts, and exhibits.

Our schedule must remain fluid as we navigate the final steps in this process. The library/archive and shop will open in July. This will be followed by the first-floor exhibits, however, this is contingent on the contractors completing work in the third-floor storage areas, after which the stairwell and three hallways must undergo plaster repair and repainting. The second floor – with several new exhibits – will open as soon as most of those rooms are completed.

To remain relevant in a changing world, the FRHS must continue to identify and accept the challenges and needs of this organization, embrace them, and initiate further solutions. Thus far, this awareness has

resulted in progress on many fronts thanks in great part to the interest and generosity of foundations and private donors. Having been presented with this unique opportunity for renewal, the FRHS must act on it, think bigger, improve, and revitalize. We must unlock this new potential.

Sensibility is key. The most practical strategy is to attempt to complete the remaining interior infrastructure work at the present time, while the building is empty and the collections are safely stored. This will allow the FRHS to reopen on a firm footing and with a clean slate.

But a few hurdles remain. Additional funding is needed to clear those hurdles and take the FRHS over the finish line. We are trying to get there.

Thank you all for your understanding, interest, and support as we work together to make for a better FRHS.

Michael Martins,
Curator

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JOSIAH SMITH'S GREATCLOAK

BY CONRAD KRAPF

In 1956, Louise Smith Borden Waring donated an item to the Fall River Historical Society, so that it might be preserved and shown to future generations. She was a descendant of Josiah Smith, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and donated a piece of clothing that had belonged to him. The item itself is on the face of it rather unremarkable, a blue greatcloak with some shreds of green wool inside and a brown velvet collar. For several decades, it was on display, in direct sunlight and uncovered, simply resting on a dress stand. Little was known about the cloak, or indeed the man by whom it was owned. Over the past few months, I've been working to turn this garment without a history into a greatcloak that can tell its own story.

Josiah Smith's life started in South Hadley, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1757. He was born to Josiah Smith Sr. (1707-1782), and his recruitment records show that he lived in or near the town until the Revolutionary War began. He enlisted as a private in August 1775 and found himself rising through the ranks after a few years as a private, all the way to lieutenant by the end of the war. He served in the Massachusetts Line. His service record in the war was that of a valuable soldier, volunteering for dangerous positions in the Battle of Stony Point and taking part in multiple battles.

He appears to have retired from the Army by January 1781, just under a year before the effective end of the war in December of the same year, and two years before the legal end of the war due to the Treaty of Paris. Through my research, one point of contention was raised by his own gravestone, which claims that he was a member of Washington's Life Guard, the predecessor to the Secret Service, a bodyguard unit that kept Washington safe in the field. This claim, however, must be placed under some scrutiny. Smith's service record in the *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War* has no mention of assignment to the Life Guard, with a similar lack of reference in his service record according to the Society of the Cincinnati, of which he was a member. Unfortunately, the records of the men who were members of the Life Guard were destroyed in the Naval Yard Fire of 1815. A reconstruction by scholar Carlos E. Godfrey in 1904, which, according to him, only excludes those who were "killed, wounded, or missing in the Battle of King's Bridge, July 3, 1781," does not include Josiah Smith. It remains possible that he was attached to the unit and these sources have failed to list his name, but it

is unlikely. The most likely answer is that, given his 92-year lifespan, a story of his guarding the tent of Washington on one of the several battles in which they both took part, or perhaps fighting together, evolved into his being a member of the Life Guard.

One story, which I was unable to verify in any way, but simply could not ignore, comes from the *Memorials of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati*, printed in 1890. It describes Smith and several other soldiers pursuing Native Americans, before being trapped in a counterattack by the Natives. During their retreat, every one of his comrades was killed, but Smith was saved by "the traitor Arnold," no doubt General Benedict Arnold, who "clinch[ing] him by the shoulder, rode off with him, making a successful escape, although his hat and clothing were pierced with balls fired by the Indians in pursuit."

Smith married Mercy Shaw (1770-1844) in 1788 in Middleborough, Massachusetts, and would have six children with her. Of their three sons, George Shaw Smith (1791-1810) and Jedidiah Smith (1795-1819) would die at sea, while Martin Smith would live the longest of any of the children, born in 1799 and dying in 1884, the only child of the two to have a family of his own. Of Josiah's daughters, it seems that none had a family, with Polly Smith dying days after her birth in 1790, Mercy Smith (1793-1838) never marrying according to available records, and Mahala Smith, whose birth date is unknown, but likely in 1813, as according to her gravestone; she died at the age of 11 in early January 1825. After his wife Mercy's death in 1844, Josiah willed half of his house and estate to his son Martin and his family, with the understanding that Martin would take full control of the property when Josiah died. Given that Josiah would have been about 88 at the time, it is likely that Martin and his family supported Josiah in his old age. Four years after his wife, and with only one surviving child, Josiah Smith passed away on July 7th, 1848, presumably leaving a beautiful blue greatcloak to his son.

The exterior of the cloak is made up of a fine handwoven fabric dyed blue, while the interior panel was a green wool, now mostly removed leaving only remnants. The collar of the greatcloak is a fine brown velvet, likely also handmade and imported from Europe. Given the style of manufacturing, it was likely made somewhere in between 1790 and 1810, as machine woven apparel began to filter into the market after this

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MISSION: ACCOMPLISHED

BY DENNIS A. BINETTE

Having spent thirty-plus years of my life connected with the Historical Society, I was fairly secure in thinking that there was not an inch of the building that I had not in some way come in contact. Whether it be a burst radiator valve, leaking ceiling, or the occasional bat, I felt that I, and of course Michael in the years before I arrived, had had to deal with just about everything. This, as it turned out, was not the case. For me, at least.

I had witnessed some of the tremendous amount of work that had been taking place at 451 Rock Street over the last year and a half but was not exposed to the day-to-day developments. With that in mind, and the installation process of the HVAC system at its completion, Michael took me on what amounted to a tour of the "construction" site, to obtain a clearer picture of the volume of work that had been completed, in preparation for the writing of what you are currently reading.

So, in light of the fact that just about every space of the structure has been affected in some way by this project, it makes perfect sense to start at the top and work our way down.

Having seen the third floor periodically throughout this adventure, I was amazed at the completed project on my last visit up there, and just how incredibly involved the HVAC installation was. But to begin to examine the work done, it would be best to describe the layout of the floor itself.

The floor plan consists of four rooms, once bedrooms, one in each corner of the building, all having large closets or dressing rooms. These run off of a large central hallway, where two walk-in closets (each larger than some modern-day apartment bathrooms) occupy the east side. These last mentioned are spaces that were key in the installation of the system.

Each of the hallway walk-ins now has a central unit for air environmental control, as do smaller closets off of some of the bedrooms. My initial reaction to these was "Hmm, that's very interesting," until certain features of the placement of these units, and more importantly their purpose in the project at large, caused me to take a new look at them.

The fact that the equipment there contained is responsible for the processing and distri-

bution of filtered air throughout this floor, and then some, was cause for further examination. It was then explained how existing space, much not visible to the eye, was used. Ductwork had to be run from these units, and the team of architects and contractors all worked in tandem to devise the most effective, least intrusive, way of solving the dilemma of navigating to get "there from here." One case in point has a duct beginning in a third-floor closet, extending down the wall between two rooms, and resurfacing one floor below, above a display case/former closet, where an inconspicuous vent distributes processed air.

It should be said at this point that the air running through the HVAC system is not recycled; there is also fresh air drawn from outside the building so that a constant flow of "new" is present.

All of the equipment on this floor is readily accessible - the advantage to it being stored in existing closet space - so any servicing in the future will not involve complicated maneuvers to access anything. All areas here have been utilized to optimum efficiency.

A brief aside at this point. Prior to the installation of this system, the main method of air circulation was to open windows and use floor fans. With the exception of the third floor. During the summer months, the granite building gradually retained heat and, as we know, heat rises. This was not conducive to working with collections that were stored in this space. At times, the dreaded trip to the third floor simply to retrieve an item was put off as long as possible. Setting aside the inconvenience to the human element, HVAC will now provide an atmosphere ideal for storage of art, textiles, and other artifacts.

Traveling down to the second floor, the results of the meticulous ductwork channeling are present. The rectangular grates, located for the most part in the upper parts of walls, are virtually inconspicuous. They are either primed and painted to match the wall color or, should they be located on a darker surface, are of anodized dark bronze, enabling them to blend in with their surroundings.

As the third floor was a key location for equipment that services the second, the basement level was used in the same manner for the first floor. The sub-ground level is not strictly

where the library and archive are situated but also is used as office space, so concealment of equipment was essential. One major piece was placed in an alcove off of the east side of an office, but the largest amount of the equipment is in a storage area at the south end of the building.

As with above, ductwork has to be run throughout, but in this case the approach was from below. This was installed under the floors, with grates in each first-floor room in either floors or walls, again painted or in anodized metal in carpeted areas, rendering them totally unobtrusive.

The ell, which houses the museum shop, and is the home of new office space on its second floor, also has equipment again located in a closet. The benefits of heat and air conditioning will be a welcome change in this part of the building, which was not only particularly frigid during the winter months, but also sweltering in the summer, its small windows not allowing for the benefit of any cross-ventilation.

The HVAC system, throughout the Historical Society, stands as tribute to the talents of those involved, but also as a testament to their respect for the structure itself. Whether it be in snaking ductwork throughout the building or cutting penetrations for the vents required, a tremendous amount of care was taken to preserve the integrity and beauty of the structure and its irreplaceable interior appointments.

Following my extensive tour of the "work site," I was amazed at how spaces I always perceived as strictly storage areas had now become refitted as an integral part of a building-wide working unit. This massive undertaking was not only a way to control temperature, but rather one to create optimum conditions of humidity and air quality throughout a one-hundred-and-fifty-five-year-old structure as well.

Mission accomplished.





REFITTING THE MUSEUM SHOP

BY CLAUDETTE M. AUBIN

As part of the infrastructure projects at the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS], positive changes have been made to the Museum Shop.

To address the need for more professional office space, it was sensible to vacate the second-floor ell, which had previously been used as part of the museum shop. This required that the shop be contained on only one level, making it more efficient to manage.

To this end, the walls in the hall and former kitchen were fitted with slat-wall panels with built in grooves, forming slats, where wire baskets, wood or acrylic shelves, hooks of various lengths and design, and other fixtures, can be inserted for merchandise display. This highly adaptable product maximizes retail space.

We were on our way to a redesigned shop! The walls were painted in an olive-green shade, reminiscent of the original 19th-century color, and new carpeting, interior storm window inserts, shop door, and additional lighting were installed.

The new HVAC system will certainly make it more comfortable for shoppers and staff alike. Prior to the improvements, sitting in the museum shop office was likened to the rocky coast of Maine on a winter's day or an Arizona desert in the summer. Our volunteers will now work in a comfortable environment.

Upon entering the museum shop, your eyes are immediately drawn to the far end of the

hall. Once, where there were just a few shelves for display, it is now fitted with nearly floor-to-ceiling slat-wall panels on three sides. Rows of hand-blown glass ornaments will glisten in the newly installed lighting, with numerous acrylic bins available for additional ornaments at the bottom. All this efficiently fits what was once an entire room of Christmas merchandise into one area for convenient browsing. Space is also available for a lighted "pencil tree" for displaying clip-on ornaments. An area for holiday-themed clearance items was also created, allowing for more rotation of inventory.

Along the hallway, once unused wall space has become a featured display area through the installation of additional slat wall and the use of shorter hooks, so as not to impede walking space.

To the immediate left of the entrance is the "Book Nook," that has also been refitted with additional shelves for displaying works of local interest, some of which are published by our own FRHS Press. To the right, what was the maid's passage to the dining room now serves as a clearance area.

In the main shop, originally the kitchen, we have again maximized the space, by using additional slat-wall panels and sizable, lighted display cases. The original Walker's range and soapstone sink are visible to visitors but utilized as retail space. These changes have been made in a way that is completely reversible to preserve the integrity of the original fixtures.

Any doubts about having enough retail space were soon dispelled as we began to design and build the "new" shop. In essence a shop within a shop has been created with designated areas for specific items and products, eliciting many positive responses during the last Christmas season, and making for a more enjoyable experience for shoppers. The museum shop will be reopening in July.



SAVE THE DATE

► October 25, 2025: Semi-annual Clamboil, Seekonk Rod & Gun Club, \$40 per person.

► December 5, 2025: Members Christmas Social, Fall River Country Club.

COLLECTION STORAGE: OUT OF SIGHT, BUT NEVER OUT OF MIND

In the 104 years since its incorporation, the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] has amassed a large and diverse collection documenting the history of Fall River and its multicultural people. The organization possesses far more than can be exhibited at any one time. Items are often added to the holdings, based on a collecting policy: All accepted material must fill a particular need, upgrade or broaden the scope of existing collections, or have a connection to the history of the city of Fall River and its people.

The FRHS is duty-bound to exercise good stewardship of this material by properly managing and caring for it to ensure its preservation for future generations. The organization must strive to adhere to established ethical practices, maintain a collections management and maintenance program, conserve objects in its care, undertake collection related research, document provenance, and work to make the material accessible to an engaged public.

Maintaining these standards is challenging in well-funded and fully staffed institutions; in a small museum, with limited funding, rising operating costs, and insufficient staff, it is daunting. But, as stated in Fall River's official city motto: "We'll Try!"

Despite many challenges, excellent progress has been made and advancements with major grant-funded infrastructure projects are positively impacting collections stewardship.

The new HVAC system provides the ability to adhere to environmental control standards to house materials within the accepted range of 65° to 77° for exhibition areas, and 60° to 68° in storage areas. This is transformative for our collections care and management.

But good stewardship also requires proper physical storage conditions; changes were necessary.

At the FRHS, books, manuscripts, and photographs are housed in the library and archival area, located at the basement level. But all other collection materials are stored on the third-floor in five rooms – four large rooms, originally used as bedrooms, and a mid-sized dressing room – the hallway, and a few closets.

These areas were furnished with an odd assortment of shelving units and cabinets acquired over decades from various sources.

Storing material in this "make-do" manner was hazardous, impeded proper cataloguing, and made accessibility, at best, extremely difficult. To rectify the situation, a complete overhaul was necessary to maximize storage capacity; every available inch of space is being fully exploited in the design.

With FRHS collections safely stored for the HVAC installation and rooms for the most part empty, the ideal time for this undertaking was provided, the work seamlessly coinciding with other ongoing infrastructure projects.

The board and staff recognize this as the most sensible strategy, being fully aware that it is very much a "now or never" situation: The building is virtually empty, to allow contractors accessibility; construction creates dust that penetrates all areas of the structure, and it is impossible to store and access collections without a suitably outfitted facility in which to do so.

Fortunately, funding for some of this work has been secured.

Furniture:

The FRHS collection includes numerous examples of furniture for various uses, periods, and styles. Sizes vary, ranging from diminutive – seat furniture made for children – to medium-size examples – tables, desks, and armchairs – to monumental – bookcases, for example. Storage space is at a premium for items not on display.

To address this issue, the northwest room on the third floor, previously used for storage of various items, has been redesigned and fitted out specifically for furniture storage.

The room had not been renovated since the 1930s and was in poor condition, requiring a complete overhaul. The plaster exhibited age-related defects, including cracks, crazing, and areas of debonding, all of which were stabilized and repaired. The room was primed and repainted, and energy-efficient LED track lighting with easily adjustable heads was installed. Floor covering of durable, industrial-grade carpet tiles was also laid, allowing for easy movement of heavy pieces.

Two large, sturdy raised platforms were constructed at a height of six feet and installed in both the southwest and northwest corners of the room, thus maximizing available space by providing storage on two levels. Additionally, the north and west window alcoves were

fitted with single-shelf units, designed to store chairs on two levels.

Heavy-duty dollies have been purchased for placement under large pieces of furniture, providing the ability to safely move them without danger of damage to the piece or injury to the staff. Although the room is not large enough to house all the furniture in the FRHS collection, its reconfiguration has greatly increased storage capacity.

This project was funded by the late David Amaral (1946-2024), a longtime FRHS member and supporter, who passed away in October 2024. Rest in peace, David.

Framed Works:

Among the collections are many framed objects – including paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, and textiles – that are problematic to carefully and efficiently store due to their varying sizes and weights. The difficulty is compounded by the characteristics of the objects: canvas can be easily punctured or otherwise damaged; paper tears and is often brittle; glass breaks; ornamental frames – especially gesso – are extremely fragile; textiles are delicate; and all are light and climate sensitive.

In the past, objects not on display were stored in less-than-ideal conditions; damage was inevitable. Every available inch of third-floor wall space was utilized for hanging framed works, and additional items were stacked or leaned, with sheets of cardboard between them providing some protection.

Unfortunately, the FRHS does not have space in-house for a metal pull-out art rack on rollers, which is the ideal solution for storing framed objects. However, the perfectly acceptable next-best solution was the installation of an art storing system, custom designed for optimum capacity. This is also the most cost-effective solution, being considerably more economical than purchasing prefabricated modular units that would not maximize the space.

The center west room on the third floor of the building has been adapted for this purpose. The space was formerly utilized by the FRHS for furniture storage and was vacated when those items were moved to their new location. The room is not large – it measures 11' x 9', with a 10 ½' ceiling height and additional space in a window alcove – but is well suited for the purpose.

(continued on next page)

COLLECTION STORAGE CONT.

A unit 11' long with vertical storage compartments on three levels has been installed on the entire east wall, designed to store items of varied sizes, ranging from 8' to 2' in height and at a depth from 2' to 4', providing efficient compartmental separation for framed pieces. Adjustable dividers can be removed in 4" increments to allow for larger compartmental widths.

To fully maximize all available storage space, a second unit – 4' x 4' x 10' high – was installed in the window alcove on the west wall to provide adjustable vertical and fixed horizontal compartments.

A steel cabinet with adjustable shelves will provide additional storage for small objects.

The room was refurbished in preparation for this installation: damaged plaster was repaired, and walls, crown molding, and wood trim were repainted. New track lighting with easily adjustable LED fixtures that was installed when the building was rewired provides ample illumination.

Framed works can now be safely and efficiently stored at various levels, allowing for accessibility and ease in cataloguing.

This project has been generously funded through a bequest from the estate of the late Peter Buffington (1935-2024), a third generation FRHS member and longtime supporter.

Three Dimensional Objects:

FRHS collections include thousands of three-dimensional objects of all descriptions, uses, materials, sizes, and conditions; storing them poses myriad issues. Space has been a major concern, especially when taking into consideration the shelving and cabinetry necessary to safely house objects that often require specialized storage containers, padding, and wrapping to ensure their safety.

As with the other storage areas on this floor, the northeast room was fully repaired, repainted, and ample LED lighting was installed.

The south wall was fitted with a large unit constructed with three bays designed to house steel cabinets with adjustable shelving, above which are three rows of open shelving. Likewise, the center of the room features a large unit with bays for an additional six cabinets, arranged three on each side, back to back. Above each is a single bay of open shelving, with considerable space above for storing oversize objects. The northeast corner of the room was similarly designed to hold two more cabinets, with three rows of shelving above.

The two window alcoves in this room – one facing north and the other, east – have been

fitted with large, fully adjustable shelving units, thereby taking advantage of previously unused space. In addition, two floor-to-ceiling shelving units have also been installed behind doors, fully maximizing storage capacity.

The room also allows for three more free-standing steel cabinets located on the west wall; these will be placed on dollies for ease in moving.

This project was very generously funded by FRHS member Betty M. Welch. A long-time supporter of the organization, Betty is an officer on the board, serving as treasurer, and is one of our staunchest advocates. Thank you, Betty!

Costumes, Accessories, and Textiles:

The FRHS houses a large and impressive collection of costumes, fashion accessories, and various textiles from the late-17th century through the mid-20th century. This includes civilian and military clothing of all sorts, household items from quilts to flour sacks, and samples of cloth manufactured in Fall River's mills. Safely storing these fragile items presents many unique challenges.

Proper storage is crucial for their preservation, with multiple factors – among them light, pests, and humidity/temperature fluctuations – causing deterioration. Items should be housed in specifically designed archival boxes, mostly stored flat, and padded with acid-free tissue to prevent creasing; large flat textiles should be rolled on archival tubes of various lengths and widths.

An example: Josiah Smith's greatcloak, documented in the feature story of this issue. An extremely rare survivor of the era, it must be housed in safe environmentally friendly conditions and properly contained in acid-free materials to ensure its preservation for future generations.

Safe storage also takes considerable space, with some large archival/textile boxes measuring 5.5' x 18" x 5" – the FRHS houses over 150 in that size alone – in addition to other specialty boxes in various dimensions. Space is at a premium.

The costume/textile collection has long been stored in the southeast room, using a Jenga-like system of store-bought metal shelving. The strategy was serviceable, albeit somewhat wobbly, but highly inefficient due to waste of space. Units were prefabricated, not customized for specific boxes. In the new design of this room, all available space has been fully exploited, with units constructed to specific dimensions.

Three large sturdy units are being built, capable of holding a total of 231 of the largest size

For their financial support for infrastructure projects and general operations, the FRHS extends its sincerest thanks to the following donors:

The Manton Foundation

Amy J. Bare Charitable Trust

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David Amaral

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Fall River Community Preservation Committee

Foley Family Charitable Trust

Grimshaw Gudewicz Memorial Charitable Trust

Ida S. Charlton Charity Fund

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Peter Buffington Estate

The Test Fund

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Your generosity and unwavering support have been instrumental in bringing these projects to fruition. Thank you for being such a vital part of our mission.

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THANKS TO:

♥ Special thanks goes to **Kathy Rockett** for her work planning the FRHS semiannual clamboils. For helping at the events, appreciation also goes to **Bill Aubin, Dennis Binette, Monique Campeau, Ray DeMello, Angie Gastall, Crystal Gendreau, Lillian Gendreau, Madeline Gendreau, Mark Gendreau, M. J. Gendreau, Cindy Harrington, Judy Perreault, Chris Pettine, Polly Phenix, Betty Prescott, Trish Rebello, Denise Sherman, Carole Siembab, Jim & Joan Smith, Ann Rockett Sperling, Pat Taylor, and Nancy Teasdale.**

♥ Sincere gratitude goes to **Betty Prescott** for the countless hours spent coordinating all aspects of the Florence Cook Brigham Award 2024 Annual Fundraising Dinner, and to **Kathy Rockett**, who successfully co-chaired the event. Congratulations go to **Carole A. Fiola** and **Douglas Hills Borden Jr.**, the well-deserved 2024 honorees. Thank you, both, for your work on behalf of the FRHS! We would also like to thank **Bill Aubin, Dennis Binette, Monique Campeau, Bill & Sue Crombie, Ray DeMello, Mark Gendreau, Cindy Harrington, Christina Johnk, Linda McHugh, Carolyn Novo, Judy Perreault, Chris Pettine, Polly Phenix, Trish Rebello, Suzie Mills Shaw, Ann Rockett Sperling, and Pat Taylor** for their assistance.

♥ For their assistance in preparing the museum shop for opening during the last holiday season and help in the candy packaging department, we acknowledge the help of **Dennis Binette, Judy Perreault, Betty Prescott, Trish Rebello, Kathy Rockett, David Roseberry, Suzie Mills Shaw, and Nancy Teasdale.**

♥ For their help during the holiday season, our thanks go to museum shop clerks **Dennis Binette, Angie Gastall, Cathy Kitchen, Judy Perreault, Fran Rachlin, and Trish Rebello.**

♥ As funds for redesigning the third-floor storage areas became available, it was necessary to empty those rooms for contractors to begin work. As such, everything that remained stored on that level had to be moved to the second floor – quickly. In record time, hundreds of boxes and objects of various sizes and weight were moved down two flights of stairs. For willingly schlepping, side-by-side with the staff, the FRHS sincerely thanks **Henry Keane, Trish Rebello, and Kathy Rockett.**

♥ To ensure plastering and painting contractors the ability to move from room-to-room on the third floor to commence work in a timely fashion, messy “grunt work” was undertaken by FRHS volunteers and staff. Several weeks have been spent dealing with major plaster problems – from removing loose plaster, opening cracks, and scraping delamination – and scraping peeling paint. The work is dirty, dusty, and very labor intensive. For going to the extreme, the FRHS gratefully acknowledges **Trish Rebello, Kathy Rockett, and Betty Prescott.**

♥ **Bill Aubin** for acting as general handyman and readily answering calls for tools – often at short notice. Many thanks, Bill.

♥ **Nancy Teasdale** for planting the 19th-century urns on the FRHS grounds in memory of her parents, Russell & Estelle Teasdale. Thank you, Nancy, for continuing this lovely tradition.

♥ When it rains, it pours. With other projects pressing, the FRHS was notified that it would be necessary to move the contents of our storage unit in a Fall River mill from one room to another. In just a few days we did it, thanks in great part to **Trish Rebello** and **Kathy Rockett**, who were there from the onset. Thank you both!

Note: *Sincere apologies to anyone unintentionally omitted from these listings. Many sincere thanks!*



GREATCLOAK CONT.

period in the United States. While wool products were common, the Colonies had relied on exporting wool to Britain, where craftsmen would produce the high-quality finished products, and after the Revolution, this trade network was cut off. Post-Revolution, linsey-woolsey, a fabric made by weaving linen and wool together, continued to be used to stretch out the wool available on the United States market, which explains why the largest portion of the cloak, the exterior, would be made of very high-quality linsey-woolsey. The interior green wool and brown velvet collar further imply a high price, and it is clearly the cloak of a gentleman. The brown velvet especially implies wealth, as even this small amount of fabric would have been prohibitively expensive to import and tailor onto the cloak. Through this greatcloak we can confirm that Josiah Smith was such a gentleman, as he was referred to in several locations with the title "Esquire," often used to denote wealthy men or lawyers, both of which Smith may have been, given his profession of Justice of the Peace and his holding of land.

Altogether, a picture is painted by what we can observe of the surviving cloak. It was expensive, handmade, and stylish for the late 1700s or early 1800s. Most likely this cloak was worn by Smith after his service in the Revolution and shows his higher social and economic status in Plymouth County. The cloak is in fantastic condition for what is likely a 200-year-old piece of clothing, although it needs restoration to stabilize it. Moth hole damage, small tears, and dye degradation due to acidity (the dye on the scraps of green wool has faded due to being in contact with the highly acidic blue linsey-woolsey) have left discoloration and damage along several sections of the cloak. But despite that damage, it is an exemplar of an incredibly rare surviving article, as men's outerwear from the 18th Century very rarely survived to the modern era. It is part of a classic story of American success in the early years of the country, of a man rising from a young private in the Massachusetts line to wealthy local politician, acquiring a fashionable greatcloak along the way.

I'd like to extend my thanks to Jonathan Lane and J. Archer O'Reilly of the Massachusetts chapter of the Society of the Cincinnati for their help in providing a biography of Josiah Smith from their own records, which greatly aided in my research.



INTRODUCING CONRAD KRAPF



Conrad Krapp is a research intern at the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS], currently documenting various objects in the collection.

Born in Carlisle, Massachusetts, he received his secondary education at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts, and was a 2024 graduate of Southern Methodist University. While at the Dallas, Texas, institution, Conrad earned a history degree with concentrations in Medieval, Middle Eastern, and European studies.

After concluding the investigation into the Smith overcoat of the Revolutionary War era, detailed in the preceding narrative, Conrad continued with additional research projects, including in-depth biographical research on Tiverton, Rhode Island, Senator and General, Benjamin Howland (1755-1821). This was to document an invitation in the FRHS collection sent from President Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) to Howland, inviting him to dine at the White House on February 10, 1807.

The identity of the recipient was unknown before Conrad's research. There is no donor information linked to the invitation, but it is documented as having been in the collection by 1978.

He has also completed two other projects: Identifying the individuals in a large collection of miniature "gem" tintype photographs of students from the Highland Military Academy of Lowell, Massachusetts. These are contained in a late- 1860s album owned and assembled by Fall River resident Joseph Durfee Carr (1850-1880),

who attended the school. The students were contemporaneously identified, likely by Carr, with surnames only. Conrad researched the academy, identified most of the individuals, and compiled pertinent biographical information. The album has been in the collection since 1985, being one of a long list of items that required in-depth research to be properly catalogued.

Additionally, he researched an 1863 albumen print photograph depicting a class of United States Naval Academy midshipmen, including Fall Riverite George Stephen Davol (1848-1924), training on the Sloop-of-War *USS Marion* in the Civil War. Once again, the crew members were identified, possibly by Davol, using mostly surnames, diminutives, or combinations of both. In a like manner, Conrad researched the vessel, identified most of the men, and gathered biographical material. The image was donated in 1993.

In both cases – the album and the photograph – the faces now have names.

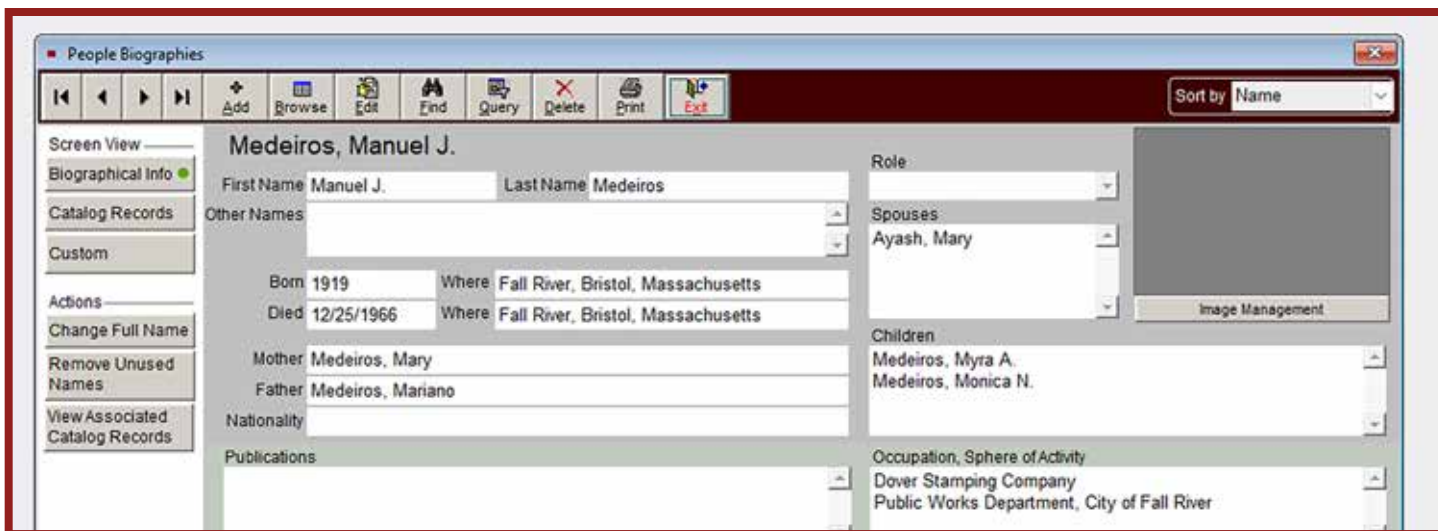
Both have been catalogued, and Conrad entered the results of his research into the FRHS biographical database, linking the individual names to the object.

Currently, he is researching a photograph album assembled in 1898, containing 97 gelatin-silver prints taken onboard the *USS Prairie* during the Spanish-American War. The album belonged to, or was a commemorative of, Fall Riverite Lynward French (1871-1898), Chief Boatswains Mate on the vessel, who died in Guantanamo, Cuba, while in service. French was one of the many Fall River men who served on the *Prairie*.

Aided by a period typewritten index that is in some instances rather cryptic, he is researching the named individuals in the photographs, as well as the ships, localities, and landmarks. Significantly, he is also attempting to identify the unnamed men – many of them undoubtedly Fall Riverites – using other resources, including previously identified images of crew members that are contained in FRHS collections. The album was donated in 1946 and remained uncatalogued, pending research.

Conrad's plans are to go on to graduate school and a career of learning and teaching. He lives at home with his parents in Westport, Massachusetts.





COLLECTION CARE AND MANAGEMENT BY CAROLINE H. AUBIN

While the museum has been closed to the public for ongoing infrastructure work, the staff and volunteers have not been idle. In fact, far from it! Without a doubt, considerable time has been occupied with project administration and onsite supervision to make sure that all day-to-day objectives are met and that everyone remains synchronized and on the same page.

But during this "downtime," we have also made care and management a top priority.

Over the past months, a great deal of progress has been made cataloguing collections and recording information in the PastPerfect Museum Software (PP), providing a consistent system for recording information on Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] holdings. Additionally, over 50,000 names have been entered into individual files in the People Biographies field of PP. This area provides contextual information and is instrumental when cataloguing objects, being used to identify people who appear in photographs, or are associated with objects, archival materials, and publications in the collection. This valuable aid in linking individuals to associated catalogue records is extremely useful in locating material for patrons.

Projects include:

- ◆ More than 35,000 index cards from a card catalogue assembled by the FRHS over several decades that contained biographical, historical, and reference information pertaining to centuries of Fall Riverites have been entered in PP.

- ◆ In preparation for cataloguing and scanning, the majority of individuals who

are portrayed in 1,312 photographs from the FRHS collection that depict groups of people assembled for various occasions, have been identified. The total number of people positively identified is 4,159. This represents only a fraction of the FRHS collection. All those names, along with pertinent biographical information, have been entered in PP.

- ◆ The FRHS holdings include a vast collection of portrait photographs of men, women, and children, dating from the dawn of photography to the present day. In preparation for cataloguing and scanning, biographical information pertaining to 4,223 individuals depicted in these images has been entered into PP.

- ◆ Prior to the HVAC installation, it was necessary to pack and store all the books in the FRHS research library to ensure their safety during construction. As part of the process of reshelfing, all the volumes in the collection are being thoroughly catalogued in PP. Among those completed: Fall River City Directories 1853-1997; City Documents 1842-1927; Poll Tax Records 1843-1957; School Reports 1842-1910; Water Works Reports 1875-1903; and Probate Records pertaining to various Fall River estates, 1890-1970.

- ◆ The FRHS holdings include a large collection of ephemera, among which are several hundred scrapbooks assembled by Fall Riverites during the scrapbook craze that lasted for approximately one hundred years, beginning in the mid-19th century. Compiling volumes of newspaper clippings was a popular way to document personal interests, family or city history, and current events. As such, they contain a plethora of information.

Due to the highly acidic nature of some papers, conditions vary, ranging from excellent to extremely poor. Several of these scrapbooks have been conserved in-house, with the clippings removed from the brittle pages, deacidified, and transferred to archival scrapbooks. This involved work will remain ongoing, as time permits.

To make them available to researchers, it is necessary to undertake the tedious process of indexing, thereby providing an efficient means of retrieving data. Two scrapbook indexes have been completed, with all pertinent data entered in PP: Union Hospital School of Nursing Scrapbook and FRHS Obituaries Scrapbook, with a combined total of 2,626 individual names.

Additionally, a scrapbook of wills assembled at a time when publishing the entire contents of personal wills and/or estate inventories in the newspaper was commonplace – in Fall River and elsewhere – is in the process of being catalogued. An index containing 1,740 individual names has been compiled for this volume, with the information currently being entered into PP.

Indeed, there are no idle hands at the FRHS! Managing the growing collections of the museum benefits not only the organization itself but allows for better access to the collections for researchers and visitors. The work may not be as striking as freshly painted walls or air conditioning but is as important nonetheless.



INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES

Three-phase Power System: As a former private residence, the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] building had long been serviced by a single-phase electrical system, fed via a conduit from Maple Street. This was insufficient to power the needs of a growing organization. Necessary upgrade required the costly installation of a 3-phase system, which is a method of delivering alternating current electricity using three separate phases that are out of sync with each other by a determined number of degrees. The efficient system is employed for commercial applications that require significant power.

The closest utility line to the FRHS with 3-phase power is routed to an underground vault over a city-block south of the museum building. This required that new underground electrical infrastructure be run from that vault, up Rock Street, north, to the FRHS. The undertaking was major, involving contractors representing various trades.

The design called for the installation of two 4" concrete-encased underground conduits extending from a vault located near the intersection of Rock and Walnut Streets, to a heavy-duty handhole on the FRHS grounds, and then to a transformer pad. The new transformer pad is located southeast of the museum building, along the edge of the off-street parking area; in compliance with code, it is provided with oil containment and meter exposure on the secondary side. From the transformer, a 4" non-encased conduit was extended underground to the south side of the building.

Fortunately, no subsurface anomalies, such as granite ledge, were encountered. Upon completion, the streets and sidewalks excavated during construction were restored to their original condition.

Significantly, completion of this major project guarantees that the FRHS has sufficient power onsite to service current – or any future – infrastructure projects that require a 3-phase system.

This project was made possible by a generous grant of \$236,374.29 from the Fall River Community Preservation Committee, for which the FRHS is extremely grateful.

Electrical Rewiring: The scope of work for the new HVAC system included the in-

stallation of new wiring, circuit breakers, and other electrical components necessary to operate the system. However, during installation, it became increasingly apparent that there was considerable antiquated wiring throughout the entire structure, including much of the original knob-and-tube that was still in operation. As expected in a building that was first wired for electricity ca. 1907 and with a service modified by electricians for over a century, several concerning safety hazards were uncovered. Among them were exposed wires, compromised wire insulation, and mismatched circuits. A complete electrical upgrade, crucial for safety, functionality, and preservation, was necessary.

Fortunately, the timing was serendipitous. The very complicated process was made easier and more cost effective because the penetrations that were cut throughout the building for the HVAC installation allowed electricians greater accessibility to wiring.

Every room in the building was impacted in some manner, with all electrical wiring, outlets, receptacles, and panels replaced. New receptacles were also installed in precise locations, intended for specific uses – for example, IT equipment or display cases – eliminating the use of unsightly extension cords. Additionally, energy-efficient track lighting was installed in the third-floor storage areas.

Completion of this major project that was identified as a priority in the Master Preservation Plan has ensured that all aspects of the FRHS electrical infrastructure are reliable, meet modern safety standards, and comply with city and state building codes. Gone are the days of flickering lights and tripped circuits.

This project was made possible by the gift of a Private Foundation, supplemented by the FRHS general fund.

Interior Storm Windows: To increase the efficiency of the HVAC system, 47 Inner-glass Window Systems interior storm windows have been fabricated for installation in the museum building.

These minimally invasive windows are compression-fit and are used in house museums nationwide due to a streamline design that makes them ideally suited for historic interiors. They provide energy-efficiency, sound-

proofing, and essential UV protection, and eliminate outside airborne pollutants and particulate matter.

The effectiveness of this product manifested itself during the colder months; the extra layer of insulation produced a noticeable difference in window drafts and cold pockets.

This project was funded in great part by the late David Amaral (1946-2024), with additional support from The Amy J. Bare Charitable Trust.

Lighting Fixture Conservation and Restoration: The FRHS houses a remarkable collection of antique lighting, including several ca. 1869 fixtures that are original to the building, and those from other Fall River homes. To ensure their safety during the HVAC installation, it was necessary to disconnect all the lighting fixtures – including gasoliers, chandeliers, wall sconces, and newel post light – throughout the entire building. This furnished the optimum time for conservation and electrical rewiring.

Antique lighting fixtures typically accumulate grime and discoloration due to many factors, including exposure to dust, airborne pollutants, insects, oil/fingerprint stains, debris, and yellowed discoloration of protective lacquer. As they age, brass, bronze, spelter metal, and silver fixtures tarnish, iron rusts, bronze can develop bronze disease – evidenced by a specific green corrosion – and polychrome discolors. Glass globes and faceted crystal pendants are susceptible to dust, grime, and fingerprints. All these factors produce an overall dull appearance.

Fall River's own Renaissance Lighting, a specialist firm providing restoration services to museums, architects, and the trade throughout New England, assisted in disconnecting the fixtures and transported them to their studio. They were dismantled, meticulously cleaned, and the original metal finishes and patination were conserved, restored when necessary, and rewired. In all cases there were marked overall aesthetic improvements; in some instances, they were spectacular.

This work was sponsored by a grant from an Anonymous Private Foundation.

(continued on next page)

INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES CONT.

Cupola Restoration - The Interior:

Restoration work on the interior of the cupola has recently been completed; it retains most of its original structural details, despite being subjected to severe changes in temperature over time. The outside will be restored as part of the roof and exterior restoration project.

The inside walls and ceiling are clad in tongue-and-groove paneling that had been painted only three times since 1870. Eight windows facing the four cardinal directions allow sunlight to penetrate, with exposure to harmful UV rays damaging painted surfaces and causing photo-oxidation, a process by which wood degrades.

The damaged wood was repaired, and the walls and ceiling were primed and repainted using a UV resistant product. The elaborate circular balustrade and handrail, constructed in black walnut and matching that installed on the main staircase in the building, was also revarnished.

The original four-arm gasolier remains in place hanging from a decorative ceiling medallion, but the sun had severely degraded the patinated bronze finish and the glass globes were long gone. The fixture has been restored, electrified in a manner in keeping with its preservation, and new globes procured.

A photocell installed when the building was rewired efficiently turns the gasolier on and off based on available light, illuminating the cupola and furnishing a nighttime focal point to the FRHS landmark structure.

This project was made possible through a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism.

Repainting: Several rooms in the building have been repainted and restored to their former appearance in preparation for reopening to the public; some were affected by HVAC installation, while others required refreshing. The parlor, dining room, and washroom on

the first floor, and the northwest gallery and west exhibit room on the second floor are complete. As soon as work on the third-floor storage rooms is finished, the entire stairwell and hallway will be repainted in the original color scheme.

Efforts are being made to expedite this work in a timely manner, however, when working in a remarkably well-preserved historic interior, many things cannot be rushed. The challenges faced by the painting contractor are many, chief among them the painstaking task of painting rooms without damaging original hardwood moldings, delicate gilding, and rare, polychrome stenciling on ceilings, or borders on walls and above wainscoting.

This work is funded through the generosity of various donors.

Information Technology (IT) Upgrades:

Technology is ever-changing and to operate efficiently the FRHS must adapt to modern standards to keep up. Addressing this issue, the entire hardwired IT infrastructure has been replaced. This includes network

(continued on next page)

CREATING ADDITIONAL OFFICE SPACE

Space – or lack thereof – has always been an issue at the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] as we juggle the need for public spaces, such as period room settings, exhibition galleries, and a library/research area, with private rooms for storage, collections care/management, and offices.

For the past several decades all office space for the staff had been in two small, windowless rooms in the library/archival area on the basement level – one furnished with two desks, and the other, with three. When filing cabinets and necessary items of workplace paraphernalia are added to that, things get tight ... fast.

Privacy, especially for business calls, was virtually non-existent: Just outside the office used by the curator is the only space available for a microfilm reader available for researchers. Closing the louvered door did little to muffle the sound, furnishing only a visual semblance of confidentiality. The most practical solution on busy days with researchers present has long been business calls using mobile telephones from the privacy of a car, or the third floor of the museum building. Adaptability is key.

At the FRHS we also lacked an area for small meetings.

The installation of the new HVAC system opened a range of possibilities for the FRHS, including reimagining some areas of the building for other uses. The second floor of the ell, originally staff quarters when the structure was a private residence and most recently used by the museum shop, offered the ideal solution for the lack of offices: three rooms and a hallway of prime space that could easily be converted into an office suite.

The entire area had previously been heated by the one small radiator that remained in operation; it was frigid in the winter, and, with no method of cooling, correspondingly sweltering in summer. The HVAC system made the rooms habitable.

As with other infrastructure projects, it was necessary to retain all the original features in the rooms to preserve historical integrity; anything added is completely reversible. To start with, HVAC equipment for this area was placed in a closet and above ceilings, disguising it while also making it easily serviceable. The rooms were insulated, electrical and IT lines were installed, and plaster and windows repaired. The area was completely repainted, interior storm windows were fitted, and new lighting and carpeting installed.

This area now very comfortably houses the curator, the business office, and a small meeting room.

After decades working from a cramped shared room in the basement, the curator now has an office with two windows, one facing north and the other, east. The day after the physical move was an early one for Michael, who was at his desk at 6:30 awaiting the arrival of contractors. There was a light cloud cover that morning, and then as if by magic the sunlight shone through the east window, illuminating the desk and computer, causing him to pause for a moment. In his words: "It was startling. I sat there, basking in the sun for a moment. Windows are a very good thing."

This reconfiguration freed up much-needed space in the former office areas. Caroline Aubin, Registrar and Assistant Site Manager, formerly shared a room with the business office. She has now vacated her corner cubbyhole – it was, in fact, too small to be considered a cubicle – and has an actual office with room for a table, an essential tool when cataloguing collections. The room has been repainted, carpeted, and properly outfitted; it provides a comfortable, efficient space from which to work.

The FRHS recognizes the Anonymous Donor who funded the costs associated with the office creation and relocation. Thank you!

INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES CONT.

cabling, internal data processing, computer telephony integration, and hardware upgrades, ensuring reliable and secure transfer of data.

The timing for this work was ideal: Openings that had been cut throughout the building for various construction/installation projects gave technicians easier access for wiring.

This new system has quickly proved its worth, providing efficient, streamlined operations and increased productivity. It also provides the ability for improved collections preservation and management, enhances research and education, and will make for a better visitor experience.

This project was funded through the generosity of an Anonymous Private Foundation.

Egress Lighting: A code requirement of the HVAC project was the installation of egress lighting throughout the museum building, augmenting the fire pull stations and other emergency systems already in place. This included illuminated signs indicating exit routes and the fixtures necessary to illuminate those routes in the event of a power outage, fire, or other emergency.

Collectively, these elements ensure a safe and orderly evacuation for FRHS staff, volunteers, and visitors.

This work was made possible by The Manton Foundation.



RECENT ACQUISITION



Abbie Luella Zuill (1856-1921), "Still Life with Roses," 1891. The gift of Douglas Hills Borden Jr. in memory of Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden. This painting will be featured in the next issue of *In Focus*.

NEW EXHIBITION AREAS

Several new exhibits are being planned for the second floor of the building. In preparation for their installation, some rooms have been, or are in the process of being completely renovated, each for a specific purpose.

Notable among the planned exhibits:

B.M.C. Durfee – The Story of a Memorial: This exhibit will tell the story of Fall River's iconic B.M.C. Durfee High School and the life of its namesake, Bradford Matthew Chaloner Durfee (1843-1872). The tale – involving a devastating fire, two untimely deaths, a lost will, a vast fortune, and a major act of philanthropy – has all the makings of historical fiction, but did, in fact, occur in 19th-century Fall River.

The historic narrative will be set against the backdrop of the city's rise to international prominence as one of the world's largest producers of cotton cloth. The exhibit will include illustrated text panels, paintings, photographs, ephemera, and rare, original artifacts from the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] collections. Many of the artifacts have never been exhibited publicly. This compelling story has never fully been told.

On the Old Fall River Line: This exhibit will document the history of the famed Fall River Line of steamships that plowed the coastal waters from Fall River to Newport to New York City, and back again, for ninety years, from 1847 to 1937.

The vessels were the technological marvels of their day and were the largest, fastest, and most luxurious ships to navigate the coastal route, carrying vast amounts of freight and hundreds of passengers. Among those traveling on the line were thousands of immigrants of myriad nationalities en route to Fall River and employment in the city's textile mills – the first step in their American dream. Other notable passengers included several United States presidents.

This exhibit will comprise paintings, photographs, ephemera, and original artifacts from the FRHS collections, including some recently acquired and exhibited for the first time. Recordings and film footage will also be incorporated into the text panels for this presentation.

Among the stellar pieces in the exhibit will be a selection of important paintings of the Fall River Line ships by the noted marine artists Antonio Nicolo Gasparo Jacobsen

(1850-1921) and Fred Pansing (1844-1912).

Work is ongoing in other rooms on this floor as well. The north-west gallery and the west exhibit room have been repainted and are awaiting the installation of Gallery System Art Display picture rails and new floor covering.

To increase much needed exhibit space in the hallway, a screen measuring 9' wide x 10' high has been constructed, concealing an unused door and radiator. The area will provide a focal point for featured artifacts in the collection and can be changed frequently. To preserve the historic integrity of the building and in keeping with other alterations made for exhibition purposes, the screen can be removed without damaging any original architectural features.

This ongoing work has been made possible, in large part, through the generous support of Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism, and the gift of an Anonymous Donor.

The FRHS is currently seeking additional funding to complete these projects.



COLLECTION STORAGE CONT.

costume boxes. The two window alcoves in this room – one facing east and the other, south – are being fitted with large shelving units, and four wall mounted floor-to-ceiling units will also be installed, designed for hats and footwear.

Extending off the main room to the north are two small spaces – originally a sink room and dressing area – that are also being fitted with shelves for small box storage, and poles for items that can be safely hung on archival padded hangers and garment bags.

In keeping with the other storage areas on this floor, the room was fully repaired, repainted, and ample LED lighting was installed.

To date, the FRHS has not secured grant or private-donor funding for the construction portion of this project. However, to safeguard the collection and capitalize on the unique opportunity of an empty room and contractors onsite it was decided, after careful consideration, to self-fund this work.

The FRHS is currently seeking donor assistance to offset the cost of this project. Contact the curator at 508-679-1071 x 2. Thank you!



FRHS Officers and Directors FY2025-2026

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PROJECT UPDATE: HVAC SYSTEM IN OPERATION

The new HVAC system is in full operation. This is the result of two decisive firsts in the 104-year history of the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS]: It was the largest and most transformative infrastructure project ever undertaken by the organization and was made possible by the largest grant ever received by the FRHS.

It is the culmination of a three-phase process: In 2020, funding was awarded for a Preservation Master Plan and Site Survey that created a prioritized approach for maintenance and restoration of the museum building and its critical systems; in 2021, funding was received for a MEP design for the HVAC system; and in 2023, a grant made the HVAC System installation a reality.

As detailed in past issues of *In Focus*, the impact of this project is major, long-lasting, and cannot be overstated. The changes to the ambient environment in the building are dramatic due to the constant flow of filtered fresh air and balanced heat/cooling that is circulating throughout the entire structure. This will aid significantly in the preservation of the historic interiors of the museum building, safeguard objects in the collections, and guarantee a comfortable visitor experience.

The ability to maintain different temperatures is beneficial on several levels. This is especially important in both exhibition and storage areas, where it is crucial to maintain varied temperatures because collection materials deteriorate at different rates, with fluctuations causing significant damage to fragile artifacts.

The installation process was highly complex, especially given the need to ensure the preservation and historical integrity of the structure and the FRHS collections. The facility closed to the public on July 21, 2023, to begin packing collections; emptying the building of its contents was necessary to safeguard artifacts and provide contractors access to all areas. The task was daunting.

Construction and installation work commenced in earnest in mid-September 2023. The project progressed corresponding to the original scheduled timeline and very few delays were encountered. Many sincere thanks go out to Michael and Ann Keane of Civitects, Tony DiGiantommaso and Bruce Churbuck of Page Building Construction, and all the various subcontractors – too many to mention by name – for their skill, dedication, and cautious approach to this project. Well done, all!

The installation phase of the project is complete, as are the majority of related structural and/or cosmetic repairs to the building necessary to bring any affected areas back to their original appearance. Completion of the repair work that remains to be done is contingent on other, non-project-related infrastructure work being finished, and is being scheduled accordingly.

The lengthy process of bringing the interior of the structure back to its original appearance is ongoing and considerable progress has already been made. Nearly every room in the building has been, is, or will be repaired in some manner, including carpentry, painting, plastering, and floor covering; dust is ever-present. This work is progressing, and all attempts are being made to expedite the process in a timely, efficient manner.

For the first time in its history, the FRHS can monitor and control temperatures specifically for the needs of the collection: This is a real gamechanger.

The FRHS is indebted to The Manton Foundation making a major investment in the future of this organization by providing funding for all aspects of this impactful project. For your generosity and interest in its work the FRHS is extremely grateful



ROOF AND EXTERIOR RESTORATION

In June 2021, the Fall River Historical Society [FRHS] was awarded a grant of \$389,943 from the Fall River Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for the replacement of the roofing membrane on the main portion of the museum building, restoration of related original 19th-century wood trim on the slate-sided Mansard roof, fabrication of missing components, and conservation of the iron crest railing. Work on this project was originally expected to commence shortly after the funds were awarded.

The design for the installation of the new HVAC system required that various penetrations be cut into the roof for the installation of ventilation ducts. Accordingly, the FRHS requested an extension from the CPC to put the project on hold until the HVAC work was completed, it being irrational to cut into a new roof. Fortunately, this initial extension request was granted and has recently been further extended.

In nearly four years since the grant was awarded, many things have changed. Exterior deterioration of the structure has progressed rapidly, significantly altering the base scope of the project, and building material/labor costs have likewise greatly increased. As such, a revised August 2024 estimate for all the necessary exterior restoration work was slightly more than \$750,000, a figure based on the entire project being done consecutively to optimize costly scaffolding rental/installation and associated costs.

This revised estimate is \$362,497 more than the awarded grant funding, and is also subject to change due to trade uncertainties, including material/labor cost increases. Unfortunately, grant funding for this additional work has not yet been secured.

As such, a phased approach is being adopted for this project

by breaking out various components of the work from the base scope and completing them incrementally. Work is expected to commence in July 2025. Although ultimately less cost effective, this approach will allow partial work to begin using available funding.

This restoration work is essential. Proper maintenance of an historic structure ensures that the building remains structurally sound, thus providing a tangible link to the past that allows visitors of today – and those of future generations – to understand and appreciate history.

The FRHS museum building, constructed on Columbia Street in 1843 in the Greek Revival style, moved to its present location in 1870 and redesigned in French Second Empire is a rare survivor, with most of its grand interior and exterior features remaining in situ. The organization is fortunate to be housed in a remarkable structure that is widely recognized as one of the finest preserved historic buildings in Southeastern Massachusetts.

It is imperative that the building that houses the most significant collection of cultural artifacts extant pertaining to the history of Fall River and its people be properly maintained. Good stewardship of the plethora of objects in FRHS holdings can easily overshadow the pressing needs of the building that is, in fact, the largest object in the collection. The long-term vitality of the building – and the collections – must be a priority.

The challenges are many and the issue is a pressing one. As such, all efforts will be made to secure the additional funding to complete the entire project.



CONTACT US

The IT upgrade included computer telephony integration that necessitated changing the telephone extensions previously in use. The telephone number 508-679-1071 remains the same. Below is a list of new extension numbers for your convenience.

FRHS General Information:	1
Michael Martins, Curator:	2
Caroline Aubin, Registrar/Asst. Site Manager:	3
Christine Pettine, Bookkeeping:	4
Melissa Kenyon, Accountant:	5
Claudette Aubin, Gift Shop Manager:	6
Library & Archive:	7

IN MEMORIAM



J. THOMAS COTTRELL JR. APRIL 12, 1925 - MAY 30, 2025

A life member and benefactor of the Fall River Historical Society, Tom Cottrell was a longtime director, serving as president from 1985 to 1993. During his tenure, he completely revitalized the organization on many levels – if not for his guidance and perseverance the organization would not exist in its present form.

A tribute to Tom Cottrell will appear in the next issue of *In Focus*.



Josiah Smith's greatcloak. The FRHS is hoping to secure funding for its conservation.



Left: Parlor ceiling showing repair to plaster from radiator leak. The radiator was replaced as part of the HVAC project. Right: Ceiling after restoration.



NE room, 3rd floor, after being fitted with custom shelving for storage of 3-D objects.



Walls and ceiling in SW storage room, 3rd floor, after damaged plaster was removed by FRHS volunteers and staff.



Mitch Heroux constructing units in SE room, 3rd floor, for costume and textile storage.



Main hallway gasolier pendant lighting fixtures, ca. 1869, before and after conservation.



Left: The initial stage of cleaning. The heavy layer of accumulated grime is evident. Right: The skylight installed following restoration.

SKYLIGHT RESTORED TO FORMER BRILLIANCE

A painted and stained-glass skylight that is the only example of the artform in the building has been restored to its former brilliance; it had been obscured in darkness and overlooked by visitors for decades.

Created by an unidentified artisan or commercial manufacturer ca. 1869, it was selected for Robert Knight Remington's Rock Street residence when the structure was moved and rebuilt in 1870.

The skylight is configured in a geometric stadium shape – rectangular with a pair of semicircles at both ends – made up of eight separate panels held together by heavy lead came. It was set in the third-floor ceiling above the stairwell to furnish illumination and aesthetic appeal and is perfectly complemented by the elaborate polychrome ceiling and border stenciling that surrounds it.

The central design of the window features a rosette surrounded by a series of concentric rings, set into a wide circular border of reuleaux-like triangles framing stylized acanthus leaves, in turn enclosed by a wide ring border; the whole is set in a field of quatrefoil devices. The semicircular ends feature a stylized fleur-de-lis, emanating a series of elaborate ornamental scrolls.

It was originally covered by a thick protective glass plate that was laid flat onto the roof, thus providing a means of natural light; the glass plate was removed and the void covered with roofing material sometime in the mid-20th century, relegating the skylight to darkness.

In the 155 years since its installation, the glass became further darkened by layers of grime and all manner of detritus that had accumulated on its surface, including dust, insulation, small debris, and scattered animal and insect deposits. There was also considerable damage and losses to one of the semicircular end panels.

Conservation was necessary.

The work on the window was undertaken by stained glass conservator James Donahue Jr. of New England Stained Glass, whose initial visit to the Fall River Historical Society was to conduct a physical

assessment of the piece. The skylight is positioned in the loft under a low-pitched roof and is extremely difficult to access. It can only be reached by shimmying through a small cabinet-size door set low into the north wall of the cupola, or by climbing through a ceiling access panel in one of two third-floor closets; both are equally challenging. Fortunately, Jim is not claustrophobic.

During review, it was discovered that the window had originally been set into a heavy wood frame that remained structurally sound, a feature that lent stability to the brittle glass during the removal process, which occurred a few weeks later.

Following the time-consuming process of carefully cleaning the glass, the conservation and restoration began. According to Jim, the "window was a challenge" because "we had to match existing paint colors and glass to repair the damage."

"The window was a challenge; we had to match existing paint colors and glass to repair the damage"

"This window had multiple colors of glass stains (deep yellows/oranges) as well as black, brown, and blue paints, and went through a total of ten firings for each piece to achieve the right color matches."

"The craftsmanship and painting on this window was done in a very traditional way. From the minor detailed filigree to the sharp linework, the window

was painted with high quality and precision ... it was originally all painted by hand – we can confirm that by the minor differences from piece to piece. This window used a unique technique of plating colored glass over the existing painted glass to make certain details stand out."

The results of the conservation treatment were stunning.

Prior to its reinstallation, the skylight was illuminated electrically as part of the building rewiring project. Now, at the flip of a switch, it is once again a focal point in the hallway as was originally intended.

This project was made possible by the generosity of an Anonymous Donor.

