



Teaching the 250th

Considerations and Tips:

This guide is designed to help Vermont's local historical societies approach the 250th anniversaries of the United States and Vermont with honesty, depth, and community purpose. It is organized into three areas: framing the conversation around commemoration, grade-level direction, and connecting collections to classrooms and the wider public.

Part 1: Why “Commemorate” versus “Celebrate?”

The Core Distinction

Celebration asks us to feel good. Commemoration asks us to pay attention. Both have their place. In a politically divided moment, celebration can feel like erasure to the people whose stories don't fit the triumphant narrative. Commemoration makes room for everyone at the table.



Tips for Navigating Resistance

When working with mixed audiences, some enthusiastic about nuanced history and some resistant, keep these principles in mind.

- ▶ Name the discomfort early.
- ▶ Avoid the false binary. Commemoration is not “patriots vs. critics.” History holds both grief and gratitude.
- ▶ Give people agency. People are more open to complexity when they feel ownership over which threads of their local history to pull.

Part 2: History Education in Vermont

Changes in Vermont Social Studies Curriculum

Over the past decade or more, social studies education has undergone significant shifts as Vermont has grappled with how to balance content knowledge, civic skill-building, and curriculum decisions. VT first moved away from strict grade-by-grade content standards for social studies back in 2004, when it introduced the History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations. Rather than specifying individual grade levels, these were organized by grade clusters — preK/K; 1–2; 3–4; 5–6; 7–8; and high school.

In 2017, the Vermont State Board of Education adopted the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards to guide teaching of civics, economics, geography, and history statewide. The Agency of Education subsequently developed a Social Studies Proficiency-Based Graduation Hierarchy for grades 9–12 through an iterative process involving Vermont K–12 educators. Each content area has between 5 and 10 graduation proficiencies. Districts set their own specific local requirements, but those requirements must be rooted in the state-adopted content standards.

VT shifted from “students in grade X should know Y content” to “students should be able to do these inquiry and disciplinary thinking skills.” Districts have significant local control over what content they use to teach those skills. The content is now largely a local curriculum decision, and local history is a natural fit.



Basic Grade Breakdown

- ▶ **K** - Me and My Community
 - ▶ **1** - People, Places, and the Environment
 - ▶ **2** - The Americas
 - ▶ **3** - Global Interactions
 - ▶ **4** - Vermont, the Early Republic and the U.S.; Pre-Colonial Times to the Civil War
 - ▶ **5** - World Geography and Ancient Civilizations I: Western Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Subs-Saharan Africa
 - ▶ **6** - World Geography and Ancient Civilizations II: Latin America, South and East Asia, Oceania, Latin America, and Europe
 - ▶ **7** - Vermont and the U.S. - From Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement
 - ▶ **8** - Civics and Economics in Action
 - ▶ **9-12** - U.S. History, World History, and U.S. Government and Politics
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Vermont History

A standalone Vermont history course at the high school level is not common or required. Vermont history tends to get woven into broader U.S. history courses, if it appears at all. Because course offerings are so locally variable, teachers are often working with very thin curriculum resources for anything beyond the U.S. History requirement. This is a potentially a significant curricular gap and a real opportunity for historical societies to fill a genuine void.

Part 3: Collections, Classrooms, And Community

Start with an Informal Collections Audit

- What do we have a lot of in our collection? (town records, land deeds, photographs, newspapers)
- What do we have little of in our collection? (women's history, immigrant stories, etc.)
- What do we have that we don't fully know we have? (unprocessed/ uncatalogued letters, diaries, photographs, etc.)
- What exists in our community but not in our collection?
 - It is developing an understanding that any collection is a reflection of past choices, and this is an opportunity to decide what choices want to be made as an LHS moving forward.

Translate Your Collection into Teacher Language

Identify and communicate these types of materials to teachers:

- Documents that show change over time (land use records, census data, town reports)
- Objects or images that raise questions (a photo with an unknown subject, a tool whose purpose isn't obvious, a letter referencing an unfamiliar event)
- Local connections to national moments (Civil War letters, WWII rationing records, Depression-era relief documents, civil rights-era materials)
- Silences and absences - what the collection doesn't include can, itself, be a powerful teaching tool.

Programming Ideas That Bridge Collections and Classrooms

Teachers are busy, and don't often have time to dig through finding aids. Offer them:

- A simple one-page "What We Have" document organized by topic or time period, in plain language
- Teacher open houses where teachers browse collections with a guide, specifically framed around curriculum connections
- Classroom visits where you bring a curated selection of primary sources framed around a compelling question or present students with a mystery object/document and ask them to practice historical thinking to figure out to what it is and to whom it belonged
- Invite teachers to participate in existing VHS programs and act as a partner (*All In Vermont* or *Vermont History Day*)