WHY DO STORIES MATTER?

Vermont Humanities Council
ANNUAL REPORT 2015
“Welcome to the complicated, fascinating world of the humanities. Enjoy its stories and also the non-narrative nature of life’s chaos.”
Given the Vermont Humanities Council’s focus on not only literacy and reading, but also history and literature, it’s appropriate that VHC programming last year would start and end with two prominent “bookend” events, especially because in 2015 much of the Council’s work focused on stories in all their forms and guises.

On January 14, 2015, Salman Rushdie, the author of the year’s Vermont Reads book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, spoke to a capacity crowd at Ira Allen Chapel. The event was co-sponsored with UVM and presented as part of our First Wednesdays series. In his enormously compelling remarks (available in audio and video at vermonthumanities.org/rushdie) he considered the question explicitly raised in *Haroun*: “What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?” And, in response to a question, he spoke about the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*, which had happened only a week before.

The year’s other bookend, VHC’s sold-out 42nd Fall Conference in November, picked up on the question raised in *Haroun* and asked, “Why do stories matter?” The conference examined the richness and diversity of the stories that surround us, how they work, and why they matter. We considered the stories we tell ourselves about our lives and the world; we considered history as story; the cosmic stories of comparative religions; the stories of folktales and children’s literature; the stories associated with heroes that reflect the values of the era; stories that can be conveyed in a painting; personal storytelling and oral history in Vermont; how video games can affect both the telling and experiencing of stories; stories played out on the stage; documentary poetry; Homer’s narratives of return and rage; and how author Katherine Paterson’s life experiences informed her fiction.

Cognitive neuroscientists now know that human brains are built to learn and to understand experience as narrative—as stories. But as students of the humanities, we are also cognizant of life’s complexity and ambiguity. We need to be willing to live with that confusion and uncertainty. And so we need stories, and we need to be suspicious of stories, especially the ones that are too simple.

Welcome to the complicated, fascinating world of the humanities. Enjoy its stories and also the non-narrative nature of life’s chaos. Drink life to the lees, live generously, examine life, and, in part by connecting with VHC programs near you, strive to be one upon whom nothing is lost.

*STORIES AND BOOKENDS*

Peter A. Gilbert  
Executive Director

Ben Doyle  
VHC Board Chair
“Haroun came along at the right time for that particular group.”


The class undertook many Haroun-related projects throughout the school year, including hosting an evening of student-facilitated community book discussions, and creating and binding a hundred copies of a book of their own reactions to *Haroun*.

“Haroun is fantastic because it’s a very simple story, and it’s also not a simple story. Can you look at things which are, on the surface, quite simple and see the allegory? How does that then extend your own thinking? The book came along at the right time for that particular group.

“These students were very interested in ideas; they were prepared to work with ideas and see where they would go. They did a very different kind of learning from what many middle school students do.

“The great challenge, I think, is to invite students to do things they’re not invited to do in many places. How do we encourage people to be contemplative?

“There’s a permanence to story, I think, that other things don’t have. *Beowulf* is still with us, as is the desire to slay the monster, the desire to be the hero. Those fundamental things are embodied in story, everywhere. Perhaps story is a great equalizer and a great unifier and more true than anything that we have. And it lasts beyond us.”
VHC chose *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, by internationally renowned author Salman Rushdie, for its 2015 Vermont Reads book. A modern folktale steeped in the narrative traditions of world cultures, the story follows the trials of father Rashid Khalifa and his son Haroun, who must find a way to unclog the Sea of Stories and restore the father’s storytelling abilities. Funny, touching, and wise, *Haroun* is a reflection on the importance of stories, imagination, and creativity.

**VerMont reads SupporterS**

The Vermont Humanities Council is grateful to the major partners that support Vermont Reads.

Since 2007, Vermont Reads has been generously underwritten by Renewable NRG Systems of Hinesburg, Vermont (formerly NRG Systems).

VHC is also grateful for the generous support of the Jack & Dorothy Byrne Foundation, and the Fieldstone Foundation.

Vermont Public Radio is VHC’s media partner; each year VPR presents several days of Vermont Reads programming.

**Salman Rushdie’s Vermont Reads Appearance Packs Ira Allen Chapel**

After months of preparation, VHC and the University of Vermont hosted one of the world’s most recognized literary figures, Salman Rushdie, at Ira Allen Chapel in Burlington in January. The widely publicized talk, “What’s the Use of Stories That Aren’t Even True?” served as a resounding kickoff to Vermont Reads 2015 and also as a special First Wednesdays lecture.

Speaking before a capacity audience of nearly 1,000, Rushdie discussed the power and importance of stories and his novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, which VHC selected for its 2015 Vermont Reads book. Written for his son, the novel is a funny and touching folktale that celebrates stories and imagination. Rushdie characterized the novel as “a battle between language and silence, between the virtues of speech and fear of speech being stifled.”

A Booker Prize winner knighted in 2007 for services to literature, Rushdie answered questions from UVM students, read by VHC board chair and UVM professor Major Jackson, who had been instrumental in helping bring Rushdie to Vermont. Rushdie then graciously signed books for a long line of fans.

Rushdie’s talk, particularly his comments about the terrorist attack on a French satirical magazine in Paris that happened only a week before, made international news. The talk was later broadcast by Vermont PBS. Vermont Public Radio, VHC’s Vermont Reads partner, interviewed Rushdie on *Morning Edition*. Rushdie’s talk and VPR interview can be found at vermonthumanities.org/rushdie.
Michael Heaney is a retired American history professor, lawyer, and a wounded combat veteran of the Vietnam War. He leads two of the Veterans Book Groups sponsored by the Vermont Humanities Council.

“When I came back from Vietnam [in 1966], I was still very much in favor of the war. I thought it was the right thing to do. Then somebody handed me a book and said, 'You should read this'...It was called Street without Joy, by a French war correspondent named Bernard Fall. He covered the horrific French experience in Vietnam in the 1940s and 1950s.

"Bernard Fall seemed to be describing the experience I had, as well as the questions I was starting to develop about what we were really doing in Vietnam. It started the long process where I would re-think my commitment to the war, and ultimately change my opinion about it. I said to myself, 'Why didn't somebody show me this book before?'”

“We guess it's my way of saying, books are very important. And reading groups are very important. And the work that the Humanities Council is doing is very important.”
Reading and Discussion

Led by a trained scholar, participants make connections by reading and talking about books.

“The facilitator was so well-prepared and so well-versed in the topics, I could not ask for more. These discussions are at the level of college courses, if not graduate courses.”

– Joan Hickey, “Farms and Gardens” participant at Dailey Memorial Library

vermonthumanities.org/reading

Literature and Medicine

A hospital-based reading and discussion program open to all hospital staff.

“The program has made me more aware of cultural differences and how they can affect patient care. How would I feel if I was in a hospital in a country where I did not speak the language?”

– Literature and Medicine participant at Copley Hospital

vermonthumanities.org/medicine

Veterans Book Groups

A reading and discussion program open to former service members, including one group of female veterans.

“It was good to exchange perspectives in our discussions. The readings and debates revealed the importance of camaraderie among veterans.”

– Participant in a 2015 Veterans Book Group

vermonthumanities.org/veterans
“Someone may ask a question that hadn’t even occurred to you.”

Cindy Waters (left) is the Adult Services Librarian and Programming Coordinator for the Manchester Community Library, which hosts First Wednesdays events at the First Congregational Church of Manchester.

“Our attendees are intellectually curious, but they like to be in the community with other people. You can listen to Beethoven at home, and read a book about him, but during a First Wednesdays event, someone may ask a question that hadn’t even occurred to you. You think, ‘Yes, I want to know about that, too!’”
In 2015 the ever-popular First Wednesdays series featured topics such as visual satire, the writings of Thoreau, the buildings of Vermont, Buddhism in the West, Russian cuisine, and Impressionist painting. Special venues hosted events with NPR’s John Hockenberry on climate change, world-famous novelist Salman Rushdie on storytelling, and Grammy nominee Stephen Wade performing traditional folk songs.

Attendees: 7086

Number of talks: 71

Towns served:
Brattleboro, Essex Junction, Manchester, Middlebury, Montpelier, Newport, Norwich, Rutland, and St. Johnsbury

“During the winter months it is an anchor to my intellectual life—a stretch toward ideas and topics that I know just enough about to know I know very little!”
   – First Wednesdays attendee

“We are extremely fortunate to have free, public events in our state. The variety of topics and the quality of speakers are astounding.”
   – Dr. Robert Ackland, Literacy Education professor at SUNY-Plattsburgh

vermonthumanities.org/first-wednesdays

Middlebury College professor Elizabeth Morrison discussed “The Appeal of Buddhism in the West” in St. Johnsbury.

James Maroney, the former head of American Paintings at both Sotheby’s and Christie’s, presented a critical evaluation of Georgia O’Keeffe’s best work.

Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro hosted Middlebury College professor Glenn Andres and his talk, “The Buildings of Vermont.”
**Never Too Early**

Early literacy professional development for childcare providers, and family literacy training for parents, especially low-income households and teen parents.

“I look at reading books (to children and myself) differently. I didn’t think I could love books more than I already did.”

– Participant at Child Care Resource in Williston

vermonthumanities.org/never-too-early

**Connections**

A reading and discussion program offered with the Community High School of Vermont, the Vermont Department of Corrections, and community organizations.

“This is the first time in my life I have written a poem! I didn’t know I could do it!”

– Student in a six-week reading, discussion, and writing program at the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor.

vermonthumanities.org/connections

**Voices**

Professional development for adult educators to gain expertise in facilitating book discussions. Includes gift books for their students.

“I saw quiet students gain confidence in their thoughts, ideas, and reading ability. It’s amazing what a trusting environment, rich texts, and open discussions can create for a hesitant learner!”

– Alyssa Gagne, Vermont Adult Learning, Burlington

vermonthumanities.org/voices
“Everything was hand-me-down, but I had stories.”

Morgan Irons has worked with the Vermont Humanities Council for almost 30 years as a facilitator for our literacy programs. She leads early literacy, family literacy, and adult literacy programs at State Correctional Facilities in Newport and St. Johnsbury, and elsewhere around Vermont.

“I grew up in Williamstown, Vermont. The children’s collection in the library was small, and there was no movie theater, no museum. But my mother read to me constantly, and I experienced the world and history and biography that way. My childhood was so rich even though I never wore new clothes. Everything was hand-me-down, but I had stories.

“I’m convinced that a lot of what I picked up in my childhood, as far as teachings about how to live a productive and good life, came from stories.”
Humanities Camps

VHC’s Humanities Camps are week-long, summer day camps for at-risk middle school students. The camps strengthen literacy skills, build positive peer groups, and nurture a love of reading.

Ten middle schools across Vermont held Humanities Camps in 2015, the 19th year of this program. The schools selected a course of study from one of two themes: Africa! and Photos That Changed History. Within each theme, students took part in guided reading and discussion groups, and hands-on learning activities.

In Burlington, Edmunds Middle School students enjoyed an “amazing” Ethiopian meal at ArtsRiot, prepared by Alganesh Micheal, who was born in Eritrea. At Irasburg’s Africa camp, a local farmer brought his goat so campers could try their hand at milking.

Annette Goyne, who directed the Photos That Changed History camp in Richford, said, “Our walking tour of Richford, visiting the Richford Historical Society and the Arvin A. Brown Public Library, was a highlight for all. The students liked the connections between the places they knew, the people they knew, and the stories they have heard.”

Vermont Reads and Literacy

Fifteen correctional facilities and adult education centers offered reading and discussion programs centered on Haroun and the Sea of Stories, the 2015 Vermont Reads book. These discussions were facilitated by trained adult educators and Vermont Humanities scholars.

Adult basic literacy students at one center enjoyed listening to a live reading of Haroun, and then read an adapted, accessible version of Arabian Nights. At the Lamoille Family Center in Morrisville, the staff and the teen parent group read Haroun and engaged in group discussions.

Adult students at the three Tutorial Center sites in Bennington, Pownal, and Manchester came together for a special event to launch their reading and discussion of Haroun. VHC scholar and storyteller Judy Witters introduced the book by sharing folk stories and leading a “story pouch” activity.

“I learned that reading is fun and creative, and when you read the words and paint a picture the story comes to life.”

– Adult Literacy student in Bennington
Expanding on the theme introduced in the 2015 Vermont Reads book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Salman Rushdie, the Vermont Humanities Council’s 42nd annual Fall Conference examined the richness and diversity of the stories that surround us, how they work, and why they matter.

The conference was held at the Dudley H. Davis Center on the University of Vermont campus on November 13 and 14, 2015. It was the second consecutive year the event has sold out.

Attendees were treated to a broad range of thought-provoking presentations. University of Wisconsin-Madison historian William Cronon offered a riveting exploration of storytelling and memory in describing his research into the town of Portage, Wisconsin. Harvard professor Maria Tatar decoded the not-so-simple stories of traditional fairytales like “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Beauty and the Beast,” and brought to light their cultural contradictions.

Poet, UVM professor, and VHC board chair Major Jackson discussed documentary poetry, which uses collage, found materials, and multiple voices to create compelling narratives. Folklorists Jane Beck, the founder of the Vermont Folklife Center, and Gregory Sharrow, the center’s current co-director, shared recordings and personal reflections from their lives’ work of “catching stories” to preserve the experiences of everyday Vermonters. And in an enthralling talk that left many in tears, Katherine Paterson reflected on the intersection between her fictional stories and her life.

Thanks to a grant from the Bay & Paul Foundations, VHC provided full scholarships for 26 Vermont educators who teach a variety of humanities topics. These educators reported that the conference provided not only an opportunity for reflection and renewal, but also delivered specific classroom inspiration.

In addition, several schools sent student groups, including Marlboro College, Champlain College, Mill River High School, and Norwich University.

On Friday night, attendees were thrilled by historian William Cronon’s plenary talk about his research into the history of Portage, Wisconsin.

Harvard professor Maria Tatar discussed how childhood stories engage with adult matters in her talk, “The Wolf Trap: Entering the Woods through Fairy Tales.”

**“Why Do Stories Matter?”**

“**What a rich, varied, and vibrant series of lectures and discussions! This experience will linger for a long time, and will certainly make its way into my own teaching.”**

– Sabrina Case
(First-time attendee)
Reading Frederick Douglass

Fourteen communities held events to read Frederick Douglass’ 1852 Fourth of July address, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro,” in 2015. Nearly 700 people attended these readings in the second year of the program, more than three times the number of participants in 2014.

“The reaction to the speech was overwhelmingly terrific. Everyone was moved by the diversity of ages, races, accents, and passion for the speech’s delivery. This prompted even more soul searching and compassion.”

– Linda Bland, coordinator of Cambridge, Vermont’s Reading Frederick Douglass event

“The conversation [afterwards] was thoughtful. Many attendees were interested in what they could do about the continued problem of racism in America. And we had Curtiss Reed [Executive Director of Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity] to remind us not to just bemoan the situation in South Carolina, for example, but to consider the impact of racism here in Vermont.”

– Jane Williamson, Executive Director of the Rokeby Museum in Ferrisburg
Speakers Bureau

Speakers and living history presenters are made available for public lectures at libraries and other community centers statewide.

“Helene Lang was wonderful. We felt like we really had Agatha Christie in front of us!”
– Jenney Silva, Barnard Historical Society
vermonthumanities.org/speakers

Topics:
Included cartooning, the Hollywood blacklist, the history of garden vegetables, and Vermont’s evolving cultural diversity. An updated catalogue offers 13 new scholars and 41 new talks.

Participants: 3356
Number of Programs: 90
Locations: 63 towns in Vermont

Reading Frederick Douglass

Annual community participatory readings of Frederick Douglass’s 1852 Fourth of July address.

“Talking about racism can be difficult. Having literature and a historic person like Frederick Douglass as the starting point quite possibly allowed folks to share in a way that is different than in other racial justice events.”
– Kyle Silliiman-Smith, Program Manager, Peace and Justice Center
vermonthumanities.org/douglass

Participants: 696
Locations: 14 towns in Vermont

Events: Ranged from large productions at the city halls of Burlington and Montpelier to intimate gatherings in rural villages such as Landgrove and South Hero.

Ideas on Tap

A new series exploring engaging topics in a casual setting.

“This was an informal, comfortable opportunity to learn more about current issues and ideas. I loved the chance to have in-depth conversations with others and to access the rich knowledge of the presenters.”
– Margaret Tamulonis, Ideas on Tap attendee
vermonthumanities.org/ideas

Participants: 82
Number of pilot events: 3
Location: ArtsRiot, a Burlington restaurant/bar and performance space.

Topics: “Epidemics and Ethics,” “What’s with Our Zombie Obsession?” and “Love in the Time of Tinder.”
“It made all the difference to say that we were being supported by the Vermont Humanities Council.”

Tamra Higgins (left) and Mary Jane Dickerson founded the Sundog Poetry Center in 2012 to promote poetry and aid poets in their work.

In 2015, supported by a $1500 grant from the Vermont Humanities Council, Sundog sponsored lectures by 11 Vermont poets—including Sydney Lea, David Budbill, and Pamela Harrison—at bookstores across the state. “Poets and Their Craft” was such a hit that Vermont PBS created a televised series about the talks, and Tamra and Mary Jane hope to publish a book based on the lectures.

“When we asked poets to participate in the program, it made all the difference to say that we were being supported by the Vermont Humanities Council,” says Mary Jane. “It was a real stamp of approval for us in the literary arts world in Vermont.”

The events differed from customary poetry readings in that poets were asked to deliver a lecture related to the craft of poetry, and then lead the audience in a discussion. “David Budbill said, ‘How nice to do something different, to talk about poetry as well as reading examples,’” says Tamra. “Not that we don’t love poetry readings, but we wanted to get behind the scenes in the poet’s thinking.” Each poet chose the topic for their lecture.

Following the success of the 2015 program, Sundog successfully applied for a grant from VHC for a new program, a series of one-on-one conversations with poets which they are now recording and will post online throughout 2016.

Both Mary Jane and Tamra recalled a young boy who attended David Huddle’s lecture with his parents. Huddle had read several poems related to his father’s death, and his mother’s illness and eventual death. Although sometimes adults were hesitant to ask questions of these well-established poets after the lectures, the boy raised his hand and asked Huddle, “What makes you want to write about death?” “David answered the question,” says Mary Jane. “He treated it seriously as he should have.”

“Poets and Their Craft” series on Vermont PBS: vermontpbs.org/poets

“Conversations with Vermont Poets” on the Sundog website: sundogpoetry.org/conversations-with-vermont-poets/
$35,000 Awarded to Twenty Organizations

AXIS Lecture Series
Southern Vermont Dance Festival
$1,000 to support lectures, round tables, and workshops on the history, philosophy, ethics, and integrated learning in the arts.

Brattleboro Literary Festival 2015 (14th Annual)
Building a Better Brattleboro
$3,000 to support the festival.

Brundibar: A Musical Tale
Theatre Kavanah
$1,000 to support four public lectures about a community production of the children’s opera Brundibar.

Burlington Book Festival 2015 (11th Annual)
Vermont Performing Arts League, Burlington
$3,000 to support the Queen City’s celebration of the written word.

Conversations with Vermont Poets
Sundog Poetry Center, Inc.
$1,500 to support a series of interviews with some of Vermont’s most interesting and well-known poets.

Green Mountain Film Festival 2016 (19th Annual)
Focus on Film, Inc.
$2,000 to support a ten-day festival comprised of films, renowned guests, and great discussions on film and culture.

History Camp
Swanton Public Library
$1,000 to support a free, week-long summer camp for children ages 6-12.

Hoag Farm Welcome Kiosk
Willowell Foundation, Monkton
$2,000 to support the building of a Welcome Kiosk at Willowell Educational Center, the former location of historic Hoag Farm, to function as an ongoing historical program.

Lifelong Learning Music Series 2015–2016 (15th Annual)
South Burlington Community Library
$800 to support a series of presentations highlighting composers, conductors, and musical genres to deepen music appreciation and understanding.

Literacy of the Heart
The Art House, Inc.
$1,000 to support a four-part series exploring different themes in literature and art.

PlayTalk: Intimate Apparel
Dorset Theatre Festival
$1,000 to support two humanities-based PlayTalk events in conjunction with a production of the celebrated play Intimate Apparel.

PoemCampus 2016
Norwich University
$1,000 to support a month-long poetry celebration featuring major poets and highlighting student, faculty, and community poetry.

PoemCity 2016
Kellogg-Hubbard Library
$4,200 to support a showcase in Montpelier of the work of Vermont’s contemporary poets, including free workshops and presentations throughout April.

Presidential Writers Conversation Series
Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier
$1,000 to support a series bringing major national literary figures to Vermont to promote the importance of literature and writing.

Programs Tent at Vermont History Expo
Vermont Historical Society
$2,500 to support a biannual festival celebrating Vermont history.

2016 Teachers Workshop
Weston Playhouse Theatre Company
$1,000 to support a workshop for educators exploring Arthur Miller’s All My Sons to bring it to life for their students.

Time Travelers Camp 2015
Orleans County Historical Society, Brownington
$3,500 to support a week-long educational summer camp exploring the history of Brownington residents in the 1800s.

Triptych Journey’s Precious Guru Exhibition and Complementary Events
Fractured Atlas, Burlington
$750 to support an exhibition and events exploring the story of Guru Rinpoche and his enduring impact on the practices of Himalayan Buddhists.

The Vermont Romance Tour 2016
Vermont International Film Foundation
$2,500 to support a centenary tour of A Vermont Romance (1916), the first known narrative film shot in Vermont.

Vision & Voice Traveling Exhibit Program
Vermont Folklife Center, various locations statewide
$1,250 to support the Vermont Folklife Center’s Vision & Voice Gallery traveling exhibitions and related public programming.
“I think the work is important, and I want it to continue.”

Barbara Mieder is a retired teacher of German and Latin who served on the board of the Vermont Humanities Council for ten years, from 1986 to 1995, including two years as chair. Barbara and her husband, Wolfgang, started a fund at the Vermont Community Foundation to benefit VHC. They are also members of VHC’s Living Legacy Society, a group of friends of the Council who have included VHC in their estate planning to help ensure the Council’s long-term financial health. To learn more about the Living Legacy Society, visit vermonthumanities.org/living-legacy, or contact Peter Gilbert at (802) 262-1351.

“The Humanities Council really reaches out to all layers of society, from newly literate adults to children who are struggling to read. It just opens a whole new world to everybody in the state. You don’t have to pay an entrance fee to go to First Wednesdays, or to attend a program at your local library. It gets books into day care centers, and puts books into the homes of families who may not be able to buy them.

“The Humanities Council has had a big impact on my life. It has meant a lot to me so I want to pay it back. I think the work is important, and I want it to continue.”
Thank You to
Our Donors

January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015

Our work depends on the generosity of our many donors and volunteers. In 2015, the Vermont Humanities Council received 954 donations from individuals, businesses, and foundations committed to providing literacy and public humanities programs in every county in Vermont. We are grateful to each of you!

$20,000
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Artist, composer, and educator Ray Vega examined the Latino American musicians who helped create Latin Jazz in a first Wednesdays talk in December.
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Author Jacqueline Woodson discussed her Newbery Medal-winning book, Brown Girl Dreaming, at the Unitarian Church of Montpelier in October.
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Grammy nominee, banjo player, and music historian Stephen Wade explored “The Beautiful Music All Around Us” in Manchester and Montpelier programs.
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A record 7086 people attended First Wednesdays events in 2015, including eight talks held at the Brownell Library in Essex Junction.

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VHC’s grant program supported the Time Travelers Camp at the Old Stone House Museum in Brownington. Campers explored the history of area residents in the 1800s, including learning how to process flax (right).

### Vermont Humanities Council

#### Revenue and Expenses

**Revenue**
- National Endowment for the Humanities $531,620
- State of Vermont 217,959
- Contributions and grants 456,037
- Program and other income 131,001
- **Total revenue** $1,336,617

**Expenses**
- Programs and program management $891,943
- General and administration 237,386
- Development 123,789
- **Total expenses** $1,253,118

**Other changes**
- Change in net assets from operations $83,499
- Nonoperating investment return [91,988]
- **Total changes in net assets** [8,489]

#### Statement of Financial Position

**Assets**
- Cash $582,953
- Other current assets 64,193
- Fixed assets 374,696
- Other assets 219,819
- Long-term investment 893,394
- **Total assets** $2,135,055

**Liabilities**
- Payroll expenses payable $64,263
- Grants payable 15,200
- Other payables 11,297
- **Total liabilities** $90,760

**Net assets**
- Undesignated $443,886
- Investment in plant, property, and equipment 374,696
- Board-designated long-term investments 977,668
- Temporarily restricted 170,303
- Permanently restricted 77,742
- **Total net assets** $2,044,295

**Total liabilities and net assets** $2,135,055

Under grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication, or in VHC programs, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
Sunny Wright Receives 2015 Victor R. Swenson Award

Sunny Wright was the recipient of the 2015 Victor R. Swenson Award, which recognizes a Vermont educator who exemplifies excellence in the teaching of the humanities. She has taught at Burr and Burton Academy in Manchester since 1999.

“What has kept me going through various phases of my teaching career is the excitement of hearing other people’s stories, especially those of my students, from whom I learn so much. I love seeing students start to value themselves as they discover their voices and tell their stories. It is also powerful to see them value the stories of others.

“I think stories matter because they allow us to empathize. As human beings, it’s an innate and natural thing to use stories to try to make sense of our world. We grow up hearing stories—whether they are family stories or stories that we read—and they all offer a lens to see the world.

“At our school we have a lab that is called the STEAM lab instead of the STEM lab. It comes from that idea of involving the arts and humanities—whether it’s graphic art or some other form—into technology and science.

“So I guess I’ve always seen literature, art, and science intertwined in terms of them all coming from curiosity. We just made up those barriers between science and technology and poetry. But there are plenty of people who carry that combination. A former student was a creative writing major. He wrote a book of poetry for his thesis, and now he works at Google. Go figure!”

“Victor R. Swenson Award

Teacher Sunny Wright with some of her students at Burr and Burton Academy.
The Vermont Humanities Council strives to make Vermont a state in which every individual reads, participates in public affairs, and continues to learn throughout life. A state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, VHC relies on private donations to do its work.

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“We need stories, and we need to be suspicious of stories, especially the ones that are too simple.”

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