

Report of the President

Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences

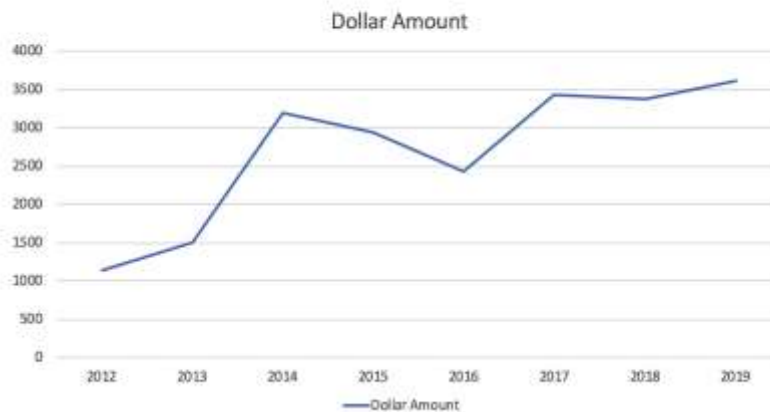
2019

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

Pardon in advance the length of this report for the activities of 2019. The year was filled with highs and lows, so I will take this opportunity to summarize the year and make plans for 2020. It is hard for me to believe that this is now my third year as President and I have been doing the fundraising through annual dues and donations for 2017, 2018, and 2019.

A. Members. Let me start with our membership in VAAS during 2019. At this writing, I have received 52 checks for either dues or donations. My solicitation went out on October 24th this year and I am still receiving donations each day as the 2019 year closes and we move into the new year. Overall, these donations represent a healthy number of members who find our organization worthy of support. Many responses include comments about the job we are doing and their willingness to help support our efforts. To give context to our current fundraising through annual dues and donations, I have been keeping track of our members and regularly updating our mailing list as members have moved or changed addresses. We have almost 100 members on our mailing list and 77 of them have contributed at least once over the past three years, with an average of 56 donations each year. We are slightly down this year, but part of that is due to the later solicitation. Here is the annual revenue for dues and donations over the past eight years since Lauren Howard started maintaining our spreadsheets:

Dues and Donations 2012-2019



The trends show a doubling of revenues from 2013 to 2014 and then a relatively steady level of revenues at 3000 dollars annually. We budget this amount and have met or exceeded this target on most years since 2014. Looking ahead, I would recommend that we seek new members and actively engage in fundraising as we move forward. While our membership has remained steady, we do have turnover and our population is getting older. I have not done any micro-

analysis of the charitable giving that we receive, but my sense is that even though the number of donors may be decreasing, the amount given is increasing, in some cases exceeding even our Benefactor option at 100 dollars. I have looked at our dues structure from the 1980's and we are still requesting the same dues! I do not recommend that we increase our dues, but rather engage in a wider campaign to recruit new members for 2020 and beyond.

B. Trustees. Related to our members, we need to pay special attention to our Board of Trustees. We have had extensive turnover on our Board for the past several years. Based on the Biennial Reports, we lose about 7 Board Members and then recruit about 7 more. In 2019, our attrition was not as high as in previous years, but due to the unfortunate closure of four colleges in Vermont in 2019, our board membership has been decimated. We currently have 14 Trustees, with 10 active. Our most notable loss this year was our Vice President, John Van Hoesen, who also managed our website and electronic archives. I have been relying extensively on Connie Gallagher to provide advice and help in the interim. I have also asked Claire Veach to revive the website and provide electronic archives for our vital VAAS documents. Claire has done a wonderful job rebuilding our website through SquareSpace. I have also nominated her to be our new Vice President pending ratification at our next meeting. As we move forward in 2020, we need to continue recruiting Board Members. I am pleased to announce that Thomas Leddy-Cecere from Bennington College agreed to join the Board, and that Diane Byrne will be returning to the Board. I have also asked Flo Keyes and Dart Thalman to return to the Board and they are considering. We have traditionally recruited from Colleges and Universities across the State of Vermont, but with the loss of many faculty from Green Mountain College, Southern Vermont College, College of Saint Joseph's, and Marlboro College, it is hard to see how to grow our membership from a greatly reduced set of colleges. I recommend that we begin to partner with other nonprofit organizations and museums to find new members and trustees. We need to retain a balance of new trustees and continuing trustees as well as a balance of faculty members from different schools and different organizations. The composition and maintenance of our Board remain the greatest existential threats to our organization and it needs to be nurtured and grown in order to be sustainable.

C. Officers and Understudies. I wanted to make a special point that with the addition of Claire Veach as Vice-President, our slate of officers will finally be complete again. However, we should make special efforts this year to ensure that each Officer will prepare an understudy who can help with those duties and be prepared to undertake those duties in the absence of the Officer. For example, the Vice-President is essentially the understudy of the President, and I have shared all of the documents that I have regarding VAAS with Claire for archiving in both our Google Drive and our website. Claire and I have discussed ways to keep these documents safe and secure. We would like to request that all other officers share their documents regarding VAAS with Claire for archiving purposes. We have many documents shared by Lauren Howard regarding our finances, and these are maintained by Matt Thomas. We do need an understudy for Matt as Treasurer. Likewise, Bill Brown has maintained records of our IRS Letters and Biennial Reports with the Secretary of State. We need an understudy for Bill, and these documents need to be archived and secured. David Tomasi has agreed to be our understudy for the Secretary. Finally, we have many historical documents stored in the archives at UVM.

D. Archives. I am very pleased to announce that Scott McLaughlin, Executive Director of the Vermont Granite Museum, as part of our collaborative efforts this past year, has secured an

AmeriCorps Vista Grant to support a full-time archivist/scholar, Cooper Sheldon, to assist with uncovering and exhibiting our history as an organization and the many diverse contributions of our Fellows. This is very exciting! Scott and Cooper are planning to create a permanent exhibit at the Granite Museum to showcase the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences. They are also reaching out to our Fellows in order to build a schedule for a series of events featuring our Fellows throughout the season at the Granite Museum. In order to facilitate this process I would like to stand up a Ways and Means Committee that will work closely with Scott and provide the necessary source material for the permanent exhibit. It may also be a good opportunity to update our Short History of the VAAS which was written in 2000, and to continue our efforts to write up biographies of our Fellows.

D. Fellows. Our Fellows represent the best of our organization and we have inducted five new Fellows each year. In 2019, we held our Fellows Luncheon at *Fire and Ice* in Middlebury on September 21. The event was a huge success as we inducted François Clemmons, Garret Keizer, Janie Cohen, Arthur Westing, and Catherine Donnelly. Many thanks to Jeff Marshall for organizing this event and to Connie Gallagher and Rachel Johnson for serving on the Awards Committee and nominating these wonderful fellows! We now have inducted 185 Fellows of the Academy and we look forward to the next slate of candidates for 2020.

E. Symposium. The 53rd Annual Intercollegiate Symposium was held at Castleton University this year on April 27, 2019. Original works were presented by over 25 students from five different campuses. The event was a great success and awards were given to all presenters. Many thanks to Flo Keyes at Castleton for organizing the event and providing the refreshments, classrooms, and lunches! This coming year, we plan to hold the conference at Saint Michael's College on April 4, 2020. Sadly, we have often hosted our symposium at Green Mountain College and Marlboro College in the past, and these campuses will no longer be available. David Tomasi and I will be looking at increasing the profile of the University of Vermont as a host for our symposium in the future and we will be working with the VPA as they develop an undergraduate research conference on March 30, 2020 for the first time.

F. Fall Conference. On Tuesday, November 19, 2019, Norwich University hosted the Fall conference in celebration of the *Bicentennial of Norwich (1819-2019)*. This 7PM event was held in the new Mack Hall Auditorium and was open to the public. The speaker was Lisa Brooks, PhD, Amherst College, and she discussed her book *Our Beloved Kin* and retraced the steps of an Abenaki heroine Weetamoo as she faced the troubles of the ongoing war in New England between the English settlers and the *Wabanaki Nation*. The event drew a very supportive crowd despite the weather and we had a wonderful dinner in the Sullivan Museum in honor of Dr. Brooks.

G. 2020 Fall Conference at the Vermont Granite Museum. We have been working with Executive Director Scott McLaughlin and the Vermont Granite Museum since 2018 to host our Fall Conference. In February 2019, we approved a plan to develop activities associated with the Vermont Granite Museum for 2020. As part of these plans, we developed a proposal for a Granite Monument to honor our Fellows of the Academy. Chris Miller, who sculpted the statue of *Agriculture* for the State House, presented a detailed scale model and proposed sites for the monument. The Board asked Chris in October 2019 to draft a budget and a timeline for the

project. All Board Members were then invited to meet with Scott McLaughlin and Chris Miller in December 2019 to plan a series of events associated with the sculpting of the monument at the Granite Museum during the 2020 season. Many ideas were shared concerning how the VAAS could partner with the VGM and Chris Miller during the season to draw publicity for our organizations as well as fund-raising activities. We were very inspired by both the model that Chris Miller presented and the opportunity to showcase the Fellows and Members of VAAS at the Vermont Granite Museum across a six month timeline. On December 18, 2019, the proposals for the Monument and the timeline were presented to the Board of Trustees for a vote. Members were given two weeks to respond and all responses were obtained within the first few days. The result of the vote was 7-3-0 in favor of the monument and the timeline of activities associated with the carving of the monument by Chris Miller at the Vermont Granite Museum under the direction of Scott McLaughlin. As President, I listen to all voices and give each voice an equal weight. Even though the result of the vote was not unanimous, the clear majority were in favor of this project. Concerns were raised about the scope and timeline of the project, and these concerns will be addressed as the project unfolds through fund-raising and extending the timeline. There are too many advantages to this project that will advance the causes of the Academy. I listed many of the advantages in the original proposal, but fund-raising and increasing our membership should also have a high priority in this project. These activities will help to reduce the direct cost of the project and build a stronger foundation for the Academy in the future. Here are the next steps based on this vote and ongoing management of the project based on the budget and timeline.

1) In accordance with the stipulated budget and payment schedule, one-third of the cost will be paid to Chris Miller for the work he has done to date, and for preparations needed to advance the project before the opening of the VGM in May. Treasurer Matt Thomas and I will obtain the necessary funds from UBS and work with both Scott McLaughlin and Chris Miller to ensure a payment schedule and process that is in accord with the budget.

2) To manage the scope and timeline of the project as well as organize the fund-raising opportunities, I would like to authorize a Ways and Means Committee as described in our Bylaws. The members of the Ways and Means Committee will consider the following options:

a) The committee will work closely with Scott McLaughlin and Chris Miller on all phases of the project, lending support to the activities and events planned by Scott for the hosting the sculpture in the Vermont Granite Museum. Also, as mentioned above, archival research efforts by Cooper Sheldon will result in a permanent display for the VAAS regarding our history and the works of our Fellows.

b) The committee will seek ways to publicize the work of the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences in order to recruit more members who support our mission, and to create more general public awareness of the VAAS and its mission.

i). Wherever possible, we should work with Scott McLaughlin to attract the media to our events and create an archive of videos and documentaries that we can host on our website.

ii). We can use the ongoing events as feed for our website as well, encouraging visitors to visit our website for the upcoming schedule of events, or to view past events, and progress on completion of the monument as well as milestones in our fund-raising.

iii). New members will be recruited through this publicity and they can join by mail using applications for membership at the Museum or via the website.

c) The committee will set the fund-raising goals and publicize them so that the public can see our progress. We can support these fund-raising efforts on our website and encourage visitors to make donations for the monument, honoring our Fellows, and supporting the arts and sciences across Vermont.

d) The committee will also work closely with Scott and Chris to extend the timeline over two years so that publicity and fund-raising efforts can be sustained. It would be advantageous to have more time to work with the Museum for more than one year. Scott and the Vermont Granite Museum have generously agreed to host the sculpting in the Museum, donating their collective time, energy, and substantial resources in terms of operating equipment, space, electricity, heat, and many volunteers! We should seek ways to promote the success and fund-raising efforts of the Granite Museum throughout the process.

e) At each stage, the Ways and Means Committee may make recommendations regarding the budget, timeline, publicity, and fund-raising. The committee will be responsible for setting the goals and helping Scott and Chris meet those goals.

3) Due to the potential of this project for publicity, please remain discreet about the project. We will work closely with Scott and Chris on publicity, but our role should not interfere with their efforts. The public release date will be on or near April 1. Scott has many contacts with the media and would be best suited to launch publicity. Chris has many contacts in the State and Legislature. Now that our Board has voted on the monument, we should stand unified and ready to promote these efforts. Our stance should emphasize our unwavering support for the Arts and Sciences in Vermont, and toward all artists and scientists, and the institutions, organizations, and agencies where they work.

Once again, I apologize for the length of this year's Report from the President. I am looking forward to the new year and hope that we can revive a sense of optimism for the Arts and Sciences through our collaborations with Scott, Chris, and many other nonprofit organizations that share our goals.

Sincerely,

Kevin Fleming, VAAS President