

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: New Hampshire
COUNTY: Sullivan
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE: JUN 1 1975

1. NAME
COMMON: The Church-on-the-Hill
AND/OR HISTORIC: Acworth Congregational Church, (Acworth Meeting House)

2. LOCATION
STREET AND NUMBER: N end of town common
CITY OR TOWN: Acworth
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Second
STATE: New Hampshire
CODE: 33
COUNTY: Sullivan
CODE: 019

3. CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY (Check One): Building
OWNERSHIP: Private
STATUS: Occupied
ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC: Unrestricted
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate): Comments In use summers only

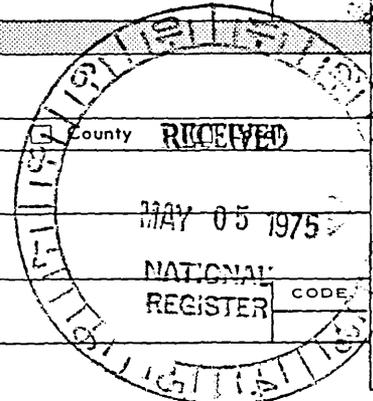
4. OWNER OF PROPERTY
OWNER'S NAME: United Church of Acworth
STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN: Acworth
STATE: New Hampshire
CODE: 03601 33

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Sullivan County Registry of Deeds
STREET AND NUMBER: Main Street
CITY OR TOWN: Newport
STATE: New Hampshire
CODE: 03773 33

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE OF SURVEY: See Continuation Sheet 1
DATE OF SURVEY: County RECEIVED
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN:
STATE: NATIONAL REGISTER

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: New Hampshire
COUNTY: Sullivan
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE



7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Church-on-the-Hill (Acworth Congregational Church) rises from the high northern end of the town common; silhouetted against a backdrop of trees and sky, it crowns the village like a finial. The building is of wooden frame construction, two stories high, with white-painted clapboards and trim, dark green shutters and blinds. Rectangular in plan, with an enclosed, projecting porch on the south (front) facade, it measures approximately 58' in width and 69' in length (63'-6", plus 5'6" porch depth); a triple flight of granite steps extends across the width of the porch. The ridge of the medium pitch gable roof is placed at right angles to the facade, and forms, with the porch roof, a double pediment on the front elevation; the rear facade is without pediment. A four-stage tower rises from the porch and main roof.

The foundation consists of granite blocks, set on fieldstone slabs, laid dry; interior columns bear on massive loose-laid bounders stacked three high. Portions of the fieldstone walls have been pointed with mortar; sections of the west and north walls may have been relaid.¹ A stream runs through the cellar from west to east; in order to provide ventilation, two-foot-wide openings occur in the granite foundation: two on the west, one on the east.

Structural framing is of heavy timbers, with mortise and tenon pegged joints. As would be expected in a building of such age, design and exposure, some members have deteriorated and are in need of repair; the rear wall has moved outward, causing ceiling joists to separate from the main lateral beam.²

The facade, with its double pediments, is framed by single quasi-Ionic fluted pilasters on elevated bases, one at each front corner of the main building and the porch. The pilasters "support" an entablature continuous only across the pediments; ending at an intersection with the cornerboard at either end of the facade, it recommences on the sides of the building some distance upward, as a simple boxed projecting cornice with decorated frieze/architrave, similar to the cornices of the pediments. The cornice at both front and sides departs from the standard neoclassic vocabulary. Its brackets are sculptural inverted pyramidal shapes with doubled triangular "tassels" extending below the applied baseline on which the apex of each pyramid rests.

The pediment of the main mass, broken by the tower rising through it, is clapboarded; the porch pediment is flush-boarded, centered with an eight-division vertical ovoid window in moulding frame, having applied detail encirclement beyond the frame, and crossed olive branches below.

The porch facade consists of three bays: On the first floor, a central door with recessed four-pane sidelights and elliptical rayed fanlight is flanked by two narrower and slightly smaller side doors having round-arched recessed fans with fixed louvers. Each door has a recessed granite stoop, face flush with the clapboards.

Continued on Continuation Sheet 2

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1821; 1856; 1888

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SIGNIFICANCE -- ARCHITECTURE

The Acworth Congregational Church (The Church-on-the-Hill) is significant for the clarity, harmony and elaboration of its Federal exterior, as well as for the richness and completeness of its now rare late Victorian interior, one of the very few of its type in New Hampshire which have survived intact.

Dr. Frank J. Roos, in his HABS study, called the Acworth church "One of the best preserved and more elaborately decorated of the larger meeting houses in the Middle Connecticut River Valley."¹ Its appearance is further enhanced by its location, as it "stands on a hilltop, flanked by school and town hall, all facing on the common--the epitome of the New England village."² Speare states, "Set on the highest elevation of all meeting houses in the state, this beautiful church is considered by experts. . . to be the culmination of complete art in white pine . . . Words cannot do justice to the beauty. . ."³

As Sinnott points out, the church belongs to the "Templeton Group" of churches in Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire inspired by Elias Carter's Federated Church of 1811 in Templeton, Massachusetts.⁴ The Templeton structure seems to be derived ultimately from English prototypes through the medium of builders' handbooks;⁵ it particularly resembles Gibbs' 1719-20 spire of S. Clement Danes, London. There is a persistent tradition that Carter himself built the Acworth church, and a nearby house with similar detailing. Roos⁶ and Wright⁷ assign the building to Carter, though Speare⁸ and Sinnott⁹ do not. Unfortunately, all church records of the period of construction have been lost; extensive research has been conducted, including correspondence with Carter's and Cooke's descendents, but it has not led to positive identification of the architect.

The frame of the first meeting house in Acworth was raised and perhaps covered in 1784, although the pews were not assigned until 1787 and it was not occupied until 1789.¹⁰ Finish work, including glazing, plastering and joinery were done on a pay-as-one-goes basis at different times, as the congregation could afford the work.¹¹ The town history (1869) states that "There are those still living, who remember sitting upon benches of the rudest kind in the unfinished meeting-house, during Mr. Archibald's ministry. This house was a frame building of nearly a square form, and

Continued on Continuation Sheet 6

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Acworth, New Hampshire. A Souvenir of Old Home Day, Acworth, N.H., August twenty-first, nineteen hundred and seven (Boston, Massachusetts: The Barta Press, 1907).

Acworth, New Hampshire Bicentennial Committee. Acworth, New Hampshire Bicentennial 1767-1967 Souvenir Programme (Acworth, New Hampshire: 1967)

Merrill, Rev. J.L. ed. History of Acworth (Acworth, New Hampshire: Published by the Town, 1869).

Mountain, Archie. "Acworth Church Faces Renovations" The Daily Eagle 60:14 (Claremont, New Hampshire: January 17, 1974).

Continued on Continuation Sheet # 11

UTM
2N18
719800
4788480

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

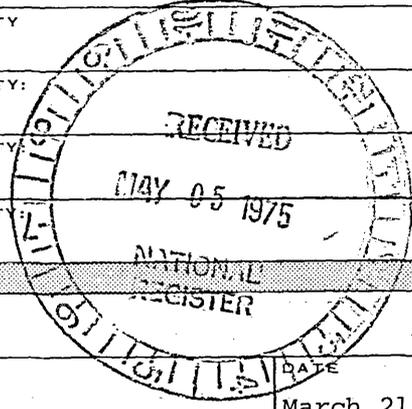
| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | | O R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | | | |
|--|----------|---------|-----------|---------|---|---------|-----------|---------|---------|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | | LONGITUDE | | |
| | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds |
| NW | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | 43° | 13' | 05" |
| NE | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | 75° | 17' | 34" |
| SE | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | | | |
| SW | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | | | |

HR

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: *Less than one (1) acre*

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
George F. Hanson, Chairman

ORGANIZATION:
Acworth Church Preservation Committee

DATE:
March 21, 1975

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
RFD Alstead

STATE:
New Hampshire 03602

CODE:
33

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION **NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name: <u><i>G. S. Gilman</i></u></p> <p>Title: <u>Commissioner, DRED</u> <u>State Historic Preservation Officer</u></p> <p>Date: <u>April 30, 1975</u></p> | <p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p><u><i>A. W. ...</i></u> Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date: <u>6/13/75</u></p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p><u><i>W. ...</i></u> Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date: <u>JUN 12 1975</u></p> |
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet) |

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|------------------------|------------|
| STATE New Hampshire | |
| COUNTY Sullivan | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
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| | JUN 1 1975 |

(Number all entries)

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS, continued.

Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS-NH-54)
1959/ x Federal
Library of Congress
10 First Street, SE
Washington, D.C. 20540/ 11

New Hampshire Historic Preservation Plan
1970/ x state
State of New Hampshire
Department of Resources and Economic Development
PO Box 856, 3rd Floor State House Annex
Concord, New Hampshire 03301



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet) 2

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| STATE | New Hampshire |
| COUNTY | Sullivan |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| 60018 | 10/13/78 |

(Number all entries) 7. DESCRIPTION, continued.

The doorframes are elaborated with carved mouldings typical of the period, including diamonds, beading, reeding (vertical and chevron), and decorative keystones; however, a thick accretion of paint has nearly obscured the detail. The second story is centered with a Palladian window flanked by 12/12 double-hung windows, one on either side, directly aligned with the doors below. The decoration of the Palladian window matches the door detailing, though the frames of the sashed windows consist only of surround and backband. Blinds of the Palladian window are kept closed; the flanking windows have shutters which are left open.

Double-hung windows matching those of the porch are placed in the main facade, one at each story on either side. Located immediately next to the porch, their porch-side shutters rest against the sidewalls when open, as there is no room for them to lie flat against the facade. All facade glazing is of clear glass.

The tower rises in four stages. The first stage is square in plan, with Palladian window in the front elevation matching that of the porch below, and an elaborate projecting boxed cornice with curved brackets and applied decoration of the architrave. A second stage, the belfry, is also square in plan, with balustrade, corner urns on pedestals, and central panels with applied double swags on all four sides. The belfry has four identical arched openings, with keystone, backbanded surrounds, and simple moulded imposts; the arches are framed by paired flat pilasters on elevated bases. Above the pilasters is an entablature with running-diamond patterned architrave, curved brackets and dentils, surmounted by a continuous balustrade--similar to but lighter than the one below--with corner urns and pedestals. The two lower balustrades are examples of Yankee thrift: As they were to be viewed from one side only, they were made of half-round stock.

The third stage is octagonal in plan, having round-arched openings with fixed blinds, between creased pilasters which form the corners of the octagon. The decorative entablature is a very free interpretation of the neoclassic vocabulary. Above rises the fourth stage, also surrounded by a balustrade, having a railing of crossed diagonals bound to a vertical element with a central "knot"; there are small urns at each corner. The fourth stage is sheathed with flush horizontal boarding on which are painted identical vertical ovoid panels; these panels seem not to have been divided, in imitation of muntins, as old photographs show them exactly as they are now.³ The fourth stage has pilasters identical to those of the third stage; however, the entablature is much simpler, with plain architrave; applied decoration consists of an up-and-down motif band on the frieze. Above the fourth stage is the final balustrade, of 90° diagonals, with tiny urns at each corner. The whole is crowned by the "S" profile metal-sheathed dome, from which rises a two-stage spindle with ball top, the base of a Flying Breeches (the local name) weathervane typical of the area and period.

Continued on Continuation Sheet 3

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet) 3

| | |
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(Number all entries)

7. DESCRIPTION, continued.

The roofs of the tower stages, hidden behind the balustrades, are composition shingles; the roof of the church and porch is standing-seam "tin" (galvanized iron); although generally sound, it has deteriorated at the eaves, where water has collected along the drip line.

Two tall red brick chimneys pierce the roof at either side of the north end of the building; these were added c. 1830 when stoves were introduced into the church, over much opposition.⁴

The bell, which with its carriage remains in the belfry, was cast by the Boston Copper Company, one of the firms descended from Paul Revere and Sons;⁵ it later became the Henry N. Hooper Co., and eventually was known as William Blake and Son Company.⁶ Speare states that the bell has been recast, but no date is given.⁷

The west and east (side) elevations have stratified, though harmonious, window arrangements. The windows of the lower floor are the original 12/12 clear-glazed double-hung sash, with simple surrounds and backband. There are seven bays: The east side has seven windows, equally spaced; the west side has six windows, and a door at the northern end. It is assumed that the original second-floor window placement was identical to that of the first floor. The existing second floor (sanctuary) windows, three to a side, are aligned with the second, fourth and sixth windows below, and consist of paired narrow stained glass 1/1 sash with peaked transom panels, also of stained glass; each unit is contained within a single frame.

Decoration of each side elevation consists of a cornice previously described, cornerboards at each end, and a watertable which is continuous around the building, unifying the composition and providing a visual base line.

The north (rear) facade is trimmed with cornerboards and the continuous watertable; it has a simple rake detail with returns, rather than a pediment. A wooden areaway basement entrance is placed slightly to the west of center of the building. The first floor windows are 12/12 clear-glazed double-hung sash, with shutters: A central window is flanked by one window on the east and two on the west. The second-floor window arrangement is symmetrical, with two each (also 12/12 clear-glazed double hung, but without shutters) on the east and west; centered between them is a large circular stained glass window, with two horizontal mullions. At the attic level, in the middle of the gable, is a single 12/12 clear-glazed double-hung window, with shutters.

The church originally had one floor, with galleries on three sides;⁸ in 1856 the galleries and pulpit were removed, and the ceiling lowered;⁹ in 1872 the exterior was painted and shingled and the auditorium walls papered.¹⁰ In 1886 a second floor was inserted above the lowered ceiling; the sanctuary was removed to ~~a~~^{the} newly-made second floor, and the first floor became the vestry.¹¹ Even now, traces of the original arrangement can be detected by a study of the floorboards and columns on the first floor, including two

Continued on Continuation Sheet 4

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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| STATE | |
| New Hampshire | |
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| Sullivan | |
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7. DESCRIPTION, continued

original gallery columns remaining in the kitchen and Ladies' Parlor. The first floor plan now consists of a vestibule extending across the entire front of the building, and incorporating the porch; stairs to the second floor are placed along both sidewalls. The stairs, with their cherry railing and golden oak flush panel balustrade, pierced in a vertical "dumbbell" pattern, serve as a transition from the 1821 exterior and 1856 vestry to the 1886 sanctuary. The church parlor extends from the vestibule to the rear wall, and from the east wall to a point approximately 3/5 the width of the building. The remaining 2/5 is occupied by the kitchen (northwest corner), Ladies Parlor (central area), hall, and toilets. There are two large wood stoves in the parlor, one each in the northwest and southeast corners; a Chickering square piano is placed in the northeast corner. Two rows of square timber columns, with chamfered edges, divide the parlor into longitudinal bays; the walls are painted plaster, with a two-board wainscot having a plain base and simple cap. The window surrounds, resting on the wainscot cap, are original and indicate a familiarity with Asher Benjamin detailing. Doors are plain, generally with four flat panels 2/2, and may date either from 1821 or 1856. Floors throughout the building are of random width pine.

The interior of the church proper is remarkable as the exterior, but for entirely different reasons: The results of the 1886 remodeling have been preserved intact, a colorful, harmonious and complete example of a fashionable Victorian church interior of the last quarter of the 19th century. The decorations were done by W. H. Henry, an artist from Cambridge, Massachusetts who may also have done the interiors of the Silsby Library across the street. The walls and ceilings are painted in various shades of blue, gold, tan, brown and venetian red, in a system--apparently inspired by William Morris motifs--that includes striping, panels, borders, bands, Renaissance Revival swags and foliate ornament, and stencilled sunflower patterns at the chandelier and cornice which are almost Art Deco in spirit. A semicircular scroll outlines the circular apse window; its legend, "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord forever", was painted on the wall of the previous sanctuary as well.¹³ On either side of the platform are curved walls, with Biblical quotations lettered across their upper register, below the continuous sunflower frieze. The choir loft, at the rear of the room, has a smaller round stained glass window centered in its curved rear wall; the window fronts onto the second level of the vestibule and is therefore not expressed on the exterior. All of the sanctuary windows are without wooden casings; instead, the plastered walls are splayed outward, the splay emphasized by painted borders and bands.

The wainscot is vertical matched boards, in golden oak; the door casings are also oak, with convex flutes and corner rondels; the 2/2 flat panel doors appear to be of earlier vintage, but have been grained to match the interior woodwork. The original pews--of design standard in the region c. 1820-1860--were cut down to accommodate the new arrangement, and are grained in golden ash, with cherry trim. The pulpit furniture is late 19th century ecclesiastical eclectic, though there are earlier chairs and tables, as well as original kneeling cushions, in other parts of the room. The finest piece

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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| STATE New Hampshire | |
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| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| JUN 1 8 1975 | |

(Number all entries) 7. DESCRIPTION, continued

of furniture is the 1821 communion table--late Federal, with spiral carved legs, and back curved to fit the original curved platform--found abandoned in the church cellar some years ago.¹⁴ The original 12-globe gas chandelier, and single-globe gas scones, remain in place and in use.

The curving chancel walls, added in 1886, form two small anterooms, now used for storage, in the northwest and northeast corners of the sanctuary. Within these rooms are preserved the best evidence of the former appearance of the church interior; fragments of Classic Revival wallpaper, with corner columns approximately 8' high; traces of the mortises where the gallery was framed into the rear wall; fragments of the 1821 curved plaster cove transition from wall to ceiling; and sections of the original plastered walls on split lath (the lath used for the 1886 partitions is machine-made). A thorough study of the architectural detritus in the two rooms could provide considerable information about the 1821 and 1856 appearance of the church interior, but for informational rather than restorational purposes.

¹ William F. Butler. "Inspection Report, Acworth Church, Acworth, New Hampshire" (Providence, Rhode Island: Eastern Construction Company, August 8, 1974; letter to George F. Hanson, United Church of Acworth), 1.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Acworth, New Hampshire. A Souvenir of Old Home Day, Acworth, New Hampshire, August twenty-first, nineteen hundred and seven (Boston, Massachusetts: The Barta Press, 1907), frontispiece; 39.

⁴ Rev. J. L. Merrill, ed. History of Acworth (Acworth, New Hampshire: Published by the Town, 1869), 153.

⁵ Eva A. Speare. Colonial Meeting Houses of New Hampshire (Littleton, New Hampshire: Courier Printing Co., 1838), 138; 142-3. Eva A. Spear. Historic Bells in New Hampshire (Littleton, New Hampshire: Courier Printing Co., 1944), 38.

⁶ Speare, Meeting Houses, 138.

⁷ Speare, Bells, 37.

⁸ Merrill, op. cit., 150; Archie Mountain, "Acworth Church Faces Renovations" The Daily Eagle 60:14 (Claremont, New Hampshire: January 17, 1974) 1-2; Acworth New Hampshire Bicentennial Committee. Acworth, New Hampshire Bicentennial 1767-1967 Souvenir Programme (Acworth, NH: 1967), 4.

⁹ Merrill, op. cit., 150; Mountain, op. cit., 1-2.

¹⁰ Mountain, op. cit., 2.

¹¹ Mountain, op. cit., 1-2.

¹² Church records compiled by Mrs. Mildred Ingram, Acworth, NH and displayed in the vestibule.

¹³ Merrill, op. cit., 150; Acworth Bicentennial Committee, op. cit., 4.

¹⁴ Mountain, op. cit., 1.

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| STATE New Hampshire | |
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| | APR 1 8 1975 |

(Number all entries)

8. SIGNIFICANCE--ARCHITECTURE, continued.

had entrances at the south, east and west sides, adorned with porches. The pulpit was at the northern end. The pews were about five feet square. There was a row of them all around the walls of the house, and an aisle ran around just inside of this row. There was also a middle aisle with two rows of pews on each side. The deacons' seats were benches immediately in front of the body pews. The gallery ran around three sides of the house, having as below, a row of pews next to the wall, and also a second row on the front end. Space was thus left, on the east and west sides, for the singing-seats. . . In calling up the old house in imagination we must not forget the sounding-board over the pulpit".¹² An anecdote from the Centennial address notes that the Town Meeting of December 23, 1784, voted eighteen pounds toward the purchase of rum for the framing and raising of the meeting house; it continued: "Because of their poverty, they had been twenty years without a place of worship. The materials were mostly contributed, in lieu of money so hard to be raised; but now that the timber was on the ground and the work begun, they could afford to purchase and drink on hundred dollars' worth of rum, in preparing and setting up the frame!"¹³ Acworth's mixture of rum and religion was to have far-reaching results during the ministry of Rev. Phineas Cooke.

When Rev. Cooke settled in Acworth in 1814, the original meeting house (then approximately 25 years old) was in need of repair.¹⁴ Because of the concern in Acworth over the relationship of church and state--perhaps a result of the numbers of Presbyterians¹⁵ and Baptists¹⁶ in the population--the town would not vote to repair the structure except on condition that other denominations could use the building on a proportional basis. "This the Congregationalists were unwilling to agree to, and the house continued to decay, until it leaked so badly that it was impossible to hold meetings in rainy weather. A terrible thunder shower during Sabbath service one day completely flooded it; and measures were immediately taken to build a new one."¹⁷ The building was dismantled, on condition that the salvaged materials be used to build a town house (town hall); this was done in 1821,¹⁸ and the town house thus built remains, adjacent the present church, used for its original function.

The Church-on-the-Hill was also built in 1821; a neighboring barn, still standing, was used for services while the new building was under construction.¹⁹ The church cost \$6,000; it was considered at the time "one of the largest and best churches in the state outside of the large towns".²⁰

The town history also notes that "The elevated site of the church and its lofty steeple, together with his own stature and prominence in the State, gave Mr. Cooke the title of 'High Priest of New Hampshire,'"²¹ indicating that the church, despite its rural location, must have been well-known and generally admired.

How the design was chosen, and by whom, is unknown. There were several Templeton-type churches already in the Monadnock area when the Acworth church

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8. SIGNIFICANCE--ARCHITECTURE, continued.

was built, including Fitzwilliam (1816 and 1818), Dublin (now destroyed) (1818), and Hancock (1820). It is said that Fitzwilliam was copied from Templeton;²² it is known that Dublin was copied from Fitzwilliam²³ and Hancock from Dublin,²⁴ although a thorough study of the continuities and cross-connections within the group has yet to be made.

The chief distinction of the Templeton-type churches, as a group, is the adaptation of the English Baroque Anglican prototypes to American Federal Congregational purposes, and the rural New England builders' translation--often, mistranslation--of the neoclassical idiom.

The principal significance of the interior of the Acworth Congregational Church is the successful adaptation of an early 19th century church building to later needs and tastes, while retaining as much as possible of the Federal exterior. The freshness and completeness of the sanctuary design scheme, now eighty-nine years old, is astonishing, particularly since few similar interiors now exist.

SIGNIFICANCE--RELIGION

Acworth, New Hampshire, was settled in 1767 under a 1766 charter from Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire, by emigrants from Connecticut, probably descendants of Massachusetts Bay colonists.²⁵ The Connecticut pioneers were later joined by Ulster Scots from Londonderry, New Hampshire,²⁶ and descendants of Yorkshire colonists from Rowley, Massachusetts.²⁷ The first Town Meeting was held in March, 1771;²⁸ the following August, a special Town Meeting was called "to fix and lay out a place for a meeting-house, if they shall think proper; also, a convenient common thereto, and a burying-yard for said town" which was affirmatively voted.²⁹ A church of eight members was formed in March 1773, and in 1774 the town voted to call a minister.³⁰ However, because of the Revolution, the first settled minister was not called and ordained until 1779-80, although there was "preaching" in the town nearly every year in the interim.³¹

Before the first minister could be called, it was necessary to adapt the form of church government to accommodate the somewhat different views held by the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians; this early experiment in ecumenism was so successfully done that only one later change, regarding child baptism, became necessary.³² According to the town history, "The title of the church was the 'Reformed Church of Acworth', a title applicable to any Protestant church, not Lutheran, thus avoiding the decision of the question, to which denomination the church belonged."³³

Phineas Cooke, the third and most influential of the Acworth ministers, was born in Hadley, Massachusetts in 1781; he graduated from Williams College in 1803 and practiced law in Keene, New Hampshire, from 1804 to 1812. "After a very marked and thorough religious experience. . . he soon began to pursue

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SIGNIFICANCE--RELIGION, continued.

the study of theology without a teacher or an adequate library, but his early training in the Westminster Catechism and his religious experience assisted him greatly."³⁴ He was licensed to preach in 1812, and was called to the ministry in Acworth by the town and the church, in 1813. There was token opposition, partly because of a political speech he had made in Keene, but principally because of a growing feeling that the town should not be taxed to support a minister.³⁵ Cooke was ordained in 1814;³⁶ until 1820 his salary was paid by town taxes.³⁷ Church and state were separated in New Hampshire in 1819; it then became necessary to vote an annual appropriation to pay the minister's salary.³⁸ This became such a strong issue--with the town literally evenly divided--that the church began to assess only members for the salary, augmented by voluntary contributions from non-members.³⁹

Rev. Cooke was dismissed in March, 1829, as a result of the temperance movement, of which he was a fervent exponent.⁴⁰ A customary remark of one of the earliest settlers had been, "Acworth never would have been settled, had it not been for New England rum."⁴¹ The congregation was unable or unwilling to give up its traditional refreshment; it gave up its minister instead. Rev. Cooke moved to Lebanon, New Hampshire, where he served for nineteen years before retiring to Amherst, Massachusetts in 1848.⁴² During his retirement he continued to preach, almost until his death in 1853.⁴³ At his request he was buried in Acworth; the site is marked by a monument given in his memory by the people of the town.⁴⁴ Even today his involvement with the church continues: His portrait, icon-like, dominates the principal (north) wall of the church parlor, making him a visible though silent participant in church affairs.

- ¹ Dr. Frank J. Roos, Jr., HABS-NH-54 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1959).
- ² Edmund Ware Sinnott, Meetinghouse and Church in Early New England (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), 98.
- ³ Eva A. Speare, Colonial Meeting Houses of New Hampshire (Littleton, NH: Courier Printing Company, 1938), 137.
- ⁴ Sinnott, op. cit., 95-6; also see: Mrs. Harriette M. Forbes, "Elias Carter, Architect of Worcester, Massachusetts" Old Time New England XI:2 (October 1920), 58ff.
- ⁵ Sinnott, op.cit., 75.
- ⁶ Roos, op. cit.
- ⁷ Louis B. Wright, ed. The Arts in America: The Colonial Period (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1966), 138.
- ⁸ Speare, op. cit., 137

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SIGNIFICANCE--FOOTNOTES, continued.

- 9 Sinnott, op. cit., 96, 98.
 - 10 Rev. Giles Bailey, "Centennial Address," in Rev. S. C. Merrill, ed., History of Acworth (Acworth, NH: Published by the Town, 1869), 26; Merrill, op. cit., 143.
 - 11 Bailey, op. cit., 26.
 - 12 Merrill, op. cit., 143-4; also see Bailey, op. cit., 26.
 - 13 Bailey, op. cit., 36.
 - 14 Merrill, op. cit., 150.
 - 15 Bailey, op. cit., 22-3; Merrill, op. cit., 145.
 - 16 Merrill, op. cit., 155.
 - 17 Ibid., 150.
 - 18 Idem.
 - 19 Idem. As the town house was built from the remains of the original meeting house, and the present church was built on the meeting house site, it appears that construction of the town house antedates that of the church, making it unlikely that the church was ever used as a true meeting hosue (i.e., for church and town purposes).
 - 20 Idem.
 - 21 Idem.
 - 22 Sinnott, op. cit., 98.
 - 23 The History of Dublin, New Hampshire (Boston, Massachusetts: John Wilson and Son, 1855), 36;
 - 24 William Willis Hayward, The History of Hancock, New Hampshire 1764-1889 Vol. I (Lowell, Massachusetts: Vox Populi Press, S.W. Huse and Company, 1889), 143.
 - 25 Bailey, op. cit., 21-2.
 - 26 Ibid., 22-3.
 - 27 Ibid., 23-4.
 - 28 Ibid., 22.
 - 29 Ibid., 24. Evidently there were second thoughts: Merrill, op. cit., 143, notes that there were subsequent disagreements about the site; a committee was sent by the Court "c.1779 to determine a site, and in 1782
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SIGNIFICANCE--FOOTNOTES, continued.

when the framing materials were nearly ready, "A committee of citizens of the neighboring towns by request fixed the site for the house."

30 Bailey, op. cit., 24; Merrill, op. cit., 144.

31 Bailey, op. cit., 25; Merrill, idem.

32 Merrill, op. cit., 145

33 Idem.

34 Ibid., 148.

35 Idem.

36 Ibid., 149; Rev. Amos Foster "To the memory of the late Phinehas Cooke" in Merrill, op. cit., 82.

37 Ibid., 150.

38 Idem.

39 Ibid., 151.

40 Idem., also Foster, op. cit., 83.

41 Ibid., 133.

42 Ibid., 152; Foster, op. cit., 83.

43 Idem.

44 Idem.



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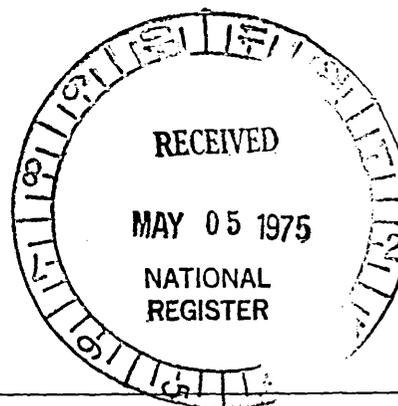
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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES, continued.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA, continued.

10.2 UTM References

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