

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **NOV 7 1983**  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic SILSBY FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

and/or common ACWORTH SILSBY LIBRARY (preferred) ✓

**2. Location**

street & number Adjoins Town Common at intersection of  
Cold Pond Road & Lynn Hill Roads. add n/a not for publication

city, town Acworth n/a vicinity of

state N.H. code 33 county Sullivan code 019

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: library

**4. Owner of Property**

name Town of Acworth (Easement: Robert & Meredith Skinner  
Acworth, New Hampshire 03601)

street & number Office of Selectmen

city, town Acworth, n/a vicinity of state New Hampshire 03601

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Sullivan County Courthouse/Registry of Deeds

street & number 20 Main Street

city, town Newport state New Hampshire

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title NONE has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a moved date <u>  n/a  </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Silsby Free Public Library in Acworth is a one-and-a-half-story structure of brick laid in red mortar with a hipped roof and a T-shaped plan. The building stands on a foundation of round fieldstones laid in a lime-cement mixture with a slight batter to the walls above grade. The foundation is capped by a six-inch water table of split and hammered granite.

The front block of the library measures 40 feet by 18 feet. The facade is composed of three bays. At the center of the building is a slightly projecting brick pavilion with granite corbels at the eaves line. The center of the pavilion is pierced by an opening with granite impost blocks at about half the height from the water table to the cornice. A semicircular brick arch with three courses of corbelled brick voussoirs springs from these impost blocks and encloses a recessed doorway opening. The wooden front doors of the library have two leaves, each with three panels and a vertically proportioned window. Above the doors is a wooden fanlight glazed with yellow rolled glass. The doorway is reached by a flight of five granite steps set between granite buttresses. The cornice of the pavilion, like that around the remainder of the building, is composed of five courses of corbelled bricks, the middle course having alternate headers which project in the form of modillions. Above the cornice of the pavilion is a brick gable ornamented with a trapezoidal granite tablet bearing the words "SILSBY/FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY", and above this are four courses of square terra cotta tiles. There is an additional granite block bearing the date "1891" at the center of the pavilion below the cornice, at the same level as the two granite corbels.

The two bays that flank the central pavilion each have walls laid in American bond. Each wall is pierced by a pair of windows separated by a wooden mullion. At the base of each window is a granite sill, connected to other window sills around the structure by a belt composed of three corbelled courses of brick. Each window opening is spanned by a granite lintel which is supported at each end by a granite corbel, creating the effect of a label moulding. The sashes are 1-over-1, and above them, separated by a transom, are fixed sashes glazed with rolled colored glass.

Each side wall of the front section of the building has a pair of sashes like those on the facade. The rear walls of the main section of the building have single windows flanking each side of the intersecting wing.

The wing of the library, used as a stack room, measures 25 by 24 feet. Along each side wall of the wing are four narrow windows separated by brick piers. Like the other windows of the library, these have granite sills connected to one another by a brick belt course granite lintels and corbels, and 1-over-1 wooden sashes. Although these windows have transom sashes, these are glazed with single sheets of clear glass rather than small panes of colored glass. The rear wall of the wing has a pair of sashes in its center, separated by a mullion and spanned by a single lintel in the same manner as the doubled sashes on the front and sides of the main block.

The roof of the building is covered with Vermont sea green slate. The ridges are decorated with moulded copper-covered caps; that on the gable of the pavilion terminates in a finial at the peak of the pediment. A brick chimney serving a basement furnace and a first-floor fireplace rises through the ridge of the wing near its intersection with the ridge of the main building.

continued-

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Continuation sheet #1 - DESCRIPTION

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The interior of the main block of the building is divided into a central entrance foyer and two symmetrical rooms. These two rooms are similar, except that the room on the left incorporates a doorway leading to the building's attic while the room on the right includes a fireplace. Both are finished with simple woodwork of white ash. Floors are birch or maple.

The stack room has an uninterrupted width achieved through the use of wood and iron trusses in the attic above. The finish of this room, which includes casings for the exposed lower chords of the trusses, is whitewood (basswood).

Original appearance: The Silsby Free Public Library essentially retains its original appearance. Principal changes since 1891 include the addition of electricity (though with the retention of original kerosene fixtures), some interior repainting, and the replacement of the original wood-burning furnace with an oil-fired unit.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1891 **Builder/Architect** Hira Beckwith of Claremont, N.H.

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Silsby Free Public Library is an important example of the work of a local builder - architect and an excellent rural expression of the Romansque style. The building is also a significant manifestation of the combination of private philanthropy and public support which characterized the rural New Hampshire public library in the late nineteenth century.

**Architecture:** The Acworth Silsby Free Public Library was designed and built by Hira Ransom Beckwith (1852–1947), a prominent local architect and contractor of Claremont, New Hampshire. Educated locally, Beckwith learned the carpenter's trade and then studied for a year with O.F. Smith, a Boston architect. In 1873 Beckwith settled in Claremont and established himself as a contractor. Beckwith built a town hall in Windsor, Vermont; and Hotel Claremont, the Union Block, the Huston Building, and the town hall and opera house in Claremont. In 1877, he remodelled the Fiske Free Library in that town. Beckwith served as contractor, and in some cases as architect, for a number of structures in neighboring Newport, New Hampshire, including the Richards Free Library and the Sullivan County Courthouse; for St. Anthony's Church in White River Junction, Vermont; and buildings in Walpole, New Hampshire, Bellows Falls, Vermont, Bennington, Vermont, and Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Many of these structures, like the Silsby Library building, are strongly Romanesque in style. The Richards Free Library in Newport (1889), in particular, served as a larger and more elaborate prototype for the Acworth library building of 1891; plans for the now-destroyed Newport building are held by George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Acworth Silsby Free Public Library is a relatively small building constructed on a limited budget, the structure reveals a simplified Romanesque style in keeping with a dominant trend in late-nineteenth-century American architecture. The careful detailing of the building and its sound construction have ensured that the structure became and remains the principal cultural center of its small town as well as the only substantial example of late-nineteenth-century eclecticism in Acworth.

**Social/Humanitarian:** The Acworth Silsby Free Public Library was built as the result of a bequest by Ithiel Homer Silsby (1817–1874), a native of Acworth. The post-Civil War era was a notable period of private philanthropy in New Hampshire, and a commonplace focus of such philanthropy was the public library building. During this period the scores of privately-supported "social" libraries, which had provided most New Hampshire towns with their first semi-public collections of books, often proved inadequate to meet the growing desire for literary collections. In 1849 the New Hampshire Legislature passed an act encouraging the establishment of public libraries and the construction of library buildings.<sup>3</sup> The impetus provided by this law gave rise to many such institutions in succeeding years, but frequently small towns felt that they could feasibly appropriate monies for the establishment of public libraries only after a private gift defrayed the considerable cost of erecting a suitable home for such a library. Among the finest public buildings in the small towns of New Hampshire are many libraries that were constructed as the result of such private philanthropy.<sup>4</sup> The Acworth Silsby Free Public Library is an excellent example of such a structure.

continued-

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property one +

Quadrangle name Bellows Falls, NH-VT

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UTM References

A 

1	8	7	1	9	9	2	0	4	7	8	8	4	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification:** The nominated property includes the library itself as well as an easement for maintenance along its north side and the library lawn bordered by Cold Pond Road to the west and Lynn Hill Road to the south. Boundaries are noted by black line on attached sketch map. This constitutes all the property associated with the building. Tax map #1, Lot #AC5 = Acworth Tax Records.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code
n/a			

state	code	county	code
n/a			

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Fay Knicely, Trustee

organization Acworth Silsby Library

date April 1983

street & number n/a

telephone 835-2295

city or town Acworth

state New Hampshire 03601

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

Commissioner, Dept. of Resources & Economic Development

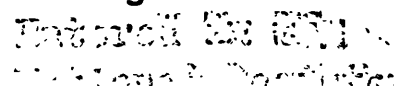
title NH State Historic Preservation Officer

date OCT 28 1983

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
Keeper of the National Register

  
date 12/8/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet #2 - SIGNIFICANCE

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The donor of the building, Ithiel Homer Silsby, had become wealthy in the hotel business in Boston. After the death of his only child, Silsby bequeathed the sum of \$10,000 each to the towns of Acworth, his birthplace, and Charlestown, New Hampshire, where he had taught school as a young man. The conditions of the gifts, in both cases, were that the respective towns should "expend eight of said ten thousand dollars in the erection of a building of face brick with stone trimmings, one and one-half stories high, the entrance to said building to be in the center of the front thereof, with a room on each side for books, and a reading room, and over all a large room or hall ... and that said town shall spend the remainder of said ten thousand dollars in the purchase of suitable books for a FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY."<sup>5</sup> The Silsby Free Public Library in Charlestown, also a structure in the Romanesque style, was designed by C.C. McAlpine of Boston.

The Acworth Silsby Free Public Library immediately assumed an important place in the cultural life of the community. In less than a year after its opening, the town had spent nearly \$1,000 on books and some 3,300 books had been lent.<sup>6</sup> During the following year an average of 88 books were borrowed from the library each week.

The Acworth Silsby Free Public Library is thus a characteristic example of the combination of public and private endeavor which provided many New Hampshire towns with their most ambitious late-nineteenth-century structures and their most active cultural centers.

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<sup>1</sup>"New Hampshire's Largest Town: The Claremont of Today and Tomorrow--Its Men and Affairs," Granite Monthly XL (April-May, 1908), pp. 153-154.

<sup>2</sup>Letter, Mary O'Brien to Fay Knicely, July 15, 1983.

<sup>3</sup>Jesse H. Shera, Foundations of the Public Library (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 186.

<sup>4</sup>Bryant F. Tolles, Jr., New Hampshire Architecture: An Illustrated Guide (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1979), s.v. "Libraries."

<sup>5</sup>Will of Ithiel Homer Silsby (copy), Silsby Free Public Library, Acworth, N.H.

<sup>6</sup>Reports of the Selectmen and Other Town Officers of Acworth for the Year Ending March 1, 1893.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

Continuation sheet #3 - REFERENCES

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Unpublished references:

Building Specification; handwritten booklet prepared by Hira Beckwith, Claremont, NH dated August 1891; 40 pages. (In collection of Acworth Library.)

Will of Ithial Silsby dated July 17, 1874; pp. 4, 5. (In collection of Acworth Library.)

Published references:

Reports of the Trustees of the State Library and the State Librarian for the period beginning June 1, 1904 and ending May 31, 1906. Vol. VIII - Part VI. Printed by the John B. Clarke Co., Manchester, N.H. pp. 365, 366, 378 & 461.

History of Acworth with the Proceedings of the Centennial Anniversary, Edited by Rev. J.L. Merrill, published by the Town, 1869, p. 15.

Second History of Charlestown, N.H. by Martha McD. Frizzell and Others, printed for the Town by Courier Printing Company, Littleton, N.H. 1955, p. 193-195.

Acworth Town Reports:

1892 - p.12; 1893 - p.3, 12, 13; 1894 - p.6, 7; 1895 - p.13, 14; 1896 - p.25, 26; 1897 - p.15; 1898 - p.56; 1899 - p.21, 22; 1900 - p.14; 1901 - p.14 and general statements from the Annual Report of the libraries and/or trustees to the past (1983) town report.

No specific statement from minutes - only general overview of maintenance, gifts, expenses. (Similar to annual reports) 1946 - 1983. Record book and Town Reports in A.S. Library.

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Continuation sheet #4 - ACCOMPANYING  
DOCUMENTATION

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July 18, 1983

I hereby certify that the appearance of the Acworth Silsby Library  
has not changed since these photographs were taken.

*Fay Knicely*  
Fay Knicely



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Continuation sheet #5 - SKETCH MAP

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Acworth Silsby Library  
Acworth, New Hampshire  
(not drawn to scale)

