

4 MAR 2

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION
SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR

CIVIL WAR MEMORIAL ASSESSMENT FORM

PLEASE:

- Type or print, using a ball-point pen, when filling out this form. Legibility is critical.
- Do not guess at the information. An answer of, "Unknown," is more helpful.
- Include a photograph of each viewable side and label it with name & direction of view.

- Thank You.

Type of Memorial

- Monument with Sculpture Monument with Cannon
 Monument without Sculpture Historical Marker Plaque

LIBRARY BUILDING GIVEN BY MR WILDE

Affiliation

WITH CIVIL WAR TABLETS (2) IN FRONT FOYER

- G.A.R. (Post Name & No. _____) M.O.L.L.U.S.
 W.R.C. (Corps Name & No. _____) Other Allied Order
 SUVCW (Camp Name & No. _____) (Please describe below)
 DUVCW (Tent Name & No. _____)
 Other: _____

Original Dedication Date 1890⁺ Please consult any/all newspaper archives for a local paper's article that would have information on the first dedication ceremony and/or other facts on the memorial. Please submit a copy of your findings with full identification of the paper & date of publication. Thank you.

Location

The Memorial is currently located at:

Street/Road address or site location 486 MAIN ST.
City/Village ACTON Township _____ County MSX.

The front of the Memorial faces: North South East West

Government Body, Agency, or Individual Owner (of private cemetery that Memorial is located in)...

Name TOWN OF ACTON Dept./Div. _____
Street Address ACTON TOWN HALL
City ACTON State MA Zip Code 01720
Contact Person DEAN CHARTER Telephone () _____

If the Memorial has been moved, please list former location(s)...

Physical Details

Material of Monument or base under a Sculpture or Cannon = Stone Concrete Metal Undetermined
If known, name specific material (color of granite, marble, etc.) _____

Material of the Sculpture = ___ Stone ___ Concrete ___ Metal ___ Undetermined
 If known, name specific material (color of granite, marble, etc.) _____
 If the Sculpture is of metal, is it solid cast or "hollow?" _____

Material of Plaque or Historical Marker / Tablet = 2 SLATE TABLETS

Material of Cannon = ___ Bronze ___ Iron - Consult known Ordnance Listing to confirm
 Markings on muzzle = _____

Markings on Left Trunion _____ Right Trunion _____

Is inert ammunition a part of the Memorial? ___ If so, describe _____

Approximate Dimensions (indicate unit of measure) - taken from tallest / widest points
 Monument or Base: Height _____ Width _____ Depth _____ or Diameter _____
 Sculpture: Height _____ Width _____ Depth _____ or Diameter _____

For Memorials with multiple Sculptures, please record this information on a separate sheet of paper for each statue and attach to this form. Please describe the "pose" of each statue and any weapons/implements involved (in case your photos become separated from this form). Thank you!

Markings/Inscriptions (on stone-work / metal-work of monument, base, sculpture)

Maker or Fabricator mark / name? If so, give name & location found _____

The "Dedication Text" is formed: ___ cut into material ___ raised up from material face

Record the text (indicate any separation if on different sides...) Please use additional sheet if necessary.

Environmental Setting

(The general vicinity and immediate locale surrounding a memorial can play a major role in its overall condition.)

Type of Location

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cemetery | <input type="checkbox"/> Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Plaza/Courtyard |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> "Town Square" | <input type="checkbox"/> Post Office | <input type="checkbox"/> School |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal Building | <input type="checkbox"/> State Capitol | Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Courthouse | <input type="checkbox"/> College Campus | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Circle | <input type="checkbox"/> Library | _____ |

Surface Coating

Does there appear to be a coating? Yes No Unable to determine

If known, identify type of coating.

Gilded Painted Varnished Waxed Unable to determine

Is the coating in good condition? Yes No Unable to determine

Basic Surface Condition Assessment (check one)

In your opinion, what is the general appearance or condition of the Memorial?

Well maintained Would benefit from treatment In urgent need of treatment Unable to determine

Overall Description

Briefly describe the Memorial (affiliation / overall condition & any concern not already touched on).

SEE TYPE OF MEMORIAL

Supplemental Background Information

In addition to your on-site survey, any additional information you can provide on the described Memorial will be welcomed. Please label each account with its source (author, title, publisher, date, pages). Topics include any reference to the points listed on this questionnaire, plus any previous conservation treatments - or efforts to raise money for treatment. Thank you.

Inspector Identification

Date of On-site Survey _____

Your Name _____

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____ Telephone () _____

Please send this completed form to:

**Douglass R. Knight, Camp Commander
William Tabor Camp #162 (Methuen)
Department of Massachusetts
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War
Post Office Box 955
Salem, N.H. 03079**

Thank you for your help, and attention to detail.

SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR
National Civil War Memorials Committee



POST OFFICE BOX 389
ACTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01720

HAROLD PHELPS HISTORY OF
ACTON 1954

was brought up again a month later and again failed of a majority. Consequently oxen continued to be used by those who preferred them. To the modern reader this action may appear hopelessly reactionary but back of it lay a deal of sound sense. Oxen to be sure are slow of motion, far slower than horses, but they have their points. Horses are highly nervous and even a well trained and willing pair will not pull for more than a few seconds on a hitch that fails to move. Consequently in clearing stump land, or plowing where stubborn roots prevail, the constant stopping and continued annoyance soon drive them into a frenzied lather. In some cases even though they may survive the first day they will never respond again under similar circumstances.

A lusty pair of willing oxen, on the other hand, particularly if drawing with a Dutch¹ yoke, can pull tremendously. They almost never get excited and if the load fails to move they just quietly lay into it and increase the strain for an interminable time, until even the witnesses sometimes wonder how long they will persist. Horses want to do most of the pulling with the leg muscles whereas oxen seem to sense instinctively that the trick is to constantly increase the body angle and let their huge weight do the work. Many of the author's own generation can remember the familiar sight of Mr. Frank Pratt and his pair of Holsteins drawing boulders on a stone drag under conditions that would have driven a pair of horses beyond control. In spite of their deliberateness capable oxen were, in an earlier era, the counterpart of the modern bulldozer.

In 1889 the long burning question of a town library came to a brisk and unexpected climax through the generosity of Mr. William A. Wilde, a native son. The present beautiful brick and brownstone structure was the result of his enduring pride in the place of his birth and his desire to do something tangible for it. On February 27th, 1890 Mr. Wilde addressed to the selectmen the following letter:
Malden, Mass., Feb. 27, 1890

"To the Selectmen of Acton:

Gentlemen, — For a long time past it has been my intention, if ever I was able to do so, to remember my native town by the gift of some memorial to the memory of those brave and patriotic men of Acton who so freely gave their time, strength, and health — and many of them their lives — in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-65.

To carry out this plan in what seemed to me the most

¹The ordinary American yoke lay across the back of the neck and had bows hanging below. The Dutch yoke, on the other hand, was specially designed for rugged service. The beam was lashed to the horns and lay across the foreheads of the oxen. In this hitch there were no bows to choke and no chance to gall the shoulders or neck.

advantageous and permanent method possible, I have purchased the estate of the Rev. James Fletcher, adjacent to the Town House, and erected thereon a Memorial Library, placing upon its shelves some four thousand volumes, more or less, and I beg the privilege of presenting this property to the town as a free gift, only stipulating that it shall forever be kept as a Memorial Library, and free to all citizens of the patriotic old town of Acton, which I shall always love and be proud of.

If it shall please the town to accept this gift I shall be glad to pass all necessary papers for the transfer of the property to whom and at such time as the town shall direct.

I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

WILLIAM A. WILDE

This letter was read to the citizens of Acton convened in town meeting March 3, 1890 by Mr. Howard B. White, chairman of the Board of Selectmen. Thereupon Rev. James Fletcher presented the following resolutions which were unanimously adopted, forwarded to Mr. Wilde, and also inscribed upon the town records.

"WHEREAS a charter of incorporation has passed the Legislature and been signed by his Excellency Gov. J. Q. A. Brackett incorporating the Memorial Library, and Hon. William A. Wilde, a native of Acton — now a resident of Malden — has signified his readiness to deed to the town the Memorial Library Building just completed at his expense, and the land on which it stands, and all the appurtenances thereof, including books already selected, the Memorial Room and the town vault for the archives of the town, —

"Resolved 1st, We, the inhabitants of the town of Acton, in town meeting assembled, do accept the trust and authorize the Selectmen, in behalf of the town, to sign all papers and perform all the acts necessary to complete the transfer of the property to the care of the trustees.

"Resolved 2nd, In passing this vote we wish to express to Mr. Wilde — in behalf of the present inhabitants of the town; in behalf of all future generations who may be resident here, and participants in the benefits to be enjoyed; in behalf of the soldiers of the War of the Rebellion, whose memory and valor he has so tenderly cherished in the name and arrangement of the structure — our profound appreciation of his generous gift.

"We assure him of our hearty thanks for remembering

of the library and with the Grand Army Post as escort marched down the common and returning to the library building performed the dedicatory services for the tablets on either side of the arched vestibule. Commander Hall, at the conclusion of the simple exercises appointed a guard of honor under Adjutant Samuel R. Guilford and Herbert E. Preston, officer of the guard, who made a stack of arms, surmounted by the national ensign in the vestibule, over which stood as guard a comrade in full uniform armed with musket and fixed bayonet. A passage of scripture was read; the exercises were declared ended and the procession reformed and marched back to the tent.¹

Mr. William A. Wilde, the donor of the library, was born in Acton July 11, 1827, at the home of his father Joseph Wilde, who lived in the house that sets in the Y formed by Parker St. and the prolongation of Concord St. that goes out toward Sinking Pond.² His grandfather lived on the old Deacon Fletcher homestead now the residence of Mr. Jorgen Larson. Mr. Wilde married three times. The first wife was Lois Mace of Pepperell, the second Lydia Jane Bride of Berlin, Mass., and the third Celestina Dona Hoyt of Wentworth, N. H. There were three children by the second marriage and two by the last. Mr. Wilde was a prominent publisher in Boston. Among other items his company issued the Sunday School Quarterlies that were used almost universally in the Congregational churches of New England at that time. He was educated at Groton and Pepperell Academies. He taught school for twelve years, was superintendant of the Malden schools, represented the city for two terms in the legislature, and was chairman of the House Committee on Education. In addition he was a trustee of the Malden library for eight years and was one of the Prison Commissioners of Massachusetts.

The style of architecture is Romanesque and the external appearance and the internal arrangements and furnishings are in harmony with this idea. The materials are red brick and brownstone. The extreme length is sixty six feet six inches and the width thirty two feet ten inches. The principal entrance opens toward the south and through a large, solid freestone arch with rich mouldings and carved spandrels. Once through this main arch, the observer finds on either hand two immense slate tablets. On one, under the heading, "OUR HONORED DEAD" are inscribed the names of the twenty nine sons of Acton who lost their lives in the Civil War³ On the other appears the names of those who were fortunate enough to survive. On entering the building, a reading room, sixteen by twenty five feet is found at the left. Directly ahead is a room originally designed for the trustees but now used mostly as a repository for important town relics. The

¹ The tent stood between the town hall and Woodbury Lane.

² Now the home of Mr. Edward Howard.

³ See Appendix XVI.

stack room, thirty two feet by twenty four, has alcoves on two levels.

The dedication exercises cost the town two hundred and seventy eight dollars, an insignificant sum by present standards, but at that time it encompassed the expenses of the speaker, Hon. John D. Long, his entertainment by Dr. Charles B. Sanders, the rental of a huge tent and the cost of its erection, a drum corps, printing and postage and twelve teams for the transportation of the crowds in attendance.¹

Previous to the opening of the library in June of 1890 Miss Hattie E. Tuttle, Miss Susan Conant and Mrs. Frank Fisk assisted in the cataloging and readying the general facilities. Mrs. Fisk still lives just a stone's throw from the scene of her early activities and is an interested and alert student of Actonaria. On the opening day there were 3973 volumes on the shelves. The first librarian was Miss Ida Hale who retired from duty in 1896. She was followed by Miss Viola S. Tuttle until her retirement because of ill health in 1902. Miss Flora Reed then served for several months but did not care to continue in the work and was followed by Mr. Arthur F. Davis who was elected by the trustees in May of 1902.

One of the first donations received for the library by one other than the donor was a check for one hundred dollars from Mr. Alvin Lothrop of South Acton and Washington, D. C. to be expended in the purchase of a suitable clock. With it was purchased the fine hall clock that has marked the passing hours ever since. At about the same time friends of Mr. Wilde in Malden had a life sized crayon portrait made by William T. Robinson and this has constantly hung in a prominent place in the reading room.

While not a gift in the ordinary sense Mr. Moses Taylor showed his interest and generosity by assuming the expense of moving the Fletcher buildings and clearing the land upon which the library stands. He also donated two swords, one carried by his grandfather at the battle of Bennington and the other by Silas Jones at South Boston in 1812. Edwin J. Piper and brother of Springfield, Mass. sent the drum and sword originally belonging to Major Josiah Piper of Acton. Silas Hosmer presented a paper cutter made from wood from the timbers of the Old North Bridge. At about this time also Mr. Wilde donated a fine stain proof engraving of General U. S. Grant.

In 1891 Mr. Moses Taylor gave a picture of Libby Prison as it appeared in Richmond in 1863. The portrait of General George B. McClellan came from Mr. Wilde as did also the fine steel engraving entitled "The Last Cartridge" which represents an episode in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. On the evening of April 20th, 1891 Mr. Wilde in the town hall presented the Isaac Davis Post G. A. R.,

¹ Town report of March, 1891. gives itemized account.