



The Acworth Bird Collection & History Mystery Quest

Acworth, New Hampshire

Physical Difficulty: Easy

Special Features: Historical

Duration: 0:45

Season: Year-round

Bring: Compass

To get there: Going south on Route 12, turn left in Charlestown onto Sullivan Street. If you pass the Jiffy Mart, you missed the turn! At .6 of a mile, turn right at the Y intersection onto the Acworth Road. Travel 7.5 miles, steadily climbing uphill. At the top, you will finally enter the small village of Acworth with a large white church on the left. Immediately, you will be in an intersection of tar and dirt roads. The library is a small brick building almost straight ahead on the left side of the dirt road called Lynn Hill Road. Use this dirt road to enter the parking lot of the library. The phone at the library is 603-835-2150. The Library is open on Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:30am – 5:30pm and Saturdays & Sundays 11:30am – 4:30pm.

Clues:



Welcome! This library was built for you way back in 1892.
 We invite you now to hike through history, with clues.
 To build our town library, the State gave 100 dollars,
 But Acworth's Ithiel H. Silsby gave thousands!
 When his will was read, the town got to work: they
 moved Thornton's blacksmith shop,
 And where the elder Silsby's store used to be, the library
 was plopped on top.

Go look at the Bird Collection in the room by the door.
 You will definitely want to learn a whole lot more!
 We've looked at these shelves filled with fur and with feathers.

We've studied the times they were all put together.
We've learned about birds and some mammals too,
And of course, Gawin Gilmore Dickey, born in 1842.
Look up over the birds...his portrait smiles at you!

This bird collection was made by Dickey: we call him "our guy".
We also solved a mystery—and here we'll tell you why!
His family called him "Gilmore," which was news to us.
He was quite a fine woodworker and taxidermist.
Town records call him "crippled," "hunchback," "injured in childhood."
But as to how this might have happened, the records were no good.
So of course this made us wonder...as anybody would.

Then we found a Mr. Porter, who lives in Minnesota (r!).
And his great, great grandmother was Gilmore Dickey's aunt!
Right there in Minnesota was an old note in a box.
The note answered THE QUESTION, which gave us a shock!

The note was simple. The note was sad.
Gawin Gilmore Dickey fell down long, steep stairs as a very young lad.
His spine was injured badly, and he grew up bent and frail.
He never did get married. He stayed on with his folks,
but lived a full life and people liked him without fail.
His only brother, Freeman, moved to Holyoke "M-A".
Sometimes Gilmore took the train to visit, following the river the whole
way. We're glad we got to know him and a bit about his art.
Gilmore used his head, his hands and the smarts in his heart.

Yes, G. studied birds by stuffing them and modeling them as in real life.
This was a brand new art form that Gilmore took to new heights.
From 1880 through '87 his collection grew and grew;
People from all around brought birds in by the slew.
Some Ruddy Ducks from Alstead are here from '84;
A Cedar Waxwing, a Northern Shrike... each time you'll see more.
The dangling tags—in perfect script—all tell important facts:
The year, the date, the sex or age, the town the bird was found in;
The Latin names, and now and then, the man who killed or found them.
Some sadness is behind the glass; a once-wild bird....extinct.
From flocks of millions the Passenger Pigeon lives on with a tag of ink.
*(If you want to read a full list of the 218 specimens that are in the collection, you may
ask our librarian.)*

Before we move along, look out the left window...quick.
See Ithiel Silsby's house that he built in 1806.
There's a hiding place inside the house...behind the largest bookshelf.
Dr. Lyman Brooks lived in this home when the Civil War broke forth.
Were slaves safely hidden here on their way traveling to the north?

Now move outside into Gilmore Dickey's Acworth.
From the library parking lot, please walk down Lynn Hill Road.
The Dickey house is second house on the left and has a long, long story.
There were so many relatives it's hard to relate without spinning our heads in a hurry!
But Gilmore lived here his whole life and you can read about the rest of his family...
When you finish this hunt and find our treasure box, by golly!

As you head up toward the Stop sign, pause just awhile:
On your left is a street called "Hoe Handle" though no sign exists today.
But a mill down the hill on a stream that's still there, made pile upon pile of handles for tools... and the neighbors built fences of those thrown away!
The lovely brick home here on Hoe Handle Street was once "Daniel Robinson's store".
Then in 1848, more school space was sought, so the Town bought the store...and twenty years here were taught!
Perhaps Gilmore Dickey attended this school, going home 'cross the street for his lunch?
Did his mother come here? Or his father chop wood? We don't have a hunch.

Now up to Hill Road! Across the intersection, there is a large white house.
As Gilmore was starting his bird collection, summer guests came to Acworth to dwell, and some of them may have stayed right here...since this used to be a hotel!
Left of the hotel were two big brick buildings, though leaves may block your view.
The middle one was the Brick Store & Post Office, but burned long ago.

Now, please cross safely (look all ways) to get to the wide, green Town Common.
We don't want to lose you or write poems of those meeting cars fast down upon them!
The Common was cleared in Seventeen seventy-six.

It took 2 whole days for all the men in town to chop down the trees into sticks.

The Church on the Hill is a sight you can't miss
On this very high site was the town's first "Meetinghouse".
It was very rough and not good in the rain for dry people.
Taken apart in 1821, the meetinghouse was used to build our Town Hall that you see.
This large church before you was built the same year;
Up front were tall stairs that the pastor did climb.
As he spoke to the people below in the pews, the hours passed by....

Then this church was remodeled in 1886, and Gilmore Dickey was part of the mix.
He helped design the new upstairs plus handled the correspondence.
When all was said and all was done, three thousand bucks had been well spent.
Through all that work, Gilmore was there to the end.
Our guy was a dedicated man, and a true friend.

Then came the Civil War. Abe Lincoln put out the call
And many men of Acworth answered and gave their all.
All hoped for the best and were cheered on by their loved ones,
but some were badly hurt and others never again saw their sons.
When the war was finally over, many farmers just kept moving
and settled their families "out west".
But for our town's *One Hundredth Birthday* in 1868
most all came home, saying Acworth was the best!

Now... see if the Town Hall is open, if so, please step right on in.
They will give you warm greetings
and show you the stage where our plays and our songs long have been.
The Horse Sheds, out back, were filled once a week,
when church and town groups held their meetings.
Imagine your horse eating hay.. .June through May,
Thinking "Hooray for these plays and these greetings!"
Beyond the Horse Sheds is the old stone "Town Pound".
In earlier days, all pigs, cows, and horses here would stay
If they broke fences at home and then ran away!

Now, head down to the school that we use.
(We feed birds there each day but don't stuff them!)

A Baptist church was built right here the same year Ithiel Silsby built his house.

But in 1868 the church moved to South Acworth,
Where mills and families were growing fast.

Then the brick school on Hoe Handle was sold and a new school was built right here.

A big classroom below with big gathering room above...

....it was proudly named "Eagle Hall".

But fire took it late at night December 1929 long after Gilmore was gone.

Bill Mitchell was only seven when he saw the flames that night.

His dad had cleared a view of school so his mother could see it right,
And thus they saw, so far away, the fire that burned so bright.

Bill lost his favorite pencil box plus his whole beloved school.

Classes did continue, but held at the Town Hall.

By fall, a brand new school, with no upstairs hall was ready for their studies.

You see it here, much longer now, with room for us and our buddies.

Imagine this: Acworth had twelve schools around town at one time.

All students had to walk to and from their nearest school back then.

Even in the winter!

Our Quest is almost over, so go to where you began it.

Don't worry if the library is locked up tight, unless your keys are in it!

South of the library there is a post, you'll see it's made of granite.

Please walk east down that nice lawn, though it'd be faster if you ran it!

Now turn north until you find a posted reservation.

Nearby there is a treasure in a place too small for us....

...too small for you....though very nice for wrens or mice.

A treasure there is waiting and we hope that you will like it.

Find it! Find it! Find it! We made it for you, not for them!

By Grades 4 & 5 of the Acworth School, Winter 2007.

Vital Communities

Valley Quest is a program of Vital Communities, a regional non-profit organization serving the Upper Valley Region. For more information about Valley Quest please check our website: www.vitalcommunities.org. You can call us at 802-291-9100 or email valleyquest@vitalcommunities.org.

