

For Immediate Release

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Vermont State Historic Preservation Office Announces 2026 Preservation Excellence Award

MONTPELIER, Vt. – The Vermont State Historic Preservation Office has awarded the 2026 Preservation Excellence Award to the **John Woodruff Simpson Memorial Library**. This prestigious honor recognizes the library's director and board for their outstanding commitment to preservation stewardship, historical documentation, and community education. The award highlights their work in sharing the outsized history and lasting impact of the small East Craftsbury library, as well as celebrating its founder and community benefactor, **Jean Walker Simpson**.

"We are exceptionally proud to celebrate the John Woodruff Simpson Memorial Library for their dedication to preserving our cultural heritage," stated State Historic Preservation Officer **Laura V. Trieschmann**. "Their work reminds us that a small building can hold profound community history, providing an inspiring model for communities across Vermont."

The library's multi-year effort culminated in the official listing of the library in the National Register of Historic Places. Prepared by architectural historian consultant Polly Allen, the National Register nomination recognizes the small library's extraordinary history, including a period when it held the highest per capita book circulation rates in Vermont.

"We are thrilled to receive this award and are deeply grateful to everyone who has supported our work to preserve the library and the community history held here," said Library Director **Kristin Urie**. "Over the past five years, we have been working to archive materials in our special collections with the goal of preservation and access. The connection to history that happens through storytelling has been part of the library since it was founded in 1921, and our efforts to preserve the historic building and the history it contains are simply a continuation of that thread."

Historic Preservationist **Polly Allen** confirmed that, "Every month is a symphony of events and activities that are emphasizing the human connections that Ms. Jean Simpson engrained in the fabric and life of the library."

The Legacy of "Miss Jean"

The National Register designation honors the nearly 60-year tenure of founder Jean Walker Simpson ("Miss Jean"). In 1921, she converted her family's former general store into the library, establishing an intellectual enclave that nurtured the arts and civic life through her direct management. Serving for decades as head librarian, she personally curated cardboard boxes of books to circulate weekly to families in the town's rural hinterland, while simultaneously serving as the driving force behind the local East Hill Players Theatre and area Girl Scout troops. Her enduring legacy continues to shape the community and physical identity of Craftsbury and its environs to the present day.