

2 *Church and State, Religion and Education*

Religion and education were perhaps the two civic concerns uppermost in the minds of the early settlers of Jaffrey. In both instances buildings were required, publicly constructed and maintained. In 1749, when the Masonian Proprietors granted the township of Middle Monadnock, three shares of land were reserved for public use: "one for the first settled minister in the Township, one for the support of the ministry, and one for the school there forever." It was also a condition of the conveyance "that a good and convenient Meeting House be Built in said Township as near the Center of the Town as may be with Convenience." It wasn't until 1775 that this condition was fulfilled.

The Meetinghouse and the Churches that Followed

Albert Annett observed in the Town History that "never did the town of Jaffrey enter upon a great public undertaking under such unfavorable conditions as in the building of the meeting-house. The town was less than a year old as a body politic. It had only 351 inhabitants, a large majority of whom were women and children; its roads were only marked trails or cartpaths; there were probably not a dozen framed houses in the township; and the necessities of everyday living imposed a severe limitation upon the labor that could be devoted to the public service. Moreover, there were already rumblings of the impending war with the Mother Country, that was to create an incredible drain upon the resources of the town during the Revolutionary period."

In 1775, the frame of the Meetinghouse was raised, the first important civic event in Jaffrey's history. The location chosen, on a rise of land in the central part of the town, would effectively determine the new community's development pattern: the route of roads, the siting of stores and taverns, the building of farms and houses. In short, the town grew up around and out from its Meetinghouse. Tradition has it that the raising occurred on the day of the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 17th) and that the sounds of the Charlestown cannonade could be heard by those toiling on the Common. The builder/contractor was Captain Samuel Adams, twenty-four years of age and then of Rindge, assisted by his brother-in-law, Jeremiah

Spofford. In 1822, the bell tower and spire were added, built by Joel Oakes Patrick and paid for by donations on the condition that the Town would buy the bell, which it did the following year. It was cast by the Paul Revere Foundry. At the same time, the building was painted and new clapboards were installed.

The Meetinghouse served both as the church and as a site for Town Meetings. In time, other church denominations were accommodated. With the building of the nearby Brick Church and other churches in East Jaffrey, the Meetinghouse was seldom put to use for other than Town Meetings until after the Civil War when, in 1870, the interior was totally rebuilt to provide town offices and schoolrooms. The school (Conant High School) eventually moved to the Union Hall on School Street, and at the 1914 Town Meeting it was voted to move the town offices and the location of future Town Meetings to East Jaffrey, the former to the second floor of the library.

The present layout, appearance and use of the Meetinghouse date from a major remodelling undertaken in 1922 by the Village Improvement Society in cooperation with the Town. The Horsesheds at the rear, adjoining the Old Burying Ground, were built in 1810 and restored between 1949 and 1954. There were originally twelve stalls, now nine. At one time a Hearse House stood at the western end of the sheds. Some time in this century it was moved to a location downtown, off Old Peterborough Road. (A similar structure still stands at the entrance to the Village Cemetery on East Main Street.)

Referred to in the Town History as Jaffrey's "dearest possession," the Meetinghouse certainly has over its long life stood as the town's most important building, historically, architecturally and symbolically. Happily, the changes over the years—and there have been many in both physical terms and in use—have reinforced and complemented the original design.

Other churches would be built in Jaffrey throughout the 19th century and right up to the present day, responding to the needs of convenience, differing religious practices and new populations. But changing government policy was a factor, too. The Toleration Act of 1819 called for the severing of connections between church and state. Initially this meant that other denominations became entitled to use the Meetinghouse for their services. According to the Town History, "in 1829 the apportionment was as follows: the Congregationalists, 21 Sabbaths; the Universalists, 13 Sabbaths; the Unitarians ... and the Baptists, 9 Sabbaths each." This arrangement gave little permanent satisfaction and soon plans were launched by the Baptists and the Congregationalists to provide themselves with separate church buildings.

The first to be completed, in 1830, was the Baptist Church on a site now occupied by the Jaffrey Post Office on East Main Street [now

Turnpike Road]. This had the benefit of being a more convenient location to serve the growing population of Factory Village. In the following year the Congregationalists completed their Brick Church adjacent to the Meetinghouse. That year, 1831, was the last in which a tax for support of the ministry was assessed on the town's inhabitants, signaling the end of the church and state relationship that had existed from Jaffrey's beginning.

The next church to be built was for the Universalists. Dedicated in 1845, it still stands as the Cutler Memorial on the corner of Main and School Streets, although it was dissolved as a church in 1939.

In 1850 the town's second Congregational church was built by a group of parishioners of the Brick Church, a move indicative of the growing importance of what is now downtown Jaffrey. Today known as the United Church, the original building, although altered, is still very much a feature of Main Street.

Several decades passed before other churches were built in Jaffrey but more would follow as the town's population began to both increase and change. The expanding mill economy resulted in an influx of Irish and French Canadian workers and their families, many of whom were Roman Catholic. In 1869 the Rev. Daniel W. Murphy celebrated the first mass in Jaffrey, in the Engine House, in the Center. He made the journey from Keene once each month. Prior to this, Jaffrey's twenty or so Catholic families would travel to Peterborough for Sunday worship at St. Peter's. By 1871, the monthly services had grown in size and Union Hall on School Street was used. Three years later Jaffrey became a mission of St. Peter's and from 1882 to 1885 of the Sacred Heart Church in Wilton. In 1885 the Rev. Patrick McEvoy was appointed the parish priest of St. Peter's, Peterborough, but chose to live in Jaffrey, where he bought for \$1600 a two-story house on Main Street owned by Reuben Pierce. The following year Pierce sold the vacant pasture across the street which became the site of a new church with Father McEvoy as its first pastor. Parishioners donated 100,000 feet of lumber for its construction. It was dedicated in 1888 as St. Patrick Church and served the Catholic population of the town until the present stone church was built in 1917.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

The Meetinghouse from atop Cutter's Hotel. The original location of the main entrance to the Meetinghouse—opposite the pulpit—wasn't reestablished until 1922. The hearse house is plainly seen at the end of the Horsesheds. Earlier in this century it was moved to a location off of Old Peterborough Road where it is now used for storage. The roads across and around the Common have changed substantially over the years. The somewhat rag-tag pattern pictured here was typical in the pre-automobile

age when roadways were far less defined, especially in open areas where one's destination largely determined the route. At one time the Third New Hampshire Turnpike ran closer to the Meetinghouse than its successor, Main Street, now does. One early photograph shows a court for lawn tennis on the Common in front of the Meetinghouse. The Concord coach was probably one that had been used in regular service on the Turnpike. Later it served to transport guests to and from such places as the Shattuck Inn, Cutter's Hotel and The Ark. It was probably this coach that was owned and operated by Thomas Meer and destroyed by the fire on May 17, 1906 at E. O. McCarthy's livery stable near the Depot. 1894.

2-1 The Meetinghouse with the Horsesheds beyond. The earlier view was taken before the major renovations of 1870, at which time the main entrance door was shifted one bay to the west and the window openings were changed slightly. Close inspection of the clapboards today gives evidence of this. The tower entrance door has been shifted as well. The clock was added around 1906. The arched stall openings of the Horsesheds underwent some changes prior to the 1890s. The almost barren openness of the Common and its surroundings in the earlier view is in sharp contrast to the park-like setting of today. The newly planted saplings suggest an early beautification effort. Ca. late 1860s.