

## The Stone House

ON THE north side of Main Street in Jaffrey, just west of what is now St. Patrick School, stands The Stone House, which was described when new as the “best house on the turnpike from Keene to Boston.” It was built by Jonas Melville in 1829. Melville earlier lived on the other side of the Contoocook River in the brick building now housing Tieger Realty. Across the street once stood the Baptist Church, which came down just as the present Post Office was going up. Melville was a strict Congregationalist so he traveled two miles west each Sabbath to the Meetinghouse where his uncle, The Rev. Laban Ainsworth, was still preaching. Melville’s new Stone House would shorten that long journey somewhat. It is believed to be one of only two early stone buildings in Jaffrey.

Jonas Melville was a successful businessman and banker and is perhaps best remembered as a founder of the academy that bore his name—Melville Academy (now the home of the Village Improvement Society and a local history museum). He also was very much involved in the building of the Brick Church which still stands beside the Meetinghouse. And the First Cotton and Woolen Factory, later to become the Jaffrey Mills, the buildings which still dominate downtown Jaffrey. And, in 1851, with Peter Upton and John Conant, he founded the Monadnock Bank, now Jaffrey’s branch of TD Bank. In other words, he was a man of importance and influence in the Jaffrey of that time. However, events turned against him leading to his financial undoing. As a consequence he felt it necessary to sell his grand house. It went to auction, the winning bid being \$3,350. The purchaser was Leonard Richardson Cutter, an astute businessman and influential politician in Boston, who was born and grew up in Jaffrey. At one time he was the acting mayor of Boston and in his later years owned, with his wife Mercy, 1 Arlington Street, a grand residence, still intact, at the corner of Beacon and Arlington Streets overlooking the Public Garden.

In a privately printed memoriam to Cutter, it was written that “the sale appeared more like a funeral than like an auction. I felt sad myself to see Mr. Melville’s home go so under the hammer; but such is fate.... As a boy I used to pass it, driving cattle to Bedford,

and used to think if I could ever have money enough to own such a place as this, I would be perfectly contented.”

The 1937 Jaffrey Town History recorded that “to this place, which had been long his summer home, he [Cutter] invited as his guests on the occasion of the Jaffrey Centennial in 1873, the mayor and aldermen of Boston and others of his associates, whom he entertained as Prince Bountiful upon one of the greatest occasions in the history of his native town. ...During many years three months in summer were spent by the family in Jaffrey.”

After the deaths of Leonard and Mercy Cutter in 1894, the Stone House passed to their daughter, Agnes Elizabeth, who married Enos Hoyt Bigelow. They lived in Framingham, Massachusetts, and also used the house as their summer home.

Sometime later, in the early 1940s, we learn that Claire and Byron Reed carried on a business in the Stone House serving “luncheon, tea, and dinner” and providing “guest rooms.”

In 1946 and until 1949, it was the home of Count Viggo Brandt-Erichsen and his family. He is prominent in Jaffrey’s history as the sculptor of the massive “Buddies Monument,” commemorating World War I, that stands on the Common just to the east.

The chain of ownership comes up to the present when the Brandt-Erichsens sold the house and its 14 acres to St. Patrick Church in 1949. The present St. Patrick School next door was built in 1950-51, while the Stone House continues to be used for academic purposes and as a residence for the nuns.

And today it still remains the “best house on the turnpike from Keene to Boston.”

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