

CHAPTER XVIII

TOWN POOR

Although the Jaffrey pioneers were for the most part young and vigorous, their financial reserves were so meagre that misfortune of any kind soon exhausted their resources and forced them to depend upon the assistance of neighbors. Thus, while voluntary aid in the form of "bees" and other gratuities was generously afforded, it is not strange that the newly incorporated town was soon confronted with the necessity of planning to care for the unfortunate. Every effort was made to lighten this burden by preventing the settlement of those for whom the future seemed not propitious (see Warning Out); and that the problem was not pressing is indicated by the action of the town meeting of April 26, 1774: "Voted not to Rais Money for the Poor." But by 1785 it is evident that poverty was rearing its head and that the sturdy yeomanry believed in a policy of self-help, since it was voted on September 15 that ye Select men give Lieut Benjman Prescott their Security for ye price of a Cow, Hugh Gragg to have the use of said Cow he giving a Bill of Sale of her to ye Selectmen.

Other records of the period show numerous instances of the same type of assistance in the form of grants of firewood, animals, and foodstuffs and even of the construction of modest dwellings at town expense for the unfortunate. In other cases contracts were made with individuals for the care of certain poverty-stricken persons, the usual procedure for establishing the price being by vendue—a sort of public auction in reverse, whereby interested parties bid for the privilege of affording care, the lowest bidder receiving the contract. For instance, Moody Lawrence, Auctioneer, advertised a "Vandue" on December 31, 1825, upon the following conditions:

They will be put to the lowest bidder who shall board and nurse them in sickness and health and pay every expence for them except doctor's bills which the town will pay and clothing which the town will provide. The contract shall continue one year from the first day of January, 1825, when those persons who shall keep them shall remove them to the place which shall next be provided for them if within the town of Jaffrey.

The successful bidders were privileged to benefit by such work as the unfortunates could perform, their capacities influencing the amount of the bid. The records of the town meeting of March 21, 1794, present a picture of the procedure as well as the current cost of care.

Vote to Alow Amos Fortune 1-16-0 for Taking care of Poll Burds (Polly Burdoo).

Vote to allow John Briant—5-18-0 for Taking Care of the W^d Combs

Vote to Allow L^t Milliken's account for keeping W^d Cutter when Lame

Voted to allow Joseph Wilder 10-16-0 for keeping W^d Cutter

Vote to Vandue the towns poor this year Moses Burdoo Struck off to Joseph Stewart from this time untill he is twenty one years old at 15-15-0 the half Paid at the end of one year the other half at the end of two years if he Live if not; the last half not paid

Miss Chaplin and Child Struck Of to James French at 2/9 P^r week for one year if the Select men see fitt to let her stay dureing s^d term

W^d Cutter Struck off to David Chadwick at 7/ p^r weak for one year

W^d Combs Struck off to Robert Gilmore at 3/ p^r week for one year

These people who were "struck off" sat in the chimney corner for the most part, suppressed and glum. Some were garrulous with talk of their great accomplishments in other days. Others were spiteful in their few and pointed remarks, while some kept up a brave show of activity so that the remark became proverbial of the bustling citizen that he had "more business than a man on the town." Many, it cannot be doubted, earned their keep. The old woman still could spin and grandsir could find a melancholy interest in caring for the hogs, bringing in the wood (no small chore), puttering in the kitchen garden or working the old dash churn on butter day. When placed in decent homes their lot was only one grade below that of the incompetent "hired man" who worked from year's end to year's end for four dollars a month "and found."

But as time went on abuses and the burden on town officials for oversight of these wards of the public became serious and means were sought to lighten both evils by segregation. So in 1827 the town voted "to put all paupers to one person for three years," and "to accept the proposition of Samuel Patrick, Jr., to take all paupers for three years at \$500 per year." Samuel Patrick, Jr., lived on the old John Davidson farm in the northeast part of the town; and the experiment proved so satisfactory that, in 1833, it was voted to purchase the place for a permanent town farm, even though similar proposals in 1800, 1804, and 1805 had been voted down. The purchase price was \$2,500, the deed being dated October 4, 1834, Patrick retaining possession until January 1, 1836, and the committee in charge—Oliver Prescott, John Conant, and Edward Spaulding—thriftilly retaining \$208.47 as rent for the interim. However, Patrick later was paid \$500 for stock furniture and tools. The town took possession on April 1, 1835, and Jacob Adams and his wife were hired to run the farm at \$200 per year, they to furnish all necessary additional furniture.

On January 31, 1836, the house burned down; but at the ensuing March town meeting \$1,500 was appropriated for rebuilding; \$160 was voted to Jacob Adams to reimburse him for furniture lost in the fire; it was voted to make the town farm a house of correction; while Samuel Patrick and John A. Prescott were appointed a committee to draft by-laws for the regulation of "the poor house and penitentiary." That the town was jealous to preserve its rights in the labor of its wards and the products of the farm, that the burden on taxpayers be as moderate as was consistent with reasonable care is indicated by the advertisement appearing in the *New Hampshire Sentinel* of March 18, 1840.

All persons are forbid harboring, trusting or trading with any of the paupers belonging to the town of Jaffrey.

Benj. Haywood, Overseer of the Poor.

In the 1860's the legislature authorized the several counties to erect county farms and to take over certain responsibilities with regard to the poor, which Cheshire County did by the creation of the present Maplewood Home at Westmoreland. This change rendering a continuance of the town farm unnecessary, it was sold in 1869 to Philander Ring of Wilton and Henry K. French of Peterborough for \$5,500, with \$500 additional for stock and supplies. According to the selectmen's report of 1870, the sturdy cage built for a penitentiary was reserved from the sale and installed as a "lock-up" at East Jaffrey. The town farm is now owned as a summer residence by Clement R. Lamson (see Primeval Forest).