

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE RESCUED

Even during the hectic years of the Second World War, Homer Belletete, Ralph Boynton and Jason Sawyer had been concerned about the preservation of The Little Red Schoolhouse which they feared was rotting on its second location on the road south of The Ark.\*

To provide for this the three citizens eventually hit upon the idea of establishing an Historical Society which would serve as a preservation agency. In consequence The Jaffrey Historical Society, duly incorporated, took form in August, 1958 with Ralph Boynton as its first president. It made the relocation and rehabilitation of the Schoolhouse its Project No. 1.

As this project was taking form the interested parties secured the passage of a resolution in the Town Meeting of March 10, 1959, declaring the town's interest in placing the Schoolhouse in a proper location and empowering the Selectmen to assist in its removal and restoration. The town fathers acted on July 31, 1959, authorizing the infant Society to move the building to a new site on the Meeting House grounds in Jaffrey Center. The town was to retain its title to the structure, but it conveyed the right of rehabilitation and administration to the Society "provided that the moving be effected at no cost to the town."

An active fund raising campaign of necessity followed, and a committee was formed to deal with arrangements for moving and restoration. On it were Oren Belletete, Charles E. Chamberlain, Clyde Felch and Fred H. Smith with Robert H. George as chairman. Interest in Project No. 1 was aroused in the whole Jaffrey community. Before the fund drive was over and the work it made possible accomplished, some 350 townfolk had either made financial contributions, or, in true New England style, had provided materials, furnishings and, above all, labor.

The Society was fortunate in securing the services of Edward C. Whiting, an outstanding landscape architect and long time resident of Jaffrey, to determine the new location of The Schoolhouse on the Common. His choice was duly approved by the Selectmen and the

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(Footnote. \*For the earlier history of District No. 11's Schoolhouse see vol. I, pp. 298 ff.) It had been re-roofed and its chimney removed during the war years, but the historic structure badly needed further attention.

Society, and, with what appeared to be a sufficient bank balance, work began in August 1959. Then, Diana and Douglas Shattuck, descendants of individuals once closely connected with the School, opened the ball, Oren Belletete's power hoe went into action and Joseph Gamelin, the town's master mason, laid the field stone foundations.

The fund raising performance performance continued since, when the old building was being prepared for its move, its condition was found to be far more tragic than a preliminary survey had disclosed. Sills were rotten, so were corner posts, studs, and most of the shingles and much of the siding — carpenter ants, dry rot, multiple leaks and matted pine needles on the roof had wrought havoc with the ancient structure.

However, devoted townsfolk provided the necessary financial support and the labor of equally devoted carpenters at last prepared the building for its move. This did not take place until May 11, 1960: a day whose memory stands out in the minds of all concerned. Primitive moving apparatus, overhanging trees, a narrow bridge and grades along the route made the journey extremely perilous. But with police escort, with crews from telephone and public utility companies standing by and with "Ted" Smith dealing with unexpected emergencies — what looked like the wreck of a building was lowered on to its new foundations.

The needed new shingles, clapboards, door, windows, flooring and plaster were at length provided, and on the memorable day of October 12, 1961 The Little Red Schoolhouse was re-dedicated to the memory of its former teachers and students. The bell, once rung by Miss Lizzie Shattuck, rang again, and once more children swarmed in and crowded the benches which were miraculously intact.

A proper flagpole and a chimney were still lacking. The former was cut and dressed by 14-year-old John Smith and properly installed. The flag, given in memory of Charles Henry Ames and Andrew Jackson George — two New Hampshire men whose education began in Little Red Schoolhouses — was raised for the first time on July 4, 1962. Jaffrey's young people — junior members of the Historical Society, Boy Scout Troop 33 and Girl Scouts of Troop 267 — were in full charge of the moving ceremonies, backed by color guards and colors from the Legion and the V.F.W. Few of the attendant townsfolk will ever forget the boys' reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address, or the pledge of allegiance to the flag led by the girls.

Soon after, a poster was placed on the teacher's desk. It depicted The Schoolhouse with the legend "All We Need Is a Chimney. Won't you buy a brick?" In consequence many visitors dropped "bricks" into the "Chimney Pot" which stood alongside the placard. Their contributions, plus those of persons whose interest in the School was strong and sustained, eventually provided the chimney. It was completed on August 22, 1967 and the first fire built in the pot-bellied stove. This needed heater had been provided in fulfillment of the wish of Jonathan Torrey, whose recent tragic death made it a lasting memorial to yet another lover of Jaffrey.

In such fashion, in spite of difficulties and delays, Project No. 1 of The Jaffrey Historical Society was completed. The original cost of the building in 1822 was \$200. The expenditures for its moving and rehabilitation over the years 1959-1967 amounted to \$2,691.35. But the Project was worth all the dollars and all the labor expended over the space of eight full years. The building comes to life again when children from the Grade School visit it en masse. Visitors, 754 of them in the limited "open season" of 1967, are astonished at its truly unique character, at its desks for teacher and pupils, its slates, books, maps, chart, clock and real black-board. Its present position and condition are the result of a genuine community effort. Jaffrey's pride in its past crowned with success the effort to preserve and maintain the structure which the Town Meeting's resolution of March 10, 1959 described as of "historical value".

—Robert H. George