

CHAPTER V

SCHOOLS

“ 'Tis education forms the common mind
Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined.”

—ALEXANDER POPE

The final curtain was dropped on the old school system in Jaffrey in June, 1935, when the last rural one-room schoolhouses, Numbers 3 and 4, went on the auction block. Schoolhouse Number 3, in the Gilmore Pond district, was purchased by John T. Garfield and moved to Lincoln Corner Road in the north east part of the town and converted into a dwelling house for the Garfield family. Schoolhouse Number 4 was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Theron Champney. This house, located near the intersection of Fitzwilliam and Old Fitzwilliam Roads, was moved to a site on the Fitzwilliam Road and made into a dwelling house for the Champney family. Both houses sold for \$55.00 each, subject to removal within ninety days. Their blackboards were reserved for the School District of Jaffrey.

During their final years as halls of learning in the respective districts, both schools were served by cadet teachers sent from the Keene Normal School, now Keene State College, for nine-week periods each. By 1927 the number of pupils in these schools had become so small that it was deemed expedient to transport them to the school in the village and close the schools.

Three years earlier (1932) Schoolhouse Number 9 was sold to Edwin C. Fletcher, who moved it intact up the hill onto the former so-called Merrifield farm cellar hole. It was afterward moved to its present site farther afield and is today (1967) the attractive hilltop residence of the L. H. Alline family.

After the sale of these one-room schoolhouses there remained in Jaffrey only the Little Red Schoolhouse, Number 11, the story of which is told in a subsequent chapter.

THE NEW GRADE SCHOOL BUILDING

Jaffrey's two grade school buildings, the old brick Union Hall building and the wooden schoolhouse beside it, became objects of public concern during the latter part of the Great Depression decade. They were overcrowded and outmoded in the light of more modern educational standards. The brick building had answered the town's need for school room since it was built in 1853, when it was pro-



JAFFREY GRADE SCHOOL

claimed as the finest public school building in the County. The wooden building, erected some forty years later, had resounded to children's footsteps and voices for nearly fifty years. Both were inadequate and in need of repairs. Moreover, a new schoolhouse was needed to meet changing conditions.

Since Jaffrey had not applied for any Public Works Administration funds when they were available, the possibility of a new school being built under a similar program was considered. At the annual School District meeting, March 8, 1937, acting on motion made by Edward L. Fay, the district authorized the Jaffrey School Board to make "application to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works or any other agency of the United States for a grant to be applied to aid in financing the cost of construction of a schoolhouse and auditorium equipped with a suitable heating plant and necessary school equipment on land now owned by the District." Upon motion of George H. Duncan it was further approved that "the District authorize the School Board to accept any and all offers made by the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works or any other agency of the United States," and to proceed with the necessary formalities.

At the outset a building committee, consisting of Dr. C. Francis Wozmak, chairman, Eleanor S. Austermann, and Ernest J. Pratt, all school board members, together with Wilbur E. Webster and George H. Duncan, was named to initiate and supervise the project. Wells, Hudson & Granger of Hanover, New Hampshire, were chosen as architects for the proposed twelve classroom building and auditorium.

On September 28, 1937, a formal grant of \$52,335.00 was received from the Public Works Administration toward the building costs. This was 45% of the estimated cost of \$116,300.00 then thought sufficient for the project, but which was later found to be inadequate. Unfortunately, in excavating for the new building, 575 cubic yards of rock were encountered, which entailed an added expense of over six thousand dollars. However, several hundred dollars were saved the School District by W. W. Cross & Co., Inc., and by Wilbur E. Webster personally. Both paid for hauling some of the excess excavated material. Even at that, the School District was forced to appropriate \$71,000.00, which brought the total cost of the school to about \$123,335.00. To make an exit possible on Charlonne Street, the District purchased a piece of land from Elmer H. Eaves for \$1,500.00.

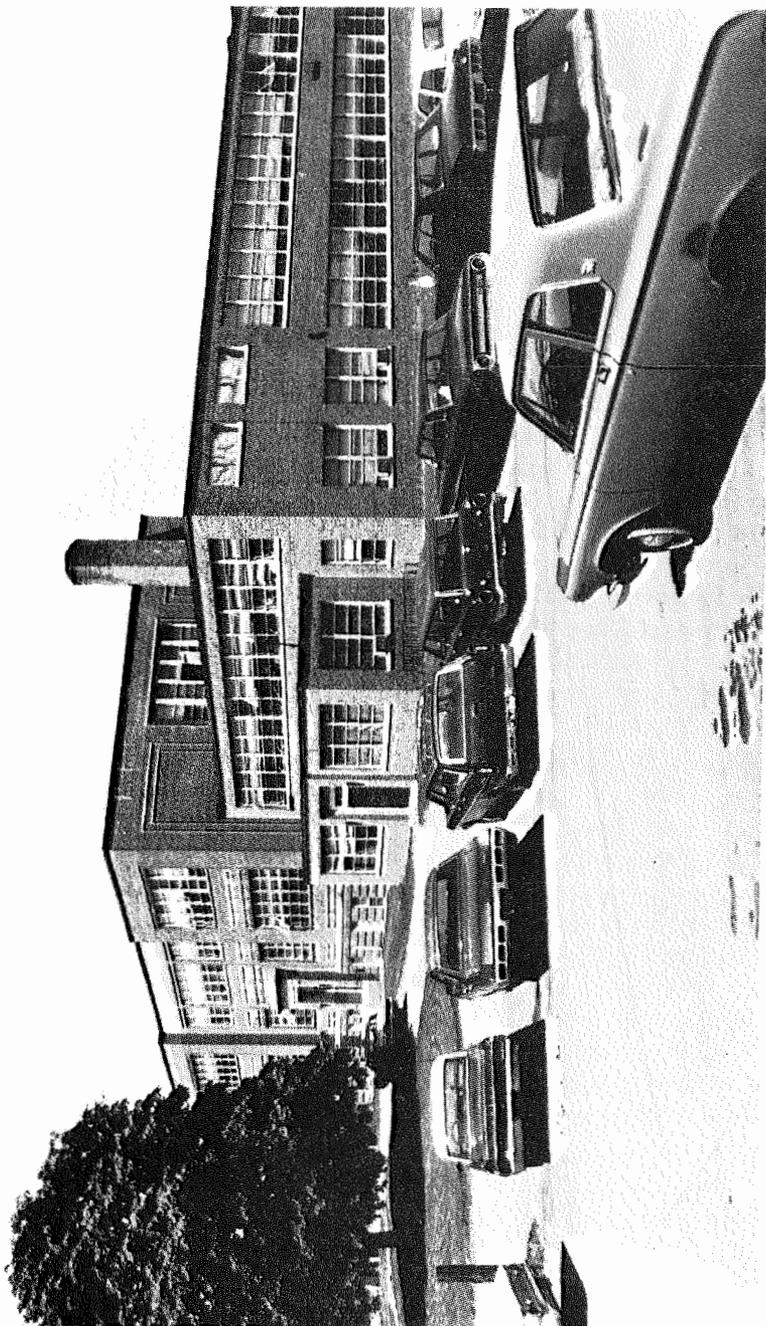
The general contractors, Columbus & Berg, of Gardner, Massachusetts, commenced work on December 20, 1937, on the project which, according to the terms of the grant offer, had to be completed by September 25, 1938. Harry B. Dore, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, who was assigned by the Public Works Administration as Resident Engineer Inspector, supervised the major part of the work, but toward the end was succeeded by J. E. McAfee, who, in turn, was succeeded by Jack Hopcroft. They looked after the interests of Uncle Sam and his taxpayers. David F. Griffiths of Jaffrey served as Clerk of the Works.

The major part of the construction work of the new school and auditorium was carried on during the school year, but no school time was lost. It was necessary to raze only the brick portion of the Union Hall building. The wooden annex was left standing and was divided into classrooms to accommodate the grades for which there was not room in the old wooden building, which was left standing until the new school was built. Only the front entrance was torn down, and with the rear fire escapes serving as entrances, it was possible to conduct school while the building of the new school was in progress. At the close of the school year both wooden buildings were torn down. The grading of the school yard and the laying of the concrete walks was done as a WPA project in 1939. The town's share of this project was \$1,817.06.

The dedication of the new school building took place on Friday, September 16, 1938, just nine days before the construction deadline set in the "grant offer." The New Hampshire Commissioner of Education, James H. Pringle, was one of the speakers. In earlier days he had been superintendent of schools in Jaffrey. Mr. Duncan, master of ceremonies, also one of the speakers, told about the school history and the construction phase of the new school building. Invocation was said by the Rev. C. Gerald Parker of the East Congregational Church, and the benediction was pronounced by the Rev. P. J. McDonough, pastor of St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Through the courtesy of Rudolph Columbus of the construction firm, the music for the dedication was furnished by the Florence Rangers Band of Gardner. Following the ceremonies there was a general inspection of the building.

ADDITION TO CONANT HIGH SCHOOL

While Jaffrey people were proudly viewing their new grade school building as a significant educational milestone, attention was begin-



CONANT HIGH SCHOOL

ning to be focused on the limitations of the town's high school, which was built in 1915-6. By 1946 the number of students in the junior and senior high schools had grown to 257. That and the new subjects added to the curriculum demanded additional classrooms to assure greater teaching and learning efficiency. At the annual meeting of the Jaffrey School District on March 11, 1946, a committee was named to study the matter of housing needs. It consisted of Headmaster Gerald H. Faunce, Ralph E. Boynton, James B. Perry, Evelyn H. Ruffle, and Alfred S. Despres. It was also requested to consider the question of acquiring additional land for use of Conant High School.

During the initial year of study, the committee made use of the services of Harold E. Mason and Edward L. Baker, school architects of Leominster, Massachusetts. In an analytical and comprehensive report at the 1947 meeting, the committee recommended an addition to and alterations in Conant High School. By this time Mr. Faunce had accepted the headmastership at the high school in Peterborough and was replaced by succeeding headmasters. Headmaster Robert G. Lewis resigned in 1951 and Mr. Perry was taken by death. Homer J. Belletete and Suzanne T. Pierce were named to fill the vacancies on the committee. Meanwhile the study continued and the architects' blue prints and specifications were placed on file with the superintendent of schools.

In the 1940's interest was aroused in proposals for a regional or cooperative school in which several adjoining towns would join. The first of these tentative plans embraced the towns of Jaffrey, Marlborough, Troy, and Fitzwilliam. It never got beyond the proposal stage. A second proposal included Jaffrey and Peterborough and several other Hillsborough County towns as Cooperative High School District No. 2. A committee, consisting of Alfred S. Despres, Philip M. Darling, and Vernon J. Bean, worked simultaneously with the Conant High School Building Study Committee and made reports to the District. At the 1953 School District meeting the matter was decided. The vote was 602 to 194 against Jaffrey's becoming a member of Cooperative High School District No. 2.

With the way now clear for an addition to Conant High School, an adjourned meeting was held on March 16, 1953, when the voters empowered the Jaffrey School Board to acquire "by purchase or right of eminent domain such land as may be necessary and desirable for the site of the addition or annex to the Conant High School building at the location selected by the Building Committee." At this

meeting Mr. Despres offered a resolution that "the district raise and appropriate \$340,000.00 for the construction, equipment and furnishing of such an addition to and make alterations as necessary to the present High School and the acquisition of any real property that may be necessary for its location." The money was to be raised by an issue of serial notes or bonds upon the credit of the District. The School Board was entrusted to care for the details. And when the votes were tallied there were 617 "for" and only 8 "against" the motion, indicating that Jaffrey voters were determined to maintain their own school system. This attitude was underlined in 1967 when the whole town turned out to decide whether or not Jaffrey should join in a regional school in Peterborough. The proposal was turned down, 1121 to 384, which vote left no doubt as to the will of the townspeople, that Jaffrey should manage her affairs in her own way. Presently further necessary additions are contemplated at Conant High School.

At the March 16, 1953 meeting, the work and diligence of the Conant High School Building Study committee was duly recognized and a vote of thanks was accorded them for their excellent "report and dignified and able manner in which it was presented" to the voters and the clerk was instructed to spread the vote upon the records of the meeting. A vote of thanks and appreciation for their work was also extended to the Cooperative School committee for their services and likewise spread upon the records of the meeting. Both were thus released.

But to build a schoolhouse addition, there must also be an actual building committee and for this end the moderator was asked to name a building committee of three persons to work with and advise the School Board on the building, acquisition of land, and supervision of construction. Moderator Jason C. Sawyer named Alfred S. Despres, Carl C. Spofford, and James H. Fitzgerald, Jr., and at the request of the School Board Mr. Sawyer was retained as an honorary *ex officio* member of the building committee. To Mr. Despres, Mr. Spofford, and Francis E. Devlin of the Jaffrey School Board, fell the task of investigating available land and the details of its purchase. The Fitzgerald field adjacent to Conant High School was procured. This was originally a part of the former John Conant farm in the village, whose gift to the town formed the nucleus on which Conant High School was established. A small amount of land was procured from Charles L. Stratton, also bordering on the school land.

With the preliminaries worked out, Irving Hearsey of Durham, New Hampshire, was hired as the architect for the addition and, following the acceptance of the architect's plans, the L. J. Raymond Company of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, was awarded the contract for the construction. However, before the work was completed this company went into bankruptcy and the building committee found itself minus a building contractor.

With the opening of the fall term of school only weeks away, for a while it looked as if an undeterminable delay was facing the school authorities. Something had to be done immediately. Accordingly, the bonding company made a settlement to the Jaffrey School District. The work was completed under the supervision of the Jaffrey School Board.

When the school was finally completed in late fall of 1954, there was a surplus of \$17,000.00 remaining of the \$340,000.00 raised for the purpose of building the addition. This money was turned in to the general school fund on January 1, 1962.

Conant High School re-opened on September 27, 1954, three weeks late on account of the delay. Grades six through twelve were housed in the old part, with none of the new part yet available for use. On December 23, 1954, the teachers and pupils were able to move into the new addition and begin a normal school operation. This was a welcome relief for both, as through the spring of that year they had been subjected to the noise of the construction going on outside the building. In the annual school report for 1954, they were "congratulated for the fine cooperation shown during those rather hectic days."

CONANT HIGH SCHOOL DEDICATION

About four hundred townspeople and students attended the formal dedication of the new Conant High School addition on Sunday afternoon, January 30, 1955. During the exercises it was pointed out that this was one of the first several secondary school buildings erected since World War II. The main speaker was Dr. Austin J. McCaffrey, the State of New Hampshire Commissioner of Education. Other speakers introduced by Ernest J. Pratt, chairman of the Jaffrey School Board, included the Superintendent of Schools Lester B. Badger, and Paul Farnham, who was the education commissioner during the construction of the building and assisted in its planning. At this time he was State Director of Administrative Services. Chairman Pratt also presented the other members of the Jaffrey School Board and the members of the building committee.

Betty Belletete, president of the Student Council at Conant High School, welcomed the group. The Rev. Frank X. McMullen of St. Patrick's Church gave the invocation, and the Rev. Richard Stoughton, Jr., of the United Church said the benediction. The high school chorus sang two selections under the direction of Robert Prince, the music supervisor.

The new building was erected at a cost of \$340,000.00 and contains some twenty rooms, including a science laboratory, a home economics room, gymnasium, shops and music rooms. The new kitchen and lunchroom accommodate about three hundred persons. Several new departments were also added at this time, including physical education and guidance departments and automobile mechanics.

The building was due to have been completed in August, 1954, but due to financial difficulties of the contractor it was not occupied until just before the Christmas Holidays. At the time, with the remodeled original building and the new addition, the potential student capacity of Conant High School was placed at five hundred and fifty, while the actual enrollment was about three hundred, which included about thirty-seven tuition pupils, mostly from the town of Rindge, New Hampshire.

PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

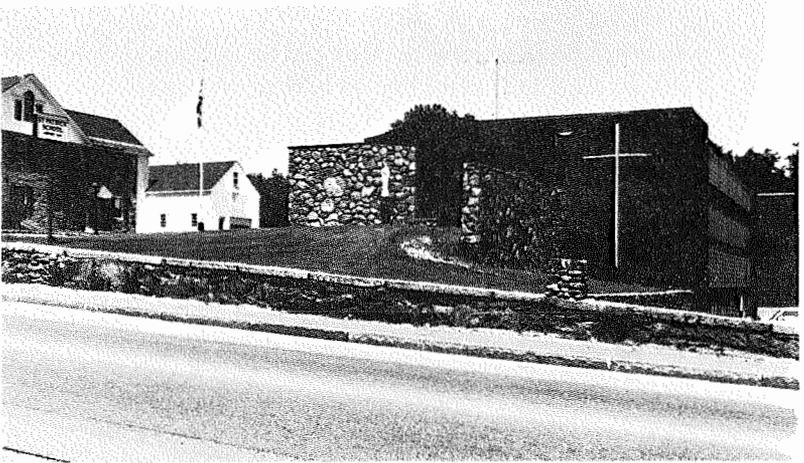
Private schools have figured at various times in the educational history of Jaffrey and today there is a parochial school, the second in the short history of parochial schools in the town.

OUR LADY OF MONADNOCK ACADEMY AND ST. PATRICK'S SCHOOL

The Rev. John A. McSweeney's dream, during his pastorate at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, was the establishment in the parish of an academy for girls of high school age. When the idea was presented to the parishioners, many of them pledged financial support and the school actually became a reality in 1951. The site for the school was already available through the purchase of the so-called "Stone House", now the convent, from Viggo Brandt-Erichsen some years earlier. On this property the parish built a one-story school building in 1950-51. It was a dream come true for Father McSweeney before he was transferred to another parish less than five years later.

Registration and entrance examinations were held on September

8, 1951, and on September 19th the school was formally opened with twenty charter members as the first freshman class. The academy, known as Our Lady of Monadnock Academy, was a regional day school for girls only. Its curriculum included courses designed for college preparatory, as well as the usual commercial and general courses. The school drew students from surrounding towns also, as far away as the city of Keene. Sister M. Roberta, A.M., was the superior.



ST. PATRICK'S SCHOOL

The academy continued as a functional part in the education of Jaffrey and out-of-town girls until 1961-62, when it was closed. After that the girls entered Conant High School, high schools in their respective towns and private schools in the New England area. In 1961-62 a change-over from secondary to elementary education was initiated. Under the new plan, the school opened in September, 1962, with the remaining thirty-two girls in the high school and twenty-nine boys and girls enrolled in grade one. The following year new third grade pupils, together with first grade pupils, were admitted. The school is now the eight-grade elementary school of the parish.

After the conversion from secondary to elementary level, an addition was built in 1961, during the pastorate of Rev. Lionel W. Boulay. The building now has eight classrooms to accommodate the eight grades. Additional rooms and facilities include a full size gymnasium, a library, remedial reading room, a TV room, and

cafeteria made in the kitchen fully equipped to accommodate three hundred persons, a principal's office, and nurse's room. The building was enlarged in 1966-67 to accommodate these additional rooms.

At the present time the school has a faculty of eight teachers, five of whom are members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The remaining staff members include two lay women and one lay man.

THE DARLING KINDERGARTEN

The importance and value of pre-school training of children became recognized realities in 1948 when Dorothea Hammond and Frances Forcier started a kindergarten, so far as known, the first such school in Jaffrey. From 1948 to 1951 they conducted the school at the Parish House, formerly the First Baptist Church edifice, and part of the time at Legion Hall. In 1951 Frances Forcier resumed teaching at the Jaffrey Grade School and was succeeded by Margherita Darling, sister of Dorothea Hammond. They formed a partnership and the Parish House continued to be the home of the school.

In 1953 Dorothea Hammond returned to teaching duties at the Jaffrey Grade School and her place was filled by Olive Christian. At this time the school became known as the Darling Kindergarten.

Following the completion of the United Church addition, the school acquired a room in the addition. In 1969 Olive Christian resigned and her place was filled by Frances Irvine, wife of the pastor of the United Church.

The attendance has gradually increased through the years from the original fifteen or eighteen boys and girls to about forty children. At present the school enjoys an enrollment of forty-three children. The increased enrollment reflects the growing appreciation by parents of pre-school training.