

CHAPTER X

CEMETERIES

THE OLD BURYING GROUND

As noted in Volume I, p. 705, of the *History of Jaffrey*, this cemetery was established in the summer of 1770. In 1784 a committee was appointed to lay out the cemetery. In 1778 a man named James French was chosen to be the sexton, and down through the years history has been recorded on the slate tombstones there. Today the cemetery is under the control of the Parks and Commons Department of the town of Jaffrey. The space available for future burials is minimal and limited to cremains only. The first of Jaffrey's cemeteries has just about reached its capacity. Those buried there are as varied as the people who have called Jaffrey their home—from the two humble graves of Amos Fortune and his wife Violet, whose tombstones have been copied and can be seen in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., world-renowned author Willa Cather, whose grave is visited by many each year, the second wife of locally famous stonecutter Viggo Brandt-Erichsen, clergy from vari-



The Old Burying Ground

ous denominations, scientists, physicians, well-known and wealthy business people, veterans of various wars, as well as Jaffrey's own average individuals who have no claim to fame.

SMALLPOX CEMETERY

It's not your usual cemetery. There are no longer any grave-stones, no flowers. "Every trace of memorial has long since vanished," wrote Albert Annett and Alice Lehtinen in *History of Jaffrey*, Vol. I, published in 1937. The remote site is the resting place of five men and one girl who died of smallpox in Jaffrey in the autumn of 1792. Through the efforts of P. Edward Deschenes and John Bryant, the Smallpox Cemetery was officially dedicated on Labor Day 1985.

The tiny cemetery is located on the Deschenes farm, about a 10-



Small Pox Cemetery

minute walk through the woods from Nutting Road. Until the renewed interest by Mr. Deschenes, it was a pathetically small stone-walled enclosure at one end of a cow pasture that had reverted to forest. Now a simple marker of native granite records the names of those whose bodies have lain all but forgotten for 193 years. The reason the site is so remote is that in

1792 smallpox was a scourge, and victims were put in isolation to prevent the disease from spreading to the healthy. The six were separated from society not only in life but in death. They were not laid to rest in an established cemetery, but in a new place set aside especially for them.

The Reverend Richard Smith, pastor of St. Patrick Church, do-

nated the granite slab which was found behind St. Patrick School. Norman "Red" Peard transported the heavy stone to Peterborough for the engraving and then back to Jaffrey and delivered it to the cemetery free of charge. John Kaufhold of Peterborough Marble & Granite Works did the engraving and discounted the cost. Jaffrey Boy Scout Troop #33 cut a path to the cemetery and have promised to maintain the site and decorate it with flowers.

Among the honored guests at the dedication were Gertrude Cleverdon of Peterborough, a great-great-great-granddaughter of Abel Wilder, who, ironically, never knew where her famous relative was buried; State Senator Jean White of Rindge, speaker; chairman of the Winchendon selectmen and master of ceremonies, Rayford R. Parker; Winchendon town historian Lois S. Greenwood; Winchendon selectman Burton E. Gould; Homer Belletete, a former Jaffrey selectman and historian; and members of Jaffrey's Boy Scout Troop #33. Because at least two Revolutionary War soldiers are buried there, the Jaffrey VFW and American Legion posts were represented by James Baird and J. Peter Bourque. Present also were members of the Deschenes family, who have never forgotten about the cemetery. They have stated that they do not plan to deed the cemetery to the town, but will keep it as private property that will not cost tax dollars to maintain. Altogether approximately 50 people witnessed the event.

A prayer was offered by the Reverend Richard Smith, a letter from Mrs. Paul Bridges of Keene, a descendant of Oliver Gould, was read, and Boy Scout Christopher Jaillet played taps.

The six smallpox victims, whose names are now permanently on the marker, are: Eliza Danforth of Amherst; Honorable Captain Abel Wilder, one of Winchendon, Massachusetts's most illustrious men; Revolutionary War soldier Oliver Gould, and 12-year-old Nancy Thorndike, both of Jaffrey; Enoch Thurber of Keene, age 23; and a Mr. Cambridge from Rindge.

As Jaffrey town historian, Alice Lehtinen, who viewed the marker at the site a few days before the dedication said, "This is quite a thing! I have always felt so bad about these people buried up there, especially little Nancy. She was only 12 years old. And poor Mr. Cambridge. They didn't even know his first name."

PHILLIPS CEMETERY

The Phillips Cemetery is also well documented in Volume I by Albert Annett and Alice Lehtinen. This cemetery has remained relatively unchanged since that writing in 1937. The only burial was that of Theron Champney in 1952 until Superintendent of Public Works Kenneth Saunders and Town Surveyor Roger Smith revised a plan of the cemetery in 1984, allowing for additional lots to be sold. These new lots were sold as soon as people learned about them. Thus the Phillips Cemetery was once again filled. In 1987 highway foreman Joseph "Rick" Forcier, Jr. established a new row of cremation lots some of which are still available.



Phillips-Heil Cemetery

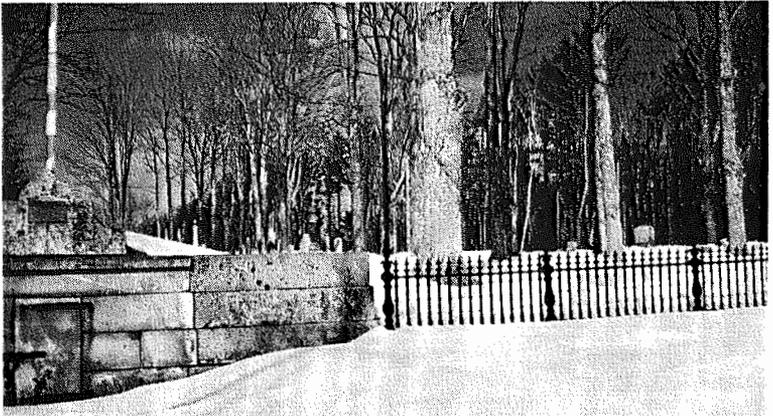
THE VILLAGE CEMETERY

This cemetery is commonly referred to as the Baptist Cemetery. No burials have taken place in this cemetery in recent history. The last recorded burial was in 1935. However, in 1986 interest in this cemetery was renewed by Robert B. Stephenson of Jaffrey Center, who, along with Selectman P. Edward Deschenes, began work on a restoration project. Inventory and recording of the families buried there began, along with repair work to some of the many broken tombstones. Boy Scouts from Troop 33 in Jaffrey were re-

cruited to cut and clear brush, and donations were sought to cover costs. On January 24, 1987, Mr. Stephenson presented the board of selectmen with a prospectus of a proposed monument from the Jaffrey Historic District Commission. Following this presentation and approval by the selectmen, work progressed very steadily but slowly until completion in 1996. An addition to Mr. Stephenson's original proposal, a flagpole, was erected and again, as in other town cemeteries, this was funded jointly by John Humiston American Legion Post #11 and Jaffrey Memorial Post #5613 VFW.

CUTTER CEMETERY

This cemetery, founded in 1836 and entrusted to the care and ownership of the town in 1927, is covered in Volume I of this history. Again town surveyor Roger Smith had the vision in 1976 to locate and make available to townsfolk new burial lots. Because many desired a burial lot in this cemetery, the new lots did not remain unsold for very long. The town again revised the map in 1987 and 1989, and of this writing no more burial lots are available. Credit must be given to Roger Smith for the repair and retooling of the cast-iron fence and gates that mark the entrance to this cemetery along Harkness Road. Mr. Smith handmade a wooden pattern and through connections with a foundry in Gardner, Massachusetts, copies of the original fence were cast and installed,



Cutter Cemetery

bringing the fence back to its original appearance. Most of the cost of this project was borne by Mr. Smith. In 1995 a veterans' memorial and flagpole were erected just inside and to the west side of the entrance. This project was funded jointly by John Humiston American Legion Post #11 and Jaffrey VFW Memorial Post #5613.

CONANT CEMETERY

As noted in Volume I of the *History of Jaffrey*, on June 17, 1860, Conant Cemetery was dedicated by the Conant Cemetery Association on land donated to the town by John Conant. Mr. Conant "fenced the new cemetery with a substantial picket fence supported by stone posts," and so well was the work done that even today the fence still stands as testimony to the workmanship. The pines that were planted back then are large trees today. Some have been toppled by winds, and others have branches missing because of the weight of winter snows or because of careful pruning by town work crews. In the late 1930s more land was acquired for expansion. This land became available following the hurricane of 1938. Trees that had been blown down were salvaged by Merrill G. Symonds, owner of the Bean & Symonds Box Company. After the trees were removed, the land was flattened and graded. This became the "new" section of Conant Cemetery. The cost of this expansion was borne by Mr. Symonds. The cemetery remained in this condition until



Conant Cemetery

the summer of 1992. Because of the continued growth of the community, more room was needed for additional cemetery lots. The area in the rear of the cemetery was targeted. Brush was cleared by town work crews, the land was graded, and new lots were surveyed. The town continues to upgrade conditions annually, pruning trees, replacing water lines and plumbing fixtures. Seeding and fertilizing are continuous projects. In 1994 the veterans' memorial, near the entrance, was restored with the help and financing of the John Humiston American Legion Post #11 and Jaffrey VFW Memorial Post #5613. The improvements consisted of replacing the flagpole, removing old evergreens and replacing them with rows of lilacs and forsythia. Conant Cemetery is maintained, as are the other cemeteries in town, by employees of the Parks and Cemeteries Department under the supervision of the Jaffrey Highway Department. As of this writing the cemetery supervisor is Janet "Peachie" Chalke. Previous supervisors have been George Davis, Harold Turner, Merrill Hill, Philip Tremblay, Leon Jackson and Ralph Harling.

Rules and regulations pertaining to town cemeteries were, for a time, almost nonexistent. The selectmen of Jaffrey, acting as Conant Cemetery trustees, adopted the only rules the town had on October 6, 1970. In 1991 then Town Manager Hunter F. Rieseberg, feeling the system lacked uniformity, saw the need for more structured rules and regulations. A committee was formed, consisting of Hunter F. Rieseberg, William Arthur, Charles Bacon, Janet "Peachie" Chalke, Randy P. Cournoyer, Jr., Joseph "Rick" Forcier, Jr. and Cynthia E. Hamilton. The general purpose of this committee was to develop and recommend a set of policies or guidelines that could be used to govern the cemetery operations in the town. After many meetings and reviewing regulations of other towns throughout the state, the committee submitted to the selectmen for their approval a very extensive set of rules and regulations. These rules were accepted by selectmen William G. Elliot, Peter B. Davis, and Jeanne L. LaBrie on February 10, 1993.

ST. PATRICK CEMETERY

The Reverend Patrick J. McEvoy, the founding pastor of St. Patrick Parish, purchased a piece of land on August 9, 1890, from

Arthur Blake for the sum of \$300. This land was named St. Patrick Cemetery after Reverend McEvoy's two successors were laid to rest there.



St. Patrick Cemetery

Over the next 100 years three other tracts of land were acquired. On March 10, 1942, the town of Jaffrey voted at the annual town meeting to convey to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester a parcel of land adjoining the present land of the Catholic cemetery and the United Shoe Machinery Corporation. This land contained approximately 1.6 acres and the cost was \$10. The second tract was acquired from David Vinal in 1963. The final portion was acquired for cemetery purposes from the town of Jaffrey for \$50 in 1965. This triangular piece of land, containing about one acre, brought the present size to approximately seven acres.

The cemetery is located on the south side of Route 202 across from Cheshire Pond, beautifully situated on a gently sloping hillside facing Mount Monadnock to the northwest. Access may be gained from Hillcrest Road by any of the three entrances. Care of the cemetery has always been under the jurisdiction of the pastor. In recent years the church sexton has been doing the actual work in the cemetery; however, the records of 1962 show that Albert Lambert and other retired men mowed the grass and maintained the cemetery for the amount of \$5.00 per lot for the entire summer (\$2.50 for two-grave lots). During the years between 1962 and 1965

the Reverend Lionel Boulay organized the project of improving the appearance of the cemetery. The land on the northerly side of the cemetery was leveled with earth brought in from the South Hill Road area of Jaffrey. Trucking was done by local contractors, with the majority of the work being done by Octave Bernier and Henry Belletete, both parishioners. George Sirois, another parishioner, donated the fieldstones from his property in Dublin. Hector Boudrieau, the sexton at the time, handpicked and transported the stones from Dublin to the cemetery. The mason work was done by a Benedetto Zanga from Peterborough while he was in the employ of a contractor named Oliver Blanchette, also from Peterborough. The costs were covered by funds raised by parishioners in various fund-raising events. The primary event was the weekly bingo games at the school gym that attracted people by bus loads from as far away as Fitchburg and Gardner, Massachusetts. Also there was the 100 Club, where men of the parish would collect \$1 each week from 200 people. The prize was \$100 and the church kept \$100. In September 1965 the perpetual care rates were increased to \$10 per year for a two-grave lot, and the cost of purchasing a cemetery lot was increased to \$62.50 per grave.

The most southerly land purchased, or the new section, was cleared and leveled by the sexton during 1968 and 1969. The cemetery remained in that state until 1985, when the Reverend Richard Smith sold sand and loam and leveled the new section. In 1991 the Reverend Richard J. Kelley contracted with the Given family, local stone masons, to continue the wall along Hillcrest Road. A new entrance road was also built at that time. The first burial in this new portion of St. Patrick Cemetery was for Robert Archambault in May 1992. Since 1994 there have been no new lots available in the old section. All lots being sold are in the new section.

During the summer of 1995, Randyl P. Cournoyer, Jr., along with the members of the Knights of Columbus and many parishioners who donated time and money, constructed a memorial dedicated to the "Sanctity of Life." St. Patrick Cemetery was only the fourth cemetery in the diocese to erect a pro-life monument. The stone work, on which the monument rests, was created and donated by John Given in memory of his father, Aylmer. A large granite altar was obtained from site of the former Queen of Peace Seminary in Jaffrey Center, transported, and rebuilt in the cul-de-sac

area in the rear of the new cemetery. Granite memorial benches were placed in front of the altar. Three wooden crosses given by Homer J. Belletete and a flagpole given by the John Humiston American Legion Post #11 and the Jaffrey VFW Memorial Post #5613 were installed. On September 23, 1995, Bishop Leo O'Neil dedicated the new altar. Many parishioners, area priests, and dignitaries were in attendance.

PHILLIPS-HEIL CEMETERY

During the summer of 1988, Jaffrey resident John Heil donated seven acres of land adjacent to the Phillips Cemetery to the town for cemetery expansion. He also donated enough land along the west side of the existing cemetery for a roadway into the new cemetery that has become known as the Phillips-Heil Cemetery. The Jaffrey Highway Department cleared and leveled the land. Roads were put in and lots were laid out by town surveyors Alfred Vorce and Norman Soney. New lots can accommodate both cremains and full casket burials. To date only a few lots have been sold, probably because this cemetery still remains relatively unknown because of its location. On any given day a visitor to the grave of a loved one might see deer or flocks of wild turkeys wandering the grounds. The first burial in the newly completed cemetery was that of Douglas McBride in July 1992. New access to both the Phillips and Phillips-Heil cemeteries is from the Fitzwilliam road, directly across from Raymond Burgoyne's driveway. During the summer of 1993 a veterans' memorial was erected in the cul-de-sac at the rear of the cemetery. A flagpole and plaque surrounded with granite curbing was installed as a lasting memorial to those veterans buried there. This memorial was funded by a joint effort of the John Humiston American Legion Post #11 and the Jaffrey VFW Memorial Post #5613.