

CHAPTER XIV

JAFFREY PUBLIC LIBRARY

"The library is the temple of learning, and learning has liberated more people than all the wars in history."

CARL TOWAN

The year 1974 saw the end of an era and the opening of a new chapter for the Jaffrey Public Library. Evelyn Ruffle, a longtime resident of Jaffrey, retired as librarian on April 25 after more than 30 years of dedicated service. Her replacement was Margaret Priest, a breath of fresh air from London, England, via New Zealand.

A teacher for 32 years, Priest loved children and quickly developed a rapport with Jaffrey's young library patrons. During her nine years as director, growth and involvement in children's programming mushroomed to include story times, reading programs, and visits by school groups to view the library's collection of Amos Fortune materials, often with author Elizabeth Yates as a guest. For several years, Priest arranged regular visits to borrow books for the students of both the Jaffrey Grade School and Saint Patrick School, neither of which had an adequate library at that time. In 1986 the Jaffrey-Rindge School District contributed money for electricity, heat, and a staff member to the Jaffrey Public Library, further acknowledging that it was indeed the Jaffrey Grade School's library, at least for a time, until the present grade school addition was completed in 1987.

Priest was also the first to see the need for and begin overseeing the adapting of the 1896 library structure for the modern age. Two renovations, one in 1976, which opened up new storage uses and a place for movies in the basement, and another in 1979, which created a children's library on the second floor as well as a librarian's office and an audiovisual room, were financed by a \$150,000 bequest from Lawrence and Josephine Wetherell. In 1980 the First Church of Jaffrey Center contributed \$5,450 for up-to-date audiovisual equipment.

Besides her major accomplishments with Jaffrey's children,

Margaret Priest reached out to the community at large by initiating the Jaffrey Public Library's participation in the annual Jaffrey Jubilee parade and by establishing a Friends of the Library volunteer group in April 1980, which became part of the state system of Friends of New Hampshire Libraries in November of that year. A yearly arrangement with the Jaffrey Woman's Club for a joint book sale means that every other year profits go to the library in exchange for the use of the club's spacious building for the sale. Upon her retirement in April 1983, library circulation had increased from 26,000 in 1974 to 40,000 in 1981.



Jaffrey Public Library

Cynthia E. Hamilton became the Jaffrey Public Library's director on Margaret Priest's retirement. A Jaffrey native with years of experience in libraries all over the United States, one of Hamilton's first changes was to acknowledge the need to further serve Jaffrey's children by hiring a full-time professional children's librarian in September 1983. Jeanne Hardendorff Burr, a published author of children's books, was the first to hold the position. She retired in September 1991. Kathy Berkley served as children's librarian from October 1991 to July 1994, Katrina Yurenka from August 1994 to August 1998, and Christine Tarrío from September 1998 to the present. Hamilton also broadened the library's involvement with local youth by starting an annual program of hiring a local high

school student as a summer worker and also by offering the library as a work experience for juvenile offenders through the Jaffrey Juvenile Diversion Committee's program.

Under Hamilton's direction, Jaffrey Friends of the Library became a more formalized group, taking a more visible place among those at the state level. She increased communication with the local business community with the library's charter membership in the Jaffrey Chamber of Commerce. In April 1985 "The Mill on Main Street," a joint venture of the chamber, the New Hampshire State Library, the New Hampshire Humanities Council, and the Jaffrey Public Library took place at the Jaffrey Mills, illustrating the director's talents for getting people to work together and cooperate with each other.

The most notable achievement during this 30-year period was the addition to the library. It would never have come to pass without the foresight and long-range planning of the library board of trustees chaired by Elizabeth B. Shea. Members during this time period were Frances X. Cheney, Charles H. Griswold, Jean B. Page, Frederick S. Richardson, and John J. Stone.

For several years the need for an addition had become increasingly evident. Bookstacks were full to bursting; there was no room to expand new collections that the public wanted, such as videos and audiotapes; and the entire building was in violation of federal handicapped laws.

It was not easy to raise the money needed in the recession-ridden 1980s, and the town of Jaffrey, while adequate in its funding of the library, had never been generous. A previous addition to the library, the Bean Reading Room, was privately funded in 1960. The first steps were small. There was already some money, a gift from the Boynton family. A federal grant for part of the construction was also obtained. The Friends of the Library purchased a strip of land that bordered the library from Virginia Quinlan, and on November 3, 1985, they presented it to the town for a library addition. The March 1986 Town Meeting voted \$7,500 for a feasibility study. John Jordan, architect, was hired to draw up plans. A bond issue for \$1,270,000 to fund an addition was defeated at the March 1987 Town Meeting. A community-wide building committee was formed chaired by Elizabeth B. Shea, chairman of the board of trustees. Members included the library trustees, the library di-

rector, Helen B. Krause, Katherine Ayers, Stella Pillsbury, Town Manager Donald Rich, selectmen Robert Chamberlain, Robert Mitchell, Franklin Sterling; Jeanne LaBrie, Richard Grodin, Steven Krause, advisor Bissell Alderman, and architect, John Jordan. The architectural plans were altered, but a \$1,000,000 bond issue was defeated in 1988. Once again the staff returned, discouraged and disheartened, to an inadequate and overcrowded building. The trustees asked Helen Krause to organize and chair a building fund committee to raise money to help offset the addition's cost. The committee consisted of Herbert Bixler, Patricia Cournoyer, Burgess Ayers, Christopher Bean, Stephen Krause, Homer Belletete, Claire Bean, Jean Page, Elizabeth Shea, Doris Richmond, Diane Schott, Ruthanne Fyfe, Thomas Brennan, Marc Tieger, and Charles Royce. Through their efforts and the generosity of the townspeople of Jaffrey, \$350,000 was raised in one year. The Friends of the Library sponsored an antiques auction on the library lawn, despite pouring rain, on Saturday, July 9, 1988, that raised \$21,000 for furnishings for the new children's area.

Town Meeting of 1989 saw the results of all the efforts by so many and the fulfillment of a dream. The bond issue for \$650,000 was passed, and work began immediately. Ground breaking was amid the snow flurries of April 10, 1989. R.M. Aho Construction of Nashua built the addition during that spring and summer. Saturday, October 28, 1989, was the day of the great move of the library's book collections to the new area of the library. After being closed for two weeks, the library reopened on November 13 with all operations in the new addition while the old building was closed off and renovated. Later in the winter operations resumed throughout the building. The library addition was formally dedicated in an outdoor ceremony and open house on a beautiful sunny day, Sunday, August 12, 1990.

With a larger building, the staff faced new challenges. In February 1990 the library was embroiled in issues of patron confidentiality when an officer of the Jaffrey Police Department used information from library book cards to further an investigation of alleged local satanic activity. The incident demonstrated that even a relatively small town is not immune to the questions and concerns of today. The new meeting room, available for such uses as high school equivalency classes and family mediation sessions for do-

mestic problems, shows the library tries to meet modern needs.

Computers for public and staff use arrived at the library in 1993. One specifically for Jaffrey's children was purchased with money donated in memory of the late Elspeth "Betty" Badertscher, a long-time and well-loved friend of the library. Dedicated to her memory on March 4, 1993, it was affectionately called "Betty" after her.

The staff comfortably settled into the larger building, continuing the commitment to daily quality service for the people of Jaffrey and getting ready for the future by preparing the collection for automation. Money for this purpose was left to the library in the wills of Rachel Evans and Betty Sisson. Bar coding began on Friday, September 8, 1995. This was the next big step in bringing the Jaffrey Public Library further into the Information Age.

On July 4, 1996, the library held a birthday party to celebrate 100 years of service in the Clay Library Building on Main Street. The festivities commenced in the morning with a performance by the Little Red Wagon, a theater group from the University of New Hampshire. The show was held outdoors on the Civic Center lawn. A large and responsive audience of children enjoyed the show and refreshments furnished by Friends of the Library.

Welcoming remarks were offered by John J. Stone, chairman of the library trustees. A representative from U. S. Senator Judd Gregg's office attended and read a letter from the senator. Dignitaries from the state library and the town attended. Afternoon activities were held indoors. A piano concert by Virginia Eskin was held in the Bean Room. Computers were set up to show that automation had arrived. Refreshments were served by the Friends of the Library in the Meeting Room.

In August 1996, Cynthia Hamilton retired after 20 years. The trustees conducted a thorough search and hired Joan A. Knight of Fitzwilliam to be the new director. Knight had previously worked at the Springfield Public Library and the State of Vermont. She completed the computerizing of the library card catalog, got the library on line, and increased interest in adult and children's programs.

In the 1998 town elections, Elizabeth B. Shea and Kevin Sterling were elected for three-year terms. The present board of trustees includes: Elizabeth B. Shea, chairman, Lyn Lambert, secretary, Patricia Cournoyer, treasurer, Frederick Richardson, and Kevin Sterling.

Finally, acknowledgement must be made of the library's tireless and hardworking staff and volunteers. Through the years their dedication has made the day-to-day running of the library a reality. Unusual in the library profession, the Jaffrey Public Library has been blessed with staff who stay a long time. Besides fund-raising, Friends of the Library members assist at the circulation desks, mend books, photocopy, sort and file catalog cards, help with inventory, organize magazines, decorate the library at Christmastime, and do countless other things. Valerie Forcier has shelved books on an almost daily basis since 1982. The late Marion Houghton was invaluable with publicity for the local newspapers, especially during the years of the campaign for the library addition. Her family will be donating annually to fund a program at the library in her memory. Thanks to all staff and friends, the Jaffrey Public Library stands ready to face the challenges of the 21st century.