

CHAPTER XXVI

UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

Vandals destroyed many of the grave markers and monuments at Conant Cemetery on April 14, 1976. The tall obelisk atop the huge white marble monument to John Conant, who died in 1877, and his wife, Mary, who died in 1858, was pushed over. The Brandt-Erichsen ceramic memorial to his wife Joan, who died in 1944, was destroyed. The memorial was done in soft greens, browns, and blues featuring small fawns, squirrels, a little dog, plant life, and toadstools. The vandals decapitated the fawns and toppled the monument. About 18 other grave markers bearing names like Warren, Newell, Upton, Deeth, Dutton, Smith, Pierce, Stearns, Sawtelle, and others were toppled, broken, or damaged. At the same time, 53 gravestones in the Baptist Cemetery were vandalized.

An oil spill into the Contoocook River was caused by vandals opening a valve between the fuel tank and the furnace at the Jaffrey Fire Protection Co. Over 100 gallons of oil seeped through the



*Crash at the corner of Main Street and
Route 202 South, October 3, 1997*

PHOTO BY BILL GNADE

foundation of the mill into the river, settling as a scum on Cheshire Pond. The June 13, 1978, vandalism cost the company over \$10,000 in cleanup expenses plus the deaths of several ducks and small animals at Cheshire Pond.

Heavy rains and falling leaves caused flooding, a power outage, and soil erosion the week of October 7, 1979. The flooding occurred on parts of Main, River, and Knight streets, Prescott Road, Hillcrest Circle, and in KK Village. While clearing a culvert pipe that was buried in sand, Department of Public Works truck driver Bruce Hautanen was sprayed by a skunk. Kenneth Saunders joked it was lucky that it happened at quitting time.

“Unbelievable” was the term used by Dominick Arceci to describe the ruins of his soft drink warehouse on Route 202. The roof collapsed due to the weight of heavy snow on January 31, 1982. Monadnock Beverage Co. distributed Cott, Canada Dry, R-C Cola, Diet-Rite, and Moxie soft drinks to stores in Cheshire and Hillsborough counties.

On Memorial Day weekend in 1984 about five inches of rain fell over the area causing local flooding and threatening to collapse the dams at Cheshire Pond and the Black Reservoir. Fortunately the dams held, but both remained in poor condition until the Cheshire dam was repaired in 1997.

Hundreds of dead fish were found in the Contoocook River downstream from the town sewer lagoons during the week of June 1, 1985. Kenneth Saunders of the Jaffrey Public Works Department did not believe the problem came from the dump or the sewer plant. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department determined that the fish died of lack of oxygen, probably caused by the illegal dumping of a toxic substance.

Hurricane Gloria in September 1985 caused the evacuation of several residences, especially mobile homes. A temporary shelter was opened at Conant High School for those residents who felt their homes might not survive heavy winds.

A black oily substance covering the water brought calls from residents on Gilmore Pond, Contoocook Lake, and Thorndike Pond. They were advised not to drink the water or to swim in it. Automobiles in town were discovered to be covered with a similar sooty residue. The July 27, 1986, mystery was solved by the State of New Hampshire when the source of the soot was found to be a

mountain of burning tires in Belchertown, Massachusetts.

An earthquake of 3.0 on the Richter scale shook the area at 1:16 P.M. on October 25, 1986, causing dishes to rattle and doors to open. It was followed by two aftershocks.

Over Thanksgiving Day weekend of 1987, it was discovered that over \$59,000 worth of Class B explosive shells had been taken from the Atlas Display Fireworks Co. They had been housed on Stratton Road and ranged in size from three to six inches. On Friday, December 11, 1987, the majority of the shells were discovered on a remote logging road in Sharon. The storing of the evidence caused a problem for the local police because there was a question of the best place to safely store them. It was decided to send them to a state police facility in Manchester. On April 29, 1988, an arrest was made in this theft.

On the same Thanksgiving weekend a "sting operation" run by state, local, and out-of-state narcotic agents resulted in the arrest of a Warner man in the parking lot of the Monadnock Shopping Plaza in Jaffrey. The arrest resulted in the confiscating of \$100,000 worth of marijuana, automatic weapons, and dynamite in the man's home in Warner.

Detective Robert Pelio of the Jaffrey Police Department was responsible for the apprehension of a suspect in a major burglary ring that was operating in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Detective Pelio had been working on the case since 1985 when he noticed similarities between several crimes. The report in the March 3, 1988, *Monadnock Ledger* stated that this was the largest ring (in terms of the numbers of places involved) in the state.

Conant High School students went on split sessions when a crack appeared in the walls of the science rooms and the Little Theater. The school was closed on January 16, 1989, and declared to be unsafe by Superintendent Larry Bramblett. The school remained on split sessions for about three weeks while the necessary repairs were made.

Jaffrey has had its share of weird ones. Someone stole a python from the Greystone Pet Supply store in mid-February 1989.

April 20, 1989, an explosion and fire at the Hadley Road pumping station of the Jaffrey sewage department left the unit temporarily disabled and resulted in sewage flooding the site. It is believed that a defective part contributed to the failure.

The real world came to Jaffrey on February 27, 1992, when four Conant students detonated a homemade pipe bomb in the men's room at the school. After an investigation by the Jaffrey Police Department and the New Hampshire State Police the four were arrested.

1993 saw a new type of disaster hit the area when many of the animals became infected with the rabies virus. Several raccoons and other small animals in Cheshire County were found to have the disease, and on June 17, 1993, Philip Tremblay was confronted by a rabid woodchuck that proceeded to chase him. A neighbor's dog attacked and killed the woodchuck that tested positive for the mid-Atlantic strain of rabies.

DEATHS

(Prior to 1970)

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Balfe of Dorchester, Massachusetts, drowned while on a fishing trip on Lake Contoocook. The September 3, 1933, drowning was ruled accidental.

Chief of Police Hubert O'Neil found Joseph Fontaine dead in his cell on January 9, 1936. Dr. Frederick C. Sweeney pronounced him dead by strangulation with the motive of suicide. He was believed to have been dead for several hours, but it had not been noticed due to the fact that there was a faulty light fixture in the cell. It was not until Chief O'Neil got a flashlight from Duncan's Drug Store that the death was discovered.

George Lagasse, 23, was killed and several other Jaffrey people were injured in an automobile accident near Ashby, Massachusetts, on June 12, 1937. The car turned over near the Willard Brook State Park, and Lagasse was thrown from the car.

Two young people died of carbon monoxide poisoning on December 5, 1937, while sitting in their car in Winchendon, Massachusetts. Bertha Cote, 17, of Winchendon and Harold F. Ellis, 21, of Jaffrey were due to marry in the spring.

A Sunday afternoon outing resulted in the death of the three-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Paradise on September 4, 1938. Little Edward Paradise was thrown to the ground while riding in a horse-drawn wagon with several other children. It is unknown what caused the horse to be startled and run away.

Friends and neighbors were shocked to hear of the accidental strangling of Emile Ouellette, 38, on June 24, 1942. Dr. Frederick C. Sweeney said that Ouellette either fainted or fell and the straps of his undershirt became tangled in the bathtub fixtures and, drawing tightly about his neck, had shut off respiration.

The members of the Jaffrey Fire Department were called out on October 14, 1953, to look for Peter J. Robidoux, 63, who was reported missing by his son, Peter. Robidoux's body was found in the field east of the L'Etoile place. Death was due to natural causes.

On Friday, December 11, 1953, Homer Ouellette, 30, was killed when an automobile went out of control on Route 124 near the Alfred Sawyer residence. He was riding in the rear seat when the door opened and he was thrown from the car.

A dreadful tragedy occurred in Jaffrey on Tuesday, March 23, 1954, when Gertrude Michaud Murby stabbed her five-month-old daughter to death. Mrs. Murby apparently carried the child, Anne Marie, to the bathroom where she stabbed her several times with a paring knife. She then returned the child to her bed. Mrs. Murby was due to be committed to the hospital in Concord for observation when the tragedy occurred.

A Jaffrey businessman was killed in a hunting accident in Colebrook, New Hampshire, on November 9, 1963. Leo A. J. Forcier, 36, co-owner of Forcier Brothers Market was killed when he was struck in the back by a bullet. The accidental shooting occurred when he collided with a hunting companion during a heavy rainstorm.

A three-year-old Jaffrey boy was crushed to death by a food delivery truck on Route 202. Larry John Sullivan, son of Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan Sullivan, was crossing the highway when he stepped into the path of a delivery van. The driver of the van tried to swerve to avoid the boy, but the truck turned over and the child was instantly killed. The accident occurred in March 1965.

A one-car accident on August 25, 1965, near the Rod and Gun Club property on Route 202 resulted in the death of Elizabeth B. LaPlante, 23. Mrs. LaPlante had lived on Cross Street in Jaffrey.

The deaths of two Franklin Pierce College instructors on December 20, 1965, were ruled accidental. The bodies of Peter Allan, 24, and John Sweeney, 31, were found in their rented cabin on Turnpike Road. They died due to carbon monoxide poisoning

caused by fumes from a gas furnace.

Jonathan L. Torrey, 25, was electrocuted on January 5, 1967, while he was repairing a loom at the Bean Fiber Glass Company. The freak accident was caused by a faulty grinder that was owned by the victim.

ALASKA TRAGEDY

(Submitted with family permission)

The town of Jaffrey was shocked on hearing of the deaths of three local men in a plane crash in the wilderness territory of the Yukon. David R. Sawyer, 47, and Alan Wheeler, 43, of Jaffrey, along with George Harmon, 52, of Munsonville were killed when their 1963 Piper 235 crashed into the Richardson Mountains in the Canadian Arctic on August 12, 1972.

The three men left Jaffrey on Sunday, August 6, planning to fly to St. John's, Newfoundland; Goose Bay, Newfoundland; Fobisher Bay on Baffin Island; Inuvik; Fort Yukon then across northern Canada to Barrow, Alaska.

Months of extensive planning had gone into the trip, and the routes had been laid out with the help of the Canadian Pilots Association. David Sawyer, owner and operator of Silver Ranch Airport, and George Harmon, a Delta Airlines captain, were both experienced pilots. Alan Wheeler, a survival expert certified by the New Hampshire Board of Education to teach individual and family survival, was in charge of their survival gear and equipment.

The flight left the airport in Inuvik, Canada, and disappeared shortly afterward. The plane was found at the 4,000-foot level of the Richardson Mountains, in one of the most rugged and unexplored areas of North America.