

CHAPTER V

JAFFREY SCHOOLS

“To furnish the means of acquiring knowledge
is the greatest benefit that can be conferred
upon mankind”

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Education of young people has always been a top priority for Jaffrey citizens. In the late 1960s the town faced some old, familiar pressures as well as new ones when it came to providing a sound and equitable education for young people facing greater competition for jobs in an ever more technical and specialized workplace. Given such diverse issues as population growth, budget constraints, state and federal mandates, and even the alarming reality of the availability of illegal drugs, Jaffrey citizens continued to come together to study, debate, and ultimately, vote on how best to educate their children.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JAFFREY-RINDGE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

At a special meeting on October 25, 1967, voters rejected an annexation proposal to join nine other towns in the Contoocook Valley Cooperative District (Conval). This was not the first time the town had voted to retain local control over the education of its children. With population figures on the rise and the 10-year accreditation of Conant High School scheduled to take place in 1970, plans were drawn up to anticipate needs and steer town schools in a new direction. A Jaffrey newspaper reported in January 1968, “at the present rate of growth,” the two empty rooms at the grade school would soon be filled. That same year it was reported that the population of Rindge had doubled in the last seven years. In response to predictions of regional growth, a study committee of concerned citizens began meeting to come up with options to present to the school board, who would then turn to the voters with a plan. On April 17, 1968, voters agreed to pay \$21,000 for educational

consultants and an architect to devise a plan for the renovation and expansion of Conant High School.

After a special meeting and vote held on May 12, 1969, Jaffrey voters cast 222 ballots (186 in favor, 35 against, and 1 blank) to form a new cooperative school district with the town of Rindge, which had been paying tuition for its students to attend Conant High School. On March 9, 1970, Jaffrey voters agreed to convey to the Jaffrey-Rindge School District, by quitclaim deed, the Jaffrey Grade School and Conant High School, together with the contents thereof, and all land owned by the district, as well as any cash on hand. Under the new district plan, the building that had been Conant High School was expanded and became Jaffrey-Rindge Middle School, and a new building for the high school was constructed. Architects of the project were Haynes, Lioneck and Smith of Fitchburg, Massachusetts. The contractor was Connecticut Valley Construction Company of North Springfield, Vermont. Citizens on the building committee were School Board Chair Daniel Shattuck, Philip Cournoyer, Anne Gordon, Bernard Hampsey, Conant High School Principal Alvah Niemala, David Sawyer, Jaffrey-Rindge School Board Chair John Weidner, Alan Wheeler and Patricia Wheeler.

A new Conant High School was proudly dedicated on September 9, 1973, before a standing-room-only crowd of students, citizens, and local and state officials in the Ernest J. Pratt Auditorium. It is built, appropriately, on land sold to the district by the Fitzgerald family, land that had once been part of John Conant's village property. In the late 1800s John Conant had bequeathed funds for Jaffrey schools and scholarships. His portrait hangs in the lobby of Conant High School, and his grave is in Conant Cemetery on Stratton Road.

In 1990, after serious flaws were discovered in the construction at the high school and middle school, the district spent approximately \$1.8 million to make needed repairs and for new construction to expand areas of the buildings that had already been outgrown.

In the 1990s public discussions are being held on building a new state-of-the-art high school and technical center on land owned by the school district and located near the Jaffrey-Rindge town line on Route 202.

SAU #47

In 1987 the Jaffrey-Rindge School District, in an effort to maintain local control over education, voted to have its own Supervisory Union, SAU # 47, which until then included ConVal, and has since been responsible for hiring its own administrators, lobbying for its own concerns at the state level, and complying with all state mandates. The SAU #47 offices are located in the downtown renovated Jaffrey Mills building. Superintendents have been: Raymond G. Edwards, William C. Page, Robert J. Reidy, Jr., Larry R. Bramblett, John Wheeler, Jules D'Agostino, and Vincent F. Simone.

The cost of education grew tremendously from 1968 to 1998. The town of Jaffrey spent approximately \$650,000 to educate its children in fiscal year 1969-70. By 1979 the school budget, shared with Rindge, was approximately \$2,000,000. In fiscal year 1998-99 the school budget is \$11,339,000.

JAFFREY GRADE SCHOOL

In 1973 Jaffrey public schools for the first time offered kindergarten to a growing number of young citizens. Prior to that time, parents who wanted to provide a kindergarten experience for their children paid tuition at a private school.

Classroom expansion and renovation to the grade school hous-



Jaffrey Grade School

ing kindergarten through fifth grades was completed in 1987. The cost to the district for work in Jaffrey and work at Rindge Memorial School by MacMillin Company of Keene was over \$5.5 million. In 1989 the grade school's multimedia center opened. By 1997 the school library held more than 760 volumes. There is a full-time media generalist. The circulation and cataloging system has been automated. There are computer-accessible reference materials as well as printed and audio-visual materials.

Annual events included a Halloween parade around the block from River Street to Main Street to School Street. Students and teachers dressed in costumes. Everyone turned out to watch. There was also a field day each June at Humiston Field. Winter events included skating parties at the Humiston rink. For many years Memorial Day has been celebrated with a program at the park in front of the Jaffrey Public Library. The music teachers from St. Patrick School and the grade school plan the musical program. This tradition continues.

The 1998 Artist-in-Residence at the grade school was professional filmmaker Huey Coleman. He gave 75 fourth graders the task of creating a film depicting Jaffrey's history. The teachers involved were Linda Barlick, Andrew Chapman, and Nancy Springfield. Students researched town history, interviewed residents, and visited landmarks to get background information. Mr. Coleman taught the students how to make a film from beginning to end, including writing scripts, creating artwork, using film equipment, and editing. The 15-minute film, "Monadnock, the Heart of Jaffrey," was done entirely by the children. It was written from Monadnock's perspective, showing how the mountain has seen the town change over the years. It includes animation, interviews, and filming of our town. Areas of focus include Amos Fortune, Hannah Davis, the Dean farm murder, the Little Red School House, Mount Monadnock, and historic buildings in Jaffrey. Students and teachers not only enjoyed filmmaking, but they are very proud of their final production that portrays Jaffrey's beauty.

In 1998 there were 403 students and 19 classroom teachers at Jaffrey Grade School carrying on a tradition of learning. Since Volume III of the *Jaffrey Town History* was published, many devoted teachers, administrators, and citizens concerned with education have retired or died. Without these caring communicators to

implement decisions made by the voters, Jaffrey schools would not have flourished. Grade School principals have been: Clayton Craig, Ralph Leonard, John Cornellier, John Moeller, Ruth-Ann Barr, and Susan L. Shaw-Sarles.

The crossing guards helping children cross at the corners of Main and River, and Main and School have been Bertha Bourque (20 years), Elaina Del Rossi, Lois Hartwell, David O'Neil, Arlene Dodge, Dominick Arceci, and Frank Gemborys.

JAFFREY-RINDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

The middle school includes grades six through eight and has been located in the Conant High School building since the early 1970s when the cooperative school district was established. In 1990 the middle school hosted a 75th anniversary of their building that had originally been Conant High School. Students, faculty, and townspeople worked together on a series of educational projects highlighting the history of the building and the people who taught and learned there over the years. Three hundred fifty people attended the Diamond Jubilee Ball, an anniversary quilt was made by the eighth grade home economics class, and the plan was to bury a time capsule to be opened in 2015 on the 100th anniversary of the building. From funds collected at the time, an alumni fund



Jaffrey-Rindge Middle School

was begun. Members of the 75th anniversary committee were: Margaret Bean, Homer Belletete, Thomas Brennan, Margaret Davieau, Juliana Getty, Gloria Kaminski, Helen Krause, Lynn Lambert, Norman Lambert, Jerilyn Pennell, Bonita Plouffe, Robert Potter (Chairman), Alice Stearns and Dennis Wright.

Principals have been: Richard Sawyer, Ralph Leonard, Jane Bergeron, Robert Potter, and Timothy Woodward.

CONANT HIGH SCHOOL

Students moved into the new Conant High School in the fall of 1973. There were three technology areas: Graphic Arts, Distributive Education, and Horticulture. The new Graphic Arts area was dedicated to Alan Wheeler; a theater was dedicated to David Sawyer.

In 1989 the high school had split sessions with the middle school while the Conant building was closed for structural repairs. High school students went to the middle school in the morning until noon; the middle school students attended classes from noon until 4:00 P.M.

Conant students have been competitors in statewide and national contests recognizing academic and sporting excellence. Whether playing on a team or competing as individuals, Jaffrey's young people have excelled. Conant teams won state championships in girls' basketball in 1985 and 1986; boys' basketball in 1985 and 1998; and in boys' track and field in 1996, 1997, and 1998. Track



Conant High School

and field champions have included Allison Dall, biathlon; Erik Keating and Jill Cournoyer, javelin; Mara Lamoureaux, Melissa Blackwell, and Scott Roy, hurdles; Joseph Boisvert, Yarrow Wright, Douglas Spafford, Kathrine Marlowe, Zachary Wright (All-American five times in four different categories!), Kristen Spafford, Emily Drew, Karen Prindle, Kirsten Young, Rachel Walker, Michelle Corcoran, Beth Belletete, Andrea Deschenes, Jeremy Caron, Adam Lapham, Andrew Marceau, Robert Wooster, Andrew Robblee, Michael Tenters, Sarith Reth and Jereaux Stewart, running; John McElroy, long jump; and Jon Farmer, high hurdles. Frank V. Wright V (Conant's first All American) and his brother Zachary Wright were champion cross-country skiers. Frank Wright IV (father of Yarrow, Zachary, and Frank V) was honored as state coach of the year in 1992, 1997, and 1998.

Students have participated in the French and Spanish national exams, Envirothon, Physics Olympics, Odyssey of the Mind, Granite State Challenge, Special Olympics, and Family Career Community Leaders. In the mid 1980s, Doris and Charles Richmond and others began Youth Reaching Out, a program enabling student leaders to assist other high school students and their families to cope with the social and economic challenges they were facing. Funds were raised for the group to attend a national conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The students were honored to be chosen to present a workshop on "Kids & Drugs" for 2,000 conference attendees. From 1986 to the present, Conant students have competed in "The Granite State Challenge," academic teams competing against other New Hampshire high schools on PBS Channel 11 in Durham. The first team was comprised of Alexis Smith, Stephanie Tilton, Rachel Gallup, Jennifer Richardson, Melody Lawn, and Jessica Devlin. This team made it to the Super Challenge, being one of two finalists in the state.

In the early 1980s Beatrice Corriveau and Ann Brown, two English teachers, started a grades 9-12 Honors English Program at Conant High School.

Advanced Placement Calculus was the first advanced placement level course, followed by French and English.

During the spring of 1981 the Conant High School Band, under the direction of David Taylor, performed at Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Conant students took first place in the New Hampshire Physics Olympics in 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1995. Students in the 1980s to mid-1990s won many awards in the National Latin exams.

The Shakespeare Festival for all SAU #47 students began in 1992 with a grant from the Jaffrey Chamber of Commerce Pride Award. It is held every year at the Old Meetinghouse.

There were a variety of musicals over the years such as *The Sound of Music* (1982), *The Wiz* (1983), *Brigadoon* (1987), and *Cinderella*.

In 1997 Katherine Ramey placed first in the National French exam. Conant High School placed first in the state in French. Students were honored from 1992 on for having placed first, second, and third in the state competition. In 1998 10 students were honored at the annual state banquet for their excellence.

CONANT GREENHOUSE

In 1997 a new polytunnel greenhouse was erected at Conant High School. Donated by Ecological Engineering Associates of Marion, Massachusetts, the greenhouse had been used for a pilot waste-water treatment plant. The structure allows students to run horticultural experiments.

The graduating class at Conant High School in 1970 included 54 students of whom 51 percent went on to further their education. In 1998 the graduating class numbered 81 with 60 percent going on to higher education.

Principals at the high school have been: Joseph LeBlanc, Vincent Gallucci, Alvah Niemela, Keith Burke, Thomas Brennan, Roxanne Fox, and Joseph Hayes.

ST. PATRICK SCHOOL

Enrollment in Jaffrey's Catholic parochial school has grown since the late 1960s to its present enrollment in 1998 of 184 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. There is one classroom for each grade with one teacher per classroom. Since 1980 the teaching staff has included lay people as well as the Sisters of Mercy. Private tuition costs have risen over the years. Support comes from parents, parishioners, and regular fund-raising events. Students in seventh and eighth grades take math, science, and physical educa-



St. Patrick School

tion classes at the Jaffrey-Rindge Middle School. Students at St. Patrick are “encouraged to make a deep personal commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church” while striving for the “highest possible standards of academic and religious education.” In 1997 a “field of dreams” was created for students when an area of land behind the school and convent was cleared of trees to make room for an athletic field. Principals have been: Sister Mary Bernadette, SSND; Sister Catherine Feeney, SSND; Ann Royce; Sister Lorraine Trombley, RSM; Sister Marie McCarthy, SSND; Michael Ouellette; and David O’Connell.

SAND BOX NURSERY SCHOOL

Sand Box Nursery School opened its door to 15 four-year-olds in September 1970. Frances Irvine (whose husband was then minister of the United Church of Jaffrey) and Patricia Wheeler held the school on the ground floor of the church building three days a week, running a licensed preschool program. In 1972 Frances moved away and Jean Hampsey took her place. The enrollment increased, and Sand Box offered a two-day and three-day program for 16 children. The school’s goal is to prepare children for kindergarten by teaching them to recognize letters, numbers, colors, and shapes; to use scissors, paste, and do art projects; to sit quietly for music and stories. Jean and Patricia are still teaching at Sand Box. Many of the children are now second-generation Sand Boxers, which speaks highly for the teachers. There are still two groups of 16 children, and in September 1998 the school began its 29th year

at the United Church.

ADVENTURES IN LEARNING PRESCHOOL

Adventures In Learning Preschool was begun by Judith Sawyer in the fall of 1990 in the home she shares with her husband, Lee, and their family. It is a state-licensed program for 12 children ages 3-6 years old. The program consists of a hands-on approach to learning with an emphasis on self-help and social skills. It provides a comfortable and caring environment where a child is free to grow to reach his or her full capabilities through social contacts and age-appropriate developmental learning. The hillside farm setting, complete with beef cattle, pigs, chickens, rabbits, guinea hens, hayfields, and Christmas trees, provides children with the advantage of a close-up look at agriculture and the vanishing rural life that is so closely tied to our history and heritage.

VICTORY HIGH SCHOOL

Victory High School is an alternative high school accredited by the state of New Hampshire and located in Jaffrey. It was founded by Lorna J. Letourneau who is the current principal. It includes students in grades 9-12 who wish to complete their high school education. In the fall of 1998 45 students were enrolled.

HOME SCHOOLING

For a variety of reasons, some Jaffrey parents have chosen to educate their children at home. According to state law, a curriculum must be followed and student portfolios must be evaluated. Homeschoolers registered with the local SAU numbered six in 1998.

HEAD START

On October 5, 1998, Head Start reopened at its new facility on Oak Street. It is a comprehensive preschool development program for children of low-income families. There are 16 children enrolled in the half-day program.