

GOLD DISAPPEARS FROM JAFFREY POST OFFICE

By Robert Stephenson

SOMETIME after 5 p.m. last Friday a quantity of gold was removed from the Jaffrey Postmaster's office by a crack team of citizens bent on public good. Few words were uttered, they just got on with the job. Insiders opened the door, the team slipped quickly in, and the gold in question slipped just as quickly out.

The heist of the century? Not at all. Just the newly restored and re-gilded weathervane being positioned for re-installation. Bob guided his mammoth platform lift into place; Walt was suited up and ready for action; Bill, Gail and Rob had cameras poised; Dick gave the Historical Society's blessing; Ken wrote a check; Allen looked on with interest; and two kids on bikes couldn't figure out what the heck was going on.

Let go back in time a bit: Last November, the weathervane atop the Jaffrey Post Office was taken down and whisked away to Walt's Signs for radical surgery. The years had taken their toll. There was rust and deterioration, and something needed to be done. Few coming and going to deal with postal matters looked up at the dingy and discolored vane. And even fewer knew the story.

It had once stood many feet higher on the very summit of the old Baptist Church which until 1968 was a Jaffrey landmark standing just to the west of the Post Office, between it and the house which for many years was owned by Mildred Cutter. In fact, as the church was being dismantled, the Post Office was rising. The church's belfry was put on a trailer and taken off to Concord, Massachusetts. (It still stands, but it's now in nearby Acton. The cornerstone is on the green in front of the Post Office. The Paul Revere bell is in the United Church. The granite steps form the

entrance to the War Memorial Park. And the Hannah Davis memorial window is in the Historical Society.)

And the weathervane ended up on the new Post Office. Exactly how and through whose efforts are unclear.

When it became obvious that some maintenance if not restoration was called for, exploratory investigations were undertaken. It turned out that the cupola above which the vane stands had no access, either from below or from the roof. There was no apparent way of getting the thing off. So that's what prompted the first appearance of Bob's platform lift. The vane was sawed off and the seven-inch stub was visible above the cupola from November until Friday.

The vane was transported to Walt's Signs and through the winter slow though steady progress was made. The wood ball was stripped and stabilized with epoxy. Old rusted bolts were replaced. Deteriorated steel strips were removed and new steel fashioned. All the surfaces were sanded. In the process it was learned that not only were copper and steel used but also cast aluminum, suggesting that this was not the vane's first major repair.

Priming came next, followed by sizing, then the fun part for Walt: applying the gold leaf. A good deal of the over \$2,000 in costs went for that gold.

Once all was finished, the weathervane was brought back to the Post Office and for several weeks was on display behind the counter. A week or so ago it was moved into the Postmaster's office where it awaited the big day. And last Friday was that day.

The weathervane restoration project was sponsored and supported financially by the Jaffrey Historical Society with the encouragement of TEAM Jaffrey and the cooperation of the staff of the Jaffrey Post Office. Additional support came from the Terra Nova Trust, a fund of the NH Charitable Foundation. Among those who worked to bring the project to a successful conclusion:

*Walt Hautanen (first and foremost) – sanding, painting, gilding.
Brad Winters – metal fabrication and welding.*

*Arnold Baldwin – machining the sleeve that holds the vane.
Bob Mesrobian (RWM Painting of Hancock) – platform lift.
Rob Stephenson – coordination.*

Any readers who would like to help defray the cost of the restoration may send a tax-deductible donation to the Jaffrey Historical Society at 40 Main Street, Jaffrey NH 03452.