

## Meetinghouse.

*Source:* VIS minutes unless otherwise indicated

Restoration 1922

Restoration 1991

“The restoration of the Meeting House in 1922 was a major undertaking in which the V.I.S. collaborated with the Town. The services of Allen W. Jackson, of Cambridge, were engaged. Mr. Jackson was an architect well known for his restorations of historic buildings in New England. In 1870 the original design of the Meeting House had been radically altered to provide two floors, Town Hall above and school below. It was not long used as a school, and after 1914 was no longer used for Town Meetings. Under Jackson’s direction, Mr. Cann rebuilt the hall along the lines of the early building.”  
(*Source:* VIS Booklet)

“In 1922 the question came up of restoring the greatly respected Town Meeting House, generally called the Town House. This building had served the town as a Congregational Church for 69 years, until its congregation divided into three parts, Congregational, Universalist, and Baptist. The two latter groups built churches themselves in East Jaffrey. The Congregationalists used the building until 1831, when they built the brick meeting-house across the Common. The old Church was later made into a two story building, the upper part for use as a Town Hall, the lower story for a High School. Both these uses were later given up, and when the V. I. S. was formed, it was used only for occasional entertainments.

Mr. Albert Annett, a public spirited citizen of East Jaffrey and an honorary member of the V. I. S., persuaded the Town Meeting to vote \$3000 toward the restoring of the Old Meeting House on condition that the V. I. S. raise the remainder of the sum necessary, and develop and carry out the restoration. This the Society agreed to do. It engaged Mr. Allan W. Jackson, the well known Cambridge architect, whose beautiful restorations of Colonial buildings were well known, to make the plans, and Mr. B. F. Cann, Jaffrey’s able carpenter and builder, and Vice President of the V. I. S., to do the work. Mr. Arthur J. Young acted as Treasurer. The money, between eight and ten thousand dollars, was raised, and the work beautifully done in time for the reception, connected with the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Town, on August 17, 1923.”  
(*Source:* Town History)

“For many years the V.I.S. was responsible for maintaining the interior of the meetinghouse. Early on, furnaces were installed, repaired, or replaced; chimneys destroyed in the 1938 hurricane were rebuilt in 1939; water and sewer connections were made; stage lights were installed; new benches and window blinds were provided. More than once the V.I.S. has repaired and/or repainted parts of the meetinghouse clock and weather vane. In 1972 the interior was completely repainted, a new velvet stage curtain was hung, and the Amos Fortune Forum committee generously donated the attractive brass chandeliers that hang there still. In the 1993 restoration a railing, designed by David

Torrey in keeping with the historical character of the building while conforming with the modern requirements for safety, was installed around the balcony. Then V.I.S. members, gathered together by Patricia Strauss, president, had a painting bee to apply two coats of paint to the hundreds of spindles required for the railing. Other members installed and painted a railing on the outside of the meetinghouse to aid the disabled using the entrance ramp.”

*(Source: Town History Vol 4)*

“1985 brought the discovery that the windows in the Meetinghouse were disintegrating, so the V.I.S. held a benefit that raised \$7,800. The windows were removed, expertly repaired, and replaced.”

*(Source: Town History Vol 4)*

“Last of all, the work of restoring the Old Town Meeting House was undertaken. The original beauty of the interior has been restored; and the building has been made safer than it was with the former single exit, steep staircase and turn at the bottom. The building is now safe and beautiful. The town made a generous contribution to the expense; but money is still needed by the Society for the completion of the work.”

*(Source: Sesquicentennial Booklet)*

### **“Jaffrey's Restored Town Hall**

This dignified old building, which stands on Jaffrey's Common, and whose beautiful spire is a landmark for miles around, has had a varied history. Built for a meeting house within three years of the founding of the town, it served as a church for many years, and the memory of its beautiful gallery, high-backed pews and tall pulpit still lingers in the minds of our older citizens. When scisms arose in the church the several factions used the building for a time on alternating Sundays, but this arrangement soon proved unsatisfactory and was given up. After 1844 the building was not used as a church.

Later, when the town realized the need of a High School, this building was pressed into service. The fine old pews, pulpit and pointed window were taken out and disposed of, the building was divided into two stories, the location of the door changed, thus destroying the symmetry of the South facade, and the upper room was sheathed in yellow pine. When the work was completed every vestige of the early beauty and dignity of the building was gone.

The building served for a term of years both as a High School and as the Town Hall. But as the town grew, East Jaffrey gained in population more rapidly than Jaffrey Center, so a few years ago the town meetings were moved to East Jaffrey. Since then the old building has been used only for occasional entertainments.

The Village Improvement Society, which since its formation in 1906 has been an important factor in improving and beautifying the town, conceived the idea late in the summer of 1921 of restoring as much of the original beauty and dignity of the interior of this historic old building as is consistent with its present uses, and of accomplishing this, if possible, before the sesqui-centennial anniversary of the founding of the town.

It seemed a very large undertaking for this small Society, and there were sceptics who doubted its possibility. But faith can move mountains, and the Society set to work with high hopes. Friends of the undertaking placed the matter before the Town Meeting in March 1922, and at a special meeting called in the following June \$3000 was generously voted for the restoration.

Contributions were received from former residents of Jaffrey from places as far distant as Paris and Kansas City. The summer colony gave generously as well as many permanent residents. The V.I.S. worked hard for the fund, giving a series of delightful entertainments for its benefit, and by the autumn of 1922 enough money was in sight to authorize beginning work on the building. Mr. Allan W. Jackson, a Boston architect, whose buildings are famous for their beauty, was engaged to make the plans, and Mr. B. F. Cann, the well known builder of Jaffrey who is a vice president, of the V.I.S. had charge of the work, which is now completed. The gallery has been restored; the lovely painted window which was over the pulpit, was discovered in a hen-house in the village and has been put back into its original place; the little oval window in the belfry, through which the bell-ringer watched for the coming of the preacher from the Old Manse across the green, has been replaced. The quaint old wrought-iron latch which graced the door of Mr. S. C. Nightingale's beautiful home on the Mountain road, was most generously given by her to the V.I.S. and is now back in its place on the south door, which has been put back in its original position. Two graceful stairways lead to the balcony; the steep old staircase with a turn at the bottom, formerly the only exit and a very dangerous one in case of fire, has been removed, and the hall now has three exits on the ground floor. It is as safe as such a hall can be made, and it is pronounced by competent critics to be one of the most beautiful small halls in New England.

A fine stage with four excellent dressing rooms, footlights, spot-lights, etc., has been arranged, and plans for a dramatic entertainment to help defray the remaining indebtedness on the building, are already underway.”

*(Source: The Annals. Newspaper clipping)*

“Correspondence

Jaffrey

### **FINANCIAL CONDITION OF V.I.S.**

To the Editor of the TRANSCRIPT:

Those of your readers who have followed the work of the Village Improvement Society in restoring the Jaffrey Town Hall, may be interested to know something of the financial side of the undertaking. To the sum of \$2300 voted at Town Meeting from the town treasury, and \$700 given from the accrued interest of the Conant Fund, the V.I.S. has already added and expended \$5600 with the result that the people of Jaffrey own today one of the most beautiful small halls in New England. This sum of \$5600 is to date the Society's largest gift to the town. It was necessary for the Society to borrow \$2000 at the beginning of the summer to pay for the completion of the work, but owing to the generous donations and the financial success of the entertainments given by the Society, all but \$600 of this sum has already been raised.

The V.I.S. has had constantly in mind the winter needs of the community, and several hundred dollars have been expended in installing a system of plumbing which can be used in the winter without danger of freezing.

The stoves formerly used in the hall are to be set up for the winter in such a position that their heat will be well diffused, the nearby woodwork being carefully protected from injury by zinc covering. The question has arisen whether a high ceiled building like the Town Hall can be adequately heated by stoves. Many buildings of this type throughout New England are still heated in this way, and as the Town Hall is now rarely used in the winter except for dances, it is thought this method of heating will prove satisfactory. If these stoves prove too small after trial, larger ones can be installed later.

The introduction of a furnace has been carefully considered but the opinion of several men of experience and judgment, who have been consulted, is that there would be considerable danger to the building from the furnace becoming overheated.

The fittings for the stage are not yet complete, but these will be procured as soon as the money can be raised.

This building owned by the people of Jaffrey, is for public use and enjoyment. It is hoped that those who use it will exercise care to preserve it from injury, especially from danger by fire.

The Village Improvement Society hopes soon to undertake the improvement of the ground immediately about the Hall, as the dignity and historic interest of the building make it worthy of a beautiful setting.

MRS. B. L. ROBINSON

President of the V.I.S., Jaffrey.”

(*Source:* The Annals. Transcript clipping)

#### **“THE ANNIVERSARY EXERCISES**

The Old Town Meeting House was filled on Friday afternoon for the Anniversary Exercises. Mrs. B. L. Robinson, as president of the Village Improvement Society, was in the chair, and opened the meeting with an account of the work accomplished in restoring the hall to its present condition.

Mrs. Robinson said, in part:

ADDRESS BY MRS. B. L. ROBINSON

PRESIDENT OF THE JAFFREY VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

WE have gathered here today with a double purpose--to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of the town of Jaffrey and to celebrate also the restoration of this beautiful building and its rededication to community uses. It is wholly fitting that these two events should be celebrated at the same time, as the history of this building is closely interwoven with the history of the town from its very beginning. In early New England communities the first great interest, after the problems of food and shelter were to some degree solved, was the founding and maintenance of a place of worship. Jaffrey was, in

this respect, a typical New England town, for within one year after the town was incorporated in 1773 this building was planned and its construction was undertaken shortly after.

The surrounding country was a wilderness with only a handful of settlers when the building was undertaken. But these men and women of Jaffrey had so much, faith in the future that they planned a building of such generous proportions that the community has not outgrown it in 150 years; and they built it so firmly and so well, that it promises to last another 150 years at least.

The tower of this building, which was added a good many years later, is famous for its beauty and is a beloved landmark for miles around. The original interior of the building, with its balcony, its tall pulpit and high backed pews is said to have been equally beautiful; and although the building was used as a church only until 1844, few changes were made in this interior until about 1870, when it was re-modelled to serve both as a High School and Town Hall, and its original beauty entirely destroyed. The High School and Town meetings have now both moved to East Jaffrey, and for several years the building has stood unused and almost deserted except for an occasional entertainment.

A building of such historic interest, which has served the town for nearly a century and a half as church, school, and as the center of government, has strong claims upon the loyalty and affection of the people of Jaffrey; and two years ago our Village Improvement Society conceived the idea of restoring as much of the original beauty and dignity of the hall as is consistent with its present day uses, and of accomplishing this if possible before Aug. 17, 1923, the sesqui-centenni of Jaffrey's incorporation. It seemed a very large undertaking for so small a society as ours, and there were skeptics who doubted its possibility. But faith can move mountains and our society undertook the task with high hopes. Today is Aug. 17, 1923 and you can judge for yourselves of our success.

It is our great happiness that the town is able today suitably to celebrate its sesqui-centennial in this historic building, beautiful again within as well as without, its foundations strengthened, its exits made safe, its conveniences greatly increased. It has had a long and honorable career as church, school and Town Hall, and we hope that for many years to come it may serve as a center and stimulus for the best community life." (Source: The Annals, newspaper clipping)

### **“Special Dispatch to the Globe**

JAFFREY, N H, July 22 — The Greater Bostonians who are summering in this town, enjoying, the cool breezes from old Mt Monadnock, are planning a strenuous season. Teas, parties, dramatics, musicales, lawn fetes, all sorts and conditions of entertainments are to follow each other in rapid succession. Not for the sake of entertaining, not for the sake of showing pretty costumes, not for the sake of social intercourse, but all for the sake of money. Money with which to restore the interior of the Old Town Hall.

The scheme is to be pushed to success by the Jaffrey Village Improvement Society, an organization consisting almost wholly of Summer residents, having its meetings only during the Summer season, supported chiefly by funds contributed by Summer

sojourners, who are trying, and have been trying for several years to make the old town of Jaffrey even more beautiful than it is by nature.

The officers of the V. I. S. are: Mrs B. L. Robinson of Cambridge, President; Rev James Bixler of Exeter, Rev Charles S. Mills of New York, Mrs Silas E. Buck of Cambridge, Miss Lucia Cutter and Rev David C. Torrey, of Jaffrey, vice presidents; Mrs. Emma Mitchell of Cambridge, recording secretary; Mrs Charles P. Strong of Cambridge, corresponding secretary; Miss Kate Fox of Jaffrey, treasurer.

The town, at its annual meeting in the Spring, voted to appropriate \$3000 toward this work. In accepting the promise of the V. I. S. to raise an equal amount, the architect's plans for the restoration call for \$6000. Many prudent persons believe the work will call for more than this amount, in which case the V.I.S. has promised to raise the balance.

### Dates to Revolution

The Old Town Hall, or "Old Town Meeting House" as it is more often called, dates back to Revolutionary days. There is a tradition that the workmen engaged in raising the framework, heard the guns fired at the Battle of Bunker Hill and that some of them dropped their tools and started on horseback to share in the fight. This tradition has been doubted by some, who do not believe the guns could be heard so far away, and these doubters insist that a man, said to have been one Jeremiah Spofford, a master carpenter, whose son, Dr Jeremiah Spofford, was later a resident of Groveland, Mass, was boss of the job of raising the building, and was on his way home, and had reached Townsend, when he and his companions heard the roar of cannons at Bunker Hill. Whichever story is true, the fact seems to be well established by dates in the town's records, that the building was framed the week the famous battle was fought.

For years it served as a meetinghouse, the minister and the building itself being supported by taxes levied on the people of the town. Later, when denominational differences of opinion arose, the town records show that it was arranged, in 1829 that the meeting house should be occupied a certain number of Sabbaths by each denomination, according to the number of members each had among the voters, as follows: Congregationalists 21 Sabbaths; Baptists, 9 Sabbaths; Universalists, 13 Sabbaths, and Unitarians, 9 Sabbaths. In 1844, the Unitarians having disbanded, and the other three denominations having built churches of their own, it was no longer used for religious purposes, but for town meetings, until the growth of the town led to the holding of such meetings in Union Hall.

The plans of the V. I. S. and the committee appointed by the town to act with this organization, call for the completion of the work of restoring the interior to its Revolutionary period style of finish in time for the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of the town, next Summer. The town's committee consists of Albert Annett, author of the history of the town, and several books of poems, as chairman, Elwyn S. Mayo and Bowman F. Cann.

### Plans for Restoration

Restoration plans call for the replacing of the old gallery, which was removed when religious services were no longer held in the building, the replacement of the old pillars;

replacing a fine old Gothic window over the pulpit, also a round window which was used in olden days by the bell ringer, on Sabbath mornings, as he rang the bell and watched for the parson to come out of the Manse, and when he had neared the church, the bell ceased to ring. In hunting up some of the old-time accessories, the V. I. S. and Mrs Robinson, in particular, have done considerable scouting. They found the Gothic window in a hen house, where it has reposed in the dust, for several years. They found that the ornamental old hinges, which formerly extended across the front entrance, and were very decorative. had been sold to the builder of one of the finest Summer residences in the town and now ornament that home. A replica of these old hinges will be made and placed on the Old Town Hall.

The series of money-raising events for this fund started this week with two performances by the Cape Cod Marionettes, in charge of Miss Melanie Elizabeth Leonard of Sandwich, Mass. Miss Georgia Emery was hostess for the first tea and Mrs Lawrence H. Wetherell of Brookline was hostess for the second one. On Friday afternoon and Saturday evening of the coming week "The Old Peabody Pew" will be given under the management of Mrs. Frank Sanborn, a former president of the Cantabridgia Club; Prof John Hart of Harvard, who has a Summer residence on the slope of Mt Monadnock, will be in the cast, which will also include C. P. Strong of Cambridge, Mrs Walter B. Cheney of Connecticut, Mrs John Poole and others. Mme C.W. Harpham of Albany, N Y, will give vocal solos between the acts.”  
(*Source: The Annals. Clipping. Noted in pencil 1922*)

“Captain Samuel Adams was born in Boxford, Mass. Aug, 22, 1750.

Removed with his father to Rindge, N. H. in 1772 and to Jaffrey, N.H. in 1778.

On July 9th, 1773 he married Lucy Spofford, daughter of Col. Elipha and Lucy Peabody Spofford of Boxford, Mass.

They had ten children, eight of whom were born in Jaffrey.

He served in the Revolution in Capt. Brown's company and became Captain in the militia.

Capt. Sam'l Adams was a carpenter and the builder of the first meeting-house in Jaffrey.

He employed Jeremiah Spofford—his wife's brother—as the master carpenter who framed the building which was raised June 15, 1775.

Capt. Adams died in Jaffrey of typhus fever Feb. 21, 1813, his widow dying of the same disease Feb. 23rd, and both were buried in one grave beside the church he designed—a beautiful specimen of church architecture—of which his descendants are most proud.

Mrs. Fred C. Demond,  
Concord, N. H.”

(Source: The Annals. Typed)

## **“Meeting House Restored By Alexander O. Varville**

The work of restoring the steeple of the Old Meeting House is being done by Alexander O. Varville and a crew of six men. No undertaking is too difficult or obstacle too high for this Jaffrey contractor to tackle. The tower, rising to a height of 140 feet from the ground, stands today almost hidden behind an intricate lattice work of staging while Varville and his men replace shingles, railings and ornaments which are none the better for long exposure to the elements. Some of the turned pieces are being made at Conant High under the supervision of Charles Chamberlain.

Mr Varville was born in Winchendon, Mass., in 1898, the son of Modesse and Philomen Varville. He came into Jaffrey with his parents in 1904, and went to work with Jaffrey Mills at the age of 14. At the end of two years he found employment with W. W. Cross, Inc., for a period of three years.

The restaurant business then attracted him and he became proprietor of such an establishment in the town, his place of business being located in the old hotel, which was later burned. Selling out at the end of his first year, he became interested in the grocery business, and for two years maintained a store at K. K. Village.

This time, trading his store to his brother Wilfred, he went to work with Bean and Symonds until 1924, when he became an apprentice to Ned Pierce of Dublin in the construction and remodelling of buildings.

This proved to be the introduction to the work in which he has become most interested. After two years at Dublin he became similarly associated with a firm of contractors at Peterboro, during all of which time he took a corresponding school course in carpentry and blue print reading.

During the war he assisted in the construction of Red Bank Village at Portland, Me., a government project containing 500 houses.

For a time he had charge of alterations and decorating at the Ark. He also remodelled the old John Poole place, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Pierce. One of the largest barns in the vicinity, possibly in the State, is that on the Henry Speckman place in Rindge. This was built by Mr. Varville, as were many buildings in Jaffrey and surrounding towns.

The Old Meeting House was built by Samuel Adams in 1775 when he was but 24 years old, and the steeple erected almost 50 years later by Joel Oakes Patrick, at the age of 29.

Public spirited citizens provided for the cost of the steeple in 1822, and a year later the town of Jaffrey purchased the Paul Revere bell which still hangs in the loft. It was recast in 1850 by Henry Hooper after it became cracked with years of hard usage. Up until 1904 it was the custom to ring the bell for a period of five minutes to mark the noon hour.

Much restoration work was done on both house and steeple by Bowman F. Cann in 1923. William Belletete is in charge of painting.

Atop the 140 foot steeple in the above picture are contractor, Alexander O. Varville, William Belletete, in charge of painting, Bert Harris, Walter Tabor and George Patteron [sic], Jr.”

(*Source*: Clipping from Jaffrey Recorder and Monadnock Breeze, 1 October 1948. Also photo. In VIS Scrapbook)