

Seats of Jaffrey Government

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As Jaffrey considers what might be the best way to accommodate its governmental activities—build a new Town Office building, renovate and improve the present one or purchase and adapt an existing property—perhaps looking at how things have been done in the past will offer insight.

For the first century of its existence the town had no office of any sort: records were likely kept at the home or business of those who kept the records, i.e. the town clerk, the selectmen, the tax collector, etc. The only public facility at which town business was carried out was the Meetinghouse where Town Meeting was held until 1915. (Jaffrey's first Town Meeting was held on September 14, 1773, "at the house of Francis Wright, innholder," a house on Gilmore Pond Road that still stands.)

In 1870 the interior of the Meetinghouse was totally rebuilt. The old box pews and the raised pulpit were removed and a floor was installed to make the building two stories. Conant High School had the ground floor which was used every other year alternating with space in the District 2 schoolhouse on School Street in what then was called East Jaffrey. Town offices and a meeting room were on the second floor. Conant eventually stayed downtown but the town offices remained in the Meetinghouse until the Jaffrey Public Library opened in 1896.

The Library, one of Jaffrey's finest buildings, was designed by the Fitchburg architect, H.M. Francis and from the start the intention was to provide space for town offices as well as a "convenient public hall...with a fire-proof vault." So although Town Meeting continued at the Meetinghouse

for another 18 years, the various town officials now had a modern and comfortable place to do their work and store their records.

In 1915 Town Meeting moved to the Union Hall in the District 2 schoolhouse and remained there until 1937 when the building was replaced by the current Jaffrey Grade School. It continued in the new school until 1956 when it moved to the “new high school auditorium on Stratton Road,” still its location today.

The Granite State Hotel overlooked the village green and was, aside from the neighboring mills, the largest building in the downtown. It was ill-fated, though, the original version and the two successors succumbing to fire, the last in 1923. Rather than rebuilding yet again, the owners, Julius and Ada Prescott, gave the site to the town for a “future town hall.” So a need for such a facility must have been evident even back then.

By 1927 a Town Hall Fund and Town Hall Capital Reserve Fund had been created, but nothing happened until the early 1950s when it became clear that “the need for a place for the town officers to do their work was a pressing one...” At the 1953 Town Meeting, a committee consisting of Ralph E. Boynton, Elizabeth D. Sawyer and Alfred S. Despres was appointed to “investigate the feasibility of locating and erecting a structure of the ‘Colonial’ type, in harmony with traditional New England architecture. The committee reported its findings at the next town meeting... At this time it was ‘voted that the Town authorize the construction and partial furnishing of a Town Office Building on the site donated by Mr. and Mrs. Julius E. Prescott...’”

The architect chosen for the project was Alfred T. Granger Associates of Hanover (also the designers of the Jaffrey Grade School) and the contractor was T.H. and E.H. Bergeron of Keene. “The foundation was

started in September, 1954, and the building was completed in the summer of 1955.” There was “suitable accommodations for the Court Room, Police Department, Town Clerk, Tax Collector, Selectmen, Water Commissioners, and a garage for the police cruiser and the V. F. W. ambulance. The total cost of the building, of brick construction, amounted to \$56,526.76.” Not only were most town departments accommodated in the new building but it was purpose-built and had perhaps the finest location in the downtown.

By the early 1990s space for town government functions had again become a problem. The Police Department had moved out and taken over the old Fire Station on River Street (1984). The Water Department now had its new building on Turnpike Road. The Court had also relocated (1985) and was in rented space elsewhere in Jaffrey. Still the Town Office building was cramped. An opportunity presented itself to purchase an industrial building and recycle it as a new Town Office building. For a variety of reasons including its location out of the downtown, this proposal did not fare well. But at about the same time another option arose. The old lumber warehouse for Goodnow’s Department Store, which had been renovated for an operations center for the bank, became available.

At the 1995 Town Meeting the voters were asked to raise and appropriate \$470,000 “to purchase and renovate property from CFX Bank. Inc....and to renovate the existing Town Office...The renovations would allow for the Town Office personnel to move to the CFX Building [and] the Police Station to move to the existing Town Office....” The proposal had strong support with the article carrying 223 to 31.

The work was accomplished and the new Town Office was occupied on November 9, 1995. And that’s where we are today.

Material quoted is from volumes I and III of the Jaffrey Town History.