

CHAPTER XVI

JAFFREY-GILMORE FOUNDATION

The use to which the Civic Center has been put since its completion in 1965 speaks well for the foresight of Marion Mack Johnson, founder of the Jaffrey-Gilmore Foundation. The building bids fair to be the "open center" for all activities of a cultural and historical nature for a long time to come, and is already the mecca for thousands who visit it or attend the numerous functions and exhibits held there. Spacious and attractive, the interior of the building has a quiet dignity and serenity that have a spirit-lifting effect on visitors who come to view the many exhibits of a wide range of categories or to hear the many programs and lectures presented in its auditorium.

One of the main purposes of the founder was to provide a home for Jaffrey's new Historical Society and this is now a very appreciable part of the facility. The Jaffrey Historical Society rooms are on the lower level, where exhibits of historical treasures are presented in a variety of changing themes by members of the society. These exhibits are well received and appreciated by the general public.

Marion Mack Johnson, who was born and grew up in Jaffrey, returned in 1964 to her native town for her retirement years, with a dream of doing something of lasting significance for the town. And thus was born the "open center concept." The next step was to find a suitable location. This was easy. In the heart of the village, next to the Jaffrey Public Library and in line with the bank, the town office building, and the Village Green with its World War Memorials, was a house that had not been occupied since the deaths of the former owners, Dr. William J. and Edna (Nichols) Wilkins. The lot was large and very suitable for what she had in mind, and the current owner, Dr. C. Francis Wozmak, was willing to sell.

The Jaffrey-Gilmore Foundation held its first meeting on May 21, 1964, with the following people serving as the original Trustees of the corporation: Marion Mack Johnson, president; Daniel M. Johnson, vice president; Donald E. Proctor, treasurer; Harry Mack Johnson, assistant clerk; Homer J. Belletete, assistant treasurer; Elizabeth S. Torrey, clerk; and the chairman of Board of Selectmen, ex-officio.

After many meetings with various businessmen and representatives of social and civic organizations, plans were started for such a building as might meet needs that others could not, or did not, currently meet. In this phase of the project the needs of Jaffrey's new Historical Society were duly recognized.

Marion Mack Johnson consulted with Abbott Lowell Cummings, director of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. He in turn introduced the group to the architect, John Radford Abbot, who had then recently done the Merrimack Valley Textile

Museum in North Andover, Massachusetts.

A special meeting of the Incorporators was held on November 19, 1964, for reviewing plans proposed by Mr. Abbot. At this meeting it was voted to retain him as the architect and to proceed with necessary details to complete drawings and to have specifications ready for bidding at the earliest possible date. Bids were solicited early in March, 1965, and the construction firm of Seppala and Aho Company of New Ipswich, New Hampshire, was awarded the contract. Work began in April, 1965. The building was opened one year later. It is a colonial brick construction, set well back from the Main Street in front and Bradley Court on the west side. It faces Main Street, with a spacious lawn in front, which, it was stipulated, "Shall remain forever green with no further buildings to be placed thereon." There is land at the rear of the building for possible future expansion. Since its completion, the building has been open daily, except Sundays and such holidays as the Library and Bank may be closed. It is closed also during the Christmas holidays.

The planning of the unusually attractive interior was done with the assistance of W. Arnold Seale of Hancock, New Hampshire. The planning of the terrace and landscape was done by Mrs. Robert Milton of Worcester, Massachusetts. The exterior ground work and parking area was done by Howard Whitcomb of Peterborough, New Hampshire.

According to the Articles of Association, "This Corporation is organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Laws)."

In the beginning it was the conclusion of the trustees and incorporators that a policy be set with some boundaries as to the use of the building. The law requires a statement such as that above, but in order to keep the tax-free position, it is necessary not to tangle with money-raising groups or groups already enjoying some of these privileges. Furthermore, it was reasoned that the religious, political, and fraternal groups all possessed quarters already. Therefore, there was no need to offer them the use of fulltime facilities. However, they are welcome to use, and do use, the building for special meetings from time to time.

The Jaffrey-Gilmore Foundation was named after people; for George Jaffrey, a member of Governor Wentworth's council in 1773, after whom the town was named, and the Gilmore family, early settlers who bore an important part in the development of the town. The Foundation or Civic Center is for the people of Jaffrey to use and enjoy. As a cultural center, it offers many ways to broaden individual skill and knowledge, to seek out and foster natural talents. "It aims to promote every factor leading to fuller enjoyment of life, heightened prosperity, and greater opportunity for all of the people of Jaffrey."

On the first floor of the building are an office, a fire-proof file room, a library, a small

meeting room, a kitchenette, and a large lecture hall that seats 100 to 125 people. A number of display cases in the lobby and the first floor hall are used for exhibits. On the second floor and in the basement are exhibit areas, classrooms and work-rooms or studios. Exhibits in the upstairs rooms are re-placed frequently so that visitors are able to enjoy a number of collections and displays. A free film program is offered Thursday afternoons and evenings. The Reading Library contains a large number of unusual and beautiful books on a variety of subjects, including gardening, religion, history, handcrafts and other subjects. The Amos Fortune Room is named in honor of Jaffrey's first public benefactor and outstanding black citizen, who died in 1801, at the reputed age of ninety-one years. The room contains memorabilia of his life, as well as the Amos Fortune Collage created by the distinguished artist, Nora Unwin of Peterborough.

There is the Bell Room, in the center of which is placed the old school bell from the former Union Hall School building on School Street, even yet the reminder of the halcyon days of youth of many a Jaffrey citizen. "Lost" for many years, it was presented to the Civic Center by Alfred and David Sawyer.

Annually now, a band concert is given on the terrace on the evening of the Fourth of July. Beautifully landscaped with flowers in bloom, the terrace is an ideal place for these annual affairs.

Source: Volume III of the Jaffrey Town History