

## CHAPTER XV

### FOUNDATIONS

#### JAFFREY GILMORE FOUNDATION (Cont. from Vol. III, pp. 126-129)

Jaffrey Civic Center is a nonprofit, multicultural facility which first opened in 1966. It was conceived, funded, and built by Marion Mack Johnson (1905-1987), a Jaffrey native and teacher who wanted to provide a center for educational and artistic purposes. In the first years of its existence it was managed by Mrs. Johnson and her close friend Claire Moore. With the help of numerous volunteers they arranged many interesting exhibits and programs.

In the summer of 1967, Betty Jane and James Balentine were appointed as executive secretaries to direct the activities at the civic center. During their 25-year tenure, Betty and James developed different programs and exhibits, many growing from the suggestions of the incorporators and visitors to the center. Gallery exhibitions included The Young People's Exhibit, which was an exhibit of art work by students from the Jaffrey-Rindge schools, became a yearly event that continues today. An exhibit of paintings of Mount Monadnock by local artists developed into the Annual Area Art Exhibit. As a result of this exhibit, the Civic Center Art Group was formed as part of the civic center program. Later the artists decided they would like to have their own organization, but kept the name Civic Center Art Group since their headquarters was at the civic center.

Another exhibition, the Annual Area Photography Show also continues to the present.

The Trees of Christmas exhibition was popular for many years. This exhibit of real trees, featuring handmade decorations representing different countries, was an annual event from 1975 through 1991. Workshops were held each year to make the different ornaments. Mini-workshops were also arranged for school groups. The school children really enjoyed making the Polish chains.

Exhibits in the first-floor display cases included collections, crafts, and hobbies. Some of them were antique glass and china, toys, pottery, keys, boxes, model ships, birds, and decoys. Most displays remained for a month or two, depending on the season.

Some of the memorable events were the Fourth of July band concerts sponsored by the Historical Society, a play based on the book Amos Fortune, Free Man, and the student musical performance on Founders Day. Also many school groups came to view the Amos Fortune Room and to see the filmstrip "Amos Fortune, Free Man." Weekly free film programs proved to be popular for over 20 years.

The building is routinely used by many local organizations, including the Jaffrey

Historical Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, Girl Scouts, Monadnock Garden Club, and several others. The building is also used for such special events as the Chamber of Commerce breakfast, eighth grade parents' night, and a variety of lectures.

In April 1970 Marion Mack Johnson was honored by Franklin Pierce College with an honorary degree of Doctor of Education for "generous and devoted leadership and support of educational and civic programs."

After the Balentines retired, Scott and Kim Cunningham of Hancock, New Hampshire, were appointed executive directors. Scott Cunningham is a metal sculptor and his wife, Kim, is a graphic artist, who is presently involved with illustrating children's books. Before coming to Jaffrey they ran the gallery at Sharon Arts Center in Sharon, New Hampshire. They continue the work started by Marion Mack Johnson and the Balentines and are active in establishing an outreach program with the Jaffrey schools, especially the fourth and fifth grades.

The Civic Center has had programs for the fifth graders to meet the artists and to critique their exhibits. It has co-sponsored programs with the Jaffrey Public Library such as the Summer Mystery/Art Outreach with the Children's Summer Reading Program and has hosted Andy's Playhouse with a special weeklong dance workshop. Throughout the year they hold a variety of workshops from decorating Easter eggs to making collages. The Jaffrey Civic Center continues to forge alliances with the schools and the library and to carry out the goals of its founder.

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*Source:* Volume IV of the Jaffrey Town History