

Schoolhouse No. 1

Years later—Who would have thought?

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY Jaffrey had 13 school districts each served by a one-room schoolhouse. Of these, five survive today as residences, and one—The Little Red Schoolhouse (No. 11)—stands on the Common beside the Meetinghouse (1775), moved there and restored in 1960 to its original schoolhouse appearance by the Jaffrey Historical Society. Schoolhouse No. 1, on Route 124 (the old Third New Hampshire Turnpike) at the corner of Prescott Road, was built in 1816 by Oliver Prescott to replace the original 1790 structure that had burned two years before. From the exterior there's nothing remarkable about this particular building; and there's nothing remarkable about old schoolhouses still being around and converted to other uses. One can probably find a handful in just about any New Hampshire town. But Schoolhouse No. 1 has a remarkable connection to the world beyond little Jaffrey, a connection that could never be guessed at.

Across the street from the former schoolhouse stands The Benjamin Prescott Inn. This was once owned by Dr. Vannevar Bush (1890-1974). Bush, a distinguished engineer and scientist, was a seasonal Jaffrey resident from around 1937 until the early 1960s. He is probably most famous as the initiator and administrator of the Manhattan Project, the secret World War II effort to develop the first atomic bomb. (He oversaw an astonishing 130,000 employees!) Dr. Bush had a long and close association with M.I.T., as a student, faculty member and administrator (Dean of the School of Engineering and Vice President of the Institute). He was one of the founders of what became the Raytheon Corporation; and was an early advocate for the creation of the National Science Foundation. He was president of the Carnegie Institution, chairman of Merck & Co. and sat on numerous corporate boards including AT&T, and served on many scientific and engineering committees. Probably no more acclaimed personage ever spent time in Jaffrey.

So it's easy to imagine that when Vannevar Bush—Pete Sawyer remembers that he always said “call me Van”—was in Jaffrey, away from the stress and commitments of Cambridge, Washington and the world, he might cross the road to the old Schoolhouse

No. 1—which he had fitted up as a laboratory and study—and ponder such things as atom bombs, analog computers and precursors of the World Wide Web. In the doorway he might have paused and looked to the east over the pasture land he then owned. If he were to do so today he would see a major industrial complex: Millipore Corporation, founded by his son, John, in 1954. Remarkable connections, indeed!

Robert B. Stephenson
Vice President
Jaffrey Historical Society
31 August 2012