

Introduction

FOR MUCH of its history, Jaffrey was what we now call Jaffrey Center—the village that grew up around the Meetinghouse. What is now ‘downtown,’ came later with the development of the water power of the Contoocook River, the opening of the Third New Hampshire Turnpike (now Route 124) and, finally, the coming of the railroad in 1870. The Center went from being literally the center of things, to something of a ‘has been,’ then to what it is today, a well-preserved, largely residential village consisting of some fine historic architecture, traditional landscape and rural views.

A Walk around Jaffrey Center

This guide features just the heart of Jaffrey Center and is easily walked. For those wishing a longer excursion, a bike ride perhaps, or prefer to drive, there are attractive rural ways leading from the village that are worth exploring.

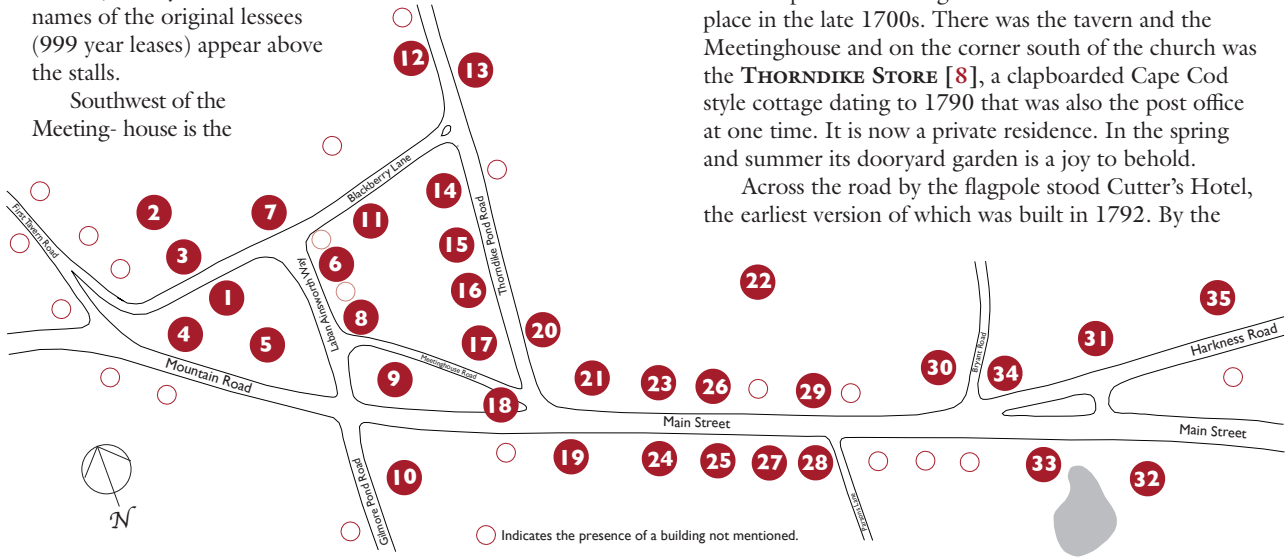
ONE CAN start this tour anywhere, although we think the logical place is in front of the **MEETINGHOUSE [1]**. Stand here and much of the interest and appeal, not to mention the history, of the village is in view—the Common, Little Red Schoolhouse, Horsesheds, Old Burying Ground, Brick Church and Cutter Park. As you look about, think back to how this scene must have appeared on June 17, 1775, the day that the frame of Meetinghouse was raised. It was also the day of the Battle of Bunker Hill, and those toiling at their task could hear the noise of cannon in far away Charlestown . . . or so tradition tells us. The original building was without the tower—that came in 1822—and, because of the difficulties of the times, it sat largely unfinished and unpainted for some years. It was intended for both church services and town meetings. To help pay for its construction, pews were sold. High against the north wall stood the pulpit with its sounding board and behind it, the arched window that can still be seen today.

The Meetinghouse, being a public building, was and still is supported by local taxes. And the minister was likewise paid out of tax revenue. But this changed in 1819 when the Toleration Act, which addressed the separation of church and state, was passed. The outcome was a burst of church building throughout New Hampshire, the nearby Brick Church (1831) being a perfect example. In 1870, after standing vacant for

some years, the Meetinghouse was drastically altered—the pews were taken out and a second floor was added—to accommodate the high school and town offices. Such usage lasted until both the school and the town offices moved to downtown Jaffrey in the early years of the next century. Again, the building stood unoccupied and largely unused until 1922 when the Town and the Village Improvement Society (VIS) undertook a restoration project inspired by Jaffrey’s sesquicentennial which was to be celebrated the next year. Since then the Meetinghouse has been used for concerts, lectures and entertainments, as well as weddings, meetings and fairs. A second major renovation project was completed in 1993.

Behind the Meetinghouse lies the **OLD BURYING GROUND [2]**, Jaffrey’s oldest cemetery, laid out in 1774. Capt. Samuel Adams, the builder of the Meetinghouse, is buried here; also Amos Fortune (immortalized by writer Elizabeth Yates McGreal) and the well-known 20th century author, Willa Cather, who vacationed in Jaffrey for many years. There is a guide to the Old Burying Ground at the end of the **HORSESHEDS [3]**. When built in 1808 the sheds, meant for sheltering carriages and horses during the often very long church services, numbered twelve. Three were removed and today nine survive. Becoming decrepit and unsightly, the Horsesheds were nearly torn down in 1949; there was actually a town meeting vote to do so. But the Village Improvement Society mobilized, a committee was formed, and by 1953 the sheds had been restored. The names of the original lessees (999 year leases) appear above the stalls.

Southwest of the Meeting- house is the



LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE [4]. This was the old District No. 11 schoolhouse, the last survivor of Jaffrey’s one-room schoolhouses which by 1845 numbered 13. Built in 1822, it was originally located a mile or so away on Dublin Road. It was moved to the Common in 1960 and restored by the Historical Society. You’ll find it open on weekend afternoons during the summer.

The **COMMON [5]** has served as a gathering place from the time the Meetinghouse was built. Early photographs show many changes over the years. In the early 1900s there was even a tennis court laid out! Today, the Common serves mostly as a setting for the ensemble of buildings surrounding it.

Second only to the Meetinghouse in importance is the **BRICK CHURCH [6]** (First Church in Jaffrey) which was built in 1831 by Aaron Howland of Walpole, a prolific architect-builder. Its proportions have been widely praised by architectural historians. The Gothic Revival tower, a detail also employed in the nearby Melville Academy, sits atop a base which has as its focal point an elegant Palladian window. Once the building was completed, the congregation simply moved the hundred or so feet from the Meetinghouse to its new home.

Beside the church is the Parsonage and across Blackberry Lane—the original road to Peterborough—stands the red **BENJAMIN CUTTER HOUSE [7]**, the oldest in the village, dating to 1784. It was built as a tavern and became so popular that the selectmen gave Cutter permission to move the Meetinghouse so that his patrons would have better access. Fortunately that never happened. The original tavern sign may be seen hanging in the Jaffrey Library.

This part of the village must have been an active place in the late 1700s. There was the tavern and the Meetinghouse and on the corner south of the church was the **THORNDIKE STORE [8]**, a clapboarded Cape Cod style cottage dating to 1790 that was also the post office at one time. It is now a private residence. In the spring and summer its dooryard garden is a joy to behold.

Across the road by the flagpole stood Cutter’s Hotel, the earliest version of which was built in 1792. By the

time it burned to the ground on November 14, 1901, it had become a rambling complex with porches, a mansarded third floor and barns and stables. It catered to summer visitors and travelers along the turnpike. The ruins lay scattered about until 1909 when the VIS, after much negotiating, purchased the site from Jonas Cutter for \$2,000. It was cleaned up, graded and improved and is now known as **CUTTER PARK [9]**.

Looking across the Common towards Main Street, **THE AINSWORTH MANSE [10]** stands on the corner of Gilmore Pond Road behind the evergreen hedge. You may wish to walk over for a better view. It was built for Laban Ainsworth, Jaffrey’s first minister, in 1787 but burned down the following year. It was promptly rebuilt and was Ainsworth’s home until his death in 1858 at 101 years. He tended his Jaffrey flock for 76 years, a ministerial record probably unmatched. Ainsworth would walk from The Manse along what is now named Laban Ainsworth Way to the Meetinghouse to lead Sunday services. The elliptical window in the tower of the Meetinghouse was there so the sexton could watch for the pastor’s approach and start the bell ringing. The house is still owned by Ainsworth descendants.

Now that we’ve seen most of the places of interest within sight of the Meetinghouse, let’s walk down Blackberry Lane to Melville Academy. Notice the First Church’s **MEMORIAL GARDEN [11]** on the right. As you approach Thorndike Pond Road and look to the left you’ll see the Greek Revival school building on the rise beside the road. **MELVILLE ACADEMY [12]** was built in 1833 as a private academy, the major benefactor and investor being Jonas Melville. It flourished for a time—in 1835 there were 174 pupils equally split between boys and girls—but financial pressures led to its closing and in 1863 it was taken over by the Town as Schoolhouse No. 7 and used as such until 1918. It sat vacant for a time until the Village Improvement Society asked permission to make

use of it as a meeting place and local history museum. The Society did extensive restoration and on August 4, 1920, a grand opening was held with some of the former students in attendance. Actual ownership was transferred to the VIS in 1960 after a Town Meeting vote. Melville Academy has an extensive collection of artifacts, tools, photographs,



clothing, signs and even the old Jaffrey Center Post Office postboxes. Like the Little Red Schoolhouse, it is open to visitors on summer weekend afternoons from 2 to 4, and at other times by arrangement.

Across the street from the Academy stands **WIDOW BETSEY CUTTER’S HOUSE [13]**, a Cape Cod style house (1830) with a distinctive and somewhat unusual shallow second floor and elevated fanlight. (On Main Street, next to The Inn, is a house built in 1836 for an entirely different Betsey Cutter. This Betsey—with two e’s—was a spinster and directed Seth Ellis to build her a house “in the same manner and with as good materials as Widow Betsy Cutter’s house near the Academy.” See No. 25.)

As you walk down Thorndike Pond Road notice the granite post and road sign at Blackberry Lane. The post is one of three in the village that were split from a single piece of granite and installed in 1995. (The post down at Main Street goes back much further.) The signs themselves incorporate the running or leaping horse symbol that was unique to Jaffrey and was used throughout the town even in the 19th century. (Neighboring towns had their own distinctive animal symbols.)

On the Blackberry Lane corner stands the **ABEL PARKER HOUSE [14]**, with its connected sheds and barn. It’s the earliest (1803) of the four houses lining the road to Main Street and with its neighbors presents a unified and pleasing early 19th century architectural assemblage—similar materials, colors, massing and details.

Next door is the **DAVID GILMORE HOUSE [15]**, built in 1815. Note the Palladian inspired attic windows. Further on is the **SAMUEL DAKIN HOUSE [16]**, distinguished by its fine three-sided porch and what is the largest barn in the village. Also of architectural interest is the band of dentils along the base of the pediment. Built in 1805, the house served as the post office for some years. Later it was the home of Mary and Kate Fox in whose dining room the organizing meeting of the Village Improvement Society was held on August 27, 1906. Kate was a moving force in the Society and served as treasurer for 34 years. The second owner of the house was Dr. Adonijah Howe who bought it from Dakin in 1815. It is still owned by Howe descendants.

The last in this line of houses is the **ARTEMUS LAWRENCE HOUSE [17]** which dates to around 1815. It, like many in the village, has gone through a variety of alterations. There once was a porch along the front (an almost universal appendage in the early 1900s and sadly becoming rarer), and for a time it was a two-family house. The owner in 1906 was Miss Dora Tenney. She sold the “flat-iron lot” across Meetinghouse Road to the VIS for \$100—the Society’s first purchase—which allowed for the installation of the granite **WATERING TROUGH [18]**, dedicated on August 31, 1907 “to the use of man

and beast.” Across Main Street is a **STATE HISTORIC MARKER [19]**. Read it and learn about Hannah Davis and Amos Fortune, famous and beloved Jaffrey citizens of the past.

On the other side of Thorndike Pond Road is the **SLADE HOUSE [20]**, built around 1810 in the Cape Cod style. But it first stood north of Melville Academy and was moved to its present site in 1876. Moving buildings back in that time was a far more common occurrence than today. It has had many owners and occupiers over the years. In 1929 it was bought by the sisters Lucy and Marjorie Slade who came as summer residents. The house was remodelled soon after the Slades purchased it. The large addition at the rear was built in 1985.

On the open lot between Main Street and the Slade house once stood the “ruinous old blacksmith shop with broken windows” which, along with the adjoining “cottage utterly in ruins, its roof fallen in,” were purchased by the VIS in 1919. They were demolished and the cellar holes filled in. The only trace today of their prior existence are the two old wells. The site now is referred to as the **BLACKSMITH LOT [21]**.

Beyond the Blacksmith Lot lies **THE SWALE [22]**, a 13 acre meadow (some would say swamp) given to the Village Improvement Society in 1931 by Dr. Charles Mills whose house still stands just to the north although it’s now obscured by trees. The Swale was used as a hay field years ago—the drainage system can still be made out from above—but is now maintained as open space.

On Main Street, beside the Blacksmith Lot, is the “rambling cottage,” built in 1826, that has been known for years as **THE ORIBE [23]**, after the tea rooms of that name that were opened in the barn in 1910 by Miss Alice Cann. The name comes from the Japanese crockery used as the tea service. This was a very popular place and continued in business until 1967. Between 1975 and 1979, the Jaffrey Center Post Office occupied a portion of the barn. Today the barn is used by The Inn for the occasional function.

The **GIBBS HOUSE [24]**, one of only two brick houses in the village, stands across from The Oribe. It was built in 1832 by Jonathan Gibbs. This interesting man was a boot and shoemaker (his shop stands beside the house; and his cobbler’s bench is in Melville Academy), but he is best remembered as an antiquarian (he kept a record of town deaths for 41 years) and the drafter of the first map of Jaffrey which appeared in 1850. In 1904 the property was bought by Bowman Cann who was a master builder and carpenter. Many of the houses, additions, porches, etc., one sees around the village today were his work. He also undertook much of the 1922 restoration of the Meetinghouse.

Next to the Gibbs House is the **BETSEY CUTTER HOUSE [25]**, which (as we learned above) was patterned after the house opposite Melville Academy owned by the other Betsy Cutter. And across from that stands **THE OLD FIRE STATION [26]**. The sign above the door reads “Monadnock 4,” but nowhere in Town records is that name explained. Jaffrey’s first fire station, built in 1829, stood on the other side of Main Street opposite the watering trough. In 1907 the present building was acquired for use as a fire station. Its prior history is unclear; it may even have been moved from elsewhere. It is owned by the Jaffrey Historical Society and operated as a fire museum. Its earliest piece of apparatus is the “Fire Fly,” a hand pumper which dates to 1828 when the engine company was established.

Across the street again, **THE INN AT JAFFREY CENTER [27]** stands as a mainstay of the village. It started out as house not unlike its neighbors. Probably in the 1870s, Sarah Lawrence began taking in summer visitors. She called the place *The Fairview* and later *The Monadnock*. Its present name dates to the 1990s. Mostly hidden behind the porches, projecting bays, gambrel roof and the three-level gallery on the west end (the latest addition), is the far-simpler original structure. The Inn is the last of the many old-time summer boarding houses that once could be found throughout the town.

Next to The Inn is **THE OLD POST OFFICE [28]**. Now a private residence, it served, off and on, as the post office and for many years as the village store as well. The post office shut its doors for the final time in 1990. The building actually began its life in 1808 on the other side of the street and was moved to its present location sometime before the mid-1800s; exactly why is not known. At one time it was the home of Salmon Wilder, Jaffrey’s first printer.

Across the street, amongst the trees, you can see an old cellar hole, the site of the **BIGELOW STORE [29]** which stood there from 1862 until September 21, 1910, when it burned to the ground. (The store is the building with the porch in the cover photograph.)

Walking east along Main Street you soon come to Bryant Road. On the near corner is **CENTENNIAL PARK [30]** which is owned by the Village Improvement Society and was dedicated in 2006 in celebration of the VIS centennial. You may wish to stop here and enjoy the view and the surroundings. A few years back that would have been difficult. Although historically open with views over The Swale to Monadnock and the tower of Melville Academy, the land had reverted to forest in recent years.

The small triangle of land bounded by Harkness Road and Main Street—the East Common—is another VIS property, given in 1913 by Annie Henchman and Alice Cutter. The Cutter name keeps reappearing throughout the village, but at one time this end of the village was truly a

“Cutter Compound.” The first and largest house—indeed, the largest in the village—is the **JOHN CUTTER HOUSE [31]**, built in 1790, and the closest thing to Georgian architecture in Jaffrey. Cutter came to town soon after his marriage and became a tanner. He was a man of “singular energy” and obviously did well at what he did. Cutter’s daughter, Esther, married Laban Rice who enlarged the house, named it Rice’s Hotel and started catering to summer visitors. Later it became known as the Shattuck House. By 1900 the building reverted to a residence and much of the back ell was removed. For many years from around World War I it was the home of the Wetherells who did much to improve and beautify Jaffrey Center.

When his son married, John Cutter built in 1830 the handsome brick (now painted white) **BENJAMIN CUTTER HOUSE [32]** as a wedding present. Benjamin inherited the tanning business, prospered and “was a prominent man in town affairs.” The adjoining pond, known as Tannery Pond, was created to provide water to the tannery which stood to the south. Massive granite blocks hold the pond back, and the brick structures that held the tanning vats can still be seen.

Next door to the Benjamin Cutter house is another **CUTTER HOUSE [33]**, built by John, which is said to have housed workers in the tannery. The addition dates from 1991. And across the street, on the corner of Bryant Road, is the fourth Cutter property, the **CURRIER SHOP [34]**, built by John for use in his leather tanning business.

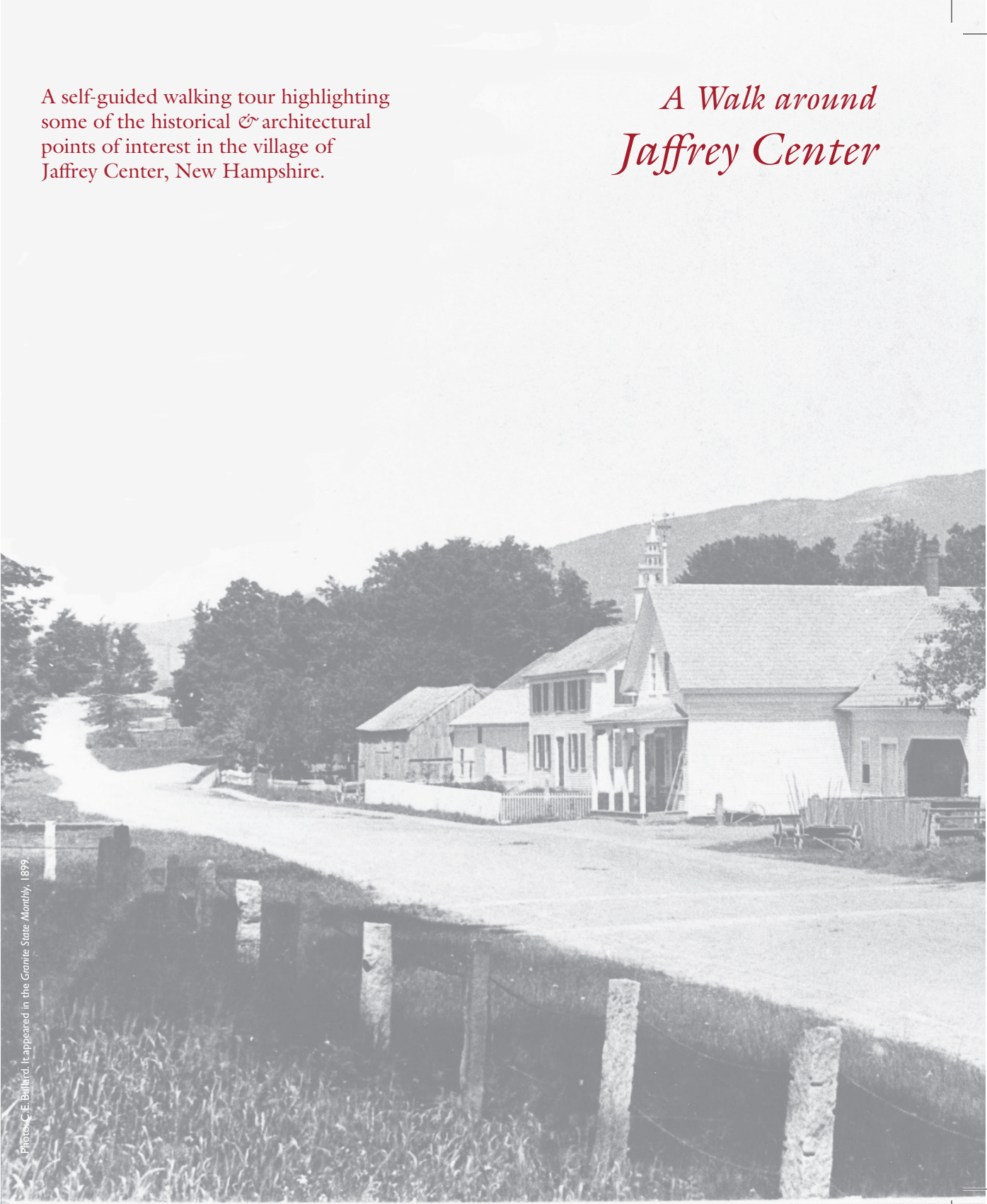
The final Cutter site at this end of the village is **CUTTER CEMETERY [35]**, which was laid out in 1836. The land was donated by John Cutter and many of the family are buried here. Since 1927 it has been a town-owned cemetery and is best known for its lovely trees and the iron fence along the Harkness Road frontage. A new extension, soon to open, adjoins it to the northwest.

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If you have enjoyed this guide, you may wish to obtain the companion guides, *A Walk around Downtown Jaffrey* and *A Walk around Squantum*, available at the Town Offices, the Jaffrey Library and the Jaffrey Chamber of Commerce. This guide also available online at: <https://www.rs41.org/JaffCtWalkingTourWeb.pdf> 📄

A Walk around Jaffrey Center was issued by the JAFFREY HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION. It was researched, written and produced by Robert B. Stephenson. The text depends heavily on *The History of Jaffrey*; *Jaffrey Center*; *Portrait of a Village*; and *Jaffrey Then and Now*. Printed by Savron Graphics, Jaffrey, New Hampshire. ©2006. Revised and reprinted 2023. 1k

A Walk around Jaffrey Center was supported in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, Dept. of Interior, through the NH Division of Historical Resources. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Dept. of Interior. Additional support was received from the Jaffrey Historic District Committion and the Jaffrey Center Village Improvement Society. 2018 edition sponsored by the Jaffrey Center Village Improvement Society.



A self-guided walking tour highlighting some of the historical & architectural points of interest in the village of Jaffrey Center, New Hampshire.

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Photo: C. E. Bullard. It appeared in the Granite State Monthly, 1899.