

CHAPTER V.

ANCIENT LANDMARKS—(continued).

Yesterday we covered the old North District, and today we will turn our faces eastward, taking our start again from the village square.

On the southerly corner stands the hotel. The building was erected by Elisha Foster near the foot of the "Dugway" in Irasville, but in 1851 it was moved by Roderick Richardson to its present site and the brick basement constructed with a view to use by the town. In fact town meetings were held there most of the time for some fifty years. Here William McAllister, John McDermid, J. Monroe Joslin, Richard F. Carleton, William Simonds, Calvin Clinton Richardson, Robert J. Coffey, Francis (France) C. Lamb, Andrew Wheatly Bigelow, H. E. Brewster and others have played boniface.

The adjoining building was erected by Oliver Carlisle Campbell as a shoe-shop, but it has been greatly enlarged, and for more than fifty years has been the headquarters of a general store conducted by three generations of Joneses.

The old bridge at the "Great Eddy" next claims attention. Its predecessor was erected on this spot before 1796, and the present structure was completed in 1833. It is the oldest bridge in town. Near it stood the massive hollowed birch stump with pestle hung on a spring pole that served to crush the grain of such as could not visit the nearest gristmill at Hancock—that is, until our own mill was built in 1793.

Across the river John Walton's blacksmith shop (1838) and house (1848) are next upon the right, while just beyond is the Congregational parsonage. This was once the little red school-house of District No. 7, and until about 1865 stood at the fork of the roads in lot 133.

Next beyond, on the same side of the street, is the brick house where in the "thirties" Lewis Holden kept his store. Here also during the "twenties" was George Frederick Kidder's store, and in it the post-office was established by him when he was appointed post-master in 1822. Across the street is the brick dwelling built by Roderick Richardson, sr., for his son

Restrain Certain Animals From Running at Large within Villages in this State." The second pound was located at this junction of the road in 1836 and a third was constructed in the westerly corner of the Common at a later date, but fell into disuse many years ago, so that the town annually designates some convenient barn-yard for the purpose.

Now we are at the top of the hill, and can look back down the slope where so many of us have coasted in the clear winter evenings, sometimes gliding as far as the village—more than a mile distant.

This is the edge of the plateau that runs along the base, or, if you prefer, forms a part, of the easterly range of mountains. Our road turns to the east through the old Ezra Jones farm, whose owner was held in the early days to be the best mathematician in the town. In his house town meetings were held occasionally, beginning in 1803, until the meeting-house was built. We pass diagonally across lot 106 until at its northeast corner, we reach the Common, second, and for many years, chief center of town life.

At the first meeting, held on March 25, 1794, for the organization of the town, a committee, consisting of Benjamin Wait, James Heaton, Moses Chase, John Barnard and William Joiner, was chosen to "Lay out a Meting Hous Spout and Other Public Yard." In August, 1795, Samuel Stow Savage, who owned lot 105, agreed to give two acres in its northwest corner for this purpose and the town voted to purchase two more acres from him and six acres from Ezra Jones in the northeast corner of lot 106. It was not until a year later that the Savage land was definitely deeded to the town and not until 1798 that five acres was finally purchased from Mr. Jones. In that year the Common was first "chopped over" and the old cemetery laid out on its westerly side, while during the autumn months, Salah Smith in accordance with his contract with the town, erected the frame of a building designed for a meeting-house and school-house, but destined after the refusal of the town to pay the cost (the only recorded instance of deliberate repudiation of its debts) to be removed to the river road and remodeled into the store owned by Chandler & Mower.

The Common was nearly square and was crossed diagonally by the old North Road and by that on which we have just come. In front of the cemetery stood the old meeting-house

built in 1807, flanked by horse sheds. Just north of this was the dwelling and shoe-shop of "Uncle Julie" Dumas, purchased by the church in 1835 for a parsonage and now forming one of the outbuildings of the adjoining farm. At the north end of the Common, on the corner of lot 108, stood the store of Roderick Richardson, sr., erected soon after 1806, and occupied by him until 1823, while a bit farther down the road stood his potash works, owned later by his brother, Doctor Frederick, whose house still stands at the westerly corner of the Common.

Next to the Doctor's home stood the house and blacksmith shop built about 1804 by Philip Gustin, and still standing. Suel Willis owned it in 1813, and later on Thomas Tinkham was the proprietor. Gustin seems to have done a small mercantile business as well, for in 1806, when he went to pieces financially, we find the constable attaching the following property: "The dwelling-house, Blacksmith's Shop, one Anvil, one Vice, one Pair of Bellows, one Sledge, one hand hammer and one Buck horn, one Iron Bound hogshead (supposed to contain) thirty gallons of new rum, one Barrel of Cider, and the barrel, a quantity of Junk, Tobacco, supposed to be twenty pounds, one chest of Bohea Tea, supposed to be Eight pounds."

The Samuel Stow Savage house was located at a little distance south of the Common, and in later years Mr. Savage built the brick house that you may see over there beneath the trees. Of him the tale is told that confiding in a thrice repeated dream of his daughter, he dug many days for a pot of buried gold, which of course vanished when his son spoke, although Mr. S. had his crowbar clinking among the yellow coins at the moment. Near the easterly corner of the Common stood the house of Constant Freeman, occupied later by Moses Chase, and in our time by Almon Joslin. There were, it would appear, several other buildings, dwellings, and perhaps another blacksmith shop, standing around the Common, but they have disappeared.

One wonders if it was on the Common, or perchance in the meeting-house itself, that the town established its magazine in 1812 in accordance with a vote to raise a tax "for the purpose of filling the town magazine," an institution that existed until 1828, when the selectmen were instructed to dispose of it.

Here for more than forty years the political and religious life of the town centered. Does not your imagination picture

it to you as we sit here in the shade? In yonder store Federalists and Jeffersonian Democrats wage wordy warfare over the Constitution or our growing difficulties with England. On Sunday gather, on foot or horseback, from the four corners of the town, a congregation that fills the meeting-house to its doors to listen to the strong Calvinistic doctrine of a century ago. After the morning sermon the people seek each other out and break their week of isolated toil with neighborly communion, or wander to the churchyard to while away the time until their stern old Puritan pastor shall for the second time that day convict them of their sins.

And now it is June Training Day, and the whole town is here to see the soldier boys and have a drink. Those men in scarlet are the "Floodwood" company of infantry. The riflemen are clad in blue, while the cavalry in lesser numbers but with brave array of trappings, strikes awe and terror to the souls of all the younger fry. The audience is large and friendly and the soldiers march and countermarch, amid applause until the climax comes and the great day ends with the noise and smoke and clash of arms of the sham battle and the still more deadly onslaught of New England rum.

Here the people gathered on that Sunday in September, 1814, while the roar of cannon thundered across the quiet bosom of Champlain. A whole company of their sons and neighbors had marched to join the American forces at Plattsburgh, and news of them was eagerly awaited. Those grey-haired men who stand together and talk in earnest tones are veterans of the Revolution recounting their own experiences in war with England. At last, impatient at delay, old General Wait, nearing his eightieth year, throws himself upon his horse and rides off to the North to intercept the courier and get first news of battle.

We might spend hours around this ancient and time-honored square recounting men and things, but a steep road lies before us and we must not tarry longer.

The first house as we leave the Common was the old Rid homestead where Salma Rider settled in 1793. It is now deserted and rapidly falling to decay, as are several other house in the vicinity.

Half a mile or more beyond, a road leads northerly across Pine Brook gulf to the old Bushnell place where we were yesterday. A few rods down upon the right one may find the rotting

timbers of the home of Rev. Amariah Chandler for which he exchanged his river farm with Joel Skinner in 1821, while just beyond under that monster pine is the house built by Eli Skinner about 1820, although he first settled on the lot in 1797.

Holding our course straight up the hill, we next pass the farm upon which Nathaniel Joslin settled. It was later occupied by Henry Jones, and still later by "Uncle" Timothy Reed, dear to the hearts of many of a younger generation.

A few rods to the east, in the junction of the roads, stands the East School-house. The first school-house of the Northeast District stood below us near the foot of the hill, and just west of Pine Brook. It was used for more than thirty years, but in 1831 the district began to agitate the question of a new building, and indulged in as bitter a controversy over the location as one could find in many a day. The east-siders wanted the old site retained, and the west-siders wanted a new one at the junction of the roads where the present building stands. No less than eighteen district meetings were held to consider the matter, and action was repeatedly taken, only to be reversed a few days later. Finally, on October 9, 1832, Jennison Jones and Joseph Wallis were chosen to ascertain that point in the district which should yield the smallest sum of distances by road, measuring from each house, and allowing one pupil from each house. On October 17 the committee reported that by measuring from a stake on the side of the road 38 rods west of the site of the old house, and making due allowance for vacant houses, the sum of west-side distances was 2354 rods, and the sum of east-side distances was 2250 rods, and that by moving the point $2\frac{1}{2}$ rods farther west a centre might be obtained. No agreement could be reached, and more than a year later the district besought the selectmen to choose a site, but they refused, and on May 16, 1834, a committee from outside the district, consisting of Jason Carpenter, Rufus Barnard and Levi Wilder, was chosen to settle the controversy. This committee immediately recommended the "crotch of the roads," and on May 20 the district voted to accept this site, and chose Asahel Rider, Jedediah Bushnell and Jennison Jones to build a schoolhouse 28 by 22 feet in size, with 10-foot posts.

But the west-siders did not dare to push their victory to a conclusion, and under date of June 6, 1834, we find the following on the records:

"We, the undersigned inhabitants and legal voters of the 2nd School District in Waitsfield, for the purpose of settling all controversy in relation to a spot for erecting a schoolhouse, do mutually agree that the building committee build said house at the foot of the hill, west of the spot where the old house stood, on the north side of the road, and west of the water-course, instead of building on the spot where voted at a late adjourned meeting of said district."

This agreement was signed by practically every voter in the district, and land for a site was secured June 18, 1834, very near the "center" as computed by the committee in 1832.

This school-house stood until 1867, but on March 4 of that year it was voted to build the present structure at the junction of the roads, and David Martin Phelps, Ezra Osgood Joslin and Albert Frederick Richardson were chosen to serve as building committee.

Leaving this well fought battlefield we cross Pine Brook, and, turning sharply to the left, clamber to the level of the plateau above us.

We are now on the old Jennison Jones farm, lot 76, while just beyond lies the farm cleared by Moses Chase and occupied by various owners until about 1828 Thomas Prentis came from Weathersfield, Vt., and settled on it.

Still further over under the mountain we can see the Amasa Skinner place, better known for forty years past as the home of Dennis Shea. Running along the north line of lot 76 is a grass-grown road that brings us to the old Doud Bushnell farm on the Northfield Road. The house is the last on the west side of Northfield mountain, and just back of it, is the little stream that Mr. Bushnell harnessed to turn the spinning wheels of his good wife and her neighbors—so far as we know, the only power-driven spindles ever operated in the town.

From this point, had we time, we should find a fairly easy pathway to the top of Bald Mountain, but our hunt for landmarks draws us away to the south, by the first home of James Joslin (1797), later known as the Wallis farm and still later as the home of Benjamin Reed, to the Joseph Joslin, jr., place, where the road bends sharply to the west down to the brook. Joseph was succeeded by his son, Alfred, and the farm was held by the family for over a century.

Our direct way now takes us through the fields to the houses on the easterly side of Pine Brook in lot 77. The first

one was for many years the home of Franklin Reed and then of Ezra Osgood Joslin, but it is now abandoned to decay. The house of Thomas Piper, hatter, which stood over there across the brook has already disappeared. On the hill to the west of us in lot 80 is the farm where Bissell Phelps and his sons settled in 1797. It was occupied in later years by Ira Bates and by his son-in-law, John Gunnison Lewis, and is now the home of Bertrand L. Joslin.

Next we turn our faces toward Palmer Hill and follow the dim outline of the pent road that leads us through the fields to the southwest corner of lot 58 where "Squire" Matthias Stone Jones made his pitch in 1798. Just above us towers the summit of Old Scrag and the whole scene is wild and mountainous. The "Squire" soon sought more fertile fields and this farm has passed through many hands. The last resident of the now deserted house was Orange Gale.

The next house, also deserted, as indeed are nearly all upon this hill, marks the home of Joseph Hamilton, a very early settler, while the south half of the lot, reached by crossing the brook and taking a fork of the road, was the home of Jonathan Palmer.

On the bank of the brook below the house, is an ideal place to rest and eat our lunch. If yesterday it took skill to catch your trout, here you will need little to place your fill of speckled beauties on the coals, and, after our tramp of six or seven miles, I venture they'll taste good.

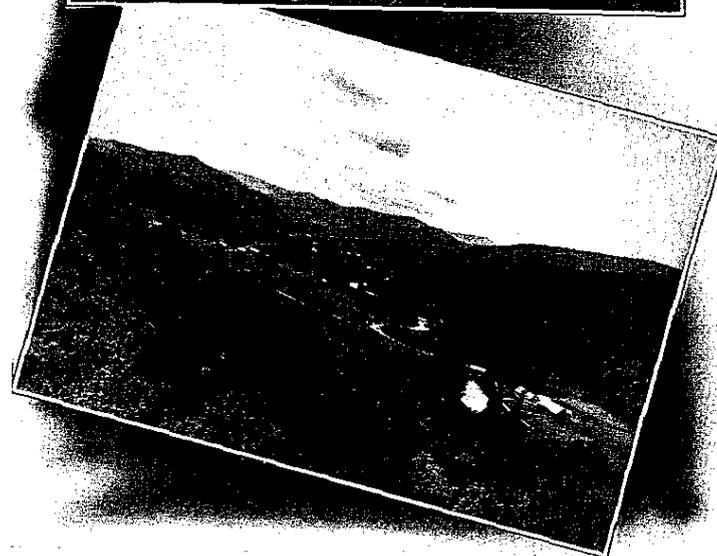
Our nooning over, we follow westward toward the main road, past the former homes of Palmers, Quimbys, Grandys, Wheelers, Bartletts and all the rest who once dwelt upon this hill and made it a hundred years ago one of the most densely settled portions of the town. Just upon the brow, we pause, for there to the north rises in all his grandeur the triple peak of Mansfield. In all the country around, there is no fairer vantage point from which to view him.

Down the hill through the woods, we soon find ourselves at the North Road once more. Here in the fork, with that massive boulder at its door, is the Center School-house. In the early days, it stood upon the west side of the highway in the corner of lot 103. It is doubtful if anywhere we could find a trace of that location now.

Across from the school-house in the northwest corner of lot 84 is the Dr. William Joslin place occupied for many years by the Skinner family. Next beyond, to the south, lived Joseph Joslin, sr., in fact this whole neighborhood was thickly settled by that family. Then comes the farm that "Squire Matt" Jones purchased after he left the mountain. It lies in lots 84 and 86 and has been occupied for many years by James H. Baird.

To the west, in lot 101, was the home of Benjamin Butterfield, but only the cellar hole can now be found on the knoll southwest of the present buildings. On lot 88 we find the Colonel Elias Taylor farm now occupied by Oramel Smith Joslin and Orrin Hubbard Joslin. Here is to be had the finest view in all the town, especially if we climb the hill a little to the east. To the west lies Lincoln Range, and to the south the lesser ranges, lined with the tracks of mighty slides. Then as we turn northward, we see Burnt Hill, Camel's Hump, Mansfield, Elmore, Sterling and Mount Hunger, while far in the north, almost upon the Canada line, Jay Peak shows its dim blue outline. Seventy miles of hills and mountain ranges stand up before us, while at our feet lies the peaceful valley with the white cottages and church spires of the village nestling there in foliage. Up over the western range come great silvery white cloud masses such as only the hill country knows. For miles and miles we watch their shadows play across the landscape, until they rush over, almost grazing the mountains behind us as they pass. We hear the farmer shout as he drives the towering load of new mown hay to cover in his spacious barns, and watch the standing herdgrass billow in the wind, while the faint tinkle of the cow bell comes from sleek herds grazing on every hand. God may have made a grander sight, but never one more beautiful.

About halfway across lot 88, a grass-grown way leads down to the Roxbury Road at the Cyrus Joslin farm on lot 99. Just where it leaves the North Road there stood in early days the store of Elias Taylor, jr., and the blacksmith shop of Capt. Richard Gale. Indeed this spot was quite the business section of the Southeast District at that time. The Joslin place just spoken of is the farm first settled by Eliphalet Bates after whom came John English, jr., and after him the Joslins, who still own it.



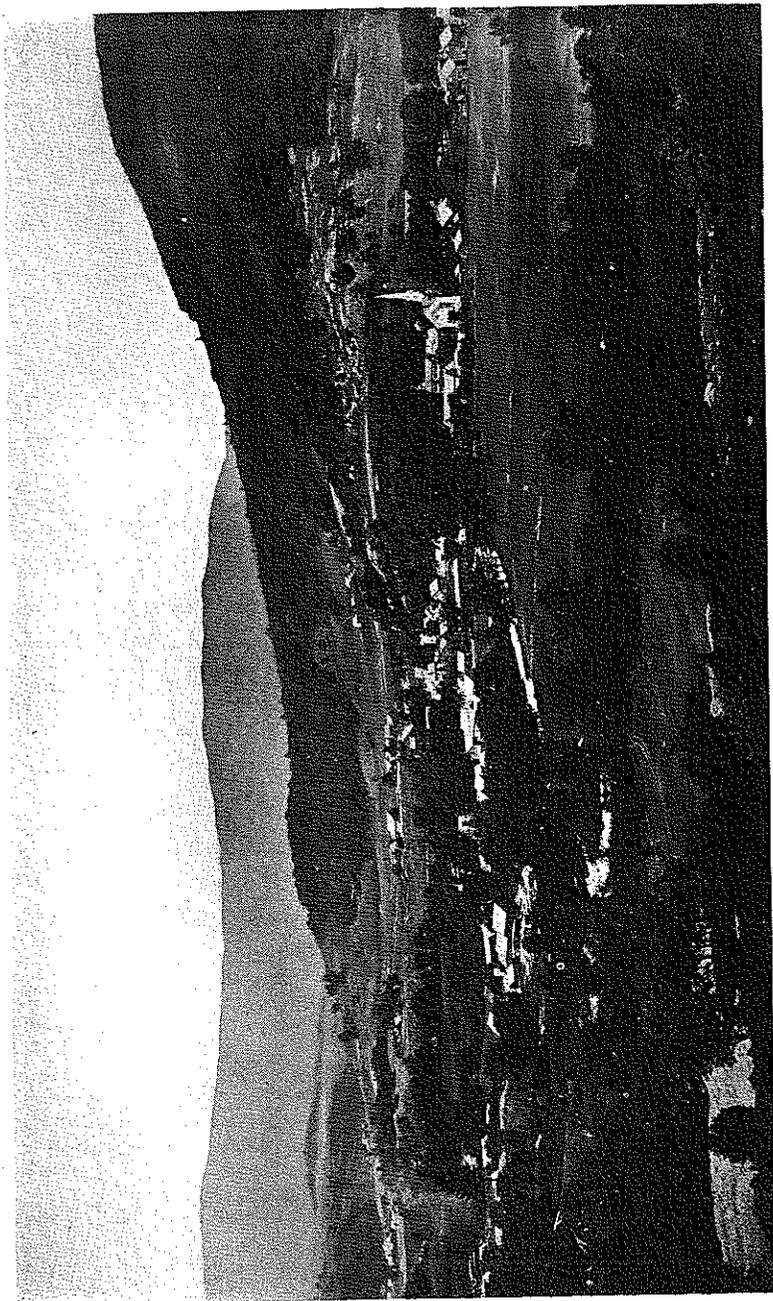
WAITSFIELD VILLAGE LOOKING SOUTH FROM SITE OF GEN. WAIT'S RESIDENCE.
MAD RIVER VALLEY LOOKING SOUTHWEST FROM PINE HILL.

To the north a little distance, an old road, long since abandoned but still traceable, leads over the hill to the northwest and down to the river road near the old fair ground. We will follow it to the top of the rise and then strike northerly through the pastures and the woods to the top of Pine Hill for from its ledges that drop sheer for several hundred feet toward the river, one can get a fine view of the south end of the valley with Irasville and Mill Brook valley to the west.

A short rest here and we will work through the scrub, a little to the north, where we can find a passage down the ledge to the river at the "suspension bridge" near the mouth of Mill Brook. This is a flimsy structure that becomes attractive as a footpath only after long acquaintance.

Down the bank of the river we soon come to the king pin swimming-hole, "Fairbanks." It takes its name from Luther Fairbanks who met his death there in 1836.

A few rods more and we are in the meadow back of the Cove, scene of our early spring fishing for horned pout, our summer search for mud turtles and our winter skating, when we were boys. Here was shot the moose that Mrs. General Wait dreamed of "three nights running" and then sent the hired man to capture. In this meadow, over to the right near the bank, was the brickyard, where Joseph Green made the bricks used in constructing the brick buildings in the village. Now out along the bank of the canal by "Uncle" Pardon Bushnell's cooper shop to the road and we are home again ready to rest against our labors on the morrow.



WAITFIELD VILLAGE LOOKING WEST TO LINCOLN MOUNTAIN.

HISTORY
OF THE
TOWN OF
WAITSFIELD, VERMONT

1782 - 1908

WITH FAMILY GENEALOGIES

BY

MATT BUSHNELL JONES

BOSTON, MASS.:
GEORGE E. LITTLEFIELD,
67 CORNHILL,
1909.