



Melville Academy Museum opens July 1 for 98th season

New JCVIS exhibits and guide to displays



A special museum exhibit honors (right to left) Amos Fortune, Rev. Laban Ainsworth, Hannah Davis, Jonas Melville, and Willa Cather, including photos of her in Jaffrey.

Melville Academy Museum opened its 98th season July 1 in Jaffrey, featuring many new exhibits and a guide to this intriguing Jaffrey history museum. Admission is free; donations are gratefully accepted. The museum will be open from 2 to 4 p.m. on July 1 through July 4 and on Saturdays and Sundays in July and August from 2 to 4 p.m.

The main room features the museum's award-winning collection of Hannah Davis bandboxes, exhibits of 19th and early 20th century clothing, and the exhibit (**photo above**) honoring Rev. Laban Ainsworth, Hannah Davis, Jonas Melville, and Willa Cather.

The Cather exhibit includes a photo of Edith Lewis, her partner, who is buried next to Cather a thousand feet away in the SW corner of the Old Burying Ground. Cather wrote that "the best part of all the better books was written here" while staying at the Shattuck Inn, referring to *My Antonia*, *A Lost Lady*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and *One of Ours*. Photos show her writing on a Shattuck Inn porch with Monadnock in the background and at the tent on a local farm where she did much of her writing.

Gorgeous dresses worn by members of the Shattuck family during the heydays of the Shattuck Inn; a painting by Jaffrey artist Fanny Hillsmith (1911-2007); and a handsomely restored photograph of George Jaffrey III (1717-1801) are among the many new items since last season. George Jaffrey III, in colonial times, was the treasurer, councilor and Supreme Court judge in the Province of New Hampshire. His name graces the town of Jaffrey, which he never visited.

The museum, a gateway to knowledge of Jaffrey's past, is located in Jaffrey Center, the gateway to Mt. Monadnock. Park by the 1775 Meetinghouse near Main Street (Rte. 124) and Laban Ainsworth Way, and walk one block down Blackberry Lane to the museum's historic 1833 building at 39 Thorndike Pond Road. Jaffrey Center Village Improvement Society (VIS) volunteers have operated it since 1920.

The first floor exhibits have been arranged into 12 themed areas, with a printed guide. The front hall displays a donation last year of a 1957 painting of First Church and Laban Ainsworth Way, by Roy W. Johnson.

Favorite older exhibits include the Jaffrey Center Post Office, which closed in 1990; a painting of Mt. Monadnock and Thorndike Pond; two 19th century samplers above a home organ; items used in the kitchen and in home industries; 19th and early 20th century communications methods, including a facebook; a notable display of logging and farm tools, including Amos Fortune's hay rake; and a model of the Meetinghouse, made by Bowman Cann, a builder and VIS vice president, in 1922 when he rebuilt the 1775 Meetinghouse for the Town. A new exhibit in progress, on the people who led "the willing forces" of the VIS over the years, is behind the Meetinghouse model on the SW wall. The SE (front) wall has a table that includes books and publications, VIS memorabilia, and the interesting life stories of many recent VIS members.

SCHOOLROOM WITH ORIGINAL DESKS

The second floor schoolroom is accessed via The Muse's Stairwell, featuring photographs and paintings of the iconic scenes of the Meetinghouse, Mt. Monadnock and Melville Academy by artists James N. Jones, Eunice Greene, Howard Hill, and Frederick James, and by New Hampshire photographers Stephen Gelbach, Robert Kozlow and Ann Wardwell.

In the upper hall is an 1857 engraving of Boston Harbor, showing the monument at the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 17, 1775). The booms of the distant cannons were heard that day in Jaffrey as citizens raised the frame of the Meetinghouse. An exhibit on Jonathan Danforth Gibbs, a shoemaker, mapmaker and recorder of local deaths, shows his photo, his cobbler's workbench and tools, his large 1850 map of Jaffrey and a small map showing the local houses. Two large signs and a small booklet memorialize The Oribe Shop, a local café and gift shop.

In the second floor main room are 28 original mortise-and-tenon bench and desk units, built without nails and fixed into the floor. Two or possibly three teen-agers sat next to each other.

On the east wall is a photo of George Jaffrey III. The photo was newly restored this week by Ron Yantis of Inkberry in Marlborough. A colonial Treasurer, Governor's Councilor and Supreme Court Justice, Jaffrey gave his name to our town. Also pictured are his grandfather, George Jaffrey I, and his Scottish estate. The around-the-room bench below the east windows has 20 sets of photographs from the 1990 book, *Jaffrey Then and Now*, by Robert B. Stephenson and Catherine L. Seiberling.

On the back (north) wall are large 1858 maps of Cheshire and Hillsborough Counties, and U.S. maps from 1843 (26 states) and 1912 (48 states).

The names of the Melville students listed in the 1841 catalogue are displayed on the front (south) wall. They include many members of the Cutter family, including Miss Sarah Cutter who was the assistant teacher. A manikin that stands tall on the teacher's 2-step platform wears a dress worn by a relative. Nineteenth century schoolbooks line a bookshelf to her left.

FIRST PRESIDENT TO DIE IN OFFICE

The nation and the Melville students in 1841 were shocked when William Henry Harrison, the ninth president of the U.S., became the first U.S. president to die in office, just one month after his inauguration. His framed photo sits on the bench of the west wall, between two fascinating old newspapers reporting the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the 1865 assassination of Abraham Lincoln (and the attempted assassination of Secretary of State William Seward). Also on this bench are 19th century children's toys and games. Above are amusing illustrations of school pupils dealing with the frowns or jokes of the schoolmaster.

The exit hallway features the sign of The Currier House bed and breakfast, a handloom for weaving, some blankets, a large cradle scythe for mowing grain, and sections of box pews from the Meetinghouse before it was converted to Town offices and school classrooms in 1870.

These are the highlights; lots of other interesting items will lure visitors back another time.

Melville Academy was Jaffrey's first high school in 1833, a private academy funded by local banker Jonas Melville. In 1835, it enrolled 87 young ladies and 87 young gentlemen. It was Jaffrey's only high school from 1833 until the Panic of 1857 ruined Jonas Melville financially and the school closed.

The museum became a public elementary school between 1863 and 1918, when the Town closed the school. In 1919, the Town allowed the VIS to use and restore the building. The VIS opened the museum Aug. 4, 1920 and received the deed in 1960. Nearly all the items have been donated by current or former residents over the years.

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