

CHAPTER IV.

ANCIENT LANDMARKS.

To one interested in our local history, there is no more fascinating occupation for a summer's day than tramping through the meadows or over the green hills, exploring brooks and long abandoned roads, seeking out the locations of early homes, and noting here and there the fast vanishing traces of the life of a hundred years ago, as all the while he revels in fresh vantages from which to view the beautiful panorama of mountains, hills and valleys, waving fields of grain, herds of sleek, lazy cattle and rural life and labor in its most pleasing aspect. As in no other way can one become so well acquainted with things of interest in the history of the town, let us spend a few days in this delightful manner, taking our start each morning from the village square, which is itself a part of the old road "looked" for the Proprietors in 1789, and formally surveyed March 11, 1796.

That road, as we have seen, ran from the Moretown line at lot 119, to a point near this square, where it turned down to the river at the Great Eddy, which was the designation of the spot where the bridge in the village now stands; running thence southerly to the Warren line, it there connected with a road long since abandoned, which led directly over the mountains to the town of Roxbury. At that time the main street of our village did not exist, for the road just referred to and the road running up the river lay several rods to the west, under the ledges back of the terrace that rises from the square. In fact, not until 1833 was the street to the southwest laid out and not until 1837 was it extended from the corner by the "brick store" to the northerly end of the village.

No business whatever centered here until Roderick Richardson the elder moved his store to this locality from the Common about 1817. Under the elm on the southwest side of the square stands his house, with one exception the oldest now extant in the village, and owned for many years by the Fullertons. Just west of the house and upon the lower slope of the terrace stood his store, now moved to the northwest corner of the square, and

forming the residence of the late John W. Gregory. A brick store building was erected by Richardson in 1831 directly across the street from his house. It was occupied by him and his son, Roderick, jr., until destroyed by fire in 1845, when the present brick structure took its place. The latter building served for some years as post-office and town clerk's office.

Now we will follow the course of the old road northward directly across the site of the present Methodist Episcopal parsonage and along the slope to the point where the terrace bends sharply to the west against the hill. Here one may note where the road that ran up the river to Green's Mills branched off. On this spot stood the board on which for many years all public notices were posted in accordance with the following vote of March 7, 1795. "Voted, that the crotch of the road by Mr. Ezra Wait's be the place for setting up advertisements for the year ensuing." Here, too, in 1801, was set the first sign-post to guide the traveler, the second being erected at the crotch of the roads on the Common later in the same year.

Within the angle of the roads, but a little above, on the level land of the terrace, stood the house of Ezra Wait. In it were held the town meetings from 1798 to 1803, and in 1802 women's rights were recognized to the extent of voting to Mrs. Wait the sum of six dollars for the trouble caused to her thereby. Here also, in 1800, was organized the Congregational Society. For some years after 1805 the house was occupied by Gilbert Wait, and here he kept the earliest tavern of which any trace may now be found, his old sign-board being still preserved, although considerably defaced. No trace of the house now exists for it fell early into decay or more probably was moved to the other side of the road to become the home of Dr. Joseph Whitcomb who was in turn followed by Ira Richardson, sr. Nearby were potash works operated probably by the Waits, although some years later Ralph Turner seems to have become the proprietor.

Now, bearing northeasterly through the pasture, we may easily trace the course of the road about one hundred rods to the spot selected by the first settler for his home. Here is the cellar of his house, the old well, curbed with stone, and remnants of the orchard planted by his hands. Tradition says that General Wait's first house was rolled up in the meadow to the southeast of us, on or very near the hillock where he and several

of his family are buried; but very soon he builded the first frame house in town upon this higher ground.

The visitor pauses instinctively to revel in the view of river, hills and woods, with the little village nestling at his feet, and wishes he might step back for a little into those earlier days and see the noble forests undulating to the mountains and dotted here and there by the new made clearing of the pioneer.

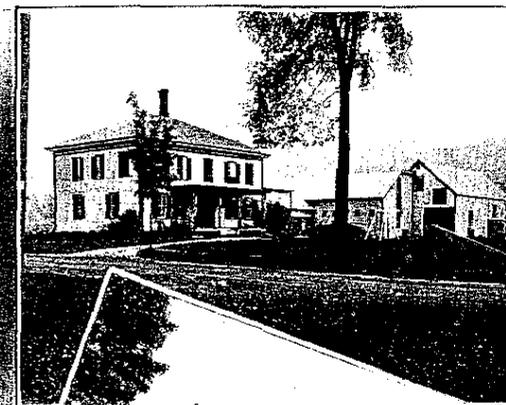
The General Wait house was square and very commodious, although but one story high, and looked out over a large and fertile farm. Here the town was organized in 1794, and all meetings held until 1798. Here the first church was gathered, and in the spacious barn was held the earliest preaching service. After the General's death in 1822, the farm passed into the hands of Roderick Richardson, who was already the owner of the Ezra or Gilbert Wait farm, adjoining on the south. About 1830 the old house was moved and stands down there on the meadow, a few rods north of the school-house. It has been remodeled, a story added, and is now occupied by Ervin S. Joslin.

Just beyond the spot where we are standing was the early business center of the town. The first road bore a little to the east around the foot of the big ledge, and then northerly again onto the terrace, but after a few years a filling (still visible) was made, and the road was extended from the Wait house straight across the brook and over the ledge, where it remained until the village street was laid out in 1837, when it again took its original course around the foot of the ledge and the second location was abandoned.

Near these ledges and on the west side of the road was erected, in 1802, the first store in town. Samuel Chandler of Worcester, Mass., and Henry Mower, of Woodstock, Vt., were the proprietors.

Nearby, and upon the same side of the road, stood the home of Edmund Rice, cabinet-maker, merchant, surveyor, pettifogger and town clerk, where were born a family of children that produced a United States Senator and a Member of Congress, leaders in the development of the great state of Minnesota.

At the top of the ledge stands a little house built probably by one of the younger Wait boys, and later occupied by Capt. Jesse Carpenter. It is now at some distance from the highway, but at that time, as we have noted, it fronted directly on the



THE FIRST FRAMED HOUSE IN WAITSFIELD, ERECTED BY GEN. WAIT.
RODERICK RICHARDSON'S FIRST VILLAGE STORE.
COVERED BRIDGE AT THE GREAT EDDY.

road, while just across the way was Carpenter's tanning and cordwainer's establishment, of which no trace may now be found, and to the west of that, near the brook, stood the potash works of Chandler & Mower, not to be confounded with the potash that stood farther to the south and has been already referred to.

Just beyond this old house, and under the northeasterly end of the ledge, stood the school-house of District No. 6, built in 1816. This was burned a year later, and another was erected on the same location, the district taking the precaution to buy sheet iron to put before the fireplace. This second building stood until a more pretentious structure was erected on a more convenient site about 1848.

To the right, on the east side of the present highway, and a few rods back in the meadow, stood the blacksmith shop built by the Durkees, and kept for some years by Captain Roswell Horr.

Our way now lies for several miles along the old highway, and we will hurry on. Here on the left is the farm now occupied by Walter C. Joslyn, first cleared by Benjamin Wait, jr. It was occupied for some years about 1825 by Garinter Hastings, and the old house now standing was then a tavern. Just south of this house, and on the same side of the road, one can make out the cellar of the store occupied in 1815 by Hebard, Baldwin & Woodward, in which our first post-office was established three years later. A few rods farther on, just where the road to centre Fayston branches off, is the north line of the original Wait farm of six hundred acres. Here stood the house where Ezra Wait lived at the time of his death, and to which, later on, Lynde Wait, first settler of Fayston, came, residing there until his removal to Ohio.

Over to the right, just at the Fayston line, where the road crosses Carding Machine Brook, Daniel Nourse had a small sawmill, and Hiland and Ransom G. Lockwood built a small chair factory on a lot that lay in the angle between the brook and the road. In 1850 they sold it to Abram S. Adams. The remnants of the sawmill dam may still be found farther up the brook.

On the left, just before we reach the junction of the old road and the present meadow road, is the Asahel Rider house, identified in later times with the Dale family, while this little

house just in the angle of the roads was the "Rex" Tewksbury place.

On the east side of the main road, under that giant pine, stood the house of Shubel Burdick, occupied in later years by Zadock Smith. In 1802 a road was surveyed directly from this house to the Common, but it was never opened. To the left, in the pasture as we cross Carding Machine Brook, now called Russ Brook, used to stand the carding plant from which the brook took its name, but we will not seek it, for every trace has disappeared. Gaius Hitchcock was the first to settle on this farm, and built the little brown house that nestles over there under the trees, well back from the highway. Our older residents remember it as the home of Amasa Russ, and the present generation will connect it with Charles Darwin Smith. This is one of the school lots, and therefore leased land, but the term will not expire "so long as grass grows and water runs."

Next comes the Ministry lot, mostly leased to John Burdick, farmer, lawyer, bridge-builder and player of the bass viol in the old meeting-house on the Common.

At the top of the hill lived Enos Wilder, killed by the fall of a tree in 1810. Tradition says that Justus Burdick, then a mere boy, felled the tree and was so overcome by the misfortune that he left home at once. Certain it is that about this time, he went to Woodstock where he engaged for twenty years or more in merchandising and then moved on to the West to become the first settler and founder of the city of Kalamazoo, Mich.

Below us at the foot of the hill is the Wallis place where stood the house of David Symonds, an early settler, and just beyond under the big maple is the house of Dr. Frederick T. Minor, who sold out his "ride" to Dr. Orange Smith in 1825.

The Palmer buildings mark the site of the first town clerk's office, the house of Dr. Moses Heaton, who departed in 1796, leaving the place to become better known as the farm of Jared Skinner and his son, Col. Orson Skinner.

We are now at the top of another hill and near its brow on the west side of the road stood the first school-house of the Northwest District, erected in 1799 at a cost of \$73.56. This served until 1821 when a new building was erected just north of Capt. Phineas Rider's house, where it still stands, although completely remodeled in 1850.

Down below us to the right is the "lower bridge." We do not know just when it was erected but it was there in 1796; not the present structure to be sure, for Mad River, true to its name, has played havoc with our bridges, and this one has been rebuilt at least five times, latest in 1852. One wonders where the river got its name. Samuel Williams, the first historian of Vermont, marks the stream upon his map of 1793, but does not name it. William Strong, the surveyor of the town, called it by its present name in his field notes of 1788, and one guesses that his party gave the name because of some unhappy experience with its uncertain habits.

But we must hurry on by the Daniel Witherbee Wilder farm, still occupied by a descendant, and by the Fair Grounds, reached by a short digression up the Fayston Road, until we come to Shepherd's Brook, first called North Brook in 1788. We are now on the old James Heaton farm, later conveyed to Jason Carpenter. In the old house convened the council called to ordain the first minister, Rev. William Salisbury, although the public exercises were held in a booth erected on the Common. Crowell Matthews, a later owner of the farm, built this saw-mill in 1848. It has been called "Green's Mill," but must not be confounded with the original Green's Mill erected many years earlier on Mill Brook. Connected with it was a starch factory, built in 1849 and operated for some years by Deacon Erastus Parker, but now unused. Over on the hill to the northwest is a talc mine, and not far away is the spot where Joseph, eldest son of Jason Carpenter, met his death under a falling tree in 1822.

Another hundred rods through Deacon John Barnard's farm brings us to the Moretown line, where, just in the corner of lot 119, stood the buildings of Dr. Stephen Pierce, although his farm lay mostly on the Moretown side.

It is a mile out of our way to retrace our steps to the bridge, so let us wander down across the meadow and ford the river to the old Samuel Barnard farm now occupied by Hugh M. Carpenter. The old house has given place to more pretentious buildings, and stands some distance back, upon the hillside. It was on this farm that numerous Indian relics were found in 1808—a gun, a copper kettle, and many wampum beads—and from the sugar bush above us Deacon Moses Fisk borrowed the sap kettles of his neighbor, whose Sabbath began at sundown

on Saturday, in order that he might boil until midnight, and then return the compliment by loaning the kettles to Mr. Barnard, who could start the fires at sundown on Sunday without breach of his Sabbath.

Here we turn south again, and follow up the east side of the river. First comes the Rufus Childs farm, cleared by Deacon Moses Fisk, and now owned by Daniel Ralph Bisbee. Just beyond is the home of Ithamar Smith; and in that little red house opposite "Aunt" Charlotte Smith, his sister, maker of straw hats for two generations, lived to the ripe age of ninety-four.

Next comes the house of Salah Smith, first schoolmaster of the town, and a leader in its life for many years; while the low brick house on the edge of the terrace, half a mile to the south, was built by Daniel Taylor around 1830, and purchased a few years later by Hiram Jones, who lived here until Thomas Prentis bought it in the late sixties. Taylor was a very early settler, and his log cabin stood below us in the meadow. Its burning furnished the first tragedy of which we have a record in the town, and we will sit here in the shade of these magnificent maples and listen to the story as told in rhyme by the late Ithamar Smith.

The Burning House.

Unlike a thousand stories new,
My story old is strictly true,
And suits the poet's page.
To snatch it fading, if I can,
From dark oblivion is my plan,
To last another age.

Who would not listen, thrilled to hear,
Of days when hunters shot the deer,
Or moose less often seen;
When smoke curled upward from the wood,
Where here and there a cabin stood,
And trees were marked between?

When Waitsfield nearly all was wild,
And I, an aged man, a child,
Then in my seventh year,
My father with a hopeful aim,
To mend his humble fortune came
From Massachusetts here.

This land was yet a forest all,
This house for wife and children small,
Was growing in the trees;
'Twas not when summer smiled in green,
For whitened were the mountains seen,
And stiffening blew the breeze.

Before us had my uncle come,
And in a meadow fixed his home
Amid the circling woods;
One room that uncle kindly spared
Till other rooms might be prepared
For us and for our goods.

His dwelling saw Mad River west,
And kindred families were blest
Beneath his roof of bark;
Of little cousins we were nine,
Who never dreamed in spirits fine,
The future might be dark.

Our happy quiet did not last
Till the first Sabbath eve was past,
So soon are pleasures fled;
The men that evening were away,
The children mostly sleeping lay,
But I was not in bed.

Some flax in bundles very dry
Was o'er an entry lying high,
A proof of early days;
Not duly heeding cause of fear,
My mother passed with candle near,
The flax received the blaze.

In vain she tried to stop the fire,
She only made it blaze the higher,
Her shriek I ne'er forgot;
The rapid flames began to pour
Bright blazes on the entry floor,
And make the entry hot.

Yet through that fiery entry lay
The only chance to flee away,
Quick, save the children, quick!
Just time the mothers had to throw
Their sleepers naked on the snow,
Through blazes falling thick.

They count their children o'er and o'er,
Lest one was left behind or more,
An awful fate to bear;
From perils pressing hard and nigh,
When would a frightened mother fly,
And leave her children there?

Poor Penny met a bitter doom,
And Puss within a burning room,
The children's chance denied;
Snatched up with children blankets four
Were saved from flames, and nothing more,
Consumed was all beside.

The absent fathers saw the flame,
And with some neighbors breathless came
To save the house too late;
Escaped from fire to keenest cold,
Their children naked they behold
With mothers in a strait.

But now from shrieks and children's cries,
And fathers struck with sad surprise,
To change the scene retire;
While fierce and high the dwelling blazed,
Some persons o'er the river gazed,
Alarmed at such a fire.

"What may that light portentous mean,
O'er trees so fearful yonder seen,
Awakening solemn thought?"
From house to house the tidings flew,
And sympathizing neighbors knew
Misfortune was our lot.

Off sped the men the worst to learn,
The women talked with deep concern,
Indulging mournful views;
"The children left alone," they said,
"Have fired the house above their head,
And sad will be the news."

But when my mother weeping came
With all her children from the flame,
They thought her troubles small;
For had one child been left to die
In flames around and blazes high,
Naught else had pained at all.

Of house and clothes and goods bereft,
In winter's cold we were not left
A friendless lot to share;
Our neighbors near much kindness showed,
And friends at distance soon bestowed
Such things as they could spare.

This tale instruction gives, no doubt,
If we will find its moral out,
And pay it due regard;
Think, when misfortune gives you pain,
It might be worse and not complain,
Or mourn your lot as hard.

If, when a lonely dwelling burns,
Its peace to consternation turns,
And joy its ruin meets;
What grief must be and deafening cries,
When driven flames o'er cities rise,
And sweep along the streets.

Now, descending the hill, we come to the home and farm of Deacon Moses Fisk, and after him of his son, Deacon Lyman Fisk. The latter's cooper shop still stands backed up against the bank on the right while to our left is Spaulding's Brook and, if you please, we will leave the road and follow its course until we reach the high land under Bald Mountain.

A few steps bring us to a beautiful pine grove standing on the bank of the gorge through which the brook comes tumbling along. Here an old log dam bars our passage. The rocky walls have narrowed and rise some thirty-five or forty feet sheer above the water but not more than twelve or fifteen feet apart. Against these ledges, in 1820, Dorrick Smith built the dam of huge logs, piled one above another to the very top, and there they stand today, to all appearances as perfect as when he rolled them into place. Do you see that log about halfway up which was partly cut away to afford entrance to the flume? This was an open trough and from it the water fell upon the old overshot wheel of the sawmill that stood some rods below us. This has now disappeared as also has the tannery that stood below it, where "Uncle Tell" Stoddard plied his trade for many years.

A sharp scramble up the bank brings us above the dam and we find the mill-pond completely filled with rocks and

gravel to the upper level of the barrier. The fishing is not of the best here, but if you are an expert angler and have brought hook and line, a few trout may soon be broiling on the coals to be discussed with the contents of our lunch basket while we revel in the beauty of the big mountains to the west and north.

Over in the pasture to our left, we can trace the old road, discontinued in 1819, that ran up the hill to Abel Spaulding's house, and then through the forest to the road near Amasa Skinner's; but it will pay us to keep to the brook until we have seen the falls, where the water comes leaping down in broken cascades a hundred feet or more. Just above the falls, we will cross the brook into the woods upon the right bank where we can make out the shallow pits that mark the ore beds where iron ore was dug in the early days; then back again into the old road we climb the ledges to the clearing, now fast growing up to forest once more, that marks the farm of Abel Spaulding whose house, erected about 1795, stood near those gnarled apple trees. No one has lived here since he left in 1818 to find a new home in Ohio. And small wonder! The spot is desolate. We have come a mile of hard road from the river settlements and it is nearly another mile through the woods to the farms under the mountains. To the northeast is the Forbush lot (115) and the summit of Little Mount Waitsfield and to the east Bald Mountain stands up before us, the highest land within the limits of the town. Its altitude does not compare with Lincoln Range and Camel's Hump but from its summit one may get a view that will repay the trouble of the climb. Fifty years ago a large portion of the mountain was bare of vegetation, but now its green slopes belie its name. This is not the direction, however, from which to approach the elevation, so we will turn our faces southward and pick our way along a wood road through the dense forest for some three-quarters of a mile until we come out on the east side of lot 111, where we will pause a moment upon the ledges to enjoy the view and then turn westward through the pasture to the valley of Pine Brook.

On the plateau above it stands the house built by Jedediah Bushnell in 1840 from timbers sawed by him in the mill, built by Joel Skinner in 1821, that stood below us where the road crosses the brook. Nothing can now be seen of the mill or dam so, instead of following the highway, we will turn across

the flat west of the house and find the old pent road that leads down through the woods and pastures to the river road about a hundred rods south of where we left it.

Yonder little white house does not look its age, it having been remodeled; but it was built by Rev. William Salisbury when he settled here in 1801, for this is the Ministry Lot, 112, that was given to the first settled minister in the town. The Dominie tried hard to get the church to pay one-half of his first year's salary of \$166.67, in labor to help him clear his farm, but the society refused and Dr. Frederick T. Minor used to tell the story that the boys made a "bee" and cleared the flat across which we have just come. They worked well and the minister, following the custom of the times, made liberal provision of New England rum for their refreshment.

And now we will head for home, crossing Pine Brook into the old Beriah Sherman farm. We are, as you will note, on the old north road that leads from the Common down to the bridge at Rider's. From this point to the Common, there have been some slight changes in the location but they are of no importance and as there are no points of especial interest, we will turn to the right along the road to the river laid out in June, 1855. It leads through the north end of lot 129, the farm first settled by Abram Marsh and sold by him to Shubel Burdick and his father-in-law Capt. John Wells. The present house was built by Russell Lockwood before the road went through, but Burdick's, as we have seen, stood on the other side of the river.

Crossing the bridge we, for the first time, retrace our steps, but it is only for a few rods as the last mile of our journey shall be along the meadow road to the village, surveyed in 1848 and opened in 1852 after considerable litigation.

As we enter the village street, lined on both sides with big maple trees, the first house to demand attention is the low brick dwelling on the right, for we have already spoken of the old Wait house and the school-house. It was built by Dan Richardson, during the "forties" after a large portion of the Wait farm had come into his possession. The square brick structure next beyond was built in 1836 by the Union Meeting-house Society and is now occupied by the local chapter of Odd Fellows who remodeled it in 1903.

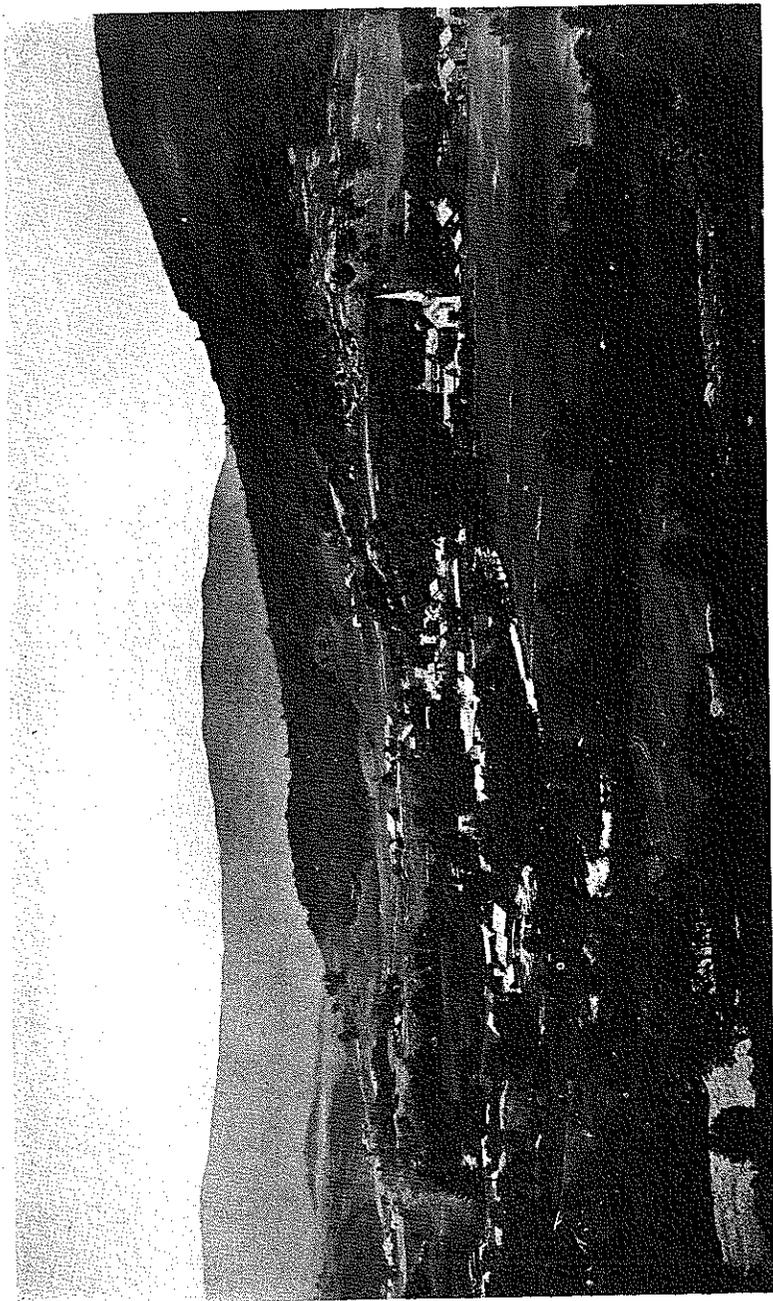
Opposite this is the old John Walton house, built in 1838, now occupied by Dr. Henry T. J. Howe, and next to it is the Dr. David Carlisle Joyslin house, built about 1835 by William Morrill Pingree.

Across the street is the Methodist Episcopal meeting-house, a modern structure, built to replace the building erected in 1870, and burned in 1894, while next it stands the house built by James M. Richardson and occupied by Andrew W. Bigelow. The little harness shop on this lot was originally erected on the Common as the saddler's shop of the elder Roderick Richardson. When he removed to the village square this building was moved to a location just across the road from his first store, where it stood until removed to its present site during the "forties." A little way beyond us is the Congregational meeting-house erected in 1874 and next to this the brick dwelling built by Roderick Richardson, jr., in 1834, but which has been for many years the home of Judge Jonathan H. Hastings.

A few steps more and we are at our starting place, but as we pass we note the wooden building next to the brick store which has for many years been the Town Clerk's office, presided over during all that time by Richardson James Gleason, who kept the post-office in the same quarters from 1861 to 1889. In fact Mr. Gleason himself may almost be ranked as one of our landmarks for he has occupied the office of Town Clerk continuously since June, 1855, a term of service that is believed to be unique in the history of Vermont.

The village has no existence separate from the town although in January, 1850, an attempt was made to define the limits of a village under the statutes of the State as follows:

"Situated and lying on the east and west side of Mad River, bounded as follows, viz.: From the supposed centre near Roderick Richardson's store, westerly up the river and leading to Warren, to the westerly line of the land where Charles D. Smith now lives, north on the River Road leading to Moretown to Dan Richardson's north line east on the road leading to the Common, to the west end of the high bridge, so-called, south on the road leading to Warren, to the south line of land now owned by Daniel Thayer to be designated by the name of Waitsfield Village."



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.