

CHAPTER VI.

ANCIENT LANDMARKS—(concluded).

The street leading southwesterly from the village square is not an old one. Originally the road ran from Ezra Wait's house directly over the hill and through the sugar orchard back of Newcomb's shop; it then turned southerly into its present course near Jeduthan Wait's house—the turn being still clearly visible near the south end of James Seymour Newcomb's residence. Indeed, it was not until September 20, 1807, that the road from Jeduthan Wait's was laid out directly down the hill with a "trundle" bridge across the brook near where Newcomb's shop now stands, to a point in the village near the houses of Hiram F. Stoddard and Charles H. Clay, and thence northerly over the terrace to a junction with the Roxbury Road just northwest of the square, where the Billings and Thompson houses now stand; and it was not until April 16, 1833, that the present street was laid out from Stoddard's down to the square.

Most of the buildings are, of course, of recent construction. The present post-office block was built by Jonathan Hammond Hastings, and Eaton's Block just beyond was once an out-building on Roderick Richardson's farm, while the Eaton residence on the left, where the road bends around the ledge, was occupied by Royal I. Fuller as a carriage and paint shop.

A little further along on the right is the house, now occupied by Hiram F. Stoddard where Col. John Stafford Campbell spent his declining years, while just across the street is the Henry N. Bushnell place for many years the home of Joshua N. Dartt.

Around the next bend we come upon Newcomb's carriage shop, built some 50 years ago, and looking older. The little brook that once turned the water wheel now babbles unrestrained through the stone dam, for its place has been taken by a more effective but less picturesque power producer.

Over there to the west, in the sugar orchard and within the limits of the old highway, is "Jed Wait's Cold Spring." For more than a century the crystal stream that here bursts

from the restraining rocks has been thus known, and treasured for its qualities, and now with undiminished flow supplies many village homes.

On up the hill we find at the left the old Jeduthan Wait home, now occupied by James A. Irwin. It is in lot 136, originally drawn by Gilbert Wait. This is one of the oldest farms in town, as the General's half-brother settled on it in 1790, although he seems not to have acquired title until 1807.

We are now upon a pronounced terrace extending from the river westerly to the face of the hill. In early times the road skirted its edge until it swung around to Dugway Hill, where we go down to the valley of Mill Brook, but now it runs directly across the level.

About 1835 James Joslin, jr., and Daniel Thayer, became the owners of the first trotting horses ever seen in town, and on this flat they used to try conclusions—one driver seated in a wagon, the other riding on his trotter's back. One cannot but wonder if they were not occasionally admonished for their worldly ways by Elder Rufus Barrett, the founder of the Methodist Church in Waitsfield, who lived in the "Peachblow House" at the head of the Dugway, just where the road branched off to Fayston Hill, the home of his staunch supporters, the Brighams, the Griggses and the Bixbys. He it was who gave the land for the Methodist Cemetery that you see just ahead upon the left, and largely through his efforts the meeting-house was built in 1835. It stands a few rods beyond the cemetery—a plain, barnlike structure that gave place in 1870 to a more pretentious edifice erected in the village. Just north of it stood the first parsonage, built in 1829, and now occupied by the family of the late Meriden L. Richardson.

This hamlet has long been known as Irasville, taking its name from the Honorable Ira Richardson, whose commodious homestead, now occupied by his grandson, stands just across the street; a few rods farther on is the store of which other grandsons are now proprietors.

At the head of the Dugway, and opposite the Peachblow House is the school-house of the old Southwest District. This building is not old (1852). In fact the earlier buildings stood near the foot of the hill, and in the valley of Mill Brook, where most of the primitive buildings in this section were erected. This old school-house was moved to the south and became a

dwelling for many years occupied by William Tell Stoddard and his son, Harlan Page. Once down the Dugway we will turn aside from our direct road to visit Green's Mills. In October, 1790, the Proprietors of the town voted a tax of "2 pence an acre," one-half to be expended for roads and one-half to encourage mills. Stimulated doubtless by a subsidy from this tax, John Heaton, jr., erected in 1793 a gristmill and a sawmill which stood in the southwest corner of lot 138 and very near the Fayston line. They were, it is believed, the first mills constructed in the town. John's cousin, James Heaton, jr., was also interested in them for a time, but soon after 1800 Thomas Green and his sons Joseph and Seth became the proprietors, and their names are still associated with the business by our older inhabitants, although the present generation speaks of "Richardson's Mill," the gristmill having been long since abandoned.

Just across the bridge below the mill the road forks. On the right it leads directly into Fayston along the valley of the brook. On the left it rises sharply, up Dana Hill, through lots 140, 142, and 144, to a dead end in 146. Let us climb for half a mile to the old Irwin place where Eli Abbott settled in 1797, and lie down for a few minutes under the trees below the house. No finer place from which to view our valley can be found in all the town. At our feet is the brook, winding its way to a confluence with the little river, whence we follow the larger stream by its blue ribbon or the occasional sparkle of its crystal waters, as it winds its way down the valley, to be lost behind the Moretown hills. Beyond we see the plateau which we explored yesterday—the Common, and the eastern mountains, while on the left the Fayston hills confront us.

From the old mill the lazy hum of saw and planer greets the ear, and we can hear the voices of the men stacking the fresh dressed lumber in the yard, while from the distant meadows come the mellowed calls of farmers busy with the rush of haying.

Comfortable homes, monster barns and waving fields of corn and grass proclaim the wisdom of the men who pitched their homes along this valley and cleared the wilderness.

Farther up the hill, in lot 142, lies the old Henry Dana farm, later occupied by Russell Steele and colloquially known at the present time as the McKenney place. Here one may



MAD RIVER VALLEY LOOKING NORTHEAST FROM DANA HILL.
Irasville in the foreground.

get the same view from a higher elevation, but there is little to be gained, and as our way lies in another direction we will retrace our steps and continue on the river road toward Warren.

First on the left as we pass the foot of the Dugway is the old house where Joel Foster lived, and some rods beyond this is the comfortable dwelling of Garinter Hastings, while nearby is the white cottage built by his son, Jonathan H. Hastings, occupied in recent days by John J. Kelty, for many years driver of the local stage to Middlesex.

Nearly opposite, on the bank of the brook, is an old mill built, probably, by Guy C. Nichols about 1815. It was then used as a fulling-mill and dyehouse, where the rough homespun was made ready for shears and pattern. In 1828 the place was run by John Kimball, and from 1834 to 1850 William Mc-Allister was the proprietor, but soon after the latter date, it was converted into a tannery, and so operated for many years by Stephen C. Parker, whose son later utilized the structure for a grist and shingle mill.

At the bridge across the brook stands the tannery erected by "Uncle Tell" Stoddard, used in later years as a starch factory, and now abandoned. Some of us can remember "Uncle Tell" after he had retired from active work, as a maker *par excellence* of whip lashes, and an unrivaled fifer and story-teller. Do you not remember that straightening of the bent form as the once-powerful muscles swelled at the memory of how, during a tremendous freshet he plunged into this very stream and swam the river for the mere pleasure of battling with the current?

Crossing the bridge we find on the right an old brickyard, the last one operated in the town, but now unused, and hardly traceable. Just in the corner of lot 139 is the home of Capt. Robert Orton Stoddard (now occupied by John Maxwell) and next beyond is the farm of Dr. Simeon Stoddard, his father, who settled on this lot in 1794. Near at hand is the bridge across the river that the worthy doctor tried for many years to get the town to build, and on the summit of the knoll at the right, under the spreading branches of the apple trees, may be found the little family cemetery where he lies buried.

On the opposite side of the stream one may see the finest example of terrace formation in the town. The highway runs along the second terrace, and above us on the third is seen the

outline of the race track and the grounds where the Agricultural Association held its first fair in 1872. The road here passes through the old Job House farm, lying in lots 96 and 141, and still owned by members of the family. As we cross lot 96 a road leads to the right down to the level of the river. Over there, just in the northeast corner of lot 143, and directly on the river bank, stood the so-called forge and trip hammer, together with the foundry where iron kettles were manufactured from ore brought from Orange County. This was operated at various times by Edward Fales, Theophilus Bixby, James Selleck and others, but in the great freshet of 1830 it was swept away, together with the dam that furnished power, and neither was rebuilt, although at a later period Thomas D. Poland constructed a small sawmill which he operated until it suffered the fate of its predecessor. John S. Poland settled on this farm in 1820, and it is in the hands of his descendants to this day.

Following the road into lot 94 we find ourselves on the farm settled by Jesse Mix in 1794. That portion of the lot on the west side by the river, together with some of the gore lands to the south, now forms the Ford farm. On the east side Fay Brook flows into the main stream. Nearby a road leads up the hill through lots 93, 147 and 92, to the Roxbury or Kingston Road. The homes of John and Captain Robert Leach stood on this road, the Captain's farm having been occupied in recent years by the late John Somerville.

But we shall find more pleasure, I imagine, in leaving the highway and following up the brook that tumbles out of the gorge in a beautiful cascade. This spot was early chosen as a favorable mill site and was bought as such by Silas Trask in 1801, but so far as can be learned no mill was actually constructed here.

For more than a mile now we shall find no clearing, and no easy pathway, for the hills rise abruptly for several hundred feet on either hand, but in lot 147, near the spot where two branches of the brook join to form the larger stream, the hill to the left has been cleared, and just back from the water one may see the cellar of an old log house, its fireplace and chimney,—built of stones from the brook—now tumbled into ruins. This was the home of Samuel Bowman in 1812, and next to that of Abel Spaulding the most desolate in its surroundings in all the town. No wonder that a few years later he abandoned

it and moved to a house on lot 92. Here, too, one sees the road, now discontinued, that led up out of the gorge, and wonders how a wagon was ever hauled up or let down. Let us follow it to the present highway, near the south line of lot 92, whence it is but a few rods to the Roxbury Road where stands the early home of Ziba Rice, later owned by Joseph Farr. To the south the road pitches down into the valley of the brook, but we will not follow it, as we can see the points of interest from here.

Just beyond us lies lot 91, settled by Moses Stewart in 1794. His house stood where that occupied in later years by Leonard C. Berry may now be seen facing the old road just beyond the point where it makes its sharp turn to the southeast. Nearby in the southwest corner of lot 46, and in the gore lands to the south, lay the farm of Oliver Colton, and next beyond this—still in the gore lands—the farm of Joshua Pike, while to the west in lot 148, on the old Kingston Road, lived Oliver Wood and his sons, on the farm now held by George A. Berry.

Turning northerly we soon find ourselves at the old Nathan Stowell* place (now occupied by Emery Somerville), and over to the east in lot 89, where Jerry Ryle now lives, Mr. Stowell found farms for his sons Nathan, jr., and Salue. Nearby on the line between lots 90 and 92 stands the south school-house, and just beyond through an avenue of beautiful maples, one may see the old Minor farm, settled by Aaron Minor about 1795, occupied for many years by Jennison Joslin, and now owned by Edward E. Neill.

Turning westerly along the road we reach lot 95, occupied by Ezekiel Hawley in 1794, and now owned by Julius E. Berry. Caleb Colton spent his declining years on a small place in the southeast corner of this lot.

Here the road swings to the north, and enters lot 97, upon which Job Tyler made his pitch in 1797. This was the scene of the smallpox outbreak in 1799, when Tyler's house was taken as a pesthouse, and quarantined by order of the town, which voted that: "Mr. Hawley go and turn the road by Mr. Tyler's house so that persons are not exposed when they drive by to take the smallpox, and to set up a monument at each end of

*Nathan Stowell lived from 1795 to 1807 on lot 101 before removing to the farm now commonly identified with his name.

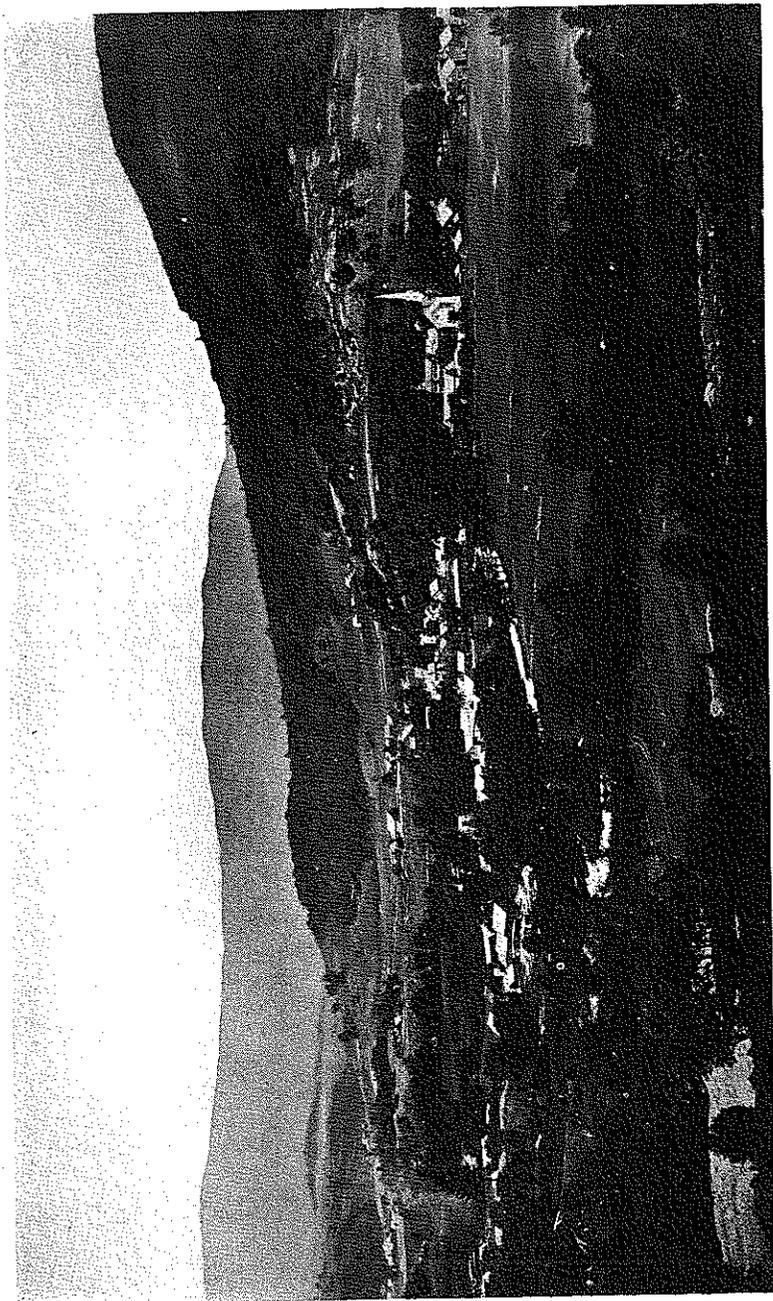
the road so turned, with these words 'Smallpox'—and he is to be allowed his expenses on his next year's highway rate."

Apparently these prompt measures prevented any spread of the disease, and in due time Mr. Tyler's house was returned to him, and he was voted \$40 for its use. The lot was soon divided into two farms. The southerly portion was occupied for a time by Isaac Tewksbury, and now forms a part of the John Saunders farm, while the northerly portion is known as the home of Capt. John Campbell, who settled there in 1801, although a later generation knows it still better as the home of the late John Waterman.

Next we pass the old English farm noted on our trip yesterday, and, farther down the hill in the northwest corner of lot 99, and running back into lot 100, we see the Josiah Campbell farm, occupied for many years by Joseph Palmer and his son Warren J.

This brings us to the minister's lot, 102, which the Church made the Rev. Mr. Salisbury deed to it before he could be settled. It has been much divided since the early days, but the only house now occupied is George H. Hastings'.

A few rods more and we find ourselves retracing our steps down the hill by the mill into the village, weary but well repaid by the knowledge gained of ancient landmarks in our little town.



WAITFIELD VILLAGE LOOKING WEST TO LINCOLN MOUNTAIN.

HISTORY
OF THE
TOWN OF
WAITSFIELD, VERMONT

1782 - 1908

WITH FAMILY GENEALOGIES

BY

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