

6. Historic Resources

6.1 Introduction

The quality of future planning can be enhanced in many ways by an appreciation of a community's past. This chapter was prepared in recognition of the fact that historic resources play a critical role in a town's character and quality of life. In terms of planning, historic structures and sites are but one part of our total environmental resources and like many others are nonrenewable, capable of being preserved or vanishing with a single action. Although Merrimack's historic resources are overshadowed by the tremendous amount of construction which has occurred in the past quarter century, the buildings and sites which survive are essential in defining the Town's unique identity. According to Census data, only 6 percent of the housing units in Town were built before 1940, as compared to 22.3 percent in the region and 22.3 percent statewide.¹

1 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

These statistics only confirm how critical it is to identify, promote and integrate significant historic resources in Town before these important links to the past are lost forever.

This chapter briefly provides an overview of Merrimack's history and discusses those areas of the community which are of particular historic or architectural interest. A wide range of preservation techniques may be used to help ensure that future growth is compatible with local design and land use traditions. These can range from such non-regulatory options as public education (school projects on local history, establishment of markers commemorating sites of historic interest) to intermediate measures (such as suggesting compatible design themes to a developer who might otherwise be unaware of the need to integrate new structures with their surroundings or nominating structures to the National Register of Historic Places). Finally, a community may opt to use regulatory techniques such as establishing local historic districts. It is the responsibility of the community to plan a program of historical and cultural protection, based on local needs and desires.

This chapter includes a discussion of:

- the history of Merrimack including archaeological resources and architectural resources;
- tools for historic preservation; and
- recommendations

Much of this chapter has previously appeared in the 2002 Merrimack Master Plan.

6.2 Historical Overview

6.2.1 General Overview

Archaeological investigation indicates that the Merrimack River Valley supported a resident prehistoric population for thousands of years prior to the arrival of the first European settlers to the Valley in the 1600s. Recent digs in Merrimack have yielded what is thought to be evidence of a 7,000 year old Indian camp.

Over three hundred years ago a band of Penacook Indians under Chief Passaconaway settled on the banks of a wide river they named "Merrimack". There are a variety of interpretations as to the exact meaning of the name. Some believe the name of the river is related to the Indian word for sturgeon. Northern Indians may have used the name to describe a place of strong current from "merroh" (strong) and "awke" (a place). Others believe that Massachusetts Indians developed the name from the word "mena" (island) and "awke" (a place), translating to the "island place" to describe the number of beautiful islands in the River. One of these islands, the big island between Merrimack and Litchfield, is said to have served as the summer camp of Chief Passaconaway.

In 1652, a survey of the Merrimack River was conducted from Massachusetts to the outlet of Lake Winnepesaukee by Captain Simon Willard, at the request of the Massachusetts General Court. Early settlements were promoted by abundant meadow land, fertile uplands and trapping potential second to none in the state. A series of land grants were made by King Charles

From 1656 to 1662, following the Indians' retreat from the area, with the primary white settlers coming from Massachusetts during the mid-1600s to the early 1700s.

The Town of Merrimack was one of sixteen present day communities in New Hampshire and Massachusetts included in the original grant of Dunstable, chartered in 1673. What is now southern Merrimack was included in a grant made to William Brenton in 1658 and became known as "Brenton's Farm". In 1746 Merrimack gathered together the lands south of the Souhegan River in the possession of Dunstable and Litchfield and petitioned the Provincial Government to incorporate. The northern part of the Town was granted to Joseph Blanchard of Nashua and others from the Hill and Reed family in 1729. In 1750 Merrimack was granted another charter and the northern section of the Town was added to its acreage, along with a strip of land on the western boundary.

The Town historically consisted of four villages: Reeds Ferry in the north, Souhegan Village near the mouth of the river of that name, Thornton's Ferry and South Merrimack. Reeds Ferry and Thornton's Ferry were named for the ferries that operated between Merrimack and Litchfield, beginning in 1728 and 1736, respectively. Souhegan Village was the center village and was later known as Merrimack. South Merrimack Village was sometimes called "Hard Scrabble" because of the difficulty of tilling the soil in this area. Each village was self-sufficient, with its own railroad station, post office, general store and schools.

McKeown's - Depot Street
(1920)



Although the Town was first settled in 1722, as early as 1655 John Cromwell had established a trading post in Merrimack about two miles south of Thornton's Ferry on the river. One of the first permanent settlers is believed to have been Jonas Barrett, who built a house 1½ miles west of Thornton's Ferry in 1722. A meetinghouse was built in the center of Town, near Turkey Hill in 1756. As the growing population of the Town gradually settled near the river, another meetinghouse was built. The original structure burned in 1896. The current Town Hall was dedicated in 1873 and has served as the Town administrative offices for over one hundred years.

What is today Route 3 was known as the River Road, the Great Road or the road from Concord to Boston in the 1700s. It was originally a tree-shaded dirt road three rods wide, gradually becoming the main road through Town. Another of the oldest roads in Merrimack is Amherst Road also known as County Road, connecting Amherst, which was the county seat, with Exeter and the coastal towns.

Throughout the 18th and first part of the 19th century, Merrimack's industry consisted mostly of saw and grist mills which were established on every river, brook and pond. The laying of Concord and Montreal railroad track along the western bank of the Merrimack River in the 1840s shifted the industrial focus of the community to the rail corridor, with residential development in close proximity following in the late 19th century. In addition to the station at Railroad Avenue (still extant), two others at Reeds Ferry and Thornton's Ferry, a B & M railroad stop in South Merrimack spurred a second wave of settlement in this area after the arrival of the railroad in 1851. By linking Merrimack to the nearby city of Nashua, the railroad helped local farmers to bring dairy, orchard and poultry products to the city, and later transported workers who were employed in the large mills in Nashua. At the end of the 19th Century and early 20th Century, Merrimack itself also had a number of small industries including the Fessenden and Lowell barrel and bucket factory at Reeds Ferry, the Haseltine & Gordon Excelsior Factory, a shoe factory and a table manufacturer all at Souhegan Village.

Merrimack's population remained relatively stable for much of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. For over a century, from 1810 to 1940, the Town's population hovered around 1,000 persons. After World War II, Merrimack, along with much of Southern New Hampshire, experienced suburbanization. By 1950 the Town's population had increased to 1,908 and between 1960 and 1970, Merrimack was one of the fastest growing communities in the state. In 1955, the 21 mile stretch of the F.E. Everett Turnpike between the Massachusetts line and Manchester's Queen City Bridge was opened. The section between Manchester and Concord was completed the following year. Highway access made Merrimack attractive to a number of industries beginning with Anheuser-Busch in 1968-70, followed by others including Sanders, Kollsman and Digital in the mid-1970s. As was the case historically, commercial development concentrated along Route 3.

To keep pace with the population growth, Merrimack constructed a number of new schools between 1949 and 1968 including Mastricola Elementary, Merrimack Middle School, Merrimack High School, Reeds Ferry and Thornton's Ferry Schools. Continued population growth has resulted in the construction of numerous additional expansions to each school since that time. Merrimack's population stood at 15,406 in 1980, and continued to show substantial growth during the 1980s, reaching a level of 22,156 in 1990. According to the US Census Bureau, Merrimack's 2000 population was 25,119 and the 2010 population stands at 25,494.

6.2.2 Archaeological Resources

Archaeological resources are the physical remains of the past that can be studied by archaeologists and other scholars to answer questions about history and prehistory. Most often these resources are sites and groups of sites, buried in the ground and invisible on the surface, yet they are especially important historic resources because they are often our only sources of knowledge about prehistory.

Prehistoric archaeological sites can generally be categorized as semi-permanent villages, seasonal camps for fishing, hunting and/or gathering, quarries, workshops and burial grounds. In predicting locations where archaeological sites might be expected to occur, archaeologists take into account environmental conditions including proximity to water, soil conditions, slope and exposure.

The availability of potable water from springs, lakes or streams is obviously a primary requirement of any population. Water also provided a network for travel. Residential sites were generally selected on the basis of soil conditions. Sandy or light, gravelly soils were most often selected in upland regions, and silty, alluvial soils were sought in river valleys. The more permeable soils were preferred because of their rapid drying qualities, and also because pits and burials excavated with digging sticks, hoes or hands, were more easily worked in these soils. Level sites were preferred. In addition, residential sites are almost always found oriented toward the south or southwest to maximize periods of warmth and sunlight and facilitate rapid drying of soil.

Over the years, the Merrimack River corridor has been an active archaeological research area and almost two hundred archaeological sites have been recorded along the entire length of the Merrimack River in New Hampshire. While Merrimack's archaeological sites have received limited investigation, across the river, Litchfield is home to some of the most significant sites in the state. Research by archaeologist Dr. Clyde Berry during the 1930s and 40s indicated the existence of prehistoric campsites at Moores Falls on both banks of the River, in Litchfield and Merrimack. Many of the artifacts catalogued by Dr. Berry were donated to the Manchester Historic Association. It was Berry's feeling that the west bank was even richer in terms of artifact density, but his testing on the east bank was apparently not as extensive. While little new information has surfaced in recent years relative to Merrimack's prehistoric archaeological potential, the significance of historic archaeological resources has emerged, such as the lock at Cromwells Falls. Constructed in 1814 of rough granite blocks, the lock is regarded as the best preserved of the eight remaining locks which survive on the former Merrimack River navigation system. Other areas which may hold potential for historic archaeological resources include cellar holes, and the sites of schoolhouses, taverns, mills, the Town's first meeting-house and early ferry crossings.

The preservation of areas of high potential for prehistoric and historic archaeological sites poses unique problems. In comparison to historic structures, archaeological resources are more difficult to identify and protect. Each site is unique and fragile. Once a site is disturbed, information is lost. While there is often an urgent need to keep the location of an important archaeological resource confidential, the same confidentiality will often preclude public awareness. Acquisition of the land or land development rights is often the only way to effectively preserve archaeological resources. Often, widespread awareness increases the likelihood that valuable sites will be disturbed.

Rapid growth is the greatest threat to archaeological resources. The few applicable laws that protect archaeological resources are primarily federal. As a result of these laws, large highway projects or projects which require review by a federal agency usually have a review of impacts to cultural resources. In addition, there is the possibility of review within the dredge and fill process. However, since much of the region's growth is from private rather than public sources, archaeological evaluation is not required. In some cases in the state, cooperative developers have permitted recording of archaeological data which would otherwise be

destroyed. The State Division of Historical Resources has very limited ability to review private projects for impact on archaeological resources. However, local officials should consult the Division if a proposal will impact a known archaeological resource or if a project is in a location with high archaeological potential.

6.2.3 Architectural Resources

Throughout Town a panorama of architectural styles is evident, ranging from the first period Cape Cod and gambrel roofed dwellings of the late 18th century to the bungalow and Cape Cod revivals of the early 1900s. The following section provides an overview of the styles which figured prominently in the Town's architectural development and offers local examples of each.

Early Period (Pre-1720)

The earliest structures erected by the settlers were undoubtedly log or plank houses, the evidence of which has all but disappeared or possibly been obscured under later building additions. Once the family was sheltered, erection of a barn was often the next priority for early residents, and on many homesteads today, the post and beam barn is the earliest surviving structure on the property.

The first period dwelling generally emphasized symmetry, horizontal lines and limited classical detail. With few exceptions, these early houses faced north and south to maximize solar exposure, with the rooms grouped around a central fireplace/chimney block. Decoration on the humble Cape Cod house is typically limited to simple casings or a band of rectangular transom lights over the doorway. The two-slope gable roof predominates, with the gambrel roof also evident.

Early period houses are scattered throughout Merrimack on many of the older roads. Good examples include the McClure-Hilton House at 16 Tinker Road, the Kent House at 45 Peaslee Road and the gambrel-roofed house at 26 Bates Road. The Old Conant/Holt Mill House has an estimated construction date of 1690.

Georgian Style (1700-1780)

The first real architectural style to appear in provincial America, the Georgian style is embellished by ornament inspired by Italian Renaissance and English sources. The style is characterized by classical moldings, both inside and out, symmetrical facades, window caps and more elaborate doorways. Most often the Georgian house measures 2 ½ stories with five individual windows across the front and two windows deep on the side elevations. The roof can be either a gable or a hip (four slopes meeting at the ridge). The sliding sash windows may have anywhere from six to twelve panes of glass in each sash.

Merrimack's Georgian residences include the O'Keefe House on Amherst (County) Road between the Souhegan River and the Town line and the former Spaulding House at 17 Peaslee Road. Another excellent Georgian doorway with flattened columns or pilasters supporting a cornice is seen on the house at 190 Baboosic Lake Road.

Federal Style (1780-1830)

The Federal style is in many ways a refinement of the preceding Georgian style, with somewhat lighter, more delicate ornament which often incorporates elliptical and semicircular fanlight shapes. Like the Georgian, the Federal style building almost always displays a five bay, symmetrical facade. The most common Federal house type is the two story dwelling with hip or gable roof. On brick Federal houses the decorative pieces over the windows (known as lintels) are often cut on a diagonal. The hallmark of the style is the fanlight or fan over the doorway with partial sidelights flanking the door. Inside the style may be expressed in a spiral or elliptical stairway.

The semicircular fanlight characteristic of the Federal style can be seen on various Merrimack structures including The Common Man Restaurant (304 Daniel Webster Highway at Greeley Street and the Buckley's Steak House (438 Daniel Webster Highway). Federal style detailing is also evident on the First Congregational Church on Baboosic Lake Road.

Greek Revival Style (1830-1860)

Loosely based on the look of a Greek temple front, the Greek Revival style is typified by a pedimented facade supported by colossal columns. While New Hampshire Greek Revival houses often display columned porches, the style was also expressed in other ways including flat headed windows and doors, heavy entablature moldings under the eaves and recessed doorways with corner block moldings and full sidelights. Indeed, the most important legacy of the Greek Revival style is the shift from earlier broad sided structures with central entrances to the front gabled house with an off-center, sidehall entrance. Contrary to popular belief, it was during this period that buildings were often first painted white to simulate the marble of classical antiquity.

The finest example of the Greek Revival style in Merrimack is undoubtedly the former Bowers-Blanchard House at 6 Manchester Street (now the Thomas More Institute). It was originally designed as a cape, but was renovated to its current design at a later date. Other examples of the vernacular Greek Revival style include the houses at 255 Daniel Webster Highway (corner of Star Drive) while the house at 74 Wire Road is a good example of an earlier Cape Cod structure, updated by a Greek Revival, cornerblock doorway. The South Merrimack Congregational Church, now the Merrimack Valley Baptist Church, exhibits how the style was applied for church use. Many Greek Revival houses display Federal decorative elements and therefore may be considered as transitional. The house at 465 Daniel Webster Highway, south of the Town Hall, with its columned front porch and pedimented brick ends is an excellent example of this trend.

French Second Empire (1860-1875)

In rural areas such as New Hampshire, the distinguishing feature of the Second Empire Style is the mansard roof (with sloping walls), which is often decorated by dormer windows. Additional details may also include projecting overhangs with large brackets and bay windows. There are only a few buildings in Town displaying mansard roofs, but the best local example of this style is Thornton Place at 604 Daniel Webster Highway in Reeds Ferry.

Italianate (1860-1880)

In larger metropolitan areas, the Italianate house usually displays a rectangular form with wide eaves, tall first floor windows and bay windows, all topped by a low pitch roof with cupola. In Merrimack, the last half of the nineteenth century marked a period of increased building activity especially in the village of Reeds Ferry and builders sought to apply elements of the latest styles to the simple gablefront house form. Decoration common to this period includes square or turned porch posts, bracketed cornices, and single story bay windows. This style is generally not well represented in Merrimack.

Queen Anne Style (1880-1900)

The term Queen Anne can be broadly applied to many late nineteenth century buildings. A most varied and decoratively rich style, the Queen Anne is characterized by asymmetry and a variety of forms, textures, materials and colors. Towers, turrets, tall chimneys, porches, bays and projecting pavilions are common. Stained glass, terra cotta trim and a variety of window types are also often used.

Although Merrimack's Queen Anne buildings are somewhat restrained in their decoration, there are a number of good examples in the Reeds Ferry area including 585 Daniel Webster Highway and the house across the street at 588 Daniel Webster.

Colonial Revival (1880-1930)

In contrast to the exuberance of the Queen Anne style, the Colonial Revival style marked a revival of earlier styles such as the Georgian and Federal of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In contrast to colonial buildings however, the Colonial Revival often displays an asymmetrical profile with stylistic details often exaggerated, out of proportion and combined in a decidedly contemporary fashion. Colonial Revival buildings of the 1890s did not attempt to be accurate copies but were free interpretations of earlier styles with details inspired by Colonial prototypes. Beginning about 1910, Colonial Revival Buildings were more carefully researched and often exhibited more historically accurate proportions and details. Later Colonial Revival style houses include Cape Cod dwellings.

Classical Revival (1890-1915)

A late 19th century renewed interest in historical architecture also manifested itself in the Classical Revival style which focused on Greek and Roman architectural orders. This style is typified by symmetrical buildings with pedimented entrances, and heavy classical moldings and ornament. Across the country, the Classical Revival style was used to evoke a reverence for knowledge and learning and was commonly used for the designs of libraries, including Lowell Memorial Library in Merrimack.

6.3 Significant Local Historic Resources

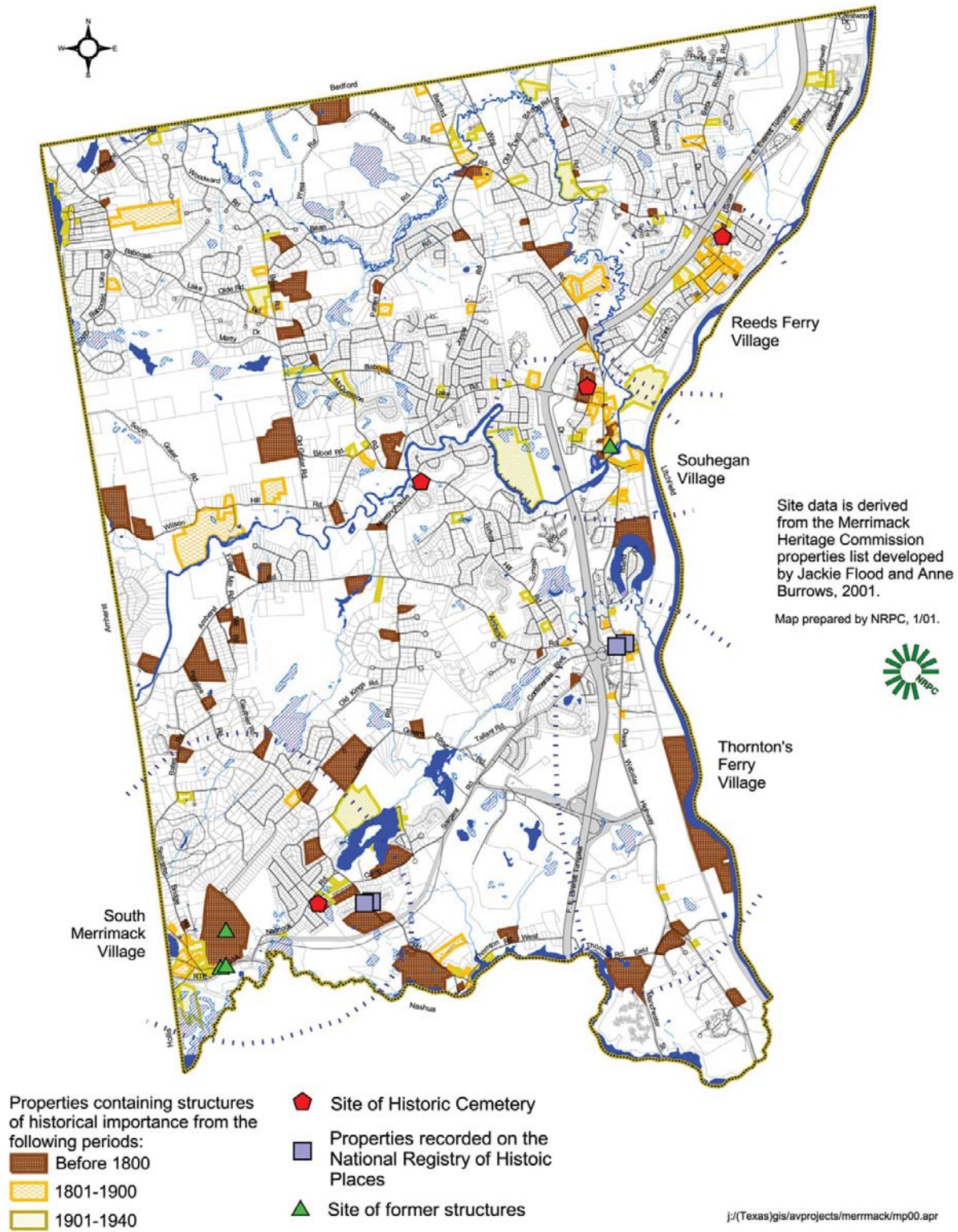
Many of Merrimack's historic resources are found in the four villages of Reeds Ferry, Thornton's Ferry, Souhegan (the present Town Center) and South Merrimack. Yet, although these areas comprise the most notable concentrations of historic resources in Town, it should be noted that there is hardly an old road in Town where an historic homestead or mill site cannot be found. Merrimack's old roads still in use include Baboosic Lake, Bean, Boston Post, County, Meetinghouse, Naticook, Patten, Parkhurst, Peaslee, Seaverns Bridge, Tinker and Wire Roads. Additional historic roads, now discontinued, include the Old Kings Highway, Old Blood Road and Grater Road. In 1990, according to the U.S. Census there were 337 dwelling units in Town constructed prior to 1939.. The following is a brief summary of the historic village areas in Merrimack:

- **Merrimack Center** – Located where the Souhegan River meets the Merrimack, along the Great Road from Concord to Boston, and later near the railroad tracks, what is now Merrimack village was well sited for a center of local activity. Known as Souhegan Village in the nineteenth century, the village hosted industries including a carpet factory as well as a store and schoolhouse. What is known as Kiestlinger's store (471 Daniel Webster Highway opposite Baboosic Lake Road) was built as a store and has served that purpose continuously for close to 200 years. The First Congregational Church was erected in 1837. The later erection of various municipal buildings over the years attests to the growing importance of the village and include the Town Hall and Town tomb after 1870 and Lowell Memorial Library in 1924. A number of significant historic houses dating to the late 18th and early 19th centuries are found primarily on the east side of Route 3 and along Loop Road. Additional late 19th century houses (c. 1870-1890) are found along Railroad Avenue, probably in response to the construction of the railroad station during this period.
- **Reeds Ferry** – A ferry landing connecting this section of Merrimack with the western shore of Litchfield was in place as early as 1728. Located on Depot Street, the Merrimack Normal Institute was the first professional training school for teachers in New Hampshire. Shares were sold to raise the \$6,000 for the building that opened in 1849 with William Russell from Scotland its first headmaster. It struggled until 1865 when it became the Granite Street Military and Collegiate Institute under the direction of Rev. Howell. This enterprise failed but in 1875 the building became Merrimack's first high school, the McGaw Institute. Robert McGaw, one of the original shareholders in the original Institute, died in 1872 and bequeathed \$10,000 for that purpose. Although there are a number of fine early nineteenth century structures including brick houses at 4 Depot Street and on Daniel Webster Highway, many of the structures in Reeds Ferry resulted from a second period of building activity at the end of the 19th century associated with the coming of the railroad and industries such as Fessenden & Lowell's who built or owned the mill, the buildings formerly known as Levi Lowell's, the large boarding house at 7 Depot Street and housing on Elm, Maple and Front Streets. Other buildings dating to this period include the Wheeler Chapel and the simple residences on Pleasant Street. Development elsewhere in Town has left Reed's Ferry Merrimack's most intact historic area.
- **Thornton's Ferry** – One of Merrimack's most famous early citizens was Matthew Thornton, who moved to Town from Londonderry in 1784 after he signed the Declaration of Independence. Trained as a doctor, Thornton settled on the farm formerly owned by Edward Lutwyche and operated the ferry, which was originally known as

Cumming's Ferry. From this time on the ferry was called Thornton's Ferry, and this section of Town is still referred to as Thornton's Ferry. The tavern built for Thornton's son, the cemetery where he and his family are buried and a monument erected in his honor in 1892 are still standing on Route 3 although the house has been converted to a restaurant and the general integrity of the area is not what it once was, due to new construction, the widening of Route 3 and the interchange with the F.E. Everett Turnpike. Some of Dunstable's earliest homes exist north of the Pennichuck Pond system in the Thornton's Ferry area of Merrimack.

- South Merrimack – One of the earliest villages established in Merrimack, South Merrimack witnessed a second wave of settlement following the arrival of the railroad in 1851. As a result, the historic structures in this area fall into two general periods, the early nineteenth century evidenced in a number of buildings in the Federal and Greek Revival style followed by additional building activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The centerpiece of the village is the South Merrimack Baptist Church, Greek Revival in style and constructed in 1829. Across the road is the former Centerville School (Community House or 1847 Schoolhouse), a one room district schoolhouse constructed in 1847 and used as a schoolhouse until 1948. This is currently the home of the Merrimack Historical Society. The railroad depot which served the commuter line to Nashua was demolished for the Route 101A Bypass in the 1950s.

Figure 6-1: Historic Villages and Sites in Merrimack





Gordon Home - Daniel Webster Highway, built in 1896

6.4 Tools for Historic Preservation

While a variety of preservation tools are available at the local, state and federal level, obviously no sector of government has the statutory power or financial means to preserve all of the historic resources worthy of preservation. As a result, much of the most basic and yet most important responsibility for historic preservation is in the hands of the private owner, who has the power to greatly enhance or denigrate a property, through repairs and maintenance. Unfortunately, improvement work undertaken with good intentions can result in techniques or materials inconsistent or insensitive to an older building. Inappropriate improvements may compromise the integrity of a structure and may actually damage the building they were intended to preserve. For example, while the application of artificial sidings to an older home may seem to be an improvement, they may conceal and even accelerate the decay of materials under the siding. Specialized information covering topics

sensitive to the needs of older buildings is available from the New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources and the Nashua Regional Planning Commission.

Building on the actions of individual owners, historical societies, historic district commissions and other citizen groups can greatly enhance the public's awareness of the importance of preserving historic resources through exhibits, slide shows, walking tours, pamphlets and publications. In 1988 the Merrimack Historical Society acquired the 1847 Schoolhouse on Boston Post Road and has renovated the building for use as a working center, meeting place and research library.

Although this chapter is primarily dedicated to historic structures and sites, some mention should also be made of the need to preserve other materials which give us a better understanding of our history and which, in some cases, are the only surviving reminders of past people, events and sites. Early Town records, documents, manuscripts and artifacts deserve a suitable and safe repository. The collection of oral histories and the continued recording of townspeople, structures and events are excellent ways to bring history to life for future generations.

6.4.1 Historic Resources Survey

Preservation through documentation is the most basic, essential and noncontroversial of preservation strategies. There are several reasons for undertaking an historic resources survey. In addition to providing a permanent written and photographic record of a town's architecture, a good inventory is the foundation for other preservation tools. It can be of service to the historic district commission and can be used to prepare nominations for listing of historic structures in the National Register of Historic Places. Data gathered in a survey may encourage a greater appreciation of historic structures and sites by local citizens. Historic resource assessments are also necessary for accomplishing environmental reviews required in projects receiving Federal funding, such as transportation projects. As the beginning of a comprehensive historic preservation strategy, information gathered should act as a firm foundation for future decision making, by identifying buildings suitable for and worthy of preservation and/or rehabilitation. A complete historic resources survey can help a community weigh proposed actions more carefully, so that the community does not inadvertently sacrifice its long-term assets in realizing immediate objectives.

The Town history includes a section on early homesteads. Other important sources include old maps such as those included in the 1858 Atlas of Hillsborough County and the 1892 New Hampshire Atlas. Resources in the South Merrimack area were surveyed by a consultant to the New Hampshire Department of Transportation in 1989 as part of the Route 101A Bypass Study. The Merrimack Heritage Commission is continually working to update the historic resources survey for the Town.

6.4.2 National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's resources worthy of preservation. Established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and administered by the National Park Service within the Department of the Interior, the Register lists properties of local, state and/or national significance in the areas of American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. Resources may be nominated individually, or in groups, as districts or as multiple resource areas and must generally be older than 50 years.

The primary benefit of National Register listing is the recognition it affords and the appreciation of local resources which is often stimulated through such recognition. The National Register also provides for review of effects which any federally funded, licensed or assisted project, most notably highway projects, might have on a property which is listed on the Register or eligible for listing. Register standing can also make a property eligible for certain federal tax benefits (investment tax credits) for the rehabilitation of income-producing buildings and the charitable deduction of donations or easements.

Contrary to many commonly held beliefs, National Register listing does not interfere with a property owner's right to alter, manage, dispose of or even demolish his property unless federal funds are involved. Nor does National Register listing require that an owner open his property to the public. For a single, privately-owned property with one owner, the property will not be listed if the owner objects. A National Register district must have the approval of a majority of property owners in the district. National Register listing can be an important catalyst to change public perception and increase historic awareness but cannot in itself prevent detrimental alterations or demolition. Yet, it remains an important first step toward historic awareness, respect and protection.

Statewide there are nearly five hundred National Register listings of which approximately fifty are districts. Twenty individual buildings or sites and four districts in the Nashua Regional Planning Commission region are listed on the Register. Within Merrimack, there are two National Register listings, the Signer's House (Hannah Jack Tavern and now The Common Man Restaurant) and Matthew Thornton Cemetery on Daniel Webster Highway and the McClure-Hilton House on Tinker Road. Because the Register lists properties of local, state and/or national significance, every community has resources which would qualify for listing, if for no other reason other than they are important to the citizens of that particular town.

6.4.3 Local Historic Districts

The term "historic district" can refer either to an historic district established by town meeting vote, or as has been previously discussed, to a National Register Historic District. Both are useful preservation tools but differ in the way in which they are established and the protection they afford. An historic area may be both a locally designated historic district and a National Register District. Several communities within the NRPC region, including Amherst, Hollis, Mont Vernon and Nashua, have enacted local historic district ordinances. In 1990, the Town of Merrimack created an Historic District Commission to accomplish an historic resources survey and evaluate whether districting might be appropriate. However, their efforts to create a district have not been accepted by the Town.

The most comprehensive preservation tool available to local governments under New Hampshire state law is the creation and administration of a local historic district (RSA 674:45). The purpose of an historic district is to protect and preserve areas of outstanding architectural and historic value from inappropriate alterations and additions which might detract from an otherwise distinctive character.

6.4.4 Certified Local Government (CLG) Program

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 provides for matching grants-in-aid to the states from the Historic Preservation Fund for historic preservation programs and projects. Federal law requires that at least ten percent of each state's Historic Preservation Fund grant be designated for transfer to eligible local governments which apply for the money. A local government can participate in the program once the State Preservation Office certifies that the community has established its own historic preservation commission, district and a program meeting certain federal and state standards. Matching grants are made each year to certified local governments for survey and planning projects, including preparation of National Register nominations and historic resource surveys. Currently, the CLG program represents the only source of state funds available for communities interested in preservation planning.

6.4.5 Historic Building Rehabilitation Federal Tax Credits

The rehabilitation of certain older buildings, frequently less expensive than new construction, can be a cost-effective solution benefiting the tax base while filling older structures with new life. The Economic Recovery Act of 1981, as amended, provides attractive incentives in the form of Federal investment tax credits for the substantial rehabilitation of income producing older buildings. In order to receive the credits, owners are required to furnish detailed rehabilitation plans for review and certification by the National Park Service. Municipally owned structures are not eligible for these credits.

Currently the tax incentives take two forms:

- **Credit Building Use Eligible Properties:** 10% Commercial/Industrial 40 years and older 20 percent Commercial/Industrial 50 years and older.
- **Income Residential:** To be eligible for the larger federal tax credit, a building must be a certified historic structure, either listed individually on the National Register, or contributing to a National Register or certified local district. Certified rehabilitation work must adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, a list of ten standards developed to ensure that significant features of a building will not be compromised. In order to qualify for any of the tax credits, rehabilitation expenditures must exceed \$5,000 or the adjusted basis of the property (cost of the building excluding the value of the land less depreciation), whichever is greater. Although not as advantageous as they once were, the investment tax credits provide some incentive to rehabilitate older buildings, especially urban structures such as commercial or mill buildings, instead of undertaking new construction. Unfortunately because these credits do not cover residences which are not income producing which constitute many of the region's historic resources, their use is somewhat limited. Larger residential structures

with income producing potential could benefit from the use of the credits, which would also ensure the sympathetic rehabilitation of the buildings. In some cases, historic barns may also be able to qualify for these credits.

[RIGHT]
Parker Homestead, built in
1760 - Parkhurst Road

[LEFT]
Phineas Gage Homestead,
built in 1783 - Bean road

[BELOW]
Mansion House



6.4.6 Historic Markers

Markers are an easy, inexpensive way to tell both residents and visitors about significant people, places and events in a community's past. The State Marker Program was originated by the New Hampshire Legislature in 1955. The aim of the program is the erection of appropriate markers designating events, people and places of historical significance to the State of New Hampshire. Communities who would like to be considered for a marker submit a request for consideration by the State Department of Transportation and Division of Historical Resources. There is generally no cost involved for a marker on a state-maintained road. There is a charge of \$1,100 for a marker on a private road. Statewide there are approximately 235 historical markers. There are two markers located in the Town of Merrimack. A marker commemorating the township of Old Dunstable is located in Watson Park, while a Matthew Thornton marker is sited adjacent to the northbound lane of the Daniel Webster Highway, at Thornton's Ferry.

The sole purpose of the marker program is recognition. The program is non-restrictive; it does not protect historic sites nor does it obligate owners in any way. The criteria which apply to marker selection are also much less stringent than those for getting a property listed on the National Register. A marker may be used to point out historic sites which have changed considerably over time or even to commemorate events for which there is no standing evidence - anything which has historical significance to a community. For the simple recognition of a historic property, the historical marker program may be a better tool than the National Register, more readily visible and much easier to use. Another type of marker which has found widespread use involves the placement of wooden date markers on a variety of historic structures including houses, taverns, schools, and other public and commercial buildings, a tool that the Commission has already used. Such programs are often sponsored by a local historical society or historic district commission which works with owners to research and authenticate dates of construction for buildings in a given area. A program such as this is another simple way in which a community can draw attention to its historical resources. The Heritage Commission is currently involved in this program.

6.4.7 Easements

Across the country, preservation easements have proven to be effective tools for protecting significant historic properties. An easement is a property right that can be bought or sold through a legal agreement between a property owner and an organization eligible to hold easements. Just as a conservation easement can be used to protect open space, scenic areas, waterways, wildlife sanctuaries, etc. from incompatible use and development, an architectural easement protects the exterior appearance of a building.

Easements provide property owners with two important benefits. First, the character of a property is protected in perpetuity. In addition, the donation of an easement may make the owner eligible for certain tax advantages. If the property is listed in the National Register, in return for giving an easement, an owner is eligible under the Tax Treatment and Extension Act of 1980 to make a deduction from his taxes.

Easements also may be beneficial to a community. The costs of acquiring easements may be significantly lower than buying properties outright to protect valuable resources, particularly when easements can be acquired by donation. Significant resources can remain in private hands but are protected from inappropriate alteration as the organization holding the easement is given the right to review any proposed changes to the structure or property. If properly administered, easements can be a superior method of conserving and protecting land, water and historic resources; perhaps better and longer than zoning or locally designated historic districts.

6.4.8 Scenic Road Designations

New Hampshire State law enables a community to designate any road as scenic unless it is a Class I or II highway. A scenic road designation protects trees and stone walls located on the public right-of-way. After designation of a scenic road, any repair, maintenance, reconstruction or paving work, tree removal or stone wall removal cannot take place without prior written consent of the planning board or official municipal body.

Designation of a road as “scenic” will not affect the Town’s eligibility to receive State aid for road construction. It does however give communities a way to protect an important state-wide resource and may also help to preserve the scenic quality around historic structures and stimulate respect for the existing landscape. A number of communities within the region are currently taking advantage of this potential preservation tool. Merrimack currently has no scenic roads.

6.4.9 Innovative Land Use Controls

The use of clustering allows for development to be located away from sensitive areas, agricultural lands, or historic areas. In the State of New Hampshire RSA 674:21 gives communities authority to adopt a variety of innovative land use controls which may support the preservation of community character and consequently historic resources. The concept of the transfer of development rights is another strategy that may be used to help a community retain its historic character.

6.4.10 Building Code Provisions

In seeking to protect the public’s health and safety, standards such as building codes may present unique complications to the use or rehabilitation of an historic building. As a result, some communities have elected to amend local building codes to exempt historic structures from certain code requirements, other than life safety provisions. This allows historic buildings to continue to be used safely while not imposing a modern set of standards that are impossible for an older building to meet without a significant loss of integrity. It should be noted that Chapter 32 of the Basic Building Code of Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA), used by many of the region’s communities including Merrimack, specifically addresses the need for sympathetic treatment of historic structures. Under this section, buildings identified as historic buildings are not subject to the code when they are “judged by the building official to be safe and in the public’s interest of health, safety and welfare regarding any proposed construction, alteration, repair, enlargement, relocation and location within fire limits.”

6.5 Recommendations

- HR-1 Strengthen incentives for historic preservation in the zoning ordinance and site plan and subdivision regulations.
- HR-2 Consider the adoption of a Scenic Road ordinance, per RSA 231:157, in order to help preserve the scenic and historic qualities of Merrimack’s rural roads.
- HR-3 Investigate protection measures for Merrimack’s Class VI roads, which were often the location of historic development, and which today can serve as recreational trails for Merrimack’s citizens. The stone walls, cellar holes, and large trees that are often located along these Class VI roads should be safeguarded from destruction or removal.
- HR-4 Investigate preservation alternatives for historic stone walls and barns through the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

- HR-5 Complete a comprehensive Town-wide historic resources survey. Information should be updated periodically to indicate changes to buildings, including additions, fire, demolition or changes to surroundings.
- HR-6 Continue to promote interest and pride in Merrimack's heritage in a variety of ways including periodic exhibits, the installation of date and name markers at historic sites, development of brochures describing local history, tours of historic structures and sites, oral history projects and by encouraging local history courses in the school curriculum.
- HR-7 Continue to identify, catalogue, and preserve Town records, documents, manuscripts and artifacts and provide a suitable and safe repository for them. Continue to make collected historical information in a protected environment accessible to Town residents and future generations. Promote the continued recording of townspeople through oral histories and photographs.
- HR-8 Encourage archaeological investigation and documentation of significant historic and prehistoric sites including cellar holes, mills and school sites and ferry landings and canals along the Merrimack River.
- HR-9 Preserve and maintain the Town graveyards.
- HR-10 Encourage the Town Manager, Town Council, and/or Town department heads to request information from the Merrimack Heritage Commission and Historical Society before modifications are proposed to Town-owned buildings and sites of potential historical value.
- HR-11 Consider adopting architectural design standards for structures within the Town Center Overlay District (TCOD).
- HR-12 Develop an "Adopt an Historic Site" program as a way of involving civic organizations and private companies in the maintenance and enhancement of local historic sites, including monuments, markers, cemeteries, etc.
- HR-13 Promote the donation of easements by the owners of historic properties to a designated authority or established land trust.
- HR-14 Consider the acquisition of important historical sites for conservation and preservation purposes in limited but critical cases. Funds to assist with land and building acquisition could come from the State grant programs such as the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) as well as from local sources.
- HR-15 Encourage National Register listing for appropriate local structures.

