

THE 'OLD' SCHOOLS IN MERRIMACK

Before 1844, students were educated in their own homes or in neighborhood homes. It appears that the first District Schools in Merrimack were built about 1844, when NH declared that there should be structured education. Merrimack had 12 (well, 13 - more about that later) district schools, all located within walking distance of the students, and usually at intersections of roads.

Each schoolhouse had a number and a name. All were closed by 1953, when the Mastricola School was built to consolidate all the students and school buses picked them up, except those living within one mile at the time. The Historical Society has records of when the schools were built, re-built or expanded and who the teachers were during those years. We also have many class photos, but not all, and few have names identified. Can you help?

#1 "Lawrence Corners School" At the intersection of Amherst, Meetinghouse and Naticook Rds. First teacher, Nancy Spaulding. Last teacher recorded: Adeline Heath. No closure date found.

#2 "Gage District School" On Bean Rd. near Baboosic Lake Rd. First teachers Mary Hutchins and William Spaulding. Last teacher Frances Bean. Currently a private home after renovations.

#3 "Reeds Ferry School" Was at 632 DW Highway south of St. James Methodist Church. Originally a one-room, but expanded to two room. Moved to 10 Depot St., in 1970's where it is currently the PTA Kindergarten. It is on the site of the old McGaw Institute- later to be Merrimack's first high school-still called McGaw. More on that later. First teachers: Priscilla Merrill and Alexis Proctor. Last teachers: Mary Tirrell and Marjorie Handley. Closed in 1952.

#4 "Merrimack School", "Center School", "Thornton's Ferry School". Originally on Loop Rd, then rebuilt at 282 DW Highway. Became the VFW headquarters, but demolished and rebuilt by VFW. First teachers Sabra Lund and Charles Morrill. Last teachers: Ruth Hamblett and Madeline Bennett. Closed in 1952

#5 "Reeds Pond School" Located at junction of Camp Sargent and Naticook Rds. in the intersection. First teachers Mary Spaulding and John Marsh. Last teacher; Irene Panas. Moved to the site of the current American Legion in 1945, then to Town Hall Parking lot, then to Pilgrim Furniture Company, planning to be reopened by the Historical Society on front St. That plan was ended, and the building demolished in 1973.

#6 "Peaslee District School" Located on Amherst Rd. across from the end of Peaslee Rd. Built of wood in 1845. First teachers Martha Gage and William Claggett. Last teachers: Gertrude Kessler and Natalie Merrill. Closed in 1933

#7 "Joppa Road School" Located on west side of road at site of condos. Moved to 126 Bedford Rd. in 1952. First teachers Abby Eastman and George McAllister. Last teachers Alice Fissette and Mary Carrick. Closed in 1952

#8 "Goodrich District School" Located at 63 Wilson Hill Rd. Brick school, closed in 1890. First teachers Laura Wheeler and Nancy Spaulding. Last teacher Bannie Brown.

#9 “Center School” Located at 10 Church St. behind the Library. A two room school, which was rebuilt and then closed in ? Became a superintendent’s office, Police Station, temporary schoolrooms in 1970’s, then expanded to become the John O’Leary Adult Community center. First teachers: Adeline McGilvray and George Hadley. Last teacher unknown, but records show a Miss Grant, who was Native American, known as teaching.



#10 “Bowers or Union District School” Located at intersection of Woodward and Parkhurst Rds. No records shown after 1880. Became private home. Demolished in 1970 to readjust the intersection. Was a small wooden red building at the time. First teacher P.J. Stephens. Last teachers: M. A. Walker and C.M. Crooker.

#11 “Eayers District School” Located at intersection of DW Highway and Manchester St. First teachers Sarah Bowers and John Spaulding. Last teacher: Etta Wilson. No records after 1890.

#12 “South Merrimack School” Located at 520 Boston Post Rd. across from the Merrimack Valley Baptist Church. Closed in 1947 and sold to the Community Club. Still at that location, but currently the home of the Merrimack Historical Society as of 1990. First teacher in 1847 was Rev. S. Dodge from the Congregational Church. Last teacher: John Gallagher

#12-13 “New South Merrimack School”. After #12 closed, the residents in South Merrimack decided to build another school, although there was not a #13 district. It was located on the Milford Rd. at Hall Street, before the road was realigned and open only a few years, before students were required to attend Mastricola. The building was moved adjacent to the Congregational Church and used for Sunday School. When the Baptists bought that church, they expanded the school to K-12 and incorporated the old #12-13 building into the current school. You can still see it today. First and last teacher recorded was Edith Fowle.

In addition to the District Schools, Merrimack had the honor to be the home of the **McGaw Institute** for training teachers, opening in 1849 on Depot St. near the ferry and railroad. Professor William Russell opened the school, which was a day school and boarding school accommodating 30 boarders, with Robert McGaw as chairman. The greatest number of students was 108 in 1851. Tuition ranged from \$5 to \$7 depending on the curriculum, and board was \$1.50 per week. By 1865, declining enrollment closed the school, then leased by Rev. Howell, naming it the Granite State Military and College Institute. After

the war ended, the school closed, and the building served as a tenement house. Robert McGaw, died in 1872 leaving an endowment to the Town of Merrimack to create the first high school with Bartlett Weston as the first headmaster. It continued as Merrimack's high school until 1950, when Merrimack's growth warranted building a new high school on Baboosic Lake Rd. (the current Masticola Upper Elementary School). The McGaw building again held renters until it was demolished, and Schoolhouse #3 moved to the site to become the PTA Kindergarten to retain the endowment left by McGaw as his land was again used for education.



Photos, furnishings and records of these schools are at the Historical Society, still located at 520 Boston Post Rd. across from the Merrimack Valley Baptist Church. It serves as a museum/schoolhouse and our headquarters. We welcome additional information, photos and other memorabilia of these schools, especially any photos of the interiors of the buildings and names of those in photos. The Society is open from noon to 8 PM on Tuesdays and by appointment. For more information, contact Anita Creager at 424-5084 or anitacreager58@comcast.net. Stop over and re-live your childhood, while showing your own kids what life was like "back when". We even have the grade book from McGaw from 1919-1931.