

JOHN CROMWELL- MERRIMACK'S FIRST RESIDENT

A survey, done in 1657, showing the current Litchfield and a portion of Merrimack, then known as Naticook, shows only ONE man-made structure, "Cromwell's House" in the bend in the Merrimack River, where Anheuser-Busch stands now.

Cromwell moved from Charlestown Massachusetts before building his home on the west bank of the Merrimack River in 1655 where he built an outpost to trade with the local Native people, receiving furs in exchange for blankets and rum, according to "*Thirty Dunstable Families*". He built it at the site of a big drop in the river, now known as Cromwell's Falls, a common fishing area along the river, later to have a lock built to facilitate barge traffic in the 1800's. A copy of this survey is at the Merrimack Historical Society, where it shows 8000 acres granted to the town of Billerica, MA for the support of their schools and to encourage settlement in the "far North". John Parker, agent for Billerica, then sold it to William Brenton. Cromwell was seen as a squatter, since he had no title to the land.

There are several legends concerning Cromwell, without any verification. At the least, he was a man of adventure and courage, venturing into the wilderness to deal with the Penacook Indians, who occupied the southern Merrimack River Valley. There has been no sign of a foundation, so the exact location is unknown. However, it is believed that his shovel and tongs were dug up and a stone with his name were found near the falls which now bears his name. Pewter, believed to have belonged to him, was found in a well and an iron pot and trammel were found in the sand, according to Scott McPhie in 1989. Legend says that the Indians burned his home, when they suspected him of cheating. When he learned they were coming, again "LEGEND" says he buried a treasure before leaving the area. Some thought that William Brenton may have been involved in Cromwell's abandoning his home.

In 1659, Cromwell bought a grant of 300 acres in what is now Tyngsborough, where he built a mansion house with many improvements on the land. He died in 1661. His estate was extensive and included many of the furs he still used to exchange with the Indians. His widow, Seaborn Bachelder Cromwell, sold the mansion to John Hull of Boston in 1662.

When Anheuser-Busch bought this land in 1968, they sought a theme for their project. Hoping to use the history as this theme, they brought archeologists in to find verification, but without success, they decided to use the Clydesdale horses as their theme, building instead the Clydesdale Hamlet. There is a monument to John Cromwell near the Visitors' Center at the brewery. At one point, the Budweiser authorities brought in a "ghostbuster" to see if they could learn more about the occupant or the treasure. The locks are still visible along the edge of the river, but access is not available from the land. Try a canoe trip to go through the lock.

Come visit the Historical Society to see more about our history. Hopefully, after the Covid19 pandemic subsides, we will again welcome visitors. However, we are still at work, doing research (and newspaper articles). Contact Anita at anitacreager58@comcasat.net or 424-5084 for further news.