

THE VILLAGES OF MERRIMACK

SOUTH MERRIMACK - "HARDSCRABBLE"

The town of Merrimack incorporated in 1746, when it separated from the combination of current Litchfield and the southern part of Merrimack. In 1750, the portion north of the Souhegan River was added, leaving us with the current borders. Four villages developed to form the entire town, but each had its own culture and reason for existence. Each village had its own store, tavern, school, railroad station and often church. The meetinghouse was built at the geographic center of the first town charter and the junction of the Souhegan River, Turkey Hill Road and Meetinghouse Road, where an early bridge was located previous to the covered bridge that burned in 1967..

Souhegan Village formed in the new center of town along the main road from Boston to Concord at the junction with Baboosic Lake Rd.

Thornton's Ferry Village formed in the area of the first ferry across the Merrimack River where the original meetinghouse in Litchfield was located in the early 1700's.

Reeds Ferry Village formed in the northern part of the town where another ferry was established in the later 1700's

South Merrimack Village, often called "Hard Scrabble" was in the southwestern part of the town at the junction with Merrimack, Amherst, Hollis and Nashua. This was along the main route from Nashua to Keene. It had the earliest population center, and remained culturally distinct from the other villages. The earliest settlers were found here with a mill built in 1620 and a home in 1720. These remain standing today.

Fosdick's Mill was located on Pennichuck Brook, which is the boundary with Nashua where Thornton's Rd crosses the brook. The yellow home at that location was expanded from the original mill house. Tinker Road was a popular route from Nashua to Merrimack, and the home at 15 Tinker Rd. is the oldest standing house in town. The McClure family built the barn and lived there while building their home across the road. That section of the village was often called "Humphreyville" after one of the early settlers; Samuel Humphrey, who moved here in 1787. Many old homes remain today on Tinker Rd.

Lake Naticook, also called Reeds Pond and Spaulding Pond was the site of many early settlers whose names are seen in the current roads as well as many Native American names, as was found all over New England. Some of the early settlers were Blanchard, Weld, McClure, Converse, Parker, Lindall, Reed, Peaslee and Spaulding. Where Naticook Road joined the Nashua/Amherst Road, a large center of population grew. Today, you can go from Nashua to Amherst traveling through Merrimack and Hollis in less than 1/8 mile, but in the early 1800's it was a thriving community bordered by only farmland in all directions. It was not an easy place to farm, so was called Hard Scrabble for all the stone used to build all those stone walls. Sheep and cattle were easier to raise than crops.

An early store on Boston Post Rd. was James Morse's in 1859, which moved across the street after a fire and was bought by Carol Hall in 1938, a Clover Farm Store, known as Hall's Market for many years, holding the post office and the cultural meeting place. Along the Amherst Road was a series of taverns, first by Oliver Farwell, then Whitney, and then Joseph Hold. It was known as the location of the muster

ground for the militia before and after the Revolutionary War. A hotel called the Rockingham House was a popular spot, with a spring-loaded dance floor, where the current Home Depot store is located. Small stores also gathered, including Roy's Market with its famous "Eat Here and Get Gas" sign, featured on the Life Magazine cover. This belonged to current Police Chief, Roy's family. Students were first taught in private homes which also held private libraries, but in 1847, schoolhouse # 12 was opened to be active for 100 years. It is currently the site of the Merrimack Historical Society. When the school closed, the residents of the village built another one-room schoolhouse on the Amherst Rd., which was soon closed and moved to the property of the nearby Congregational Church. The church was built in 1829 as the "Union Evangelical Church" to serve the nearby communities. It is currently the Merrimack Valley Baptist Church with a K- 12 school. Another schoolhouse #5 was located at the junction of Naticook and Camp Sergeant Roads on Lake Naticook.

Speaking of camps, Lake Naticook has always been a gathering place for water recreation especially children. There was a private Jewish camp, later to be Camp Naticook , a town day camp, complete with a theater and Olympic pool, and is now the site of Wasserman Park. On the other side of the lake is Camp Sergeant, a YMCA camp, still a popular spot. Merrimack is fortunate to have several open conservation areas, one of which is Horse Hill, which adjoins Wasserman Park and provides many open trails.

The railroad station was built on the route to Wilton, and the train is still active, passing through Merrimack regularly, but no longer with passengers. The station itself was moved when the road was realigned, and now is a private residence. The road from Nashua west is now one of the busiest thoroughfares in the area, with little sign of the bustling village or the farmlands that characterized its early years.

The Heritage Commission has published a series of four brochures with photos and details of many of the historical sites in our town. One brochure for each village. They are available at the Town Hall and library to use a guide while you travel throughout the town learning of our history. Stay tuned for the other three villages.

The Merrimack Historical Society is open on Tuesdays from noon to 8 PM at 520 Boston Post Rd across from the Merrimack Valley Baptist Church.