

THE VILLAGES OF MERRIMACK- REEDS FERRY

Reeds (Not Read's) Ferry is the name of the Village in Northern part of town along the Merrimack River. Its name comes from Lucy Read (note spelling), who petitioned the colony in 1749 to legally be allowed to run the ferry after her husband William, died. He had informally run this ferry previous to that. All ferries at this location were controlled from the east side of the river in Litchfield. There were other ferries south of this location, but more of that later. Merrimack and Litchfield were one town previous to 1746 and ferries were a necessary part of life, with the early meetinghouse and graveyard on the east bank of the Merrimack. Many family names are found in both towns: McQuestion, Chamberlain, Center, Griffin, Parker and Cummings among them.

The center of this village was at the junction of what is now Bedford Road and the Concord Rd. (now DW Highway). At this corner of this junction was the Reeds Ferry Graveyard, opened in 1813. A tavern was active on the river at the ferry landing, but it was moved to the road when the railroad was built in the 1840's and activity on the road increased. It remained at the corner of Depot Street with a private home attached until the 1970's, when it was disassembled and moved to Bedford, where it stands now on Meetinghouse Rd. This thriving village was a population center in the area. By the mid-1800's, it had its own school, post office, a cooperage mill (Fessenden & Lowell later to become home of Pilgrim Furniture then Yield House), a company store, village water district, Wheeler Chapel, taverns for travelers, a railroad station, doctors, lawyers, etc. It even had its own Normal School, to educate students beyond the 8 years in the district schools. In 1847, this was opened near the road, ferry and railroad by Dr. Russell, who brought the concept to America from Scotland. It was for local and boarding students from near and far, preparing students to become professional teachers and to go on to universities to become doctors, lawyers and beyond. Previous to the Civil War it became a military school, but reverted to private housing after the war until Robert McGaw brought it back to its original purposes with the name of "McGaw Normal Institute", later to become Merrimack's first high school. As Merrimack grew and required a gymnasium to be added, it was decided to build a separate high school on Baboosic Lake Road, currently the Upper Elementary School. The old building was destroyed and the #3 schoolhouse moved to that site to become the PTA Kindergarten to retain the funding McGaw had left for Merrimack's education. The last graduation from McGaw was in 1950. Artifacts from McGaw found at the Historical Society include the headmaster's desk and the grade book from 1919-1939.

We were still a farming community, with the Parker Farm, Smith Farm, Kittredge and Bell Farms being of major notice. There were many brickyards in the area mostly owned by the Eri Kittredge and his sons along Pearson Road. They shipped millions of bricks south on the river barges to Lowell and further south and during that time many brick homes and businesses were built. A classic one is the home of Chuck Mower on Depot St., a master craftsman who still makes classic Windsor chairs. The Parker House and Odd Fellows Hall were also on Depot Street nearby the railroad station and ferry. Nearby was the Fessenden & Lowell Cooperage Mill, with its company store and a great deal of company housing on the nearby streets. The management built some beautiful homes along the main road; the Gordons, Haseltines and Lowells, most of which are currently restaurants and professional buildings. Also on the main road were the gallery of Frank French, well-known sculptor and artist, Thornton Inn and Reeds Ferry Market. Homes from the 1830's to 1890's became the restaurants of today: Tortilla Flats, Homestead (earlier Silo's), Madden's and Levi Lowell's. Bell's Farm hosted cabins, and the Lone Star Ranch, a popular country music location with the Sons of the Pioneers and Johnny Cash. We even had

our own Good Times Roller Skating rink. We had a National Fish Hatchery on Dumpling Brook. The first Industry in the area was a General Electric Plant on the site of the current Saint Gobain.

An interesting bit of trivia is that for many years, Merrimack was not found on the NH road maps. Reeds Ferry was listed, since it had a zip code with home delivery. Thus, 03054 RFD 2 Reeds Ferry was our mailing address. The southwestern part of town near Route 101A was a Nashua postal code with RFD 1. Some maps showed "East Merrimack" as being along the Daniel Webster Highway near the center of town.

Many of these memories can be found at the Merrimack Historical Society at 520 Boston Post Road in South Merrimack. The headquarters, in a one-room schoolhouse is open to the public on Tuesdays from noon to 8 PM and by appointment. If you have artifacts or photos of past or present historical places, we would love to share them. Contact Anita at 424-5084 or anitacreager58@comcast.net.