

THE VILLAGES OF MERRIMACK - THORNTON'S FERRY

The southernmost village in Merrimack starts at Pennichuck Brook at the Nashua line and goes to Continental Boulevard. What changes have occurred over the years!

In 1655 the first survey was done of what would become Merrimack and Litchfield. It shows "Cromwell's Home" at the location where the Anheuser Busch plant is now located. John Cromwell built a trading post right on the river, as the first European to live in our home town. By the late 1600's, the early settlers began to arrive, including the Blanchards, Bowers, Eayers, Lunds, McClures, Spauldings among them. An early industry was right on the Pennichuck Brook, where John Eayers built a "drug and spice" mill, using local flora to turn into medical and food items, using the water power from the Brook. They settled first mostly along the Concord Rd (DW Highway) and Tinker Rd.

Most of the southern part was farmland, but the need for a ferry to cross the Merrimack River to Litchfield resulted in heavier settlement near the East-West road from Keene to Exeter (the Old King's Highway). There were several ferries over the years, from each side of the river. Temple was an early owner. The location of the ferries is in dispute at this time, but the town is planning to create a park along the river. As river traffic was replaced by roads and later railroads, many changes took place. Taverns, stores, schools filled the needs of the residents. Eayers Tavern was an early tavern, but later we found Keith's Windmill Cabins and now several hotels. Edward Lutwyche, a Tory, was prominent in town government as the King's representative, owning much land, the ferry, store and a beautiful home on the river. When he left near the end of the war, his property was confiscated and become the farm of Matthew Thornton, who had signed the Declaration of Independence. He built a tavern for his son, James, later to be the Signer's House, then Hannah Jack's and now the Common Man Restaurant. Over the years, there were many small stores in the area; Griffin's near the ferry. Welchs, Cox's and Greenleaf's are names known well by older residents. The graveyard near the ferry access holds many names: Thornton, Sarah Lutwyche (Edward's mother), Blanchards, Lunds and more.

Over the years Masticola Farm, Kaolin Farm (Kaolin means "bricks"- from the brickyard at that location), Griffin's Farm, Wright's Farm and Ralston Purina Farm were replaced by industry in the 1960's. Anheuser Busch, Kollsman Instruments, Nashua Corporation. Sanders Associates (now BAE Systems). We even had our own airport, where BAE is now. The tower remains as a reminder of this. At the north end of the runway was a Drive-In Movie Theater. George Griffin, who owned the store near the ferry (his brother owned a similar store across the river in Litchfield), had a farm, where his daughter, Abbie lived to do so very much for our town. Her home is now the location of two hotels along the road. Rev. John Wright was the minister of the First Congregational Church, and farmed his land. His home has recently been converted to apartments. Ralston Purina owned a research farm, where we saw cattle passing under the main road through a tunnel to the fields where Budweiser is now. We had a Reptile Farm and a petting farm with animals from Benson's in Hudson.

As Naticook Brook goes to the Merrimack River, we now have Horseshoe Pond and Island Drive, where Sheila's Grove, Hialiah Park and Camp Crowell attracted visitors. On Camp Sargent Road, the YMCA built a children's camp nearby Wasserman Park and day camp on Lake Naticook and a fitness facility in town. These add to the facilities from the Conservation and Parks and Recreations Commission offerings for sports, hiking, biking and nature trails.

The area had two district schools. #4, the Eayers District School was at the intersection of DW Highway and Manchester St. on Bowers land. #11, was at the current location of the VFW. James Masticola left his land to the town to be used for education which resulted in the purchase by the Nashua Corporation and the Masticola complex being built on Baboosic Lake Rd. The Thornton's Ferry Elementary school now serves those in the southern part of town. The Bowers/Blanchard homestead on Manchester St. is now the headquarters for Thomas More College.

The construction of the FE Everett turnpike with exit 11 opening, resulted in the creation of Continental Boulevard and the industrial and commercial revolution in that part of town.

As Merrimack prepares to celebrate its 275th anniversary, come to the Historical Society at 520 Boston Post Road to learn more of our history, sit at the 1800's school desks and see some of the artifacts, such as a milk bottle from Wright's Farm and photos of long-gone homes and businesses. Perhaps you can add to our collection with memories of your own.

We are open on Tuesdays from noon to 8 PM and by appointment. Contact Anita at anitscreager58@comcast.net for more information. Volume II of Merrimack's History book is available for sale for Christmas giving.

