

PRIVATE GRAVEYARDS IN MERRIMACK

'For years, it was thought that the Town of Merrimack, being settled by people from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, had no private family burial grounds. As background, in the 18th century, there were two local traditions for burials. The MA tradition was to have a single central cemetery. A second, called the NH tradition, was to have many small family (or neighborhood) burial grounds. For example, Sanbornton had 130 sites and Deerfield 103. By the early 20th century, the family tradition was discarded.

Now fast forward to the 21st century. Unlike the early 20th century when old timers would sit around a potbelly stove at the local store, we 21st century old timers sit around with pot bellies at the local Dunkin Donuts exchanging information. During one of these gatherings, the president of the NH Old Graveyard Association, heard of a family graveyard in the "middle of nowhere" in Merrimack. We located it. There is a single monument of Reuben C. Bowers, who was born in NH in 1779 and his wife, Frances born in 1807. He had twelve children with his first wife Betsey, raising them on a farm in Boscawen and later in Merrimack. After his wife died, he married Frances L. Elliott and they had one child, Fanny. The three moved back to Boscawen and Reuben ended living in Concord with family members, while Fanny and her brother ended up on the Merrimack farm. The farm was abandoned by the early 20th century, but the monument, now on private land and no longer in the middle of the woods, is being cared for by the owners of the property." These experts came from an article published in the NH Old Graveyard Association, written by Richard Mallon in Spring, 2012.

In the *History of Bedford*, this entry appears on page 388. "On the farm now owned by Nelson Merchant, near the Deacon Stevens' place, are buried Reuben Bowers and his wife. The graves are south of the buildings on a little knoll in the pasture." The Bowers farmhouse was in Bedford, but the pasture was in Merrimack.

In 2000, Scott McPhie, from the Community Development Department in Merrimack, visited that site, as it was about to be part of a development. He took photos of the site with a slate monument surrounded by a wrought iron fence. Currently it has no fence and there is a modern granite monument. It is located in the front/side yard of a private residence.

At the Thomas More College, on Manchester Street, there is said to be a Bowers/Blanchard family burial ground. The first Blanchards appear in Merrimack in 1722, when Joseph appears on a grant-map. In 1726 it is said that Jeremetheal Bowers built a small cape on this land, where the shed is dated from that year. The main building was renovated in 1750 and town records show it being built in 1759. It is currently the administration building for the college. There were many marriages between the Bowers and Blanchard families, and it is said that their burial ground is located west of the current dormitory building near the road, but there is no evidence of this. The last of the "old families" was in 1979 when Lucy Kate Bowers Blanchard leased the property to Thomas More College. This information came from Scott McPhie in 2004.

Some years ago, Chuck Mower's family, on Depot Street, found several gravestones face down in their back yard, all part of the Parker family, who once owned much of that land and lived on that street including the "Parker House" an inn and boarding house still there.

In 2016, a resident on DW Highway in Reeds Ferry, found a gravestone for 7- year old Nathan Parker Walker, buried in her back yard. She brought it to Richard Maloon, the president of the NH Old

Graveyard Association, who did research, cleaned the stone and brought it to the Merrimack Historical Society, since the youth for whom it was made was buried in the family lot in the Last Rest Cemetery on Baboosic Lake Road. The stone is currently located at the Historical Society headquarters at 520 Boston Post Road.

There are currently three historical "Graveyards" and two active "Cemeteries" in Merrimack. Are there more private burials in town? Perhaps someone will discover one in their backyard and let us know.

Richard Maloon was the speaker at the September 18 Historical Society meeting. These monthly meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month except for July and August, and are open at no cost to the public. We hope to hold a workshop with Mr. Maloon in the spring, where he will teach us how to maintain and repair old gravestones. For more information contact Anita at 424-5084 or anitacreager58@comcast.net.