

WHO WAS ABBY GRIFFIN?

Have you seen the “Abbie Griffin Park” sign? Have you visited the gazebo in the park for a concert, movie or ceremony? Have you wondered who Abbie Griffin was? In 1996, when Merrimack prepared to celebrate its 250th anniversary, a resident, Ruth Liberty, proposed to name a park in her name. In 2010, when people still didn’t know who Abbie was, Ruth published a booklet titled “Who Was Abbie Griffin?”.

Until 2005 Abbie was the most generous benefactor our town had seen, and her generosity continues to this day.

Miss Griffin (she never married) was a descendent of the Spalding and Griffin, White, Dickey families of Londonderry, Litchfield and Merrimack. Her grandfather, George M. Griffin, was one of the pioneer merchants in Litchfield, New Hampshire; his mother’s ancestor, Oliver Spalding, was one of the earliest settlers of Merrimack.

George M. Griffin lived in Litchfield, and owned a store next to the meetinghouse/town hall at the landing for Thornton’s Ferry. His home still stands next to the old town hall, currently the Litchfield Historical Society. His son, George Byron Griffin moved to Merrimack in the early 1870’s, where he married Sarah Frances Spalding in 1872. They established their homestead on the Concord Road (now called the Daniel Webster Highway) in the area currently occupied by two hotels, **the Residence Inn and Comfort Inn**. He operated a grocery store on Griffin Street near the railroad station. Griffin Street, at that time, connected with the Concord Road near the current Exit 11. . George B and Sarah had three daughters: Blanch, Clarissa and Abbie May, all of whom attended Merrimack schools including the McGaw Normal Institute, later to become Merrimack’s first high school on Depot Street.

Blanche married William Adams and moved to Illinois. After the death of her two children and then her husband, she returned to Nashua where she died in 1961.

Clarissa never married and lived with her parents until her death in 1933. She was a teacher and served on the Merrimack School Board from 1913 until 1923.

Abbie May attended Schoolhouse #4, at the location of the current VFW before going on to the McGaw Normal Institute in Reeds Ferry. Her name is on the first voting list in 1920, the first year women were allowed to vote, and she became active in town affairs. She never married, and devoted her life to the care of her parents and maintenance of their homestead and other properties. In 1963 she lived in a two story house with a large barn, where, instead of a door bell, was a large bell and a sign to “Ring the bell”. Her mother died in 1925, and when her father died in 1938, Abbie sold the Griffin store to the Thornton’s Ferry Social Club, which organized in 1940. That building was demolished in 1978. In 1955, the Village Water District lines ended where the Appletree Mall is now located, and Abbie got water from a line running from there. She paid the District to extend the line to her property.

Abbie owned a car and drove until the mid 1950’s, after which she was often driven by Angus Morrison, the agent for the Concord Railroad station, who lived with the Griffin family. Many local “boys” did errands, yard work, did repairs, but chose not to give their names to Ruth Liberty, as she wrote her short history. They will recognize themselves in this article.

In 1964, the Merrimack High School Band was invited to perform at the World's Fair in New York. After many fundraisers, they had not met their goal. Miss Griffin donated the balance. The bus returning home after the Fair, stopped at the Griffin home with souvenirs for her.

Abbie Griffin died on February 3, 1968 and is buried in the family plot in Reed's Cemetery on Naticook Road, South Merrimack. After bequests to relatives and organizations, her last will directed the rest of her estate to be divided equally among the Merrimack Village District (remember that water line she paid to have installed), a Hospital Fund for needy town residents, an Educational Fund for local scholarships and a Memorial Fund for capital equipment for the Fire and Police Departments and aid to their families injured or killed in their duties. These funds appear annually in our town budget keeping Abbie's name before us to this day.

When you pass Abbie Griffin Park, keep in mind to say a silent "Thanks" to Abbie Griffin, who gave so much to the Town of Merrimack over the years. The information for this article comes from the brochure written by Ruth Liberty in 2010, which is available at the Merrimack Historical Society. The Society headquarters is in the one-room schoolhouse at 520 Boston Post Road on Tuesdays from noon until 8 PM and by appointment.