

# Meredith Village: An Historical Overview

The origins of Meredith date back to the terms of a 1748 grant. The early proprietors divided the land into one hundred equal shares, but any attempt at settlement was halted until after the end of the "Seven Year War" in 1763. The original grant was extended in 1754 to include Meredith Neck. By 1766, nine houses had been built and fifty acres had been cleared. Ebenezer Smith, an agent for the original grantees, was one of the town's first settlers along Parade Road. He organized the settlement into an incorporated town in 1768. Governor Wentworth named the town after his friend, Sir William Meredith, a prominent member of the English Parliament.

Meredith is one of many New England communities that abandoned 18<sup>th</sup> century agricultural settlements on hilltops in favor of 19<sup>th</sup> century valley centers oriented around industry serviced by waterpower and the railroad. In 1773 the town built a road, branching off Province (now Parade) Road, running to the Moultonborough town line, part of which still serves as Main Street in the village. Meredith also profited from a seacoast road that linked Dover to Alton Bay, where transport continued on boats across the lake into inland New Hampshire. With a sawmill constructed in 1795, and shortly thereafter with the addition of a grist mill, along the brook that linked Lake Waukewan to Lake Winnepesaukee, industry grew and by 1800 a small community had taken shape.

John Bond Swasey had an enormous influence on the development of Meredith Village. In 1809 when only twenty-seven years old, he made a substantial land purchase that included a major portion of Meredith Village. In the years that followed, Swasey reconstructed the Waukewan outlet into a canal under Main Street and over a forty-foot waterfall. Several mills were then built along the canal. Dudley Leavitt, best known for his popular Farmer's Almanac, which first appeared in 1797, was another of the more illustrious persons in Meredith at this time. He taught the finer points of literature, mathematics, and the sciences to youngsters at his academy, which opened in 1819; and was located between Meredith Village and Center Harbor.

The village rapidly expanded with the arrival of the railroad in 1849.

Rival centers emerged and the area known as Meredith Bridge seceded from Meredith Village and was in-

corporated as the new town of Laconia in 1855. Despite this major loss, the village continued to thrive. In 1859, a group of local businessmen formed the Meredith Mechanic Association to promote and develop the village's manufacturing potential. Churches, a hotel, new town hall, bank, library, local newspaper and various stores attracted people from the surrounding region. Visitors from further away arrived by rail and steamboat. Beyond the confines of the village, Meredith was a prosperous agricultural town. Its

hillside farms and lake views were prized, and some of the state's most successful stock breeders raised their herds here.

By the 1880s, Meredith had become a prosperous mill town. Hodgson's hosiery mill was the largest concern, with about 150 workers by 1885. The many manufacturers in the village show the success of the Meredith Mechanic Association. These businesses included the Meredith Shook and Lumber Company that employed 60 and existed from 1860 to 1912, the J. A. Lang & Company founded in 1858, that manufactured piano-forte cases, bridges, doors, windows and other building supplies; the Wadleigh Plow Co. maker of the Granger Swivel plow, the Jaziel Robinson's organ factory located in back of the Congregational Church, and the Clark's Lumber Mill.

Meredith's identity as a popular resort destination dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Visitors first arrived by train and later by automobile. The town's position at the junction of routes south, east and into the White Mountains, encouraged development as a



regional trade center, a function it continues to serve today, with its handsome wooden storefronts. After the state relocated US Route 3 to follow the lakeshore, former industrial land was converted to parkland and became available to the public for strolling and picnics.

Meredith Village has evolved from a largely agricultural settlement into an industrial mill town and then to a visitor destination it is today. Working farms, once the mainstay of a rural economy and landscape, are now the exception. A remnant of the railroad survives as a tourist attraction. Natural resources such as fields, forests and lakes, once viewed in terms of commercial productivity, are valued for their scenic qualities, wildlife habitat, and recreation potential. Meredith, throughout all these changes, has remained a warm and welcoming community and continues to reflect what is special about New Hampshire.

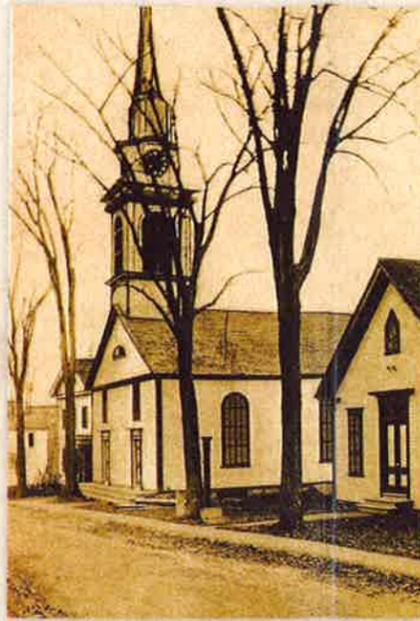


## 1. Historical Society Museum

The Ladd Block is headquarters for the Meredith Historical Society and Museum. Seneca Ladd bought the first building on this lot in 1840 and used it for a carriage manufactory until it burned in 1850. He built the current structure in the following year housing his piano and melodeon business on the second floor. In 1869, Mr. Ladd gave up that enterprise and founded the Meredith Village Savings Bank. The Ladd Block then became the town's first banking office. It also served as the Meredith Village Post Office and Public Library. In 1925, the bank moved across Highland Street to a new brick building that now serves as the Town Hall.

## 2. Congregational Church & Highland Street

Known over the years as the "North Church" or the "White House" for its prominent white spire, this church has become a symbol of Meredith's New England culture. The church was constructed in 1833 near the Old Oak on the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee and remained there until 1842, when it was moved to its present site on Highland Street. Next to the church, the Beede House, completed in 1867, is an outstanding example of Italianate architecture. The elegantly designed cupola-topped carriage shed of Sam Hodgson, now remodeled as an attractive residence is across the street.



## 3. Sanborn House | Drug Store

For well over a century, the 'Sanborn Block' has been a focal point of social and business activity in Meredith Village. The building saw a gradual conversion from residential to commercial function, but the five bays, 2 1/2-story twin-chimney form and a rear two-story ell show the original structure. In the late 1800s, Dr. Sanborn had his practice in this building. His son, George Freeman Sanborn founded a printing company in 1871 and started The Meredith News in 1880. Two years later, he launched the Meredith Public Library, providing space in this block and serving as the town's first librarian. In 1884, he opened a drug store on the corner of Water and Main Street. A mortar and pestle in stained glass still decorate both sides of the entrance to the old "Sanborn Drugs".

## 4. Baptist Church

The meetinghouse of the Second Baptist Church Society of Meredith was built in 1834 "upon a rock." Arched side windows and semi-elliptical fans in the front gable and lower tower are Federalist in style. The onion dome is a later addition. For many years, the Baptist Church bell marked deaths of residents by tolling the age of the person who had died.

## 5. The Civil War Memorial & Meredith Public Library

Major E. E. Beede's Civil War Memorial, to the right of the library entrance, is dedicated to the 12<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Regiment, who fought in many of the fiercest battles of that conflict. Local losses were particularly heavy. Major Beede survived two injuries and time as a prisoner. At the Ford Theater when Lincoln was shot, he helped carry the President to the house across the street where he died. After making a fortune mining diamonds in Africa, he gave this statue "to keep alive the memory of our fallen brave."

The Meredith Public Library had no permanent home until Benjamin M. Smith gave \$10,000 for a building. After living in the village during the mid 1800s, Mr. Smith became a successful hosiery salesman in Massachusetts. He donated the library in remembrance of his parents. The building's name and date appear in raised granite. The keystone above the entrance features a carved book. Terracotta egg and dart detailing decorates the pilasters and eaves. The original structure was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. The addition to the building, completed in 1988, employs the same materials as the original building.



## 6. The Humiston School

About 1875, Ebenezer and Cassandra (Swasey) Stevens gave this land for a new village school. The town replaced the original wood structure with the present brick building in 1914. This newer building resembles the library in design, but the trim is concrete, reflecting a growing use of less expensive, man-made materials. After Lang Street Elementary School opened in 1925, the building became the Meredith High School. It is named for John Humiston, a prominent high school teacher. Today, it houses the administrative offices of Inter-Lakes School District.

## 7. John Bond Swasey House

Born in 1782, mill owner and storekeeper, John Bond Swasey was a highly respected businessman and leader behind the early growth of Meredith Village. The first postmaster of Meredith, he is best known for the canal he built to harness waterpower for his mills. The house was incomplete when John Bond Swasey died in 1828. The building is similar to other early 19<sup>th</sup> century houses along

Main Street with 2 1/2-stories, twin chimneys and five windows above the central entrance at the front. The two-story side porch is an unusual feature reminiscent of southern homes. The house still remains in the family.

## 8. Hawkins | Deneault House

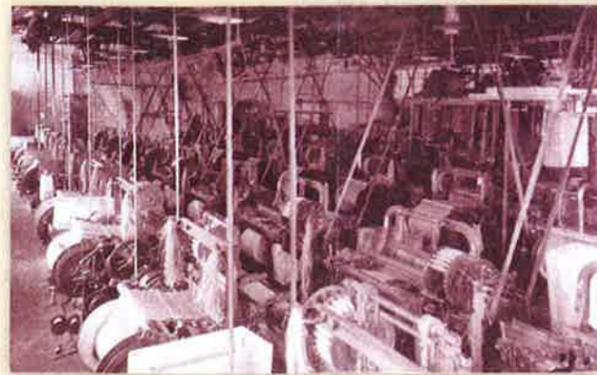
The Hawkins/Deneault House, built in 1898, accommodated the medical practice of Dr. Frederick Hawkins, principal physician in Meredith for several decades. After Dr. Hawkins died, Dr. Frederick and Dorothea Deneault purchased the property. Dr. Deneault maintained his dentistry practice in the house until the 1970s. The building is a mixture of various historical styles. Notice its angular square tower topped with a steep, flared pyramidal roof. A granite hitching post still stands near the street.

## 9. Town Halls & "The Great Catastrophe"

The center of local government from 1877 to 1958, the "Old Town Hall" (9) at the corner of Main and High Streets, was actually the second town hall in Meredith Village and the third in the town's history. The first town hall was on Parade Road, but the town voted in 1854 to move it to the corner of Main and Lake Streets (9A) in Meredith Village. On March 13, 1855, during the first town meeting in the still unfinished hall, the floor collapsed under the pressure of the weight of six to eight hundred voters, about 150 fell to the basement killing four and injuring many others. Mr. Sturtevant acquired the infamous hall, eventually tearing it down and constructing the existing building (9A). In addition, he agreed to construct new offices for the town at the corner of Main and High Streets (9). The town offices and hall were on the second floor and he retained use of the ground floor. Except for the ground storefronts, the "Old Town Hall" retains its original look.

## 10. Swasey Stone | Dover Street

Dover Street connected Main Street to the steamboat landing, now the town docks. The Swasey Stone can be seen at the corner of Main and Dover Streets. According to Swasey family tradition, this stone was used to measure all village property boundaries, but deed records indicate it only designates the southwest corner of the "Swasey Mill Lot." The stone also marks the corner of the old "Corporation Square" where community band concerts were held. Swasey's canal from Lake Waukegan to Lake Winnepesaukee runs beneath Main Street and under this area to the waterfall. Meredith's Bob Montana, creator of the famous Archie Comics, once had his studio on the corner of Main and Dover Streets across from the Swasey Stone.



## 11. Lang | Mansfield | Grad's Store

Joseph W. Lang built this dry goods store in the 1850s. Col. Ebenezer Stevens and Capt. J.W. Lang Jr. used the building in 1862 as a Civil War recruiting headquarters for the 12<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Regiment. In 1925, Samuel Grad, an immigrant who started out as a local peddler with a pushcart, bought the store from E. C. Mansfield. Grad's was a popular clothing store until the 1990s. Weeks' Country Store and the A&P grocery store were also former tenants. The store has been renovated, but some features of the original building remain.

## 12. The Horne Block & Lower Main Street

The core of the early village's shopping district was located on the hill of Lower Main Street. Among the various concerns located in these buildings have been dry goods, grocery and apothecary stores, barbers, a millinery shop, a tailor, a movie theater and even a billiard parlor.

The Horne Block, previously known as the Nutting Block was built after 1892, is one of several in the village with a well-preserved wooden storefront. This building first housed the medical offices to Dr. Mary Nutting, known as "Dr. Mary" and is remembered for the hundreds of babies she delivered. Later, Guy and Dr. Edith Horne (Meredith's first chiropractor) purchased the building. Dr. Horne continued her practice into the 1990s.

## 13. Waukegan Canal & Village Mills

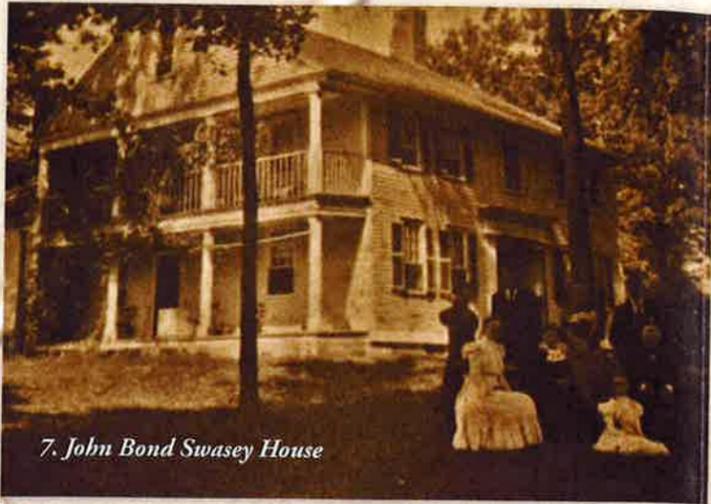
In the early 1800s, John Bond Swasey greatly increased available waterpower by channeling the Waukegan outlet to Lake Winnepesaukee into a canal running under Main Street and leading to a 40-foot waterfall, now a focal point in Meredith. He then built a series of mills that transformed the village into a typical New England town. The mill building, still standing beside the waterfall, was part of Meredith's industrial history from 1820 to 1980. The site has been home to a gristmill, cotton processing plant, hosiery manufactory and the Meredith Linen Mills. The shopping complex, developed in 1984, preserves this historic mill building and waterfall as a monument to Meredith's mill town roots.

## 14. Waterfront Parks

Meredith's pride and joy are its public waterfronts. The town docks on Lake Winnepesaukee date back to the early 1880s when Egon Hesky, owner of the Meredith Linen Mills, gave Hesky Park to the town. Previously, this was the steamboat landing. Edward H. Clough donated Clough Park, on



the northern shore, in the 1920s. He revived the Old Oak, originally an Indian landmark, which later became the town emblem. Clough Park was expanded and Scenic Park created in the late 1920s with fill along the northern shore. The boardwalk connecting the waterfront parks extending to the gazebo was constructed in 2004.



7. John Bond Swasey House



5. The Civil War Memorial & Meredith Public Library



1. Historical Society Museum



8. Hawkins | Deneault House



11. Law | Mansfield | Grad's Store



12. The Home Block & Lower Main Street



Across the Bay from Pleasant St., Meredith, N. H.

