

The Initial Settlement of Meredith Village

By

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The very first colonial settlers in the new township that became Meredith put down their roots in the 1762-1764 period. All of them established their farms generally along Parade Road (called the Province Road in those times and Rte. 106 now) on lands that are now part of Laconia. The area that became Meredith Village was unoccupied. The Village area was first opened up to travelers in 1774 when a new road was built from the Province Road to Joseph Senter's farm in what is now Center Harbor. This new road began where present day Pease Road intersects with Parade Road.

But the Village area did not attract any inhabitants for many years. It was not particularly good farm land, nestled as it was among the hills, bookended by lakes Waukegan and Winnepesaukee, and bordered at the head of the bay by the largely impassable Hawkins swamp. By the early 1780s, only Asa Foster apparently could be found squatting along the stream connecting Waukegan and Winnepesaukee.

By this time, the land that comprised the eventual core of Meredith Village was owned by Meredith's founding father, Ebenezer Smith. Smith had acquired the land, recognizing the strategic value of its water power. He took the first step in developing the Village area by developing a partnership with John Jenness, a Meredith farmer who had settled just north of the future Village. In 1787 Smith sold Jenness 40 acres of land southwest of Waukegan (called Measley pond in those days). The property bordered the upper end of what is now known as Corliss Brook, the stream that flowed out of Measley pond and down into Winnepesaukee near today's docks. Smith had identified as far back as 1770 the value of the water power of the Measley outlet.

With the assistance of Smith, Jenness became the first developer of this water power and the future Meredith Village by extension. A saw mill was in operation by 1788. It was built on Smith's property (Lot 38) southeast of Jenness' land. Smith retained a half ownership position in it. Smith's leading role in the mill was highlighted in a 1788 petition from Center Harbor region farmers who referred to this area as "Col Smith's Mill". By 1792, a grist mill was in operation nearby. By that time, John Jenness had built his home and barn on Smith's property (Lot 38) as well, and Jenness finally purchased from Smith in 1795. The mills and Jenness' house were located in the vicinity of current day 20 Lang Street in Meredith Village.

These mills were the first substantive steps in the development of what became Meredith Village.