

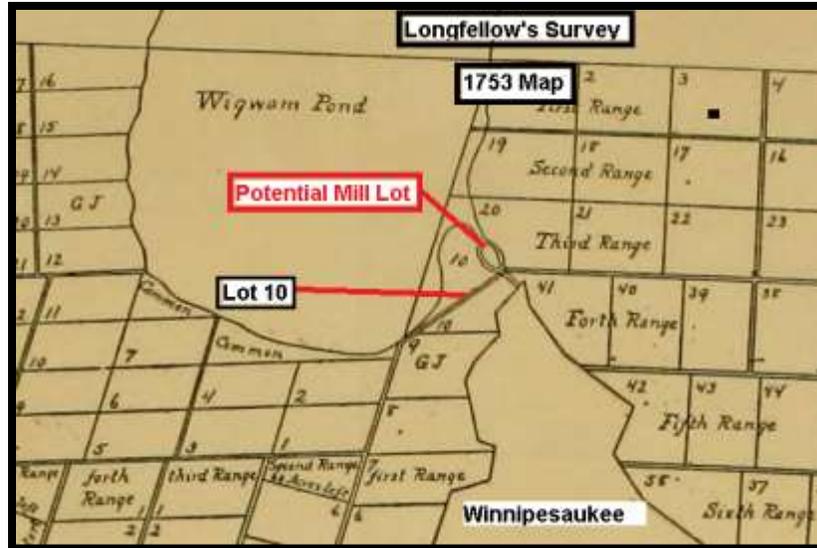
Some Early History of Hawkins Brook

Hawkins Brook is the smallest and least impactful of three natural bodies of water that determine the geographic layout of Meredith Village. The brook is located northwest of the Village center, in the quadrant between Routes 3 and 25. Its presence and nature are just now being opened up to the curious, thanks to the completion of the Laverack Nature Trail, a public board walk and path system.



The area of the brook circumscribed by the trail is its drainage basin.

Going back to town's earliest colonial history, the area that became the Village was specifically identified in the early 1750s as a possible location for a mill by the first surveyor commissioned by the original Meredith proprietors.



Note the circle on this segment of J. Longfellow's 1753 survey.

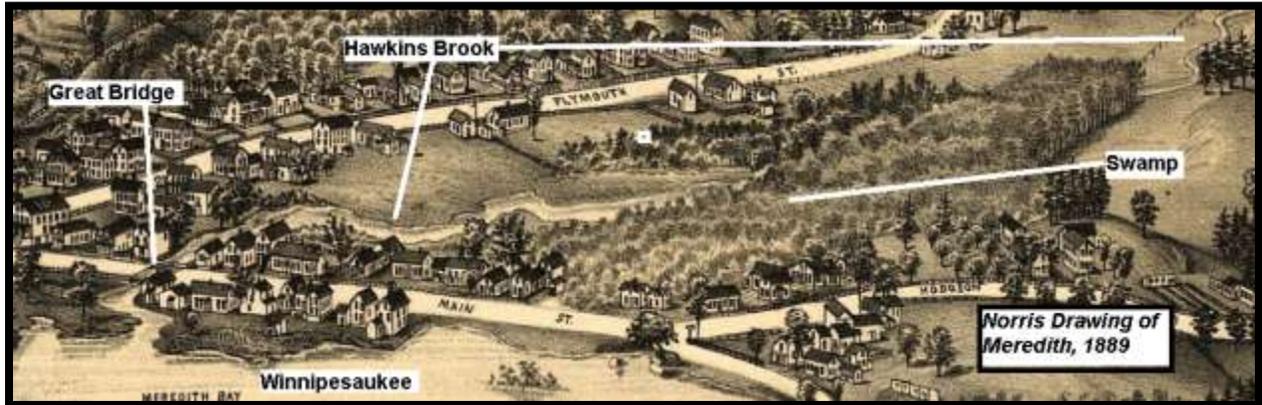
When the first settlers finally arrived in the new township in the 1760s, this future Village area was not initially inhabited. It was first opened up to travel in 1773 when the settlers built a new road from the Province Road (Parade Road or Route 106) to Center Harbor. This road is now part of Main Street. In these earliest days, the presence of Hawkins Brook catchment area prevented the road builders from easily laying it out along the shore of Meredith Bay. Instead, they turned west and built what is now Plymouth Street. This segment ran up to the Village Cemetery on Rte. 3, and then it turned east, around the Hawkins wetlands, over to True Road and Rte. 25 northeast of Barnard Ridge Road.

The impediment created by the wetlands was not insurmountable to the hardworking, undaunted settlers of Meredith who came in increasing numbers to live in the new town. Among the first of these men who settled near the future Village were James McCrillis, who established a farm on what is often now called High School hill in 1778, and Joseph and John Neal, whose farm was also purchased in 1786 on the hill looking back towards the future Village. Others arrived soon afterwards, developing more farms along what is now Rte. 25 and the old Center Harbor Road. Their presence and location led them to seek a more direct route to the Village center.

Meredith Village began to take shape as a commercial center during the late 18th century. It all began when a saw mill was established on the Lake Waukegan outlet c. 1786 in the heart of what became the Village, very near the junction of what is now Main St. and Dover St. A grist mill was built next door a few years later.

Not long thereafter, the settlers built a new road (variously called Winnepesaukee St., Elm St., Main St. and now Rte. 25) along the base of Meredith Bay. They built a

bridge over the outlet of Hawkins Brook in the vicinity of today's traffic lights. The first mention of this bridge is found in a 1792 deed in which John Jenness, the owner of the saw mill and grist mill, sold 15 acres of land to Samuel Jenness: "being all the land ...on the right hand side of the road (Main St.) between the long Bridge (over Hawkins Brook) and the bridge (where the Frog Rock Tavern is located at 67 Main St.) which crosses the stream which runs out of Measley (now Waukewan) pond."¹



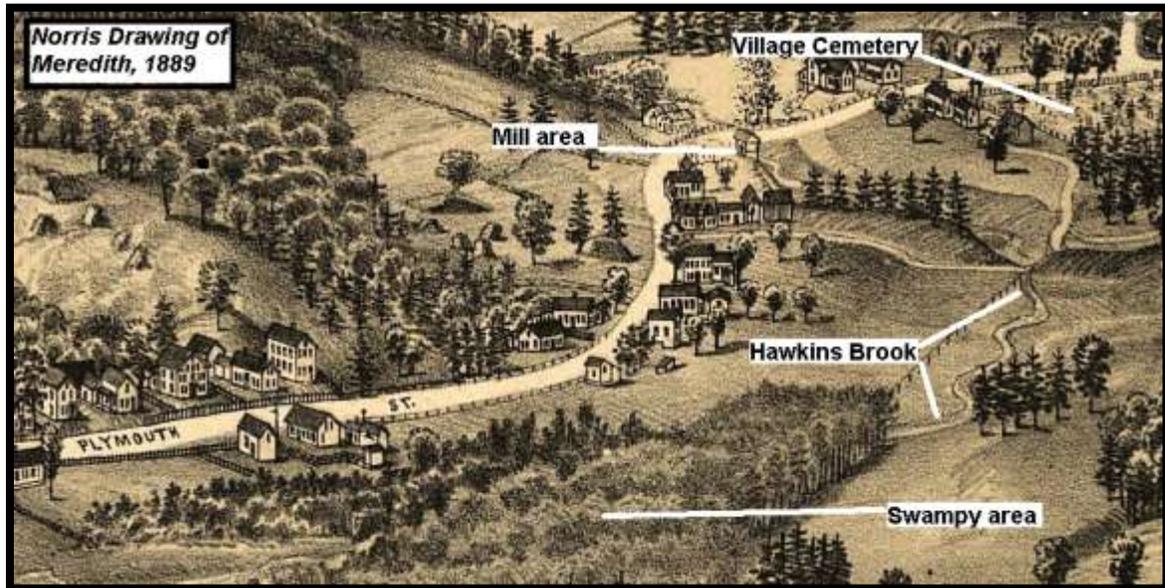
During the 1790s, the only buildings in the Village were those associated with the mills, and these were situated in the vicinity of what is now the Mill Falls Marketplace. There were no other buildings along Main St. or Plymouth St. or on either side of the bridge across Hawkins Brook.

The Village began to expand in 1796 after John Jenness sold the mills and his lands to Samuel Sever, a Moultonborough clothier. This was an era of very rapid growth in Meredith. The overall population of the town nearly doubled from 881 in 1790 to 1809 in 1800. Lots began to trade hands in the Village area, and commercial businesses began to crop up, beginning with a blacksmith shop owned by Winthrop Robinson in 1799. Commercial expansion in the Village area accelerated over the next few years when people such as David Corliss, Ebenezer Robinson, Bradbury Robinson, Jonathan Cram, John Neal, and John Towle acquired properties, built businesses and houses, and subdivided properties along Main St.. The base of Meredith Bay, however, still had no buildings; nor did Plymouth St.

The northwestern end of Plymouth St. drew its first interest in 1808 when Stephen Hawkins and his son, William, purchased some acreage that was part of Lot 22. Their focus was the stream and water power that crossed under Plymouth St. (now very close to the Community Center and the intersection with Rte. 3). The Hawkins built a saw mill there. The mill and the stream that powered the mill took on the name of Hawkins thereafter. Various mills operated at this location for decades, including a stint

¹ Online Belknap Registry of Deeds, Book/Page 9005/80.

under the ownership of Seneca Ladd during the 1840s when he and his partners made wagons there. Tim Badger was the last townsman who came to own the mills, and his major use of the water power was for his tannery.



Development in the vicinity of what is now the Rte. 3 traffic lights increased beginning in 1811 when Joseph Prescott purchased pieces of land from John Neal and David Corliss. The brook and bridge bordered the property, and the deed descriptions give a sense of the disdain the settlers felt towards the Hawkins Brook wetlands near its mouth. Both deeds reference the boundary line running “until it strikes the dead waters, or stream...near the great Bridge across the dead waters...”²

It wasn't until after 1815 that the settlers began building shops and houses along the base of Meredith Bay. This was a fairly narrow strip of solid ground between the Hawkins Brook swamp and Winnepesaukee. As the 1889 map on the previous page shows, this development was severely limited for decades by the wetlands. Road improvements were made, but no major attempts were undertaken to fill in portions of the swamp.

In the 20th century, improved earth moving equipment began to make an impact on the Hawkins Brook area and wetlands. This apparently was first felt along the Brook near Hawkins original mill yard. The “low land” northeast of what is now Rte. 3 had always been devoid of buildings because it was subject to spring flooding. The land was owned for decades by one of Meredith's early leading lights, Joseph Ela. Ela was responsible for most of the subdivision and building expansion along Plymouth Street.

² B/P 9006/181.

Sometime after the turn of the century, a field, called Peavy Field, was developed in part of Ela's "low lands" northeast of Plymouth St. after ownership had passed by will to his nieces. This land was acquired in 1922 by civic-minded businessman, Frank R. Prescott, who quickly donated it to the town of Meredith as a park. It became known as Prescott Park. A baseball field and other amenities were developed there, including grandstands. The high school team and other teams played their games there. Prescott Park has flourished ever since then.

Meanwhile, along the base of the Meredith Bay, Hawkins Brook and wetlands remained largely untouched. The Winnepesaukee shorefront nearby underwent substantial change beginning in the late 1920s. Another civic-minded part-time resident of Meredith, Edward Clough, spearheaded a multi-year effort to beautify the lake shorefront. His efforts ultimately resulted in the establishment of Clough Park and Scenic Park, including the acquisition by the town of Little Chocorua Island.

It wasn't until the latter 1940s that some major changes came to Hawkins Brook and wetlands. The development of US Rte. 3 along the shore resulted in some major surgery for them. The outlet of Hawkins Brook was moved a long stone's throw further north on Winnepesaukee St. (now Rte. 25). This process was followed by filling on the north side of Rte. 3 in the 1950s to allow for commercial expansion. In the 1960s, still further encroachment into the Hawkins Brook drainage area occurred to accommodate the development of the shopping strip that is now anchored by Hannaford's Market.

But the heart of the Hawkins Brook and swamp remained untouched. Thanks to the efforts of many people, it is now open to viewing by anyone along the Laverack boardwalk and trail.

