



Our School's History

In the late 1960's, the population of Merrimack was increasing rapidly. As a result, the number of children in the schools was increasing. The town voted to build two new elementary schools, one at each end of town. The site for Thorntons Ferry School was chosen because there was a lot of growth in this part of town, and the site was near a road. The site, which contained 39.8 acres, was bought from James B. Burns on June 5, 1968 . The architects of Fenton-Keyes Associates were hired to draw up a floor plan. In order to save money, the floor plan was the same as Reeds Ferry School . The school was built in 1968 and opened in September of that year. The original school had sixteen classrooms for students in grades one through six. The addition of the back wing, which included fifteen more classrooms and an art room, was built in 1970. Students who lived less than two miles from the school had to walk. Chester Buck was chosen to be the first principal. He was also the principal of Reeds Ferry School . The current principal of Thorntons Ferry School is Leslie Carter. He has been principal since 1986. The current assistant principal is Bridey Bellemare. Thorntons Ferry School is located at 134 Camp Sargent Road,

Merrimack, New Hampshire.

When Thorntons Ferry School was built, the town had an opportunity to name it after a special resident. They chose Matthew Thornton, the owner of the ferry which went across the Merrimack River. The ferry crossed the river at the site of which is now called Griffin Street . The site of the ferry landing was two miles from his home. The ferry had several owners after his death on June 24, 1803. The town also decided not to place an apostrophe in the word Thorntons.

Matthew Thornton was born in Ireland in the year 1714. His family moved to Wiscasset, Maine from Ireland in 1717. Later he moved to Worcester, Massachusetts where he studied medicine under a physician who lived nearby. About 1740, he began to practice medicine in Londonderry, New Hampshire . Eventually, he came to live in Merrimack where he owned and operated a ferry until his death. He married Hannah Jack in 1760. They operated a tavern and lived in what is now the Comman Man Restaurant.

When the royal governor, John Wentworth, retired in 1775, New Hampshire was without a government. Dr. Thornton became president of a convention to create one. This convention was the only government New Hampshire had for a while. Under New Hampshire 's new constitution, Matthew Thornton was chosen speaker of the assembly. In September 1776, he was chosen to be a delegate to the colonial convention. When he took his seat there on November 4, 1776 , he claimed the right to sign the Declaration of Independence. The other New Hampshire representatives, Josiah Bartlett and William Whipple, had signed with the other members in August, before he was elected.

Matthew Thornton is buried at Thorntons Cemetery near the monument erected in his honor. His gravestone reads "An Honest Man."

In 1976, the Bicentennial year, the students of Thorntons Ferry School had a contest to give the school a nickname. The students picked "The Signers" because Matthew Thornton was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The school colors are blue and white.

This history was researched by the 1991-92 fourth grade students of Thorntons Ferry School. It was edited and compiled by Pam Tinker, Director of Library Media Services, from the original papers written by: Sonia Bernier, Gregg Nolan, Meredyth Miller, Mike Avitable, Nick LaFauci, Matt Shury and Jacques Shablin.

Matthew Thornton (1714-1803)



SOURCES:

Addresses at the Dedication of the Monument Erected to the Memory of Matthew Thornton at Merrimack , N.H. September 29, 1892 . Concord, N.H. : The Republican Press Association, 1894.

Annual Reports of the Town of Merrimack , New Hampshire , “The Report of the School Board for the Year Ending June 30, 1967 .” Nashua , N.H. : Maxfield Press, Inc., 1967.

Class interview with William Ernst, former Merrimack School Board member.

Merrymac, slides, prepared by the Merrimack Historical Society.

“ New Hampshire: Years of Revolution, 1774-1783,” New Hampshire Profiles, March 1976: 78+.

Personal interviews with several of Thorntons Ferry’s veteran teachers.

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Information originally from Matthew Thornton School web site, later removed.