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Compiled and Narrated  
by  
Mattie Kilborn Webster  
for  
The Two Hundredth Anniversary  
of the  
Town of Merrimack NH  
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EPISODE 7 - Presented by Thornton's Ferry Social Club

**MEN'S INDUSTRIES**

**1746-1820**

Webster defines Industry as habitual diligence in any employment or pursuit. Man's industry from time immemorial has been to house, feed and clothe his family, and to educate and train his children.

The early industries of this Town followed that pattern. Man's first need was lumber to build his home; mills to grind his grain and card the wool for his family's clothing. His second was roads to take the place of the Indian trails, and the cooked paths through the woods from one cabin to another. The Proprietors realized this and even before your farms were laid out they had taken steps to furnish these necessities. They realized land would bring more and sell faster with mills, roads and bridges in the process of construction.

In 1776 we find the population 606 – 19 in the Revolutionary Army, 13 negroes or slaves for life. But as early as 1735 we find the Proprietors and settlers from the Town meeting at Luke Varney's. Boston to tax themselves to build a road (the River Road so-called) and bridges over the Souhegan and Baboosic Brook. The same year 120 acres was granted Capt. John Blanchard, to erect a saw mill, also a corn mill on the Souhegan on a spot chosen by the Proprietors. They also gave him three acres of land for a lumber yard (in back of Bill Abbott's and Nutes and part of ball field).

As early as 1737 taxes were raised on imports of liquor and gunpowder. All people delinquent in Church taxes and for their homestead lots could work it out on roads, bridges, etc.

Wolves were so plenty and destructive many a young marksman could well spend his time as a hunter.

By 1820 we find the Town inventory read: 1 Church, 9 school districts, 5 taverns, 5 stores, 8 sawmills, 5 grain mills, 2 clothing mills, 2 carding mills, 2 tanneries, 174 horses, 968 cattle, 844 sheep, 213 bushels of wheat raised, 147 bushels barley, 7150 bushels oats, 4772 bushels rye, 908 bushels buckwheat, 6463 bushels corn, 14969 bushels potatoes, 1532 pounds of wool, 1480 tons of hay. With all this industry, we know what the men and boys did for a livelihood.

Merrimack had had manufacturers from those early days. Grist Mills – Steven Damons on the Souhegan; Cummings at Atherton's Falls, Robbins on Baboosic at Bert Giles, David Jones on Naticook.

The first woolen mill built and run by Isaac Riddle and four sons in Merrimack, the only one of which I shall more than mention. Isaac Riddle and his four sons were natives of Bedford. In 1807 he purchased an extensive tract of land at Souhegan, without doubt many acres. He built the mill and probably houses as Merrimack came to be known as "Riddle's Village." For his second wife he married Margaret McGaw, daughter of Jacob McGaw of this town. She died between 1816-1819, having built a mansion at Quincy Point, Mass. He married again Margaret Vinol. This wife, a brother of Capt. Lincoln, prized among her treasures an axe which he used to chop open the boxes at the memorable tea party held in Boston Harbor.

Isaac Riddle bought the machinery for this mill at the Old Amoskeag Company of Manchester for \$1000. He could have bought the whole factory for \$500 more, but declined the offer and moved the machinery to his new factory at Merrimack. In this mill they made cotton woolen goods and nails. It was burned. He rebuilt it, and the second mill was destroyed about 1829-30. It is said this last fire was caused by a boy kicking over a

lantern. Isaac Riddle died on January 26, 1880 at Quincy very suddenly, immediately afterwards from an infection in a slight wound received at the time of the last fire. He was buried with Masonic honors in the family tomb at Bedford. After this we suspect his heirs gradually disposed of their holdings in this Town and the mill rights were sold to David Henderson his successor.

A cloth mill, opposite Josiah Hendersons. The cellar hold can be seen from the road.  
A yarn mill on the banks of Baboosic – the old canal now visible.  
Tables by Holton and Parker.

To mention some of more recent times.  
Fissenden & Lowell of Reeds Ferry Cooperage – kits and pails.  
Overalls and jackets – Jerry Kittredge, Reeds Ferry  
Bobbins – Hambleton Bros – Merrimack  
Boots and Shoe Co., later tannery products – A.J. Foster – McElwain  
David R. Jones – tables

This is by no means a full or comprehensive list but from 1870 and even before Merrimack has never been without a mill or factory of some kind giving its citizens employment and wealth to the town.

This town has done everything from snaring pigeons to making wheels. From growing tobacco to making drugs.