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Pageant        June 30, 1946  
Compiled and Narrated  
by  
Mattie Kilborn Webster  
for  
The Two Hundredth Anniversary  
of the  
Town of Merrimack NH  
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EPISODE 8 - Presented by Franklin Lowell Haseltine

## BRICK MAKING AND RIVER BOATING

1810

Brick making and River Boating was begun in Town prior to 1807. It fourished from 1800 to 1842, that part of the town in the N.E. corner had an abundant supply of clay suitable for the making of brick.

Everett Parker's old home place and the Kittredge place still show signs of the brick fields and pits. Large quantities were made each year sometimes over 2,000,000 selling for \$22,000 or more and employing about 20 men in one pit alone. Many factories, stores and tenements of Nashua, Lowell and Lawrence were in part made of these bricks. The bricks were hauled to Reeds Ferry in a two-wheeled cart with a yoke of oxen or a team of horses, loaded on riverboats and sent down the river. The Merrimack River between the head of the Middlesex Canal at Lowell and Concord NH had been considerably improved by the Proprietors by removing obstructions from the channel and by the construction of locks around the Falls. Parts of these locks are still visible near Cromwell's Falls. These particular locks at Cromwell's Falls and Amoskeag Falls Manchester were made for the Union Lock Co.

Capt. Isaac Riddle and son, Wm. Superintended the building of them. The funds were raised in part (about \$20,000) by lotteries managed by men at Concord. Isaac Riddle himself and Caleb Stark of Dunbarton conceived the idea of navigating the river by boats. Isaac Riddle built a boat at Bedford in front of his house, drew it 3-1/2 miles to the Merrimack River with 40 yoke of oxen and then launched it amid the shouts of those assembled. He named this boat the "Experiment." It was loaded and navigated down the river through locks and canals until it reached Boston where it was hailed with cheers and firing of cannon.

The Boston Sentinel of 1813 carried this announcement:

Arrived from Bedford N.H. Capt. Isaac Riddle  
on his canal boat "Experiment" via the  
Merrimack River and Middlesex Canal."

By this new means of transportation freight was reduced from a \$18 a ton to \$4 a ton on heavy articles and many of these boats, owned by people between Concord and Lowell, were soon going up and down the River. They were about 80 feet long, were propelled by long oars and when wind was strong a sail was used. They were forced upstream against the current near the shore by means of strong ash poles the lower end being shod with a strong steel point.

These boats were taken through the canals by means of horses and oxen traveling on the tow path and pulling the boats. Three men were the crew. Many of the boat men coming from Litchfield. Two bad accidents are recorded, one a capsizing, the boatmen losing their lives. The other, starting above Amoskeag Falls, after having fastened the oxen, when the current was strong, pulling the boat over the Falls. A man standing on the banks took his jack knife, cutting the two rope and the oxen swam ashore. A man from this Town, Vickery, was drowned. William Riddle was principal owner engaged in boating.

When Thoreau made his trip up the Merrimack he noticed the locks needed repairing and the railroads were being built, and even he predicted the end of the river trade.

After the Railroad opened in 1842 brick making in the Town declined. They could not compete with the newer brick yards located near the Railroad, particularly in Hooksett where a spur track ran up into the pit.

Bricks were also made in the south part of the Town at the Kaolin Farms. The building where Wm Abbott has his store was built of bricks from this farm. They are easily distinguished from those in the other part of the Town and seem to correspond to those made at that farm. This building was probably built between 1807 and 1829, as it was used as a store by Isaac Riddle.