

FORM A - AREA

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
294 Washington Street, Boston, MA. 02108

Form numbers in this area	Area letter
231-291	I



Newburyport  
area (if any) Merrimack  
Building District  
date or period Eighteenth  
nineteenth Centuries

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Sketch map. Draw a general map of the area indicating properties within it. Number each property for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets (including route numbers, if any) and indicate north. (Attach a separate sheet if space here is not sufficient)

Recorded by Mary Jane Stirgwolt  
Organization Office of Community  
Development  
Date 01-04-80

(Staple additional sheets here)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of area. (Describe physical setting, general character, and architecturally significant structures).

The buildings within the Merrimack Shipbuilding District illustrate

the chronology of domestic vernacular architecture as built by Merrimack River shipbuilders throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

For the most part the homes within the district are vernacular in style. Many have fine architectural features, however, such as the Federal doorway

at 313 Merrimack Street or the wonderful Greek Revival entrance at 348

Merrimack Street. The dwellings in this district, which is now predominantly residential in nature, range from the two story Georgian homes built in late

eighteenth century to gambrel roofed homes built during the Federal period. Occasionally one finds interesting architectural elements, indicative of the

fact that the homes were built by skilled craftsmen, familiar with the materials at hand. The shipbuilders and shipcarpenters used their ship-

building skills in the interpretation of the prevailing architectural styles. Excellent examples of this are the Victorian homes found on Ashland Street.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE of area. (Explain development of area, what caused it, and how it affected community; be specific).

The area included in the Merrimack Shipbuilding District was part of the Town of Newbury until 1851. In that year the City of Newburyport was

incorporated and the district north of Oakland Street was annexed to Newburyport. During the second half of the nineteenth century, most of the

shipyards in active operation were located within the Merrimack Shipbuilding District. The residential area that developed during the late eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries along Merrimack Street and the streets running from Merrimack Street toward High Street were closely associated with the shipyards.

The homes in this area, built as late as the 1880's were built by and for those associated with the shipbuilding industry along the banks of the

Merrimack River.

Several important vessels were built in the Merrimack Shipbuilding

District. These included the sloop-of-war "Wasp," built for the United States Government in 1813, by Ralph Cross and Orlando B. Merrill at a yard near

Mogridge's Point. In 1810 twenty-one ships, thirteen brigs and one schooner were built on the banks of the Merrimack. Some of these were built in the

South End by the Woodwell family. This yard was closed at mid-nineteenth century. Between 1851 and 1885 many famous merchant and clipper ships were

built in the yards in Newburyport's North End.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Assessor's Records 1890-1980

J. Currier, History of Newburyport 1764-1905-vols. I and II., reprint, Newburyport 1977.

R. Cheney, History of Merrimack River Shipbuilding, Newburyport, 1964

1851 Plan of Newburyport, Mass. H. McIntire

1872 Map of the City of Newburyport, Mass. D. G. Beers and Co.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Newburyport	Form No: I
Property Name: Merrimack Ship- Building District	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

FORM A - AREA (CONTINUED)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

There is little trace of the shipyards themselves along the banks of the Merrimack River. An occasional oak pile can be seen at low tide. The few structures that were used as shops in the yards have been destroyed.

The Merrimack Shipbuilding District does include several industrial structures. These include 200 Merrimack Street and the Towle Silversmiths, located in a factory built by the Merrimack Arms Company in 1866. The only major intrusion in this area is the Gould Shawmut Company which manufactures electrical fuses in a modern facility at 374 Merrimack Street.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

The "Dreadnaught", one of the famous nineteenth century clipper ships was built by William Currier and James L. Townsend in the yard at the foot of Ashland Street in 1853. In 1860 this vessel made the voyage from New York to England in an unequalled sailing time of nine days and thirteen hours.

Many merchant vessels were built in Newburyport's shipyards. They were employed, for the most part, in the East India and China trades. Many of these vessels were captured by Confederate cruisers during the Civil War. Others were later sold in Europe or employed in the coal and lumber trade on the Pacific coast.

During the Civil War the gunboat "Marblehead" of 529 tons and the steamer "Ascutney" of 1040 tons were built by George W. Jackman, Jr. for the United States Government. The Jackman family built ships at the foot of Forrester Street between 1822 and 1875. In 1866 and 1867 the steamships "Ontario" and "Erie" were built in this yard.

Shipbuilding remained a prosperous industry until 1883 when the ship "Mary L. Cushing" was launched from the yard of John Currier, Jr. This was the last square rigged vessel built in the area. Currier had been building ships in the yard adjacent to Merrimack Court since 1833, after building for two years at Moggridge's Point. Between 1831 and 1884 Currier built ninety-seven ships and barks and one schooner, one steamer, and one scow of 200 tons. Donald McKay, one of the most famous builders of clipper ships, worked in Currier's yard for a brief period before setting up his own shipyard in East Boston.

Other shipbuilders in the Merrimack shipbuilding district included the Coffin family with several yards at the foot of Jefferson Street and a

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

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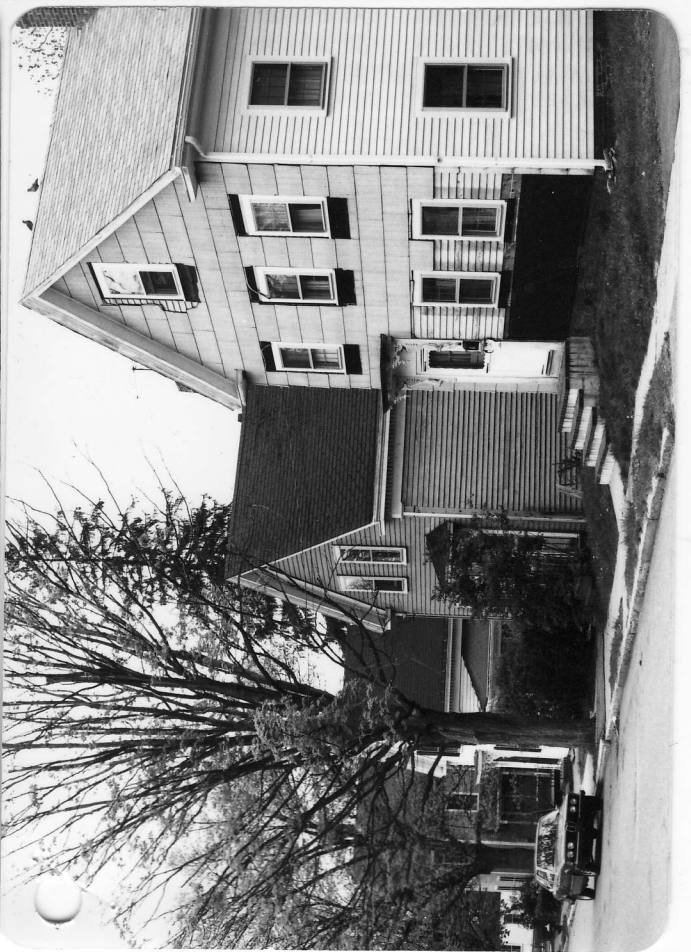
Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.  
FORM A.

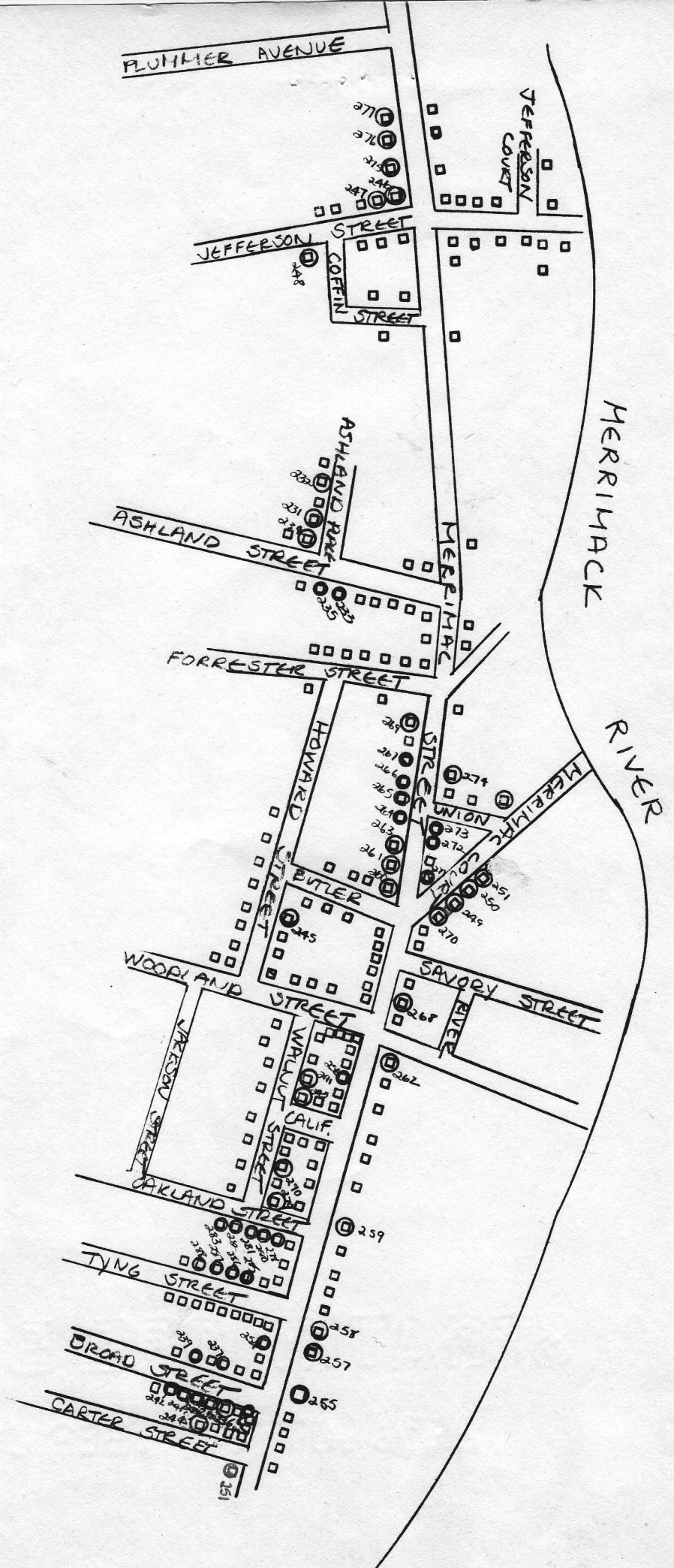
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

number of shipbuilders occupying a yard at the foot of Ashland Street. These occupants were, at various times Elisha Briggs, Currier, and McKay, Currier-Townsend, W. C. Currier, Colby&Lunt, Charles H. Currier&Co. , George E. Currier and Co. and W. S. Currier. The shipyard at Moggridge Point beyond Union Court was first used by Samuel Moggridge. It was later occupied by the Merrills, including Orlando Merrill, the inventor of the water line model.

Throughout the nineteenth century this entire district centered around the shipbuilding industry. The shipyards are no longer visible but the residences within the district remain, a testimony to the skill of these shipbuilders.

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MERRIMACK SHIPBUILDING DISTRICT

MAP IS NOT TO SCALE