

The Old Richardson Farm Trotting Track

Several years ago, while hiking in nearby woods between the Merrimack College athletic fields and Highland Road, Mary and I happened upon a rather unusual stone wall nearly hidden amongst the brambles and ivy. It ran not in a straight line like a proper New England wall, but rather in a gradual arc. Also, the earth was banked up on the inside of the curve, making it more like a retaining wall. During subsequent hikes in those woods, we came upon it often and always wondered what it could have been.

Recently we got our first clue from the records of the Andover Historical Society, which mentioned a horse breeding farm having been located in that vicinity in the early 1900's. Our curiosity then led us to the McQuade Library at Merrimack College, where we found the excellent reference book Merrimack College: Genesis and Growth 1947-1972 by E. G. Roddy Jr. containing many interesting facts about the history of the land plus a few old photos. Incidentally, an added bonus from this visit to McQuade Library was being informed by the very friendly and helpful library staff that our Andover library cards may now be used to check out books there.

The college was established in 1947 on land formerly known as the 100-acre Richardson Farm. Roddy's book mentions that the 40 acres in Andover included an oval track and states that in 1972 ". . . the outline of its race track may still be discerned." A few of our neighbors who still remember it say that it was more properly called a trotting track for the Richardson Farm horses.

Several large aerial photos mounted in McQuade Library, dating back to the early days of the college, clearly show the outline of the track. The present varsity football field is situated right in the middle of where the track was once located. The only part remaining today is that stone embankment deep in the woods, nearly all the rest having been obliterated over the years by construction and landscaping. There is, however, one other faint trace more easily accessible. Between the Ash dormitory and the athletic field, a hedgerow of trees, straight and then curved, still faithfully traces out the original path of the old trotting track.