

7

North Road

**CHELMSFORD
PUBLIC GARDEN**

Established by

The Chelmsford Garden Club

2016



CHELMSFORD PUBLIC GARDEN HISTORY

Stephen Pierce was a blacksmith and owned this land in 1813. He built the two-family house two doors over at 1-3 North Road, and a blacksmith shop out back, where the red building is located. He also built the house you see here at 11 North Road and a barn located about where the bank drive through is today.

In 1840 Stephen Pierce sold land from here over to Fletcher Street, to Hildreth Dutton, who was a butcher by trade. Dutton lived here at 11 North Road and built a slaughter house about where the yellow building is at the rear of this lot.

By 1851 the 48-year-old one-room schoolhouse across the common was overcrowded, and Hildreth Dutton sold this small piece of land to the Town for school purposes. The Centre School opened here late in 1851 and the 1802 schoolhouse was converted into a garage for the town hearse.

By 1886 Centre School was overcrowded. To make more space, the separate entries for boys and girls and a porch in front were removed and a tower was added with the bell from the former Chelmsford Academy in its belfry. (That bell is mounted in the cupola of the 1802 schoolhouse today and can still be rung.) Classrooms and entrance staircases were also added in the rear, leaving very little room for the kids to play.

In 1908 Chelmsford Common was being beaten down by its use as a school playground and two warrant articles were presented in 1909 to authorize purchase of 3/4 of an acre of land directly behind the school from owner James P. Emerson for not more than \$1,000. Both articles were voted down during that year.

In 1917 all high school students in town were transferred to a brand new building at 50 Billerica Road. That cleared more space for the grammar school students here at Centre School, but in 1926 all the remaining students were transferred to a new grammar school over on Wilson Street that was later named in honor of teacher Susan McFarlin.

A study committee, previously appointed to look for a fire station site somewhere in the Centre village, now recommended that the empty Centre School be converted for use as a fire station. Town meeting shot this idea down in 1927, and the building was auctioned off for salvage in 1928. There is one conflicting account that it remained derelict on this site until 1934 and was then condemned.

In 1945 the town meeting allocated money for the design of two new fire stations, one on this site and one in North Chelmsford, and a study committee was appointed. In 1946 a motion was made at town meeting to appropriate \$100,000 to construct and equip the two fire houses as recommended by the study committee, but this motion was voted down.

By 1950 the pressure was building to acquire a new fire station for the Center, helped along by termites that had infested the foundation of the shed they were using out in back of Town Hall. Finally, in 1952, the report of a building committee was accepted and \$80,000 appropriated for the design, construction, and original equipping of a fire station on this site. The new building was completed and occupied in 1953.

Fifty-six years later, in 2009, a strong case was made that Center Fire Station had reached the end of its useful life. A building committee worked diligently to find a site that would suit Fire Department needs and a budget that the Town would be willing to support.

Construction was started on the new Center Fire Station at 50 Billerica Road in 2013 and it was dedicated in 2014. The old familiar Fire Station on this site was demolished in 2015 and a 7 North Road Committee was appointed to find the best use for the site. As a member of that committee, I am proud to have played a part in the creation of this beautiful public space by the Chelmsford Garden Club.

Fred Merriam 6/14/2016

Chelmsford Public Garden



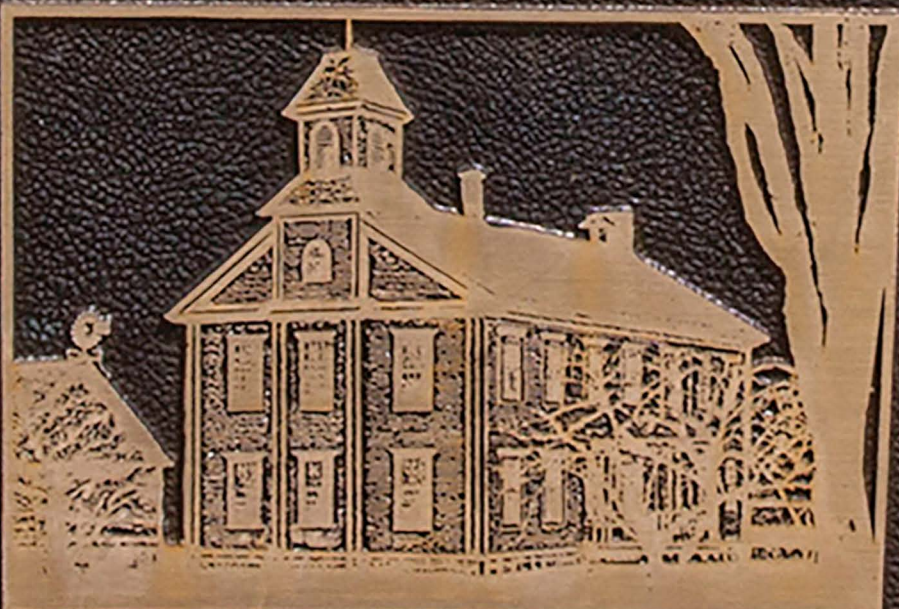
Centre School
On this site from 1851-1928



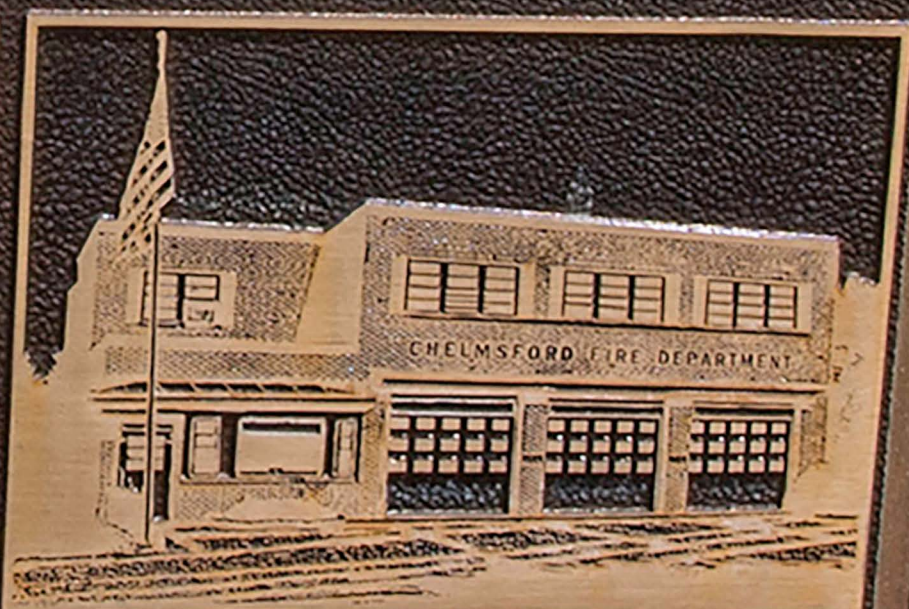
Center Fire Station
On this site from 1952-2015

Donated by Carol and Fred Merriam | Stonework by The LaMaurier Families | Artwork by Donna Berger

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Centre School
On this site from 1851-1928



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