

Chelmsford, July 4, 1886

Test your history power

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Independence Day is upon us once more. And, while for many, the day means a trip to the beach, partying with friends and watching the fireworks, it is a historical day that has been celebrated in a number of ways since 1776.

Chelmsford, too, has celebrated the day in different ways throughout the years. How much do you know about Chelmsford's July 4 celebrations in the past?

If you have been a resident for 20 years or more, you should be able to answer at least seven of the questions; for the others, a knowledge of local history will be helpful:

1. When did the Chelmsford Art Society start having its Art Festival in conjunction with the Fourth of July celebration?

2. When were Fourth of July celebrations, including the parade, revived in Chelmsford after 1924?

3. The residents of Chelmsford Center celebrated the Fourth in 1886 with a picnic, ice cream, and fireworks at the Summit House. Where was the Summit House?

4. What did the local Girl Scout Troop have to do with the 1923 celebration?

5. What activity by the First Parish Church has been a part of the Fourth of July celebration since 1968?

6. What tragic event marred the celebration of the 4th in 1889?

7. How do today's parade Grand Marshals differ from those of pre-World War II parade Marshals?

8. When was sulky racing part of the July 4 celebration?

9. Who were the Honorary Marshals of the 1983, 1984, 1985 parades?

10. Every July 4 parade before 1986 had a "Horribles Division." What was it?

11. How was the World Health Organization involved with our celebration in 1969?

12. In 1893, the celebration consisted of a picnic and fireworks at Warren's Grove. How would you get to Warren's Grove?

13. In 1923 there was a "midway" on the Center Common with several booths. What made this "midway" unique by today's standards?

14. In the past, the bonfire, lighted the night before the Fourth was a regular part of the celebration. When was a bonfire last included in the program?

15. Through 1924, the largest division of the parade was the "Trades Division." What was that?

16. How did the people get here from Lowell to see the parades in the early days?

17. In 1895, we had the biggest (up to that time) celebration with a huge crowd watching the parade. Approximately how "huge" was the crowd, 600, 2,000, 6,000?

18. What kind of prizes were awarded for winning parade entries in the 1920's?

19. Church bells played a part in the early celebrations. How?

20. One year, the parade was lead by dignitaries from outside the United States. When was this and who were the dignitaries?

Here are the answers. How many did you answer correctly?

1. In 1969 the first Art Festival was held in St. Mary's Parish Hall. It was held at St. Mary's until 1982 when it moved to the Cen-

tral Congregational Church and the following year it was in the restored Town Hall where it has been held ever since.

2. In 1968.

3. The Summit House was on the top of Robin's Hill where the fire tower stands today.

4. The 1923 celebration was organized jointly by Troop 1 Girl Scouts and the Village Improvement Association. Troop 1 was organized in 1918, only six years after Girl Scouting started in America.

5. The holiday breakfast.

6. The premature explosion of a cannon on the Center Common, killing one young man and maiming another for life.

7. Prior to 1968, the Marshal was the active organizer of the parade. He was mounted on horseback and had mounted Aides (there were 40 Aides in the 1907 parade). The Marshal and his Aides all wore tall silk hats. Nowadays the honorary Marshals ride in convertibles.

8. In 1924 (and perhaps other years of that period). The movie of the 1924 parade shows racing at the trotting park in the Westlands about where Bradley's store is today.

9. 1983, Eddie Hart; 1984, Mary Long; 1985, Dick Lahue.

10. The Horribles Division was a separate section of the parade that was made up entirely of clowns and other costumed comic characters. Marching groups and floats mimicked recognizable people or situations. This was the most popular part of the parade.

11. Members of the Secretariat of the World Health Organization were our guests for the parade and were entertained in private homes in the afternoon.

12. Go up Bartlett Street to about what is now ^{70.} Route 62. The grove was under the big trees on the left. This was a popular spot for picnics.

13. The "midway" opened at 6 p.m. the night before the 4th and the booths remained open ^{all night and} all day on the Fourth.

14. The last bonfire was held on the South Row School grounds in 1969.

15. The "Trades Division" consisted of floats — decorated trucks or wagons, in the early days — entered by all the local business firms, usually displaying samples of their products.

16. Special trains ran from Lowell to Chelmsford Center and later the street cars were crowded with passengers inside, on the roof, and hanging onto the sides of the cars.

17. The Lowell newspaper reported the next day that "there were from 6,000 to 8,000 present during the day." (Chelmsford's population at that time was about 3,000).

18. Prizes were inexpensive (even for that time) and were displayed in a store window a week or so before the Fourth. Typical examples (1924): flag, bag of flour, five pounds of candy, auto mirror, inner tube, 10 gallons of gasoline, lemonade set, thermos bottle, case of gingerale.

19. Church bells were rung at sunrise, noon, and sunset on the Fourth. (Midnight ~~ringing~~ ^{ringing} was vetoed by town authorities in 1896.)

20. The year was 1976. The dignitaries were Mrs. Helen How, chairman of the Chelmsford England District Council and her husband, Aubrey; Mr. and Mrs. Esko Laakso and Mr. and Mrs. Sylvio Mainville. Mr. Laakso and Mr. Mainville were Councilmen from Chelmsford, Ontario, Canada.

George A. Parkhurst, a Chelmsford historian, is the author of a weekly column, "The Way It Was," which can be found on the Opinion page.