

Commemorating our 100th Memorial Day

MAY 21, 1987

When the townspeople gather on Monday, May 25, to observe the Memorial Day celebration, they will be seeing Chelmsford's 100th Memorial Day parade. It was in 1888 that the town first took official recognition of Decoration Day, as it was known because it was a time to honor the deceased war veterans by decorating their graves with flowers.

A full report of the 1890 Memorial Day program was given in the *Lowell Weekly Journal* which stated, in part:

"The interest in Memorial day in this village (Chelmsford Center), as in many other places, seems to increase with each recurring year. The observance last Friday was marked by more elaborate preparations and a larger attendance than ever before. Early in the morning, the flag of the Village Improvement Association was run up to half mast and the decorations of the revolutionary monument were completed by the ladies and gentlemen of the Baptist society, having the work in charge. Great praise is due them for the elaborate and tasteful results.

"The cap of the monument was concealed by the national flag, which was crowned by a floral display. The main shaft was entwined with evergreen and the same material bordered each of the inscription tablets; the base of the column was decorated with the national colors and upon the steps was a profusion of pot plants and flowers, the whole forming a most pleasing and artistic design.

The way It was

By George A.
Parkhurst



"The 16 soldiers' grave in the Centre cemetery were decorated a 8 o'clock by (G.A.R.) Comrades James P. Emerson, George A. Parkhurst and Alfred Day, the committee having charge of the exercises of the day. At 9:30 o'clock a special train arrived from Lowell bringing a large delegation of members of Post 185, G.A.R., numbering with lady friends 117. They were greeted by the strains of the Chelmsford Cornet band, who appeared for the first time in their new uniforms and presented a fine appearance, their playing also being pronounced very creditable.

"The line was at once formed in front of the town hall in the following order: Cornet band; the veteran Crosby steed, 37 years old, led by Master Ralph Emerson, and ridden in the Virginia campaign in 1862 by the late Walter Burnham, M.D., surgeon of the Old Sixth (Massachusetts regiment); veteran soldiers; invited guests; teachers and pupils of the public schools; citizen." (The present writer wonders who was left to watch the parade.)

A musical salute was made at the monu-

ment and a ritual service held in the cemetery, following which the assemblage went into the town hall for a formal program. The speaker, Rev. Alexander Blackburn of Lowell, dwelt upon "The Educational Value of the Day."

"At the close of the address, which was heartily applauded, a substantial collation, prepared by the ladies of the village, was served to the veterans, invited guests and band, and at 12 o'clock the visitors returned to the city to take part in the program of the afternoon."

Seating for the program at the town hall was announced in advance. The center section was reserved for the veterans and invited guests; teachers and school children were seated on the left and the general public on the right. No one was allowed in the balcony except the members of the Cornet band.

This year's parade will be similar to its counterpart of a century ago in many ways but in a modern context but the crowd will be much larger.

And that's the way it was.

George A. Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.