

APRIL 30, 1987

Finding the town founding fathers

Of the founding families of Chelmsford, one predominated. This was the Parker family.

There were 29 petitioners for the original grant; four of these were Parker brothers, and a fifth brother was a very early settler. However, like several others who asked that land be granted by the General Court, some of them did not make this their permanent home but moved to other settlements after a short time.

James Parker was elected a "Trustee" of the town (early name for selectman) in 1656 but five years later moved to Groton, where he

became active in that town's affairs. His brother, Joseph, went to Groton at about the same time and later to Dunstable.

This Joseph and his wife, Margaret, settled here even before

the grant was made in 1653 and achieved the distinction of being the parents of the first baby born in Chelmsford. The birth is recorded as "Joseph Parker, the son of Joseph & Marget his wife 30 daye of March: 1653." (Obstetric and pediatric care must have been minimal in this frontier wilderness.)

Another brother, Jacob, was the first town clerk (1658) and also served as selectman until 1666, but removed to Malden sometime after 1667.

Abraham Parker of this same family, who has been referred to as the "first settler," originally lived in the vicinity of 109 Billerica Road but later moved nearer the Center village where he and his son built a sawmill in 1678. Although the exact location of the saw-

mill is not known, it is believed to have been on Beaver Brook that runs through the center of town.

Tradition has it that the wife of Abraham Parker was the first woman to "bake and brew in Chelmsford."

That the enforcement of liquor laws is nothing new is shown by a case involving some of the Parkers. "The 24 day of march 1678/9 Abraham Parker senior with his tew sonnes moses an Isack weare Acused for seling of strong lickers to seuerall endians Contrary to the law established they doe each of them frely Acknowledge ther Faulte ther in And doe heare by bind them seules severaly vnto the selectt men of Chelmsford neuer after to sell Any more strong lickers to Any Indians." (A prime example of simplified spelling!)

Moses Parker, son of Abraham, was one of those who contributed money toward the building of the first schoolhouse in town in 1718. The grandson and namesake of Moses became one of Chelmsford's early heroes. Capt. (later Lt. Col.) Moses Parker was a respected military leader who achieved fame as an Indian fighter. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, Lt. Col. Parker served in Col. Ebenezer Bridge's regiment.

He was wounded at the Battle of Bunker Hill and taken prisoner by the British. He died on July 4, 1775 in a Boston prison. Trumbull's famous painting, "The Battle of Bunker Hill," shows Col. Parker seated on the extreme left of the canvas, after being wounded. In 1976 the school on Graniteville Road was named in his honor. His home was on Turnpike Road.

The colonel was a great uncle of an internationally famous physician, Dr. Willard Parker, who was reputedly the first person in America to operate successfully on an abscessed appendix. He was one of the founders and president of the New York Academy of Medicine and was honored by the naming of the Willard Parker Hospital for infectious Diseases in New York.

Dr. Parker lived in his ancestral home, the "Hill Jock Parker House" at 155 Boston Road when he was in Chelmsford. He maintained an interest in town affairs and kept this house until late in life and always considered Chelmsford to be his hometown.

Some of the early Parkers settled in the southern part of Chelmsford that later became Parkerville (Westford).

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

The way it was

By George A.
Parkhurst

