

Veteran's Day in June? Well, in 1919...

JUNE 11, 1987

Welcoming soldiers home from any war is always the occasion for joyous celebration. At the conclusion of World War I, the people of Chelmsford went all out.

Fighting ended on November 11, 1918 but it was several months before a majority of the soldiers returned to the U.S. Most of the local doughboys were home by June, 1919 so the town organized a mammoth homecoming celebration on June 17th. The next day's morning edition of the Lowell Courier-Citizen carried a front page story complete with four large photos.

Quoting from that article, "All the Chelmsfords, North, East, West and South and the Centre, united yesterday in a monster celebration in honor of returning soldiers, sailors and nurses, 250 of whom went from the town.

"Most of the mills were closed in honor of the event, and the houses in the villages used the national colors to a large extent in the decorations.

"Great crowds from the villages assembled to pay tribute to their 250 servicemen and women, and this number was augmented by many from the city, who made their way in autos and jitneys.

"The day's program included a parade in the morning at North Chelmsford, dinner at noon at North Chelmsford and exercises on the common in the afternoon during which medals were given to the war heroes. Band concerts were given in the town halls of the North and Centre villages, followed by a ball in each of these places. Supper was served at 6 o'clock at North Chelmsford and in the Centre.

The way It was

By George A.
Parkhurst



"The parade was the big feature of the morning. It was formed at the town hall in North Chelmsford, and shortly after 10 o'clock, the order to march was given by Chief Marshal Sgt. Walter T. Monahan. His aides were William Quigley, James P. Dunningan, Carl H. Ripley and Fred Ballinger. The chief marshal was preceded by a squad of police under the direction of Chief George Wright.

"Following the staff came the servicemen and women in command of Lt. J.C. Monahan. The sailors' contingent was in command of Petty Officer E.R. Dearth and the whole was followed by R.A.R. veterans in autos."

Division one units included the U.S. Cartridge Co. band, a float carrying the Liberty girls of the Silesia mills and a detachment of the State Guard, followed by the Middlesex County Training School band and pupils of the school. Also, pupils from the local schools, the smaller ones riding in trucks.

Division two was headed by Marshal Harold Tucke and the O.M.I. Cadet drum corps of Lowell. It included a delegation from St. John's T.A.S. and a delegation from the Brotherhood of the North Congregational

church. The Chelmsford troop of Boy Scouts was followed by the float of the Foresters.

At noon the soldiers and sailors were served dinner of roast turkey in a tent on the common. The Waltham Watch Co. band opened the afternoon festivities. There were several speakers including the chairman of the Board of Selectmen, Congressman John Jacob Rogers, famous war correspondent Frank Sibley and J. Mitchell Chapelle, representing Lt. Gov. Cox.

Selectman W.E. Belleville awarded medals to the veterans which were pinned on to the breasts of the men by local young women: Misses Beatrice Brown, Ida Paignon, Eleanor Warren, Ethel Tetley, Molly Lofstedt and Esther Fox.

Several other local young women served as nurses during the war, including Misses Ella M. Burns, Elizabeth C. Devine, Olive G. Eaton, Frances M. Harrington, Madeline Hartley and Mabel E. Swanson.

It was announced in the previous day's Chelmsford news that "Any soldier, sailor or nurse will be provided free transportation to North Chelmsford, Tuesday, June 17. A truck will leave the Centre town hall at 9:30 a.m."

All veterans of the World War were invited to be guests of the movie theater in the I.O.O.F. hall (now the First Bank Building in Central Square) on Tuesday to see a full program of three movies, featuring "The Old Homestead, the wonderful rural play rich in pathos and humor."

That's the way it was in June, 1919. George A. Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.