

# Town Common

Colorized by Fred Merriam



This photo shows an early incarnation of Skip's Restaurant on Chelmsford Street. John Kydd built the diner and the adjacent ice cream shop in the 1930s.

## The cream of Chelmsford history

### Skip's Ice Cream started with a swamp

Sixty-six years of ice cream and other frozen treats were lost to Chelmsford history Nov. 22, when Skip's Ice Cream closed its doors for all time.

Long-time patrons got in their last licks and bid farewell to the little Chelmsford Street shop that fed so many for so long. The future of the site is uncertain but it seems likely the sweet shop will be torn down and replaced with a development more profitable to owners Fred Gefteas Jr. and George Burliss.

The loss of the shop strikes extremely close to home for a some long-time residents. Alan Greenhalgh, age 77, of Bridge Street, recalls helping his grandfather build and paint the ice cream stand back when he was a teenager.

"I remember carrying boards and nails and getting in the way. I was only a kid, but I worked hard on that place," Greenhalgh said.

Greenhalgh's grandparents, John Kydd and Margaret Wilson, came to Lowell in the 19th century from Arbroath, Scotland, approximately 60 miles north of Edinburgh. Kydd was a first-class blacksmith like his father. He worked in the Lowell Mills before buying out Gilman's Dairy, located near Cross Point in Lowell.



Here's a portrait-style photo of John and Margaret Wilson Kydd from the early 1900s.



Skip's Ice Cream, a town favorite for over 60 years, closed for all time last November. This photo shows the shop soon after its construction in the 1930s.

attended the University of Massachusetts and studied dairy engineering. After serving in World War II, he went to work making ice cream for residential and commercial use, including his family's ice cream stand. He usually made about 400 to 500 gallons a day while taking care of the refrigeration in the milk processing plant.

"Consistency is the secret to ice cream," he said. "People are used to flavors and every batch of ice cream has to be made the same. You can't change one little thing. If the flavor is made with 15 percent sugar, you don't put in 14 percent or 16 percent. As for taste, higher butter fat affects the taste."

Kydd's Ice Cream, which was later named Skip's, and the family diner were sold to the Gefteas and Burliss families. Greenhalgh went on to serve on the Chelmsford police force for six years and later worked for the post office for 19 years.

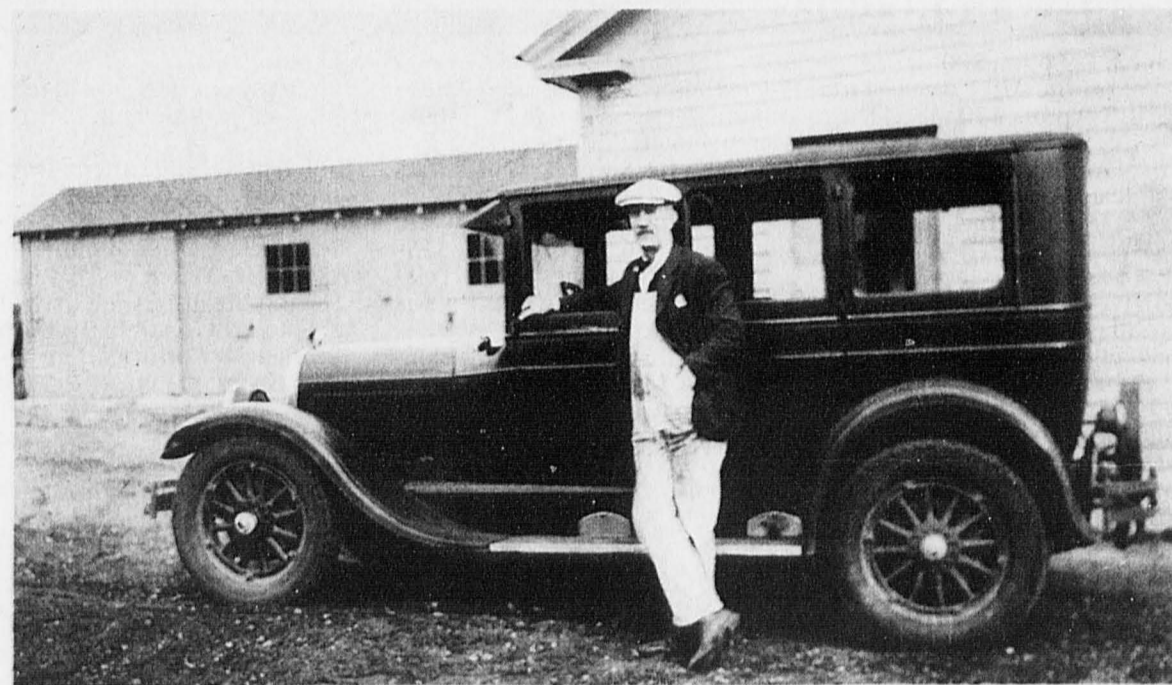
In the future, the Skip's Ice Cream torch will likely be carried by Sully's Ice Cream Stand on Graniteville Road. The shop is run by Richard Sullivan, who managed Skip's for nearly 20 years. Sullivan also owns an ice cream stand in

Tyngsboro. Greenhalgh, whose favorite flavor is vanilla, said the next home of the Skip's milk bottle should be Sully's Tyngsboro location. The final home of the bottle has yet to be determined.

The day will come when Skip's will be torn down. "I remember coming out to Chelmsford and there was nothing here. I remember when there was nothing in the center. It's just progress. It goes on. You can't stop it. If you go someplace else, it will happen there. Maybe one of my kids would like a brick from the stand."

Greenhalgh was reminded of the flavor of Chelmsford's past during a bad snowstorm several years ago when no one could get to work. It was the first time the post office was closed for three days. "You could walk up and down the street and all over the center and talk to people. It was like years ago. There are people who live two doors down from me and we never have a chance to talk. There we were saying, 'Hello.' Eventually we all had to go back to work and live. You never get over losing that feeling."

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Chelmsford entrepreneur John Kydd poses with one of the early Ford motor cars.

While delivering milk in Chelmsford, Kydd came up with the idea of building an ice cream stand on land at that time used for grazing cattle. Kydd purchased the property from farmer Ted Emerson, father of Brad Emerson, in 1934.

Greenhalgh recalled his grandfather: "John Kydd was a hard-working, honest man. When he finished for the day at the dairy, he would trim the hedge or sweep the sidewalk. He came out to Chelmsford and worked hard on that ice cream stand. It was his pride and joy."

Greenhalgh's eyes smile whenever he reminisces about working with his grandfather on Saturdays to deliver milk in Chelmsford. "We had 20 or 30 houses out here. I used to get an orange for going with my granddad. At age 7 or 8, that was a big deal and I looked forward to it."

The Kydds had seven children. One son, Jack, opened Jack's Diner in Chelmsford Center.

Greenhalgh said he not sure, nor is anyone else, who came up with the idea for the enormous milk bottle mounted atop Skip's roof. It was Norman Kydd, the eldest son, a superintendent of sheet metal fabrication at the Boston Navy Yard, who designed and built the milk bottle in two parts. "People would come out to look at it and take pictures and buy ice cream. My grandfather didn't have the milk bottle for a gimmick. He just wanted the milk bottle up there."

He remembers at least six men with ladders and ropes installing the milk bottle on the roof. It was painted all white with a yellow to

indicate the level of cream in the milk, which at that time wasn't homogenized.

The realization of Kydd's vision of an ice cream stand took a great deal of work. At that time, the land was swampy. Kydd had it filled in and leveled. "I remember one truck after another coming with land fill. Most of the fill came from Drum Hill," Greenhalgh said. Farmer Emerson's cattle grazed on this acreage and often sank in the mud. A tractor had to come and pull them out.

Customers to the stand often asked for hot dogs and sandwiches, so Kydd added hot dogs, french fries, as well as ham and cheese sandwiches, to the menu. "There were always 40 to 50 people in line every weekend. It was so busy that my grandfather built the diner the next year and it was always full. People wanted booths so he added another section with booths. Most people don't realize there were two diners," said Greenhalgh. The diner's front was changed to make it look like one large restaurant.

He recalls going to the diner as a boy. "The biggest deal was my grandfather owned the diner and I'd go in and have Scotch ham potatoes and peas for \$1.25 and I wouldn't have to pay. I didn't abuse the privilege, but it was a big deal."

The ice cream business grew and another stand was established in North Chelmsford but it didn't last long. It was small and the Princeton Lounge was built around it. Later, the Kydd's purchased a stand in Wakefield, rebuilt it and sold it.

When Greenhalgh finished high school, he

## Chelmsford was a farm town

BY ALAN GREENHALGH

John Kydd was born in Arbroath Scotland, which is about 60 miles north of Edinburgh. He and his wife, Margaret Wilson, also from Arbroath, immigrated in the late 19th century. He was a first-class blacksmith, as was his father. He worked in the Lowell Mills before buying out Gilman's Dairy in Lowell, about six houses from where Cross Towers is today.

They had four boys and three girls. My mother was his second born. Doug, Burt and Jack ran the dairy. Jack later split and ran Jack's Diner in the Center. The oldest boy, Norman, was the only one not associated in the Kydd business. He was a superintendent of sheet metal fabrication at the Boston Navy Yard.

The property was bought from Ted Emerson. I always thought it was kind of swampy. In fact, there was a small pond between the ice cream stand and Dalton Road that we skated on all winter. The hotel sits on the spot now. About 70 years ago, Chelmsford was a small farm town. The population was around three or four thousand. Before the stand was built, I used to go with my grandfather to deliver milk in Chelmsford on Saturdays. I was

only 7 or 8 but can still remember Grant's Drug Store (Jack's Diner) and leaving milk at a market across the square that was in the Lahue building, where the bank is now. Chelmsford Street, where the stand and diner are, was grazing land for Emerson's farm.

The Emerson's cattle used to graze on this acreage all the way up to his farm by the new firehouse on North Road.

I was in my early teens when the stand was built.

The business grew and another stand was put up in North Chelmsford. It was small and the Princeton Lounge was built around it. I often think of it when I drive by. It would have been in the left-front corner.

When I was a teenager there were at least 50 to 60 dairies in Lowell. There were so many people in the business, they had their own bowling league.

After finishing high school, I worked a year then went to UMass and studied dairy engineering. I got out in time to end up in the 3rd Army in World War II.

The younger family members didn't have the same enthusiasm for working seven days a week so the stand and diner were sold and the dairy kept about six milk routes.