

Pond was named after its heart shape

By George Adams Parkhurst
Guest Columnist

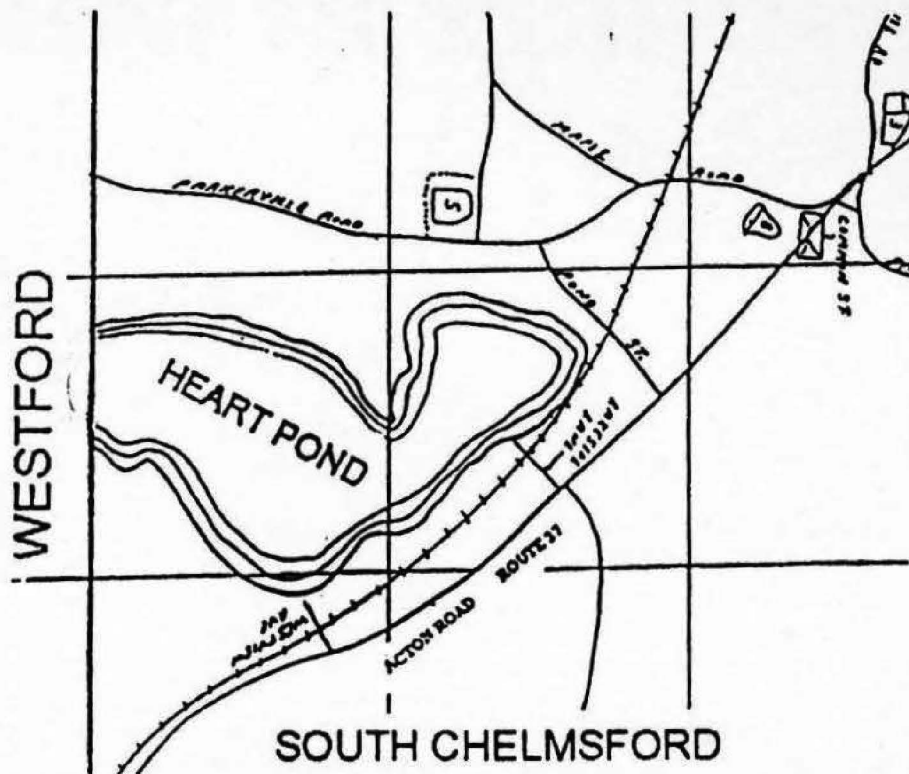
Ponds and lakes come in all shapes and sizes. Some are long and narrow, some almost round, and others have shore lines that are so irregular they defy classification. Chelmsford has the distinction of having a heart-shaped pond, and it was because of its shape that Heart Pond got its name nearly 300 years ago.

The Rev. Wilkes Allen, the sixth minister of what is today the First Parish Church, wrote in his "History of Chelmsford," published in 1820 and accepted by many as the first hardbound town history in the United States:

The only pond in town is Heart Pond, which is a very pleasant body of water of a few miles in circumference, much frequented, formerly, by those who were fond of angling. It lies in the southwest corner of town, and in form resembles a heart.

It is not clear why Rev. Allen ignored Newfield Pond, as it was known at that time, but we know it today as Freeman Lake on Groton Road in North Chelmsford.

There are no records telling us when the pond first received its name, but it is quite possible that the engineers surveying the boundary between Chelmsford and the newly incorporated Town of Westford in



The early settlers of Chelmsford named the pond in the south village "Heart Pond" because its shape roughly resembles a heart.

1729 also surveyed the outline of the pond, since the town line passes through a corner of Heart Pond. We do, however, know that its identity had been established before 1820.

Some of the old records refer to it as "Hart Pond," but this is not surprising since most of our citizens were unschooled and spelled names as they sounded, even their own names. An example can be found in the name of

the present writer. Although the name, Parkhurst, has been known in England since 1088 when the "Doomsday Book," or "Domesday Book," was written, the original settler on Parkhurst Road in Chelmsford always wrote his name as Joseph Parkis. If deeds and other records referred to "Hart Pond," it was a matter of poor spelling, not a desire to change the name of the pond.

It has been conjectured by some that the name should be "Hart" because the area might have been inhabited by several hart (or male) deer. Others have suggested that the pond might have been named for a local family by the name of Hart. However, there were very few, if any, families living in that part of Chelmsford in the 18th century and there are no records of any families by that name in early Chelmsford.

The First Baptist Society was organized in 1771 and erected a church near the pond, using its waters for baptizing its members. As a result, the pond became popularly, but not officially, known as "Baptist Pond," a name that is frequently used today.

In recent years newspaper accounts and even some maps have used the spelling "Hart" when it should be "Heart." This is due, undoubtedly, to not realizing what the correct name is. It has been said that if you misquote a fact enough times, the misinformation will become accepted as correct. Let's avoid this trap in the case of "Heart Pond." Let's not perpetuate an error of historical fact!

Writers should be guided by the words of a popular song from the musical "Damn Yankees," which stressed the admonition: "You've gotta have Heart."

George Adams Parkhurst is a local historian and a former Chelmsford resident who frequently contributes to the Chelmsford Independent.