

MEMORIES

George Parkhurst — Chelmsford settler

(George Adams Parkhurst is the grandson of George A. Parkhurst, a descendent of several of the original settlers of the town of Chelmsford.)

By GEORGE ADAMS PARKHURST

CHELMSFORD — A deep sense of civic responsibility and faith in human nature characterized the life of George A. Parkhurst. His lengthy obituary stated that, "He was gentle, kind, charitable in thought and deed, honest, upright, and faithful to every trust."

While this may sound like an exaggeration of his good qualities, there must have been some basis for this and all the similar accolades expressed by his associates across the state and as far away as California upon learning of his death.

I never knew him personally although I am his grandson and namesake; he died 10 years before my birth.

However, family records, newspaper accounts of his activities and his voluminous writings bring him back to life.

Mr. Parkhurst, a lifelong resident of Chelmsford, was descended from several of the original settlers of the town.

He was born Aug. 11, 1833 to Solomon and Lucina (Adams) Parkhurst, and received his brief formal education in the local one-room 1802 schoolhouse, followed by study at Lawrence Academy in Groton.

The records show that he began his working years as a clerk in a Lowell grocery store and worked for a short time in Illinois.

His patriotic spirit led him to volunteer for two enlist-



George A. Parkhurst

ments in the Union Army during the Civil War, serving first as a private in Co. K, 6th Mass, then in Volunteer Militia (1862-63) for nine months.

A year later, he signed up for 100 days with the rank of corporal in Company B of the same regiment, under the command of Col. Albert S. Follansbee of Lowell.

Upon his return home in 1864, Mr. Parkhurst immediately became involved in local town and church affairs.

He was one of the organizers and an active member of Lowell Post 185, G.A.R. and Chelmsford Lodge No. 218, I.O.O.F.

Civic responsibility

He began 30 years as superintendent of the Sunday School at the First Parish (Unitarian) Church in 1865. That same year he was appointed postmaster at Chelmsford center, a position he held for 20 years.

His election to the position



George Adams Parkhurst

of Town Moderator in 1865 was the inception of his interest in municipal office; he was re-elected the two following years.

A feeling of civic responsibility rather than political aspiration — he never ran for county or state office — attracted him to the office of Town Clerk and, his election in 1870 began a 33-year career as Town Clerk that would continue uninterrupted until 1903 when he no longer sought the office.

In November 1870, he married Clorinda Hodgman of Chelmsford and entered upon a happy marriage that lasted 34 years, cut short by his untimely death.

George and Clorinda shared many of the same interests and worked closely together, she serving as assistant Sunday School superintendent while he was superintendent.

They both became deeply involved as volunteers in the local Village Improvement Association and other civic groups

as well as in their church.

Mr. Parkhurst had a great interest in writing, both as a vocation and as an avocation. He was hired as a local correspondent of the Lowell Daily Courier in 1881, and was later made editor of the Lowell Weekly Journal, the weekly publication of the Daily Courier.

He continued in this capacity after the consolidation of the "Courier" and the "Citizen" in 1895.

Writing poetry was one of his favorite pastimes. Poetic readings were very popular in those days, and he could always be depended upon to compose a rather lengthy poem for any special occasion.

Among his legacies are innumerable original verses. His "Chelmsford news" in the Lowell Weekly Journal were carefully preserved in seven scrapbooks assembled by his wife.

Little did she realize how very useful their grandson would find them in researching material for historical writing years later.

The life of this public-spirited citizen came to an abrupt end on Feb. 3, 1904, a few days after he had attended the funeral of a former minister of the Central Baptist Church.

Upon returning home, he wrote a newspaper report of the funeral and went to bed suffering from a cold which developed into pneumonia and proved fatal a few days later.

His final news item appeared in the paper after his death.

With his passing, the community lost a humble, dedicated friend and neighbor who sought neither fame nor glory for doing what he considered to be the duty of every citizen.