

## Flashback from the Chelmsford Historical Society

You all know the song “Try a Little Tenderness” that has been recorded by 65 artists over the years, and may even remember “When the Red Red Robbin Goes Bob Bob Bobbin’ Along” or Kate Smith singing “When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain,” but I’ll bet you didn’t know that prolific songwriter Harry M. Woods was born right here in North Chelmsford.

His birth to musically inclined parents George H. and Edith M. Woods in 1896 is recorded in our Town Clerk’s office, but no other evidence of their being here was found. It is possible they were staying with Henry Woods, paymaster for industrialist George C. Moore and possible relative from England, at 38 Middlesex Street after their marriage in 1894. Perhaps they were helping care for Henry’s wife Eliza, who died in 1899, and records show they were living in Boston by 1900.

Here is the information on Harry from the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame. Their website:

[https://www.songhall.org/profile/Harry\\_M\\_Woods](https://www.songhall.org/profile/Harry_M_Woods)



Composer and lyricist Harry MacGregor Woods was born in North Chelmsford, Massachusetts on November 4, 1896. His mother, a concert singer, encouraged him to play the piano, regardless of the deformed left hand he had been born with. His musical training would help when he attended Harvard University and supported himself there by singing in church choirs and giving piano recitals. After graduation, Woods settled on Cape Cod and began life as a farmer. He began cultivating his talent for songwriting while in the Army during World War II. After his discharge, Woods settled in New York and began his successful career as a songwriter.

His first songwriting success came in 1923 with the song “I’m Going South”, written with Abner Silver, and a #2 hit song in 1924 for Al Jolson. In the same year, “Paddlin’ Madeleine Home” was published with words & music by Woods (a recording by Cliff Edwards in 1925 would reach #3 on Billboard).

By 1926, Woods had become an established songwriter on Tin Pan Alley and he would become legendary with his new song “When the Red, Red, Robin Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin’ Along”. One of the great standards ever written, the song was an instant hit for singers like Paul Whiteman, “Whispering” Jack Smith, Cliff Edwards and the Ipana Troubadors. Al Jolson, however, had the most success with his recording, which reached #1 on the billboard charts. The song was recreated in 1953 by Doris Day and again reached considerable success on the charts.

In 1929, Woods began contributing songs to Hollywood musicals such as *The Vagabond Lover*, *A Lady’s*

Morals, Artistic Temper, Aunt Sally, Twentieth Century, Road House, Limelight, It's Love Again, Merry Go Round of 1938 and She's For Me. In 1934, he moved to London where he lived for three years and worked for the British film studio Gaumont-British Films, contributing to the films Jack Ahoy and Evergreen.

While Woods primarily created both the words & music for his songs, he also collaborated with Mort Dixon, Howard Johnson, Arthur Freed, Rube Bloom and Gus Kahn. Alone, and with his collaborators, he wrote "I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover", "I'm Goin' South", "Just a Butterfly that's Caught in the Rain", "Side by Side", "My Old Man", "A Little Kiss Each Morning", "Heigh-Ho, Everybody, Heigh-Ho", "Man From the South", "River Stay "Way from My Door", "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain", "We Just Couldn't Say Goodbye", "Just and Echo in the Valley", "A Little Street Where Old Friends Meet", "You Ought to See Sally on Sunday", "Hustlin' and Bustlin' for Baby", "What a Little Moonlight Can Do", "Try a Little Tenderness", "I'll Never Say "Never Again" Again", "Over My Shoulder", "Tinkle Tinkle Tinkle", "When You've Got a Little Springtime in Your Heart" and "I Nearly Let Love Go Slipping Through My Fingers".

Around 1945, Woods retired and moved to Glendale, Arizona where he passed away in 1970.