

Remembering inventor Edwin R. Clark

SEPT. 3, 1987

The world is full of people who have led interesting lives; not just those whose fame and fortune have kept their names in the headlines, but ordinary citizens with interests and activities that vary from the norm.

Chelmsford resident Edwin R. Clark was one of these.

By profession he was an architect. The many large homes he designed in Chelmsford, Andover, and the Belvedere section of Lowell attest to his proficiency in his trade. He was also an accomplished landscape architect. His residence at 36 Bartlett Street with its formal rose garden and tasteful plantings was a demonstration of his ability.

Mr. Clark designed the town's high school (now the Town Office Building) on Billerica Road in 1917, and the addition to the Adams Library in 1929. When the Chelmsford Water District was started, he was a member of the five-man committee that handled the original design, construction, and organization. He also served on the committee to landscape the Center Common in 1928.

Throughout his lifetime, Mr. Clark showed a great interest in baseball and, as a young man, organized several local boys' baseball teams.

Both he and his wife were ardent supporters of the Adams Library, he on the Board of Library Trustees for more than 10 years, and Mrs. Clark as librarian at one time.

The way It was

By George A.
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However, Edwin Clark's life is most intriguing because of his interest in railroad locomotives, and especially the steam locomotive whistle that was once so common but now extinct.

It has been reported that he was one of two or three men who independently invented this whistle, but he never applied for any patent on it. Actually it consists of three separate cylindrical whistles.

Mr. Clark's prototype was a mouth-blown wooden model which this writer was privileged to try out. Using wood from an old apple tree in his yard, he made a hollow cylinder into which was pressed a core, forming three distinct chambers. A wooden mouth piece was inserted into one end of the cylinder and openings were cut through which the air escaped. A tightly fitting plug was then driven into each chamber, the whistle being turned by varying the distances the plugs were inserted. After it had been tuned to a standard chord, one plug was driven in just a bit more. This produced a slight dissonance that gave the whistle its

distinct sound and made it carry further.

Using the same principle, Mr. Clark built a whistle which he mounted on his Stanley steam-driven automobile. He particularly enjoyed using this "horn" because even he could hear it, although he was very deaf.

In the early 1920's he was given the responsibility for designing and tuning a similar whistle, mounted on the roof of the Town Hall, as the town's first audible fire whistle.

However, his interest in railroads extended beyond the whistle.

Besides owning plan books of some of the first steam locomotives built at the Lowell Machine Shop, he had a collection of several hundred photographs of early locomotives, copies of which he sold to collectors all over the country. Surprisingly, his collection contained no picture of the "Scoot Train" that ran between Lowell and Chelmsford. (The present writer was able to present him with one.)

A skilled craftsman, he machined the tiny parts and built a few models of oldtime woodburning locomotives.

Mr. Clark died January 20, 1943 at the age of 75.

George Adams Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.