

Emotions mixed on Ginger Ale razing

By George Adams Parkhurst

Beautifully landscaped lawns and gardens were not the typical setting for manufacturing plants at the beginning of the 20th century. Unlike today, it was very unusual for the owners of a factory to waste money on such unproductive aesthetics.

The Chelmsford Ginger Ale building on Littleton Road (Route 110) was the exception. The owner, Mr. C. George Armstrong, took great pride in the well manicured front lawn of his bottling plant with its fountain and flower gardens.

It was with understandable sadness that the local townspeople witnessed the erection of the ugly brick wall along the street side of the property several years ago, transforming a showplace of Chelmsford Center into an eyesore.

The only part of the original structure visible from the street today is the end of the building to the right of the brick wall. (The garage and office building at the other end of the wall had been added as the business expanded.)

Actually this is the third manufactory on this site. The first, a brick two-story machine shop, was built in 1888 to house the Byfield Manufacturing Company, who produced knitting machinery. That building burned five years later.

In 1901, Mr. Armstrong's Chelmsford Spring Company rebuilt the structure for the manufacture of ginger ale and other soft drinks. The building again burned in 1912 and was replaced by the L-shaped reinforced concrete factory which forms part of the present brick warehouse.

The upper story of the original square tower in the southwest corner of the structure is visible from Littleton Road. It was in this room that the syrups used in the formulation of the various beverages were mixed in large copper kettles by the company "chemist". From here, the syrups flowed by gravity to the bottling machine in the production line on the first floor.

The Chelmsford Spring Company (later known as Chelmsford Ginger Ale Company) got its name from the fact that the basis of the business was the use of pure spring water. This water came from a spring on the northerly side of Robin's Hill and was piped along the railroad track to the beverage plant.

Many of those whose early lives were touched by the Ginger Ale Company view the impending raz-

ing of the present building with mixed emotions. The loss of a piece of local historical heritage is always sad but the present architectural blemish on our community will not be missed.

Chelmsford ginger ale was known and respected throughout New England. It really "put Chelmsford on the map".

George Adams Parkhurst is Chelmsford's historian.