

JULY 16, 1987

And... they're off at Golden Cove Park

If you were to stand in the parking lot of the Chelmsford Mall near the entrance to Bradlees department store very late at night when there was no traffic on I-495, you might almost hear the pounding of horses hooves as they sped toward the finish line of the trotting track.

You see, this is where the Lowell Driving Club held its sulky races 60 or so years ago.

The track was a gravel oval that occupied much of the plain on which the mall has since been built. It had a small stable for the use of the competing horsemen, as well as a small wooden tower at the finish line, which served as a judges' stand. Entrance to the track was from Chelmsford Street via Manahan Street.

The name of the track, at least the name used by sports writers in the Lowell Courier-Citizen newspaper, was Golden Cove Park. However, it was usually referred to locally as the trotting park.

This writer has not been able to determine when the track was first constructed, but the press reported a racing meet on the Fourth of July in 1917. The following year, in spite of the fact that many sporting events were curtailed because of the war (World War I), a "matinee meeting at Golden Cove Park" was held on Labor Day, September 2, 1918.

The way It was

By George A.
Parkhurst



Racing meets were scheduled usually on Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, and probably at other times, at least through 1927. All heats were 1/2 mile with a purse of \$150 in each class.

On Independence Day in 1922 the trotters attracted a crowd of 2,000 people. Perhaps word had leaked out that all five horses in one race that day were to be driven by women, resulting in what was declared the "hit of the program."

Because of the interest of a Chelmsford man, George Axon, we can get a glimpse of what actually took place.

Mr. Axon, an amateur photographer, recorded some of the races on July 4th, 1923 on 16mm black and white film. A copy of this film, owned by the Chelmsford Historical Commission, including shots of the local

1923 Fourth of July parade, has recently been made into a video cassette.

This movie, along with the color film of the Tercentenary celebration of 1955, was recently shown at the Senior Citizens Center.

The automobiles parked beside the track and the clothing of the onlookers seem strange to the present generation but the people in 1923 found nothing unusual about them.

The dense clouds of dust that were raised by the sulkies as they sped along the track were duly recorded by the camera.

But, that was nothing compared to the dust resulting from the grooming of the track between races. The racing surface was smoothed by dragging a "brush" made of birch trees. A horsedrawn watering wagon with a sprinkler attachment made a valiant but vain attempt to control the dust.

That's the way it was when "going to the track" meant driving the flivver to Golden Cove Park.

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