

# Tracing history with the Hildreths

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A few of the original settlers of Chelmsford moved away after a generation or two, but most of them put down roots and stayed. The descendants of many have continued to reside in "Old" Chelmsford, which includes Westford and Lowell, the two communities having originally been sections of Chelmsford. One of those who stayed is the Hildreth family. 1635

Richard Hildreth arrived in this country about 1653 and moved to Chelmsford from Cambridge with his second wife, Elizabeth, about 1654. He had been one of the petitioners of the original grant for the town.

In 1656 he was chosen as a selectman. Richard built his home in the South Chelmsford area as, we are told, a road from Chelmsford to Groton was laid out in 1662-63 beginning at Beaver Brook Bridge (now Central Square), passing over the north side of Robbin's Hill "and thence through Richard Hildreth's yard" and then by the west end of Heart Pond.

Most of his children and their families settled in what is now (since 1729) Westford. It is believed that his eldest son, James, built the "saltbox house" on Wright Lane off Hildreth Street in Westford. James' brother, Ephraim, and his family located their farms further down Hildreth Street.

The new luxury condominiums in West-

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## The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



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ford known as Hildreth Hills are built on part of Ephraim's land that had been in the family from 1680 until a few years ago.

Joseph, a brother of James and Ephraim, lived on what is now Route 110. His 500 acre farm included Minot's Corner, the Flea Market, and Westford Valley Shopping Center. One of Joseph's descendants became world famous as Richard Hildreth, the historian, who is buried in a Swiss cemetery in Florence, Italy beside Theodore Parker, the theologian, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the English poet. Another heir of Joseph was the progenitor of a large group of Hildreths in Iowa.

One branch of the clan moved to Dracut in the early 1700's and established a prominent family there. Sarah Jones Hildreth, one of the six daughters of Dr. Israel Hildreth was an actress in New York City in 1839

and, five years later, became the bride of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler of Civil War fame. Their great, great grandson is the author and TV personality, George Plimpton.

As an interesting sidelight, there is a private Hildreth cemetery on Aiken Avenue in Lowell at the Dracut line. This is on what had been Dr. Israel Hildreth's farm. Only descendants of Dr. Israel (and their spouses) are buried there. Among those interred are four generals: Gen. Philip Reade, Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, Gen. Adelbert Ames, and Gen. Gardner Pearson.

The original Richard Hildreth (1605-1693) occupies the third oldest identifiable grave in Chelmsford's Forefathers Cemetery. For some reason that has eluded historians and genealogists, Richard's wife, Elizabeth, is buried in Bell Rock Cemetery in Malden, Mass.

The Hildreth name is perpetuated by Hildreth Streets in Chelmsford, Westford, and Lowell. The Hildreth Building is on Merrimack Street in Lowell's Kearney Square. There are also many lineal descendants of Richard Hildreth in and around Chelmsford, including the present writer.

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