

The contribution of Wilson Waters

Rev. Wilson Waters wrote in the introduction to his "History of Chelmsford," "If History be Philosophy teaching by examples, maybe this volume, falling into the hand of some newly naturalized citizen of Chelmsford, may persuade him to a reverence for the pious labors of the Fathers who made the Town and rendered it possible for him to enjoy the pleasures and privileges of the present time, and also move him towards an effort as energetic and effective for future betterment."

This 893-page history, published in 1917 at Town expense, is an outstanding source of historical material on our community. Dr. Waters recognized that, to best serve its purpose, it was better to reproduce historical documents rather than to merely refer to them. As he stated, "The History is compiled, not so much to entertain, as to inform the reader concerning the past life of the Town, and to furnish him with a reference book of lasting value."

The work was begun by Mr. Henry S. Perham, who wrote the first chapter just before his death in 1906. The project was then turned over to Dr. Waters, who completed it. The original price was \$5 plus postage.

The book received many favorable reviews: "...Dr. Waters is to be commended for introducing so many interesting details of the lives of our ancestors." Another: "Mr. Waters has devoted his leisure hours for ten years to the writing of this history, to which task the town authorities commissioned

The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



him. He has produced a really notable work descriptive of the life of one of Massachusetts' oldest and most distinctive towns." And, "It is a 'Magnum Opus.' I do not know of any town history that compares with it."

Wilson Waters was born in Marietta, Ohio, in 1855, where he spent his childhood. After graduating from Marietta College in 1876, he travelled in Europe and it was some time before he chose his life's vocation. After finally deciding to become a priest of the Episcopal Church, he studied at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, graduating in 1890. He served as curate at St. Anne's Church in Lowell for two years and came to All Saints' in Chelmsford in 1892 where he remained until his death on June 13, 1933.

He had a keen sense of humor and particularly enjoyed the intellectual gymnastics involved in making puns.

In addition to being a devoted pastor and worker in his church, Dr. Waters involved

himself in many secular activities, of which he served several years as a Trustee, the Village Improvement Association, and the Hornbeam Hill Golf Club. He was one of the organizers of the Chelmsford Historical Society in 1930, having been an active member of the Lowell Historical Society for several years. Dr. Waters served as chairman and toastmaster of the banquet in connection with the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of Chelmsford in 1905.

It was in 1926 at the 91st commencement of his alma mater that he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. He liked to quip that the only local D.D.'s he knew were chickadee-dees. He resided in the church rectory at the corner of Chelmsford Street and Billerica Road, now occupied by a real estate office. The present writer recalls visiting with him in his office in the stone church and listening to stories about town history.

Upon his death, his body was placed in a grave in Forefather's Burying Ground next to the cenotaph that was erected in memory of the Rev. John Fiske, the first minister in Chelmsford. His final resting place is marked by a stone cross.

Copies of Water's "History of Chelmsford" are available for study at the local public libraries.

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