

# The Naming of the Streets and of a Pond

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by GEORGE A. PARKHURST

The controversy over Article 34 of the town meeting warrant — the renaming of the original Clover Hill Drive — raises an interesting point. How important is the name of a street? As Shakespeare wrote in Romeo and Juliet, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." In other words, a name is only an identification tag and has no intrinsic value.

## FIREFIGHTERS CARE

The residents involved have logical reasons concerning how the change in name should be made, and no one can question the inadvisability of having two streets with the same name. Past experience has shown that complications can arise. A good example is an incident that happened several years ago.

The telephone rang at the Central Fire Station and an excited voice reported that there was a bad grass fire near the railroad tracks on Maple Street. The caller hung up before the firefighter could any further information.

Since there is no Maple Street in Chelmsford, in what direction should he dispatch the only available Forestry Truck? Maple Avenue runs off Chelmsford Street in the Westlands toward the railroad tracks, while Maple Road crosses the same railroad in South Chelmsford. It is understandable that, in his excitement, the caller said street instead of avenue or road. But this small error could have resulted in tragedy had a home been on fire.

At another time, a fire was reported as being on Pleasant Street, which runs off of Smith Street near Parkhurst Road. Actually, there was a brisk brush fire on Pleasant Avenue near the East Chelmsford reservoir.

Fortunately, in both of these cases, the errors were discovered and corrected before the property loss was large. These two examples may explain why the Fire Chief gets involved in naming new streets.

## ROOM FOR CONFUSION

In addition to those cited above, there are still a few street names that might confuse the newcomer to Chelmsford.

Park Place and Park Road are located in the same area, as is true of Colonial Drive and Colonial Terrace, and likewise Diamond Street and Diamond Terrace. However, Adams Avenue connects Bartlett Street with Boston Road near the Adams Library while Adams Street runs out of Vinal Square.

Pine Hill Avenue is at Golden Cove in the Westlands but Pine Hill Road branches off Westford Street. Putnam Avenue is east of Boston Road and Putnam Road is in North Chelmsford. While Wilson Street connects Billerica Road and Chelmsford Street, Wilson Lane runs off Main Street in West Chelmsford.

Then there is Smith Street, which parallels Route 3 between Steadman Street and Parkhurst Road, and there is "N. S. Smith Street" in East Chelmsford.

On the north side of Heart Pond in South Chelmsford we find First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Lanes. First, Second, and Third Streets run off Warren Avenue, but First, Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Avenues are in the Crystal Lake (or what was Crystal Lake) area in North Chelmsford. Confusing, isn't it!?

## NOW — AND THEN

Streets that have been laid out in the past few years have been named by the developer with the approval of the Planning Board and the Fire Chief. However, the earliest thoroughfares were called by names that were descriptive of their location such as the "Road to Groton" or "Road to Billerica," which in time became shortened to Groton Road or Billerica Road. Others received their names from families living in the vicinity: Bartlett Street, Fletcher Street, and Manning Road.

## TWO STREETS, ONE NAME

It was not until 1905 that

street names in Chelmsford were formalized. In that year a committee was appointed to prepare a list of the thoroughfares in the various sections of town. Because North, South, East, and West Chelmsford and the Center were, in those days, widely separated villages, a few street names appeared in two or more villages. For example, there was a High Street in West Chelmsford as well as in the Center. What is now North Road was called Centre Street.

## TOWN MEETING TOPIC

Twenty years later, in 1925, the matter of names came before a Special Town Meeting again. "Under Article 9 it was voted that a committee consisting of Fred A. Snow, John McAdams, A. Heady Park, James F. Leahy, Arnold C. Perham, and Henry Shedd be appointed to canvass the names and locations of the streets, avenues, and roads of the town and report their recommendations at the next annual town meeting and in case the committee contemplates a change in the name of a street the residents be given a hearing before the change is made."

A full report was presented at the town meeting on February 8, 1926.

## ONE STREET, TWO NAMES

In spite of these official names, a few streets were called by two names. As late as the 1920's it was common to hear Boston Road referred to as South Street and Chelmsford Street was usually called Lowell Road.

## LOGIC PREVAILS

It has been asked, "Where is the bridge on Bridge Street?" — a reasonable question although there is no bridge on Bridge Street. It was named after the Rev. Ebenezer Bridge, the fourth minister in town.

Like wise, one might wonder about a subway on (or under) Subway Avenue. About 50 years ago, when the area between Chelmsford Street and Dalton Road in the Westlands was a pine wood, there was a path through the dense woods with



**THE NAME OF THE Burying Ground in South Chelmsford is cut into the granite posts at the entrance. Why is it called "Hart Pond Cemetery" when the body of water across the street is generally accepted as Heart Pond?**

(Photo by George A. Parkhurst)

the canopy of the tree branches forming a veritable "subway." People coming from Lowell on the street cars would use this short cut to reach their homes in the Dalton Road - Steadman Street area. So, later when a street was put through, it was named Subway Avenue.

Academy Street at the north end of the Center common is so called because the Chelmsford Academy was located on it, near the present site of the Central Baptist Church, between 1859 and 1862.

Canal Street follows the old towpath along the Middlesex Canal. Church Street is adjacent to the former location of St. John's Church in the North village. And Mill Road (at one time known as Russell Mill Road) provided access to Russell's Mill.

In the early part of the 19th century there were many relatively straight highways constructed to facilitate stagecoach travel between major cities. One of these turnpikes, as they were called, passed through Chelmsford. It was the main route between Concord, N.H., and Boston. Sections of this highway are still in use as Turnpike Road and Old Middlesex Turnpike Street.

#### RIVERNECK ROAD

If Riverneck Road seems like an unusual name, its origin is easily explained as the road that ran from Chelmsford Center to "the neck." This was the neck of land bounded by the Merrimack River and the Concord River. Today this area

is called "downtown Lowell."

Drum Hill surprisingly has no connection with a drum. It derives its name from the fact that it is a drumlin, a geological formation that resulted from the deposition of gravel and stone from the glacier in prehistoric times.

#### GOLDEN COVE

The area near the intersection of Steadman Street with Chelmsford Street has been known as "Golden Cove" for over 300 years. Waters' "History of Chelmsford" states that "Golden Cove (found in the town records as early as 1688) is an ancient name for the locality where the brook of that name is crossed by the road to Lowell, but its origin is obscure. The sand that covered the bottom of the old fordway; the yellow lillies once numerous there; a story that the Indians had found gold there; these are some of the vague attempts to account for the name."

#### THE POND IN THE SOUTH

Perhaps the one feature in Chelmsford that is most frequently called by several names is the pond located near the South Village. Sometimes it is referred to as Heart Pond, at other times as Hart Pond, but usually as Baptist Pond. The latter because it is near the First Baptist Church and, it has been said, was used by the Church as a baptistery. Rev. Wilkes Allen, in his "History of Chelmsford" published in 1820, states that "the only (sic) pond in town, is Heart Pond, which is a very pleasant basin of water

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of a few miles in circumference, much frequented, formerly, by those who were fond of angling. It lies in the southwest corner of the town, and in form resembles a heart." Dr. Waters, in his history, mentions this body of water 14 times, and in every case spells it Heart. It has been suggested that the name could be Hart Pond because of the hart, or deer, that inhabited its shores.

#### BURYING GROUND

Directly across Parkerville Road from Heart Pond is a cemetery that is plainly marked "Hart Pond Cemetery." This burying ground, which dates back to 1774, is mentioned several times in Waters' history, and here again the spelling is consistently "Heart." However, a search of old Town Reports disclosed that the Cemetery Commissioners, since 1906, have always referred to it as Hart Pond Cemetery.

Although the present writer