

1981

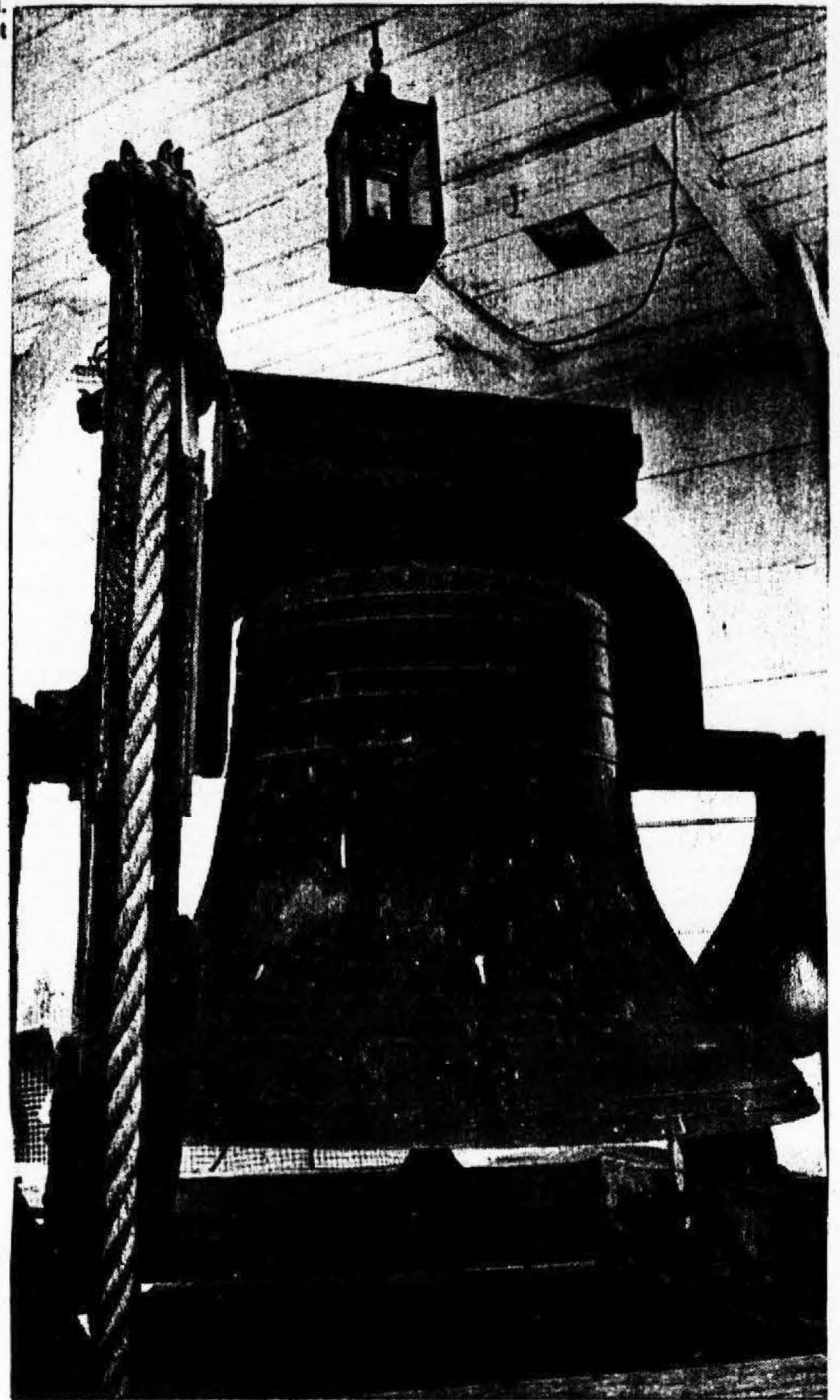
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To all the American Chelmsfordites they met five years ago, they still think of us and the great time they had here.

During the 35 mile train ride back to London, there was time to review the high points of our visit and realize that yes, you can find 14th century homes in Chelmsford, provided you go to the right Chelmsford.



WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL in front of the Civic Center (Town Hall), Chelmsford, England (Photo by G. A. Parkhurst)



During the latter part of the 19th century, the church bell at the First Parish Church served as the audible fire alarm in Chelmsford Center.

(Garo Lachinian photo)

## Barrett-Byam Museum welcomes striker

By George Parkhurst

No, the Chelmsford Historical Society has not been plagued by a work stoppage at its Byam Road museum. The striker in this case is a heavy cast iron hammer designed to strike the bell of the First Parish Church to inform the townspeople that a fire is raging out of control.

A cast iron hammer is not a particularly exciting item but this one has historic interest as an important part of the first coded fire alarm system for Chelmsford Center, 63 years ago.

During the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, the church bell of the First Parish served as the audible fire alarm in Chelmsford Center. When a person discovered a fire in progress, he would hurry to the church, open the door with the key that hung in a red box by the entrance, and pull the bell rope until others arrived. He would inform them of the fire location.

Chelmsford had no motorized fire apparatus until 1922. Small hand extinguishers, water pails, shovels and brooms were used by the "fire wards" and the general public in what was at times a pathetic attempt to extinguish the flames. In the case of building fires, everyone joined in to remove the contents of the building before it had been consumed. After a fire had been extinguished, it was not uncommon to see the front lawn cluttered with tables and chairs, beds, piles of clothing and even a piano that had been rescued.

In 1922 — the same year that Chelmsford got its first fire trucks — the first coded fire alarm in the Center district was installed. (North Chelmsford had used the mill whistles to indicate the location of the fire in that precinct.) Using a hammer to strike the bell a specified number of times, it was no longer necessary to travel to the First Parish Church to find out

where help was needed and then, in some cases, backtrack to the fire. However, within a year or so, this alarm system was replaced by the Center Village Improvement Association with an air whistle on the roof of the Town Hall.

The hammer was retired from duty at that time and only recently was found and turned over to the Historical Society for safe keeping in its museum.

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