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The way it was

A street by any other name spells danger

By George A. Parkhurst

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."

This indifference to designation may be acceptable in many cases, but not in street names.

In 1926, the Town appointed a committee to review the names of all streets in town and establish an official list. For nearly a century, several streets had been known by two or more names.

For instance, the street connecting Vinal Square in North Chelmsford with Central Square in the Center had been called Centre Square, North Street and North Road. (The latter was approved.) Boston Road was referred to as South Street and Chelmsford Street was known as Lowell Road.

Mid-19th century maps of North Chelmsford have what we know as Middlesex



Street labeled Main Street. The road that connects Drum Hill with Vinal Square was labeled Turnpike Street, it having been a portion of the Middlesex Turnpike earlier.

The problem of street names is most critical when providing emergency services. For that reason, the Police and Fire departments

are understandably concerned about duplicate (or duplicate sounding) names.

This writer recalls that, while on duty as a volunteer fire fighter many years ago, a call came into the switchboard with the frantic report that there was a grass fire along the track near Maple Street, presumably ignited by the locomotive that had just passed.

But, there is no Maple Street in Chelmsford and the caller hung up before the location could be verified. Should the forest fire truck head for Maple Avenue in the Westlands or should it go to Maple Road in South Chelmsford? (The railroad passed near both streets.)

It was decided to head for the South Village. However, within a matter of minutes, a radio message was received from the station that another call had come in establishing Maple Avenue as the correct address.

A similar case arose once when a fire on Pleasant Avenue was reported as on Pleasant Street, the former being in East Chelms-

ford while the latter is located not far from Drum Hill.

Even though duplicate names have been prohibited in recent years, there are still several streets in town that could easily cause a delay in the arrival of emergency equipment if the location is not given precisely.

In addition to the two mentioned above, we still have several duplications. To give a few examples: Pine Hill Road and Pine Hill Avenue, Adams Street and Adams Avenue, Wilson Street and Wilson Lane.

Add to this list numbered streets such as First Lane and First Street or names that can easily be confused, such as Westford Street and Old Westford Road. With only a few exceptions, the streets paired off above are miles apart.

The situation was alleviated in at least one case a few years ago when that portion of Park Road that extended north of Acton Road was renamed Barton Hill Road.

The important thing is to be precise and correct when contacting any emergency service and remain on the phone in case the person receiving the call has any questions.

Times have changed — we hope.

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