

Garrison House makes room for many visitors

By George A. Parkhurst

Garrison House on large tree-shaded lot, central chimney, fieldstone fireplace, gunstock posts, wide board paneling...

This reads like a present day ad, conjuring up a picture of a new house with the second floor overhang on the front, a wide driveway leading to a two-car garage, and tastefully landscaped grounds in one of the many new developments.

But, the house described above was built nearly 300 years ago. It's the "Old Chelmsford" Garrison House located on Garrison Road.

Although the second floor doesn't protrude beyond the first on the front as might be expected, it is an authentic Garrison — not a reproduction.

The land on which it stands was owned by Lt. Thomas Adams (one of the original residents of Chelmsford and great, great uncle of President John Adams) who conveyed it to his son, Pelatiah, in 1683.

It is believed that Pelatiah built the house as he and his wife deeded the land and a house to their sons, Thomas and Pelatiah, Jr. in 1702. The "saltbox" addition on the back dates from this period when the two brothers and their families shared the dwelling.

It was one of the 19 Garrisons in Chelmsford in March, 1691-92. These were houses, strategically located throughout the town, where the families were to gather when an attack by the Indians was anticipated.

The walls of the houses usually had heavy

The way
it was



planks or bricks in them to stop arrows and bullets. Each family was assigned to a particular house, along with two or three soldiers, where they spent many a sleepless night.

The problem of protecting against Indian raids is difficult to imagine in these times but it must be remembered that Chelmsford was a western frontier town in the 1600's. Our settlers suffered relatively little at the hands of the native Americans compared with the towns of Groton and Lancaster which are still further west.

The property was acquired from the Adam's family by Benjamin Heywood in 1728 and remained in his family until 1922, when it was sold to John and Sarah McCormick.

W.C. Lahue purchased the house and land in 1959 and donated it to the newly formed "Old Chelmsford" Garrison House association, the present owner.

The name "Old Chelmsford" came from the fact that some of the families and soldiers assigned to that Garrison lived in

what is now Westford, but in the 17th century was part of Chelmsford.

Since acquiring the property, the Association has done an excellent job of restoring the house and furnishing it much as it was years ago. The barn has been repaired and now contains a fascinating collection of old tools and vehicles. A craft center, an educational building, and an old blacksmith shop have been added to augment the museum, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The museum is open to the public Sunday afternoons during the summer. The easiest way to find it from Chelmsford Center is to go west on Littleton Road (Route 110) past the Elks Hall and turn left on Garrison Road, just beyond the drive-in movie. The Garrison House is on the left a few 100 yards down the street. Parking space is provided in the field behind the barn.

Those who have not been in the Garrison House lately should include it in their plans this summer. It's interesting and educational. The local newspapers will carry announcements giving the days and hours the museum will be open during the summer.

No Indian raids are anticipated this summer, but...

That's the way it was.

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

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