

# Chelmsford minutemen play active role

To paraphrase Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

*'Twas the 19th of April in seventy-five; There isn't a person now alive, Who remembers that famous day and year.'*

Because those who were around at that time are long gone, we must rely on published accounts of what happened on that first Patriot's Day.

Details differ, depending on the source of the material.

Some eyewitness reports were recorded many years later by elderly persons whose recollections had been enhanced by the passage of time.

But, there is one fact that cannot be refuted: Chelmsford minutemen answered the alarm and confronted the British regulars who had marched from Boston to Lexington to arrest John Hancock and Samuel Adams, who were staying in Lexington, and on to Concord to seize the military stores there. Minutemen from every town for miles around were there, also.

It is reported that the inhabitants of Chelmsford were aroused on the morning of April 19, 1775, by the firing of alarm guns and the beating of drums.

We read that many of Chelmsford's minutemen assembled on what is now the small park in Central Square, although others had headed directly for Concord as soon as they heard the alarm.

In 1899, the Molly Varnum Chapter of the

## The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



Daughters of the American Revolution marked the approximate location with a large boulder.

Rev. Ebenezer Bridge, the local minister, exhorted the men to go with him to the Meeting House for prayers before departing, but Sgt. John Ford told him that they had more urgent business on hand.

Chelmsford furnished more than 100 men. One report says that Capt. Oliver Barron's company numbered 61 and Lt. Colonel Moses Parker's, 43.

A few of the early arrivals at Concord may have participated in the battle at the North Bridge but most of the Chelmsford men encountered the retreating British at Merriam's corner and continued to harass them all the way back to Boston.

Mention will be made of a few of these men. Sgt. John Ford (mentioned above), later Capt. Ford, had fought in the French and Indian Wars; he distinguished himself at Concord, at Bunker Hill and throughout the war.

Benjamin Pierce was plowing a field (at Powell and B Streets in what is now Lowell) when he heard the alarm and left immediately to join the minutemen. Pierce, who was 19 at the time, fought at Concord and Bunker Hill and continued in the service until the end of the war. Later he was governor of New Hampshire and his son, Franklin Pierce, became the 14th President of the United States.

Lt. Col. Moses Parker had distinguished himself as an Indian fighter. He was wounded at Bunker Hill and died in a P.O.W. prison in Boston, July 4, 1775. Trumbull, in his painting, "The Battle of Bunker Hill," depicts Parker on the extreme left of the canvas, after being wounded.

Although not at Concord on April 19th, Barzillai Lew served as a fifer for two or more years in Capt. John Ford's company. He was a free black man from Jamaica and a cooper by trade. One of his descendants, Harry "Bucky" Lew, is reported to have been the first black professional basketball player in the United States.

Chelmsford residents had actively participated in events leading up to the battle at Concord and continued to give their support throughout the Revolution.

Thus, Patriot's Day is the one holiday in the year that has a special meaning for those who call Chelmsford their home.

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