

MAY 29, 1986

A revolutionary tribute to our veterans

With the return of warm spring days, an increasing number of people will be enjoying their noontime respite from the routine of their employment in the pleasant surroundings afforded by the Center Common. Some will eat their lunches on the base of the Revolutionary Monument.

This solid granite structure, which has dominated the grassy park for more than 126 years, is taken for granted as if it had always been there. Actually, it was designed and erected as a memorial to the Chelmsford men who lost their lives fighting for the independence of our country.

It was conceived and underwritten by dedicated individuals in 1859.

In March of that year, nine of the leading townsmen met at the home of Deacon Otis Adams, who lived at No. 1 Academy Street, and formulated plans for a suitable memorial. A short time later, a general meeting was held and the Chelmsford Monument Association was organized.

Willard Parker, M.D., the famous New York physician and Chelmsford native, was elected the first president. Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord was one of the vice presidents.

Membership in the Monument Association was open to all residents of Chelmsford and all lineal descendants of the original members were to automatically become members.

In 1875, the Association provided a banner to be carried by the Chelmsford Minuteman at the centennial of the Battle of Bunker Hill in Charlestown. This same banner was carried in Memorial Day parades in the Center until about the beginning of World War II.

**The way
it was**

**By George
A.
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In 1859, the sum of \$1,788.25 was raised by popular subscription and the contract awarded to a Chelmsford contractor, with the stipulation that the monument must be completed by September 15, less than six months away. That he succeeded is shown by the fact that a dedication ceremony was held on September 22.

In his design of the monument, the architect "endeavored to express a rough, rugged strength, with solidity and simplicity, avoiding elaborate decorations and highly finished surfaces, as inappropriate in a memorial of the men to whom the monument is to be raised."

The inscriptions carved into the monument include the names of the seven men from Chelmsford who were killed in the Revolutionary War.

On the north side is engraved, "Erected, 1859" and the words that have since become the town motto: "Let the children guard what the sires have won."

This brief admonition, credited to Deacon Otis Adams, is timeless. Then, "the sires"

referred to those who fought for our independence and the statesmen who fashioned our new country. The Civil War and later events secured for us freedoms that should be guarded equally, including the gains made in civil rights.

A brief report of the dedication, which was typical of that period, is interesting. In spite of rainy weather that curtailed the attendance, "The procession formed at eleven o'clock at the residence of C.H. Dalton, Esq. (He lived in the Simeon Spaulding house at 75 North Rd.) The procession moved to the meeting house, where an orchestra of string instruments and a large choir led the people in the singing of 'America' as the opening hymn."

The program continued with a prayer, the reading of an ode by Dr. John C. Dalton, Jr., a local man who was then a professor at a leading New York City college, and the main address given by Dr. Willard Parker. More music; then a letter was read from Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord stating that he had prepared a speech in anticipation of attending but ill health precluded that.

"At the appointed time, the procession formed at the church and marched around the square. When passing the Monument, three hearty cheers were given. At the large tent in the rear of the church, a sumptuous dinner was served, and toasts were given. The exercises closed about 5:30 p.m."

The people at that time must have enjoyed parading as it was usually part of the program at such gatherings. It is doubtful it would go over in our present sophisticated society. Then too, there was no traffic with which to contend.

Times have changed.

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