

Spairistike, anyone? 100 years ago...

Perhaps Spairistike is not your game. Maybe you prefer tennis. That's O.K. because they're the same thing.

The game dates from 1873, when a British army officer, Walter C. Wingfield, adapted the rules and techniques of "court tennis" (somewhat similar to our raquetball) and named it sphairistike but soon changed the name to tennis. Tennis was considered a genteel sport for those who tired of croquet.

It was only 19 years later that tennis was being played in Chelmsford. The game was quite different then from the fast, hard hitting contests we see on local courts today and the courts were no competition for those at Wimbledon. In 1892 tennis matches were played on the Center Common, but not on a hard surfaced court or even a level, well manicured grass court.

An item in the *Lowell Weekly journal* of July 15 of that year gives us an idea of what the court was like: "The lawn tennis players have begun their haying on the common, which would look much more attractive were the entire enclosure treated in a like manner."

It must be remembered that the common was, until the fall of 1926, the playground for the school located where the Center Fire Station is today. Much of it along North Road was hard-packed gravel. A baseball diamond had home plate near the corner of Academy Street and North Road with the first base line running up the hill toward the monument. Possibly the "tennis court" may have been along Westford Street. The news item called it an "enclosure" because the common was surrounded by a granite post and wooden rail fence similar to the one

The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



around the little park at the intersection of North Road and Worthen Street. (The Common was landscaped in 1928.)

The court on the common served the needs of the community for several years.

In 1907, a group of local tennis enthusiasts joined together to form a private club, the Chelmsford Lawn Tennis Club. They leased a piece of land at what is now No. 11 Crosby Lane and built two clay courts, complete with a raised referee's stand.

An examination of the treasurer's book (in the possession of this writer) gives an insight into costs at that time. Labor cost 15 cents per hour; nine-foot chestnut posts were 15 cents each; and maple lumber was two cents per foot. The net for the court was \$2 and the marking tapes were \$3.60.

Competitive matches were held starting in 1908 — the treasurer paid out \$9.88 for "cups and engraving same." These were silver "loving cups" about six inches tall. An extant photograph shows a match in progress.

One of the courts was abandoned before 1925 when this writer began playing there

but the other court was used until 1927 when the club was disbanded. The \$43.22 left in the treasury was presented to the high school tennis program.

Perhaps the most colorful player was "Wasa" (I believe his name was Wasabura J. Inowaka), a Japanese national living in Lowell. He played regularly in Chelmsford, improving his game to the point where he won the Lowell City Singles Tournament in 1925 by unseating the previous champion, Bruce Douglas.

A few private homes put in tennis courts after World War I. Some of these were Pollards on High Street, Gilmores on Middlesex Street, Wells on East Putnam Avenue and the Russell's on North Road. Varney Playground in North Chelmsford was built in 1928 and tennis courts were part of the original design. About the same time, two courts were built where the parking lot is beside the Town Office Building on Bille-rica Road.

Since 1946, interest in tennis has grown by leaps and bounds resulting in the construction of many private and municipal courts, but

That's the way it was.

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