

Tracing the Historic District's history

Chelmsford has many historic sites and buildings scattered throughout the town. Of these, the largest number located contiguously are to be found around the Center Common. It was for this reason that the Chelmsford Center Historic District was designated by a vote of Town Meeting on May 8, 1975 and subsequently listed in the *National Register of Historic Places*.

A Historic District Commission was appointed to administer the by-laws of the District as approved by the town in conformity with state and national regulations.

(There are three groups which, because of similarity of names, are confused by many people: The Historic District Commission mentioned above; The Chelmsford Historical Commission, which is part of town government but operates under state laws; The Chelmsford Historical Society, a private organization with membership open to all citizens of Chelmsford, but with no regulatory authority.)

Historical interest is not in the District itself but in the buildings and sites located within its boundaries. (This writer prepared an information booklet on the points of interest which is available from the Chelmsford Historical Society.) Space here will not permit mention of all of the historical sites in the District.

A tour of the District starts with the **1802 Schoolhouse** on Westford Street which was built by public subscription on the site of Chelmsford's first school. It was restored in 1975 as part of the Bicentennial celebration. The **Common** across the street at one time was used as a pasture. History tells us that the town "Stocks" were also located here.

The imposing granite monument was erected in 1859 in memory of Chelmsford men in the Revolutionary War. The monument opposite the Fire Station is a memorial to those who served in the Armed Services during World War II and the Korean Conflict. The house at number 16 Westford

St. was built in 1794 by the Rev. Hezekiah Packard, fifth minister of the First Parish Church. His successor, Rev. Wilkes Allen, lived here when he wrote the first *History of Chelmsford* in 1820.

The **Sam Davis or Davis/Russell House**, located at number 10 Worthen St., was built about 1799. At number 14 Worthen St. is the **Dr. Samuel Dutton House**, dating back to about 1810. The house at number 14

The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



Crosby Lane was probably built about 1790 by Capt. Josiah Fletcher. Just beyond the **Josiah Fletcher House** is a granite monument located near where the first Town Meeting was held at the home of William Fletcher in 1654.

The white building at number 33 North Rd., now used as a religious education building by St. Mary's Church, is known as the **William Fletcher House** (c.1817). The white office building at number 11 North Road, the **J. P. Emerson House**, was built in the early 19th century.

On the corner of North Road and Academy Street is the **Winn/Emerson House**. It was here that the first School for the Deaf, taught by the pure oral method, was held. (The monument across the street on the Common attests to this fact.)

One of the students there later became Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell. The small building near the northeast corner of the Common was originally located in what is

now Middlesex Village and served as a toll house on the Middlesex Canal.

The **Richardson/Davis House** at numbers 1-3 North Road has some unique architectural features. It was built about 1840 by Joseph Reed. The building, housing offices at the corner of Chelmsford Street, was moved there in 1871 from near where the Town Hall stands. Known as **Parkhurst's Store**, it was built about 1861. The real estate office at number 20 Chelmsford Street and the house across the street were built by Dr. Paul Kittridge (1831) and his son, Dr. Francis Kittridge (c. 1840) respectively.

The building at number 1 Chelmsford Street and number 6 Billerica Road was moved to its present location in 1810. It served as All Saints' Rectory for many years. The **Fiske House**, at number 1 Billerica Road, now used as offices for the First Bank, dates back to 1798 and at one time was a tavern. The **Odd Fellows Building** in Central Square, now the First Bank, has contained a meeting hall, a movie theater and many different stores. St. Mary's Church met there before building on North Road. The large building across Central Square, the **Wilson Hotel Block**, was built as a hotel in 1884.

The **First Parish Meeting House** (1842) is on the site of Chelmsford's first church in 1655-56. The lower floor served as the Town Hall until 1879. Behind the Meeting House is **Forefathers Burying Ground**, Chelmsford's first cemetery. The oldest identifiable grave is that of Grace Livemore, 1690.

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

Mr. Parkhurst will be leading a walking tour of the Chelmsford Center Historic District this Sunday, Oct. 5, beginning at the First Parish Unitarian Church parking lot. The tour will run from 2-4 p.m.