

# What's in a (street) name, anyway?

If you have ever had occasion to look up an old deed, you may have found that the property was on a different street than you thought it was. Or, an old map might show streets you hadn't heard of, even though you were familiar with the area.

The reason, of course, is that street names have been changed over the years. In many cases the commonly known names had never been officially accepted, frequently resulting in duplication of names in the same town or city. Chelmsford has, in the past, been guilty of this practice.

In order to bring order out of confusion, the Special Town Meeting of May 5, 1925 appointed a committee to study existing street names and make recommendations. (In 1905, a similar Committee on Naming Streets had compiled a list that appears in Waters' "History of Chelmsford.") The 1926 committee consisted of Arnold C. Perham, James F. Leahey, Frederick A. Snow, Harry C. Shedd, A. Heady Park, and John McAdams, each of whom represented one of the six precincts of the town.

The committee gave a report at the Annual Town Meeting on February 8, 1926. In addition to street names, the report included names of squares and "corners." Although "official" street names were established, many people, especially the older residents who had always used particular names, continued to use the ones to which they had been accustomed.

## The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



An example of this was in referring to Boston Road as South Street. Though "Boston Road" had been approved by the 1905 committee, it had never been generally accepted. A similar example was Chelmsford Street, which was more often called Lowell Road.

Crosby Place (1905) and Crosby Street (1926) still carries the old popular name of Crosby Lane in current Town records.

What we know as North Road was officially, in 1905, called Centre Street. There was no Steadman Street in 1905; Golden Cove Road crossed Chelmsford Street and continued to the Lowell line. Steadman Street residents need not worry; the 1926 committee gave them the name.

A look at Beers' Atlas map (1875) of North Chelmsford (reproduced in the "History of Chelmsford") shows several street names that appear unusual. For example, Middlesex Street is called Main Street, being Main street between North Chelmsford and Lowell. Princeton Street is called Turnpike

Street since it was a continuation of the Middlesex Turnpike. Instead of Newfield Street, it says Fletcher Street. (Fletcher Street next to St. Mary's Church in the Center was not built until the 1890's.)

Where Church Street is today, you would find Depot Street, which crossed Middlesex Street and went down to the depot near the river. Anyone looking for Quigley Avenue would have to go to Mill Street, the name at that time.

In 1875, Gay Street ran only between Middlesex and Princeton Streets. West of Princeton Street it was Silver Street, both named for the owners of the Silver & Gay machine shop nearby.

The earliest roads probably had no particular names but people knew them by where they went. Our present Billerica Road was known as "the road to the bay" as it was the route taken to reach Salem and other sea front communities.

What is so important about street names? Letter carriers and emergency services find them invaluable. Also, Cousin Minnie and her whole tribe might have trouble locating you for a Sunday afternoon visit and supper "since you insist."

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