

A far cry from our 'Chicken Corner'

Central Square has been the business center of Chelmsford for many generations but it has changed with the times. The greatest change took place after World War I when the quantum leap from the horse-drawn carriage to its horseless counterpart was made.

In the early 20's Bill Santamour closed his blacksmith shop beside Hale's Brook and moved to a new building off Cushing Place. The building at the end of that street, recently the site of the State Line Lumber Company, housed the J. Cushing Company, dealers in hay, straw, grain, feed and flour.

Beside the bridge on Cushing Place was the stable where Cushing's draft horses resided. Adjacent to the stable was Isaac Knight's wheelwright shop where he built and repaired carriages and wagons. "Doc" Harris, the local "hoss doctor," sold his house, where Care Cleaners is today, to the Dunham family. Later Mrs. Dunham would open an ice cream parlor in a building on the front lawn at 26 Central Square.

While Cushing was catering to the equine population, others were turning to the increasing number of motorists for business. Ralph Emerson and Loring Kew opened the Puritan Motor Sales Ford agency in a new building where we now have the Chelmsford Gift and Card Shop, after moving the Charles Proctor house to Fletcher Street. Shiny new Model T's, in any color you might want, as long as it was black, were on display in the showroom that set back from the street with a repair shop in the rear. A few years later, Roger Boyd and Dan Hart sold Chevrolets from their showroom on the ground floor of the Hotel Block near what is now Jack's Diner.

In 1923 "Ross" Kidder erected the large

The way It was

By George A.
Parkhurst



brick building at the upper end of the square, after first moving the house from that site to its present location at 41 Littleton Road. The Chelmsford Square Garage (and hardware store) occupied the main building while the ell that protrudes out to the sidewalk housed (just barely) the new Center fire truck and alarm system.

In order to assuage the thirst of the growing number of automobiles, merchants went into the gasoline business. The Ford agency and Kidder's garage had pumps in front of their establishments as did Grant's Shoppe (now Jack's Diner) and Haley's Market in the Odd Fellows' Building (now the First Bank). Haley's pump was located against the front of the building and had a pipe that extended overhead across the sidewalk to the curb. The Mobil filling station in the point opened a few years later in what had been a hay field.

It was at this time that chain food stores began to appear although self-service was in the future. The house where the Video shop is today had been the Post Office, but in the early 1920's was Fletcher and Donovan's plumbing shop. Later it was converted into the First National Store. The former site of the blacksmith shop was taken over by the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A & P) and E.E. Gray Co., groceries, (Henry Erik-

sen, proprietor) replaced S.W. Parkhurst's store at Eriksen's Corner (or Chicken Corner).

Ernie's Barber Shop would be built much later, but in the 20's the Wolfe family baked and sold bread and pastries, under the name Tasty Pastry Baker, in the house behind the barber shop. Grant's Shoppe, a variety store under the management of Grant and Ellen MacElroy, occupied the shop that is now Jack's Diner.

Before the Chevrolet garage, Sweetser's Market, Fall's Drug Store and, for a while, a Chinese laundry filled the lower floor of the Wilson Block. The First Bank Building, known as Odd Fellows' Hall, had E.T. Adams' grocery store and the Post Office (later Haley's market) on the ground floor. "Billy" Davis' shoe store was located at the rear. Tony Mello's Barber Shop was on the second floor along with the big hall that was used for, among other things, a dancing school, a movie theater, parties and meetings, and St. Mary's Church services.

The Purity/Marshall's Plaza was a hay field, as was the site of the present Mill Dam Office Building. A colonial house, known as "the Ark" stood on the corner of Acton Road and Bartlett Street where the filling station is today. The Page Building at 6 Boston Road was also a private home.

At the corner of Billerica Road, the white colonial house was the residence of the Fiske family, while the real estate office across the street was the Episcopal Parsonage.

And that's how this writer remembers the way it was.

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