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Linking fife and basketball? Well...

Fife playing and professional basketball seldom have anything in common, however, a Chelmsford man and his descendant were the exceptions.

The tax list of 1775 was separated into residents of the "South End" and those of the "North End." Included in the latter was one Barzilla Lew. (In other records his first name was spelled Barzillai). It is not clear where he lived but possibly north of the Merrimack River in what is now Pawtucketville, then part of Dracut.

History tells us that "the people who settled upon the north side of the Merrimack River sustained a peculiar relationship with Chelmsford. They voted, paid taxes, and attended meeting in Chelmsford and looked to the Town for protection."

The military record of Barzillai Lew (1775) states "age, 30 yrs.; stature, 6 ft.; occupation, cooper; residence, Chelmsford." He served as fife of Capt. John Ford's Co. What distinguished Barzillai from his fellow soldiers was the fact that he was a free black from Jamaica and a member of a "well-known colored family of that day, somewhat noted for their musical attainment." It has been reported that his fife is now in a library in Chicago.

The scene changes to the the beginning of the 20th century in Lowell where Lew's descendants are respected members of the community. One of the children of William and Isabelle Lew was a son, Harry ("Bucky") born January 4, 1884. Six years later, Dr. James A. Naismith of the Y.M.C.A. International Training School at Springfield, Mass. is credited with inventing the game of

The way It was

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basketball. Lowell was one of the cities that quickly took the sport to heart.

Years later the *Springfield (Mass.) Union* headlined a story "Bucky Lew First Negro in Professional Basketball."

"The time was the winter of 1902. The place, a small but crowded gymnasium in Lowell, Massachusetts. The event, the breaking of the color line in professional basketball by a 18-year-old Negro fireball named Harry Lew who later was to become affectionately known as "Bucky" Lew, one of the all-time greats of the round ball sport."

Lowell was playing Marlboro in the New England League. Bucky, only 5 ft. 8 in., had demonstrated marked ability but had yet to play in his first professional game. On this occasion, he had been given \$5.00 to sit on the bench as the sixth member of the team. When one of the Lowell players had to leave the game because of an injury, the manager opted to play with only four men but the fans got mad and demanded that Bucky be allowed to play.

In spite of the abuse and name calling because of his color, Bucky became a regular

on the team. Being relatively short, he avoided rebounding, and soon developed the ability to shoot from a distance. While playing in a game for Marblehead, he is reported to have made 11 baskets, "nine the length of the hall." He was always a very aggressive player.

Lew continued to play basketball until 1929 at the age of 42. He organized and managed his own teams for 20 years, one of them being "Bucky Lew's Travelling Five", which played throughout New England. He was also very active with the Pawtucketville Athletic Club's basketball team.

In 1929 Bucky and his family moved to Springfield, Mass. where he died at the age of 79. His obituary was headed: "First Negro Basketball Star is Dead."

Bucky's sister, Miss Teresa G. Lew, was valedictorian of her class at Lowell High and an outstanding teacher at the Barlett Junior High School in Lowell for many years.

The present writer was fortunate to learn about this family, that dates back to the 1770's in Chelmsford, through frequent business contacts with one of Bucky's daughters, Miss Phyllis Lew, a State employee. Phyllis is proud to show her fellow employees the name of her ancestor, Barzillai Lew, on the roster of the men in Capt. Ford's Company in Allen's *History of Chelmsford*.

And that's the relationship of professional basketball to fife playing.

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