

# Reviewing the tradition of Arbor Days past

Ask the average person on the street, "What is Arbor Day? When does it occur?" and you're likely to receive a rather vague, non-committal reply. It is one of our lesser publicized "holidays."

The correct answer is, of course, "A day, usually in the spring, designated by the State, for the community planting of trees." Over the years, Arbor Day has also been a time for cleaning up and generally beautifying the community. This year, thanks to the leadership of a few of our concerned citizens, Chelmsford received a face lift by the removal of the accumulated rubbish along many of our streets and highways.

Also, the Chelmsford Garden Club selected Arbor Day, 1989 as the appropriate time to memorialize the beautiful purple beech tree on the Common. This tree was planted by the students of Chelmsford's high school — all 32 of them — on Arbor Day in 1891.

The following year, the students of the Center School, which was located on North Road where the fire station stands today, celebrated Arbor Day by planting a row of arbor vitae trees along either side of the school property. While the school children observed Arbor Day with tree planting and special programs in their classrooms, the men of the Center village spent the day repairing the ravages of winter in their particular neighborhoods under the aegis of the Village Improvement Association (V.I.A.).

The V.I.A. had been organized in 1875 for the explicit purpose of "providing for the grading, or ornamentation and care of our public squares; to attend the matter of laying out sidewalks and setting shade trees along the line of our public streets; and to provide for the establishment and

## THE WAY IT WAS

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maintenance of street lights (kerosene lamps on poles) in such localities as the public necessities require."

The sidewalks were not macadam in those days but were gravel paths which needed frequent repair.

The newspaper of May 6, 1887 reported that Arbor Day was a huge success. "A card invitation from the directors of the association met with a general response and by 8 a.m. there was a busy gang of workers on each of the seven streets radiating from the Centre. In addition to general repairs there was a liberal extension of sidewalks upon every road.

"There is now a continuous sidewalk from the Centre to the town's estate (at 110 Billerica Road), and with the new street lamp at the easterly terminus bearing upon its cheerful phiz the legend "town farm"... Near the town hall along the railroad line a row of fine evergreens was set out which will prove an agreeable foil to the monotonous view of rails and sleepers ... At noon the church bells summoned the workers to the town hall, where 150 persons enjoyed a bountiful din

ner, prepared and served by the ladies of the association."

More time could be spent on beautification in those days because there was not a lot of trash scattered around the countryside. It was before the advent of the "throw away society."

In the 1930's, the town declared a "Clean Up Day" and Highway Department trucks toured the various villages and hauled away the trash, branches, etc., that had been collected and left by the side of the streets. Weekly rubbish pickup was years in the future.

And that's the way it was.

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