

Chelmsford has produced no presidents, but town has many other claims to fame

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Presidential political items have dominated the news for the past several weeks, and we can expect to see more and more between now and the November election.

Chelmsford has had national and world leaders in fields other than politics, but did we ever have any serious presidential aspirants? Unfortunately, the answer is no; none of our local sons or daughters has tossed his or her hat into the presidential political ring. But ... at least two presidents have had close ties to Chelmsford.

The second president of the United States, John Adams, had relatives living here. They were grandchildren of two of our earliest settlers, Lt. Thomas Adams and Capt. Samuel Adams. The former, or perhaps his son, built the Garrison House. The latter, Capt. Samuel Adams, operated the first mill (about 1656) on what we know as Russell Mill Pond and served as selectman and town clerk in the 1600s. President John Adams was a great-grandnephew of these men. So, at the time of his presidency, he had many cousins here.

Another presidential connection was through Benjamin Pierce, who, as a lad of 18, was one of the Chelmsford men who answered the alarm on April 19, 1775 and went to Concord to face the British troops. A descendant of one of Chelmsford's early set-

tlers, Benjamin lived with his uncle in what is now Lowell but, of course, was part of Chelmsford then. Tradition tells us that Benjamin was plowing in his field when he heard the alarm; he chained his steers to a tree and left the plow in the furrow. Taking his uncle's gun, he headed for Concord on foot. He also fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill and, for the next two years, saw action in some of the major battles of the Revolution. He remained in the army until the last troops were disbanded at West Point in February, 1784.

Benjamin Pierce left Chelmsford in 1786 and moved to Hillsborough, New Hampshire and later became governor of that state as well as a general in the militia. On Nov. 23, 1804, Benjamin and Anna Pierce became the proud parents of Franklin Pierce, who would be elected the 14th president of the United States. Although we have had no president, one of our Minutemen was the father of a president.

In the 19th century, Tammany Hall played a major role in presidential politics. The Dictionary of American History tells us that on Oct. 29, 1835, a Democratic nominating convention was being held in Tammany Hall in New York when a group of radicals from the Equal Rights faction seized control of the meeting. Their opponents, being in the minority, left the hall and turned off the gas (used for lighting). However, the radicals had anticipated this move and had brought a sup-

ply of "locofoco (self igniting) matches," manufactured only in South Chelmsford. Using these "locofocos," they lighted candles and continued the caucus. The newspapers derisively named them the "Locofoco Party." It must be remembered that, until about 1835, matches were unknown.

In 1835, Ezekiel Byam, a descendant of an early Chelmsford family, acquired the sole rights to manufacture Lucifer matches in the U.S. The Encyclopedia Britannica says, "In the U.S. a patent was granted to A. D. Phillips as early as 1836, though Ezekiel Byam is usually acclaimed as the industrial pioneer."

Byam's factory was a small building set into the bank on Robin Hill Road near the center of South Chelmsford with a single story above the basement. He later moved his business to Boston, and in 1880, his son, and successor, Ezekiel G. Byam, sold out to the originators of Diamond Match Company.

The Chelmsford Historical Commission, in connection with the American Revolutionary War bicentennial celebration, dedicated a stone marker on Robin Hill Road at the approximate location of the Byam match factory in Sept., 1975, the 140th anniversary of the inception of the business.

Perhaps one of our local politicians will someday move into the White House and give us one more claim to fame.

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