

# Parkhurst's death severs link to past

## Love of history preserved town memories for years to come

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When George Adams Parkhurst died at the age of 84, Chelmsford lost a friend, a historian, and a symbolic tie to its beginnings.

Parkhurst directly descended from eight of the 29 men who petitioned the General Court for the grant of land in 1653, and from five of the seven officers chosen at the first Town Meeting at the home of William Fletcher in 1654 "to officiate in ordering the public affairs of the place by the consent of the major part of the Town."

"From his early years," recalled Eleanor Parkhurst, another local historian and long-time resident of Chelmsford, "he had a strong curiosity about things going on in town."

He was always interested in a variety of things, according to Eleanor Parkhurst, and when he retired, he had the time to compile his memories.

He spent many hours, for instance, at the old blacksmith shop that stood beside Beaver Brook in the Center, and which was a popular gathering place



George A. Parkhurst

through the early 1900s. Parkhurst would question the blacksmith or other residents who gathered there, and he never forgot the information he picked up.

"His memory was amazing," according to Dick Lahue, a close friend who also manages the Historical Society's Museum at the Barrett-Byam House. "I would ask

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him a question about something from his past, and he would remember everything about it."

Even after Parkhurst moved to Westford, he never broke his close Chelmsford ties; he continued to write about its history, he attended meetings of the many Chelmsford organizations to which he belonged, and just months before he died, he donated many valuable artifacts to the Chelmsford Historical Society.

"George knew that the Historical Society depends on donations for its continued survival," said Lahue. "He donated more than 200 items, including over 100 books, many of which were real gems. A few of the books were used by his grandfather when he attended the 1802 schoolhouse that stands near the [Town] Common."

In addition, according to Lahue, Parkhurst donated \$50,000 worth of stock so that the Society could purchase a new computer and build up its reserves for the maintenance of the Barrett-Byam House.

# Historian Parkhurst dead at 84

**PARKHURST, FROM PAGE 1**

Most Chelmsford residents knew Parkhurst through his writings, which included *Chelmsford: The Town and Its People* (1989), a pictorial history, which sells in used book stores for up to \$50, and *Small Town Kid* (1991), in which he describes his childhood days in Chelmsford.

His many other publications include articles that appeared in the *Chelmsford Newsweekly* and the *Chelmsford Independent*, pamphlets for the Historical Society and a new, yet-to-be-published book, called *Nights at the Round Table*, a biography of 20 extraordinary people from Chelmsford's history.

Parkhurst's writings contain the best of what local history offers. First, he breathes life into the historical events he describes by showing us the interesting people who participated in them.

"Rather than merely reciting a series of dates and places," he wrote in the introduction to his *Chelmsford: The Town and Its People*, "this history has been oriented toward people — their interests, their work and their relation to the town and to each other."

Second, Parkhurst understood that local history offers its greatest lessons when it is set in a context, when it makes concrete broader events that occurred in New England, for instance, or even the country at large.

"In his famous poem, 'A tale of the Wayside Inn,'" Parkhurst wrote in his pamphlet, *The Village Clock*, "Henry W. Longfellow tells us that, 'it was one by the village clock when he [Paul Revere] entered Lexington.' That was in 1775. Although many of the larger communities had their village clocks in Revolutionary times, 100 years would pass before the residents of Chelmsford would acquire their clock."

Third, Parkhurst understood that unless information about a town is preserved and organized, it would be lost and forgotten, no longer available for future students of the town's history. That this preservation is often a monumental task is shown in his pamphlets, which include *Reading*, *'Riting*, *'Rithmetic*, *A Monumental Tribute to our Veterans* and *Ezekiel Byam and the Lucifer Match*.

"His pamphlet titled '325 Years; The Story of the First Parish Church, Chelmsford,' is still being used, and writing it was a wonderful service for the church," according to local historian, Jane Drury.

His compilation of Chelmsford's history of the last 100 years is, according to Drury, "a valuable addition to the historical literature of the Town."

Though Chelmsford will miss George A. Parkhurst, the friend and community member, they and future generations will benefit from his historical writings for years to come.

## George A. Parkhurst

George Adams Parkhurst, 84, a resident of Westford since 1985, formerly of Chelmsford, died June 17 at the Lahey-Hitchcock Clinic in Burlington.

He was born March 17, 1914 in Lowell, a son of the late Winthrop A. and Millie (Jefts) Parkhurst, he attended Chelmsford schools and graduated from Chelmsford High School in 1932. In 1936, he graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a bachelor of science in chemical engineering. He was a subaltern in the Civilian Conservation Corps. from 1939 to 1940.

Commissioned a lieutenant in the Army Reserves, Mr. Parkhurst attended Advanced Chemical Warfare Service School and Army Command and General Staff School. He served as a captain in the Army's Chemical Warfare Service during World War II, from 1942 to 1945, commanding the 5th Chemical Smoke Generator Company. He was also brigade chemical officer for the 39th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Brigade.

Prior to his retirement, Mr. Parkhurst was a chemical engineer at Dewey & Almy Corp. and the International Equipment Corp., both in Cambridge. He also had been the public liaison for the Blood Bank at Massachusetts General Hospital.

A call firefighter in Chelmsford for 26 years, he was a member of the Chelmsford Tercentenary Committee, the World War II Honor Roll Committee, the Fourth of July Celebration Committee and the Chelmsford Historical Commission.

Mr. Parkhurst was also past president of the Chelmsford Historical Society and the Chelmsford Kiwanis Club. He was a historical writer and speaker, a local history columnist for several newspapers over the years, and an author of historical books and pamphlets. His latest book, *Nights of the Round Table*,

about famous people whose lives touched Chelmsford, is unpublished.

He was also the author of several short plays and an organizer of the Chelmsford Players.

Survivors include his wife, Barbara (Hildreth) Parkhurst; a son, Robert H. Parkhurst and his wife, Debra, of Bedford; a daughter, Sandra Johnston and her husband, David, of Albuquerque, N.M.; and four grandchildren, Emalie and Rebecca Parkhurst and Susan and Steven Johnston.

Memorial contributions may be made to Chelmsford Senior Center, Barrett Byam House or to the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Chelmsford.