

# Balloon caused local scare 50 years ago

**By George Adams Parkhurst**

*Guest Columnist*

"Jap Balloon Scare in Chelmsford — Object Fell on Rooftop in East Part of Town." Thus read the heading on a story in the Lowell newspaper.

The date was June 7, 1945. World War II was continuing in the Pacific area although fighting had ceased in the European Theater. With the final outcome still undecided, the war was, understandably, on the mind of every American.

Any unusual occurrence was immediately linked to the Japanese military machine. Japanese bomb-balloons had been reported to have landed as far east as Michigan so it was conceivable that one could have reached Massachusetts.

According to the news story, a Riverneck Road resident awoke before 7 a.m. to discover a "mass of silky rubber" hanging in front of her window. At first she thought it was from a child's kite but it was too large for that. The object blew to the ground and the Chelmsford police were notified.

Because Police Chief Ralph Hulslander was working on another urgent case, the Lowell authorities were called in and Lt. Edward J. Liston and Inspector Andrew W. Hunter were dispatched to the scene. What they found was a torn balloon which, when inflated, was estimated to be about 15 feet in diameter. The balloon was attached by a short rope to a kite made of delicate tissue and tinfoil paper. The kite measured over four feet in height and six feet across.

Word of the discovery got out to the public right away and, as is usual in such a case, the few details soon became enmeshed in wild rumors. Was the war spreading to the East Coast? Had Massachusetts been targeted for involvement?

However, after a careful examination of the object which bore markings in English, not Japanese, it was thought to be a U.S. weather test balloon and the matter was dismissed as one more case of war hysteria.

*George Parkhurst is a former Chelmsford resident and local historian. He now resides in Westford.*