

Chelmsford honored its WWI veterans with a welcome home party, local medal

By George Adams Parkhurst
Independent Columnist

Are our war veterans given sufficient appreciation and thanks when they return to civilian life, or are their deeds soon forgotten?

This is a question that is frequently debated. However, there has been one shining example of recognition of Chelmsford veterans by their fellow citizens.

That was after the end of World War I in 1918.

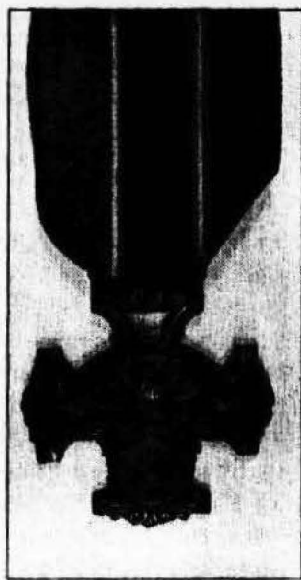
To show its appreciation, the town invited all of its returning veterans to a Welcome Home Celebration. Although hostilities had ended with the signing of the Armistice on Nov. 11, 1918, sufficient time was allowed for all, or at least a majority, of the veterans to get back home so as many as possible could attend the mammoth celebration which was scheduled for seven months later, on June 17, 1919.

Invitations were sent to all of the

survivors of the 250 men and six women (only five men from Chelmsford lost their lives in combat), inviting them to a "Welcome Home Celebration in honor of the Chelmsford Soldiers and Sailors who have performed their country's service in the World War."

The day's program included a parade and a dinner in North Chelmsford. Band concerts, suppers and balls at both the North Village and the Center completed the day's activities.

Perhaps the high point of the celebration was the convocation on the North Common in the afternoon which concluded with the presentation of a "Chelmsford Medal" to each of the veterans. To avoid hav-



The Chelmsford Medal

ing just a one-day celebration, after which the veterans might be forgotten, each veteran was given a specially designed Chelmsford medal that he or she could keep as a constant reminder of the town's appreciation.

An eagle and the Chelmsford Town Seal are embossed on the front of the medal and the words, "World War Service" are embossed in a scroll above the eagle. The embossed message on the reverse side reads: "Presented

by the Town of Chelmsford, Mass. in grateful recognition of patriotic services rendered during the World War 1917-1919."

There must have been nearly 250 of these medals handed out, but there seem to be few around today. The

present writer knows of only three, but there must be more hidden in drawers or boxes.

It is interesting that all three of these known medals were found in locations out of state.

One, presented to one of the six women, nurse Madeline Hartley, is in Towson, Md.; another, found in Newington, Conn., had been owned by Raymond C. Hildreth, a resident of North Chelmsford at the time of World War I; the third, presented to Wilhelm T. Johnson, former District Fire Chief in Chelmsford, turned up in Albuquerque, N.M.

These medals are tokens of the heartfelt thanks of our grateful citizens and have become collectibles those who are interested in preserving

Chelmsford memorabilia. Perhaps as a result of this story, a few of these medals may be located.

George Parkhurst is a historian and former Chelmsford resident.