

A history of 'Chelmsford's medical building'

There are many historical houses in Chelmsford. Some are interesting because of their unusual architecture, such as the Col. Simeon Spaulding house at the corner of North and Dalton Roads; others, because of the famous people who once resided in them. An example of the latter is the "Hill Jock" Parker house at 155 Boston Road, the residence of the nationally prominent Willard Parker, M.D.

An Associated Press story on April 23, 1989 brought to mind a locally historical dwelling that is interesting from the standpoint of both its architecture and its past inhabitants. This is the Greek revival house at 21 Chelmsford Street, with its stately Doric columns, whose history dates back to about 1840 when it was built by Dr. Francis M. Kittredge.

"Doctor Frank," as he was familiarly known, was the son of Dr. Paul Kittredge, a member of a famous family of physicians. Dr. Paul Kittredge came to Chelmsford from Littleton in 1831 to take up the established practice of Dr. John Call Dalton, the local family doctor, who was leaving. He built the house across the street, at #20 (now a real estate office), soon after his arrival. Dr. Paul-Kittredge raised a family of 14 children, four of whom became physicians. Dr. Frank was one of them.

The house at 21 Chelmsford Street might be called "Chelmsford's medical building" since it was occupied by physicians for nearly a century. The first, Dr. Frank Kittredge, was associated with his father for several years and, upon the death of the latter, took over his father's practice.

The way It was

By George A.
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The next doctor to live in the house was Levi Howard, M.D. who purchased the property from Dr. Frank in 1848. Dr. Howard continued his practice there until a week before his death in 1885, when the house and medical practice was inherited by his son, Dr. Amasa Howard.

Another son of Dr. Levi Howard was John Galen Howard, of whom more will follow.

In 1924 the property at 21 Chelmsford Street was purchased by still another physician, Dr. Leonard C. Dursthoff. Later, for a short time, the office at the east end of the house was occupied by Dr. Harriet Leach.

Most recently, it has been the residence of the late Henry Eriksen, a local grocer and dealer in antiques for many years.

As for the Associated Press release, a rather lengthy story reported on the reopening of the Beaux-Arts style Majestic theater on Tremont Street in Boston. Emerson College, the present owner, has restored the old theater whose original design and construction was under the guidance

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of the accomplished architect, John Galen Howard. The AP story further states that John Galen Howard went on to found the University of California's School of Architecture at Berkeley. When the Majestic opened in 1903, the Boston Globe called it "the most beautiful playhouse Boston has yet seen."

As mentioned above, John Galen was the son of Dr. Levi Howard. He was brought up in the house at 21 Chelmsford Street and received his early education in the Yellow Schoolhouse on North Road before going on to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he earned his degree in architecture. He then served a short apprenticeship in the office of the eminent architect, H. H. Richardson.

This venerable residence has, during its nearly 150 years existence, witnessed the joys and tribulations of several upper middle class families while, at the same time, it has stood ready to receive the victims of illness and accidents seeking the ministrations of the local doctor.

The barn, connected to the house, sheltered the horses and carriages that took the doctors on the rounds of their patients, both in Chelmsford and the surrounding communities.

While the future of the property is unknown, it is hoped that its historical significance is recognized and appreciated. The 150-year-old landmark deserves better than the crash of the wrecker's ball.

George Adams Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.