

Humble beginnings of a classic game

Nov. 26, 1927

Once again, the Chelmsford High School football team will square off against the Billerica High team tomorrow in what has become an annual Thanksgiving Day classic.

But, 'twas not always so.

In the very early part of the 20th century, Chelmsford did field a football team from time to time but these teams had no town-paid coach and were not recognized as official representatives of the school department.

This year's game will be the sixtieth anniversary of the first Chelmsford-Billerica football encounter. It was in September, 1927 that Ellsworth R. Thwing began his duties as athletic director of the Chelmsford schools. One of his first jobs was to train and equip Chelmsford High's first "official" football team.

Some twenty to thirty boys answered the call for players and Coach Thwing set to work to indoctrinate them in the fine points of offensive and defensive play. After six weeks of daily practice sessions, the team was ready — as ready as they could be — to compete against other high school squads.

Interestingly, their first opponent was Billerica. The *Lowell Courier-Citizen* announced on November 4th that Chelmsford

The way It was

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High School would play its first game of football as an organized team against Howe High School at Mitchell Field in Billerica the following afternoon. It was also stated that "the team has three other dates and several tentative ones."

School buses left the high school (now the Town Offices building on Billerica Road) with 20 players, plus many more rooters, along with a number of private automobiles, and headed for Billerica Saturday afternoon to witness something new — a Chelmsford High School football game.

(It must be remembered that there were only 221 students in the entire high school student body in 1927.)

Apparently, the newspaper reporter didn't look upon this as a "big game" as he added that "Saturdays' game will really serve as a practice game in anticipation of the coming

game with the Lowell High School 'B Squad' team."

Although the inexperienced Chelmsford team fought valiantly, the final score was Billerica 6, Chelmsford 0.

The game with Lowell High's B Squad the following week was a preliminary match before Lowell's first team met Revere. This game saw Chelmsford score its first touchdown, but Lowell won 12-6.

Six games were played during Chelmsford High's second year of football with two wins, two losses and two ties. The schedule included games with Johnson High of North Andover, Salem, N.H., Howe High of Billerica, Shirley Industrial School and two games with the Lowell B Squad.

Shirley Industrial was the state correctional school and always fielded a rough, aggressive team.

1928 saw the enlargement of the coaching staff with the appointment of Dan Torrey, a mathematics teacher, as assistant coach.

From this humble beginning has developed the championship football teams of recent years.

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