

Restored banners will preserve history

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If you had been one of the spectators watching Chelmsford's Memorial Day parades in the 1920's, you would have seen town officials, Civil War veterans, World War I veterans, Gold Star mothers, girl and boy scouts, Miss Susan McFarlin with a large number of school children and a unit consisting of only three men and a banner.

The silk banner was suspended from a horizontal wooded spindle that was mounted on top of the flag staff. A long cord,

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with a tassel on the lower end, hung from each end of the horizontal member. The man carrying the flag staff was flanked on either side by a "color guard" holding one of the tassels. The banner bore gold lettering that read: "Chelmsford Monument Association" and a picture of the monument on the Town Common.

In case you're not familiar with the Monument Association, it was the group of men who organized to erect the Revolutionary War Monument on the Town Center Common in 1859. It is doubtful that any of the original members were still living in the 1920's, but they were represented in the parades by three of their descendants.

In order that the Association would not fade into extinction, it was voted in 1894 that, "all

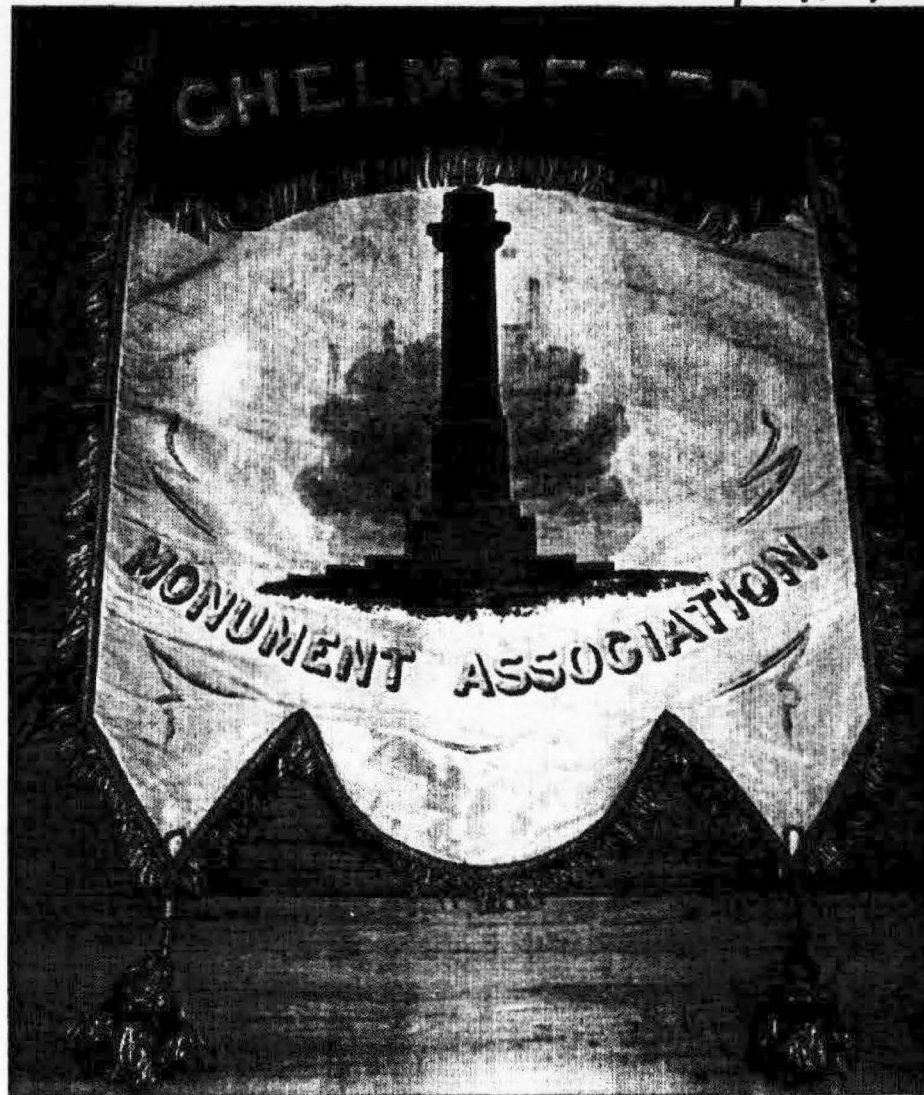


PHOTO BY GEORGE PARKHURST

As part of the Chelmsford Historical Society's collection, this silk banner honors the Revolutionary War Monument located on the Town Center Common which was built in 1859.

lineal descendants of the original members from this time henceforth forever shall be regarded as bona fide members." There must be many current "members" in town, but they

probably don't realize it. I'm part of this honored group, and my grandfather was a recording secretary of the Association in 1859.

At least two of the organizers

of the Association were world famous. The vice-president was Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous Concord poet. The man elected president had been brought up on Boston Road in Chelmsford, and was the teacher at the 1802 School (1821-1823) before getting his master's degree. His name was Willard Parker. He went to New York City where he was honored by having a New York Hospital named for him. He is also credited with being the first to operate successfully on an abscessed appendix.

Another historic banner is the one purchased by the Monument Association in 1875 to be carried by the Chelmsford contingent at the centennial of the Battle of Bunker Hill in Charlestown. Both of these banners are in the collection of the Chelmsford Historical Society but, over the years, have become too fragile to handle.

The Historical Society plans to have both of these banners restored and preserved by experienced textile restorers. This work is rather expensive so additional funds will have to be raised.

When the restoration has been completed, these very historic banners will be displayed at the Society's Barrett/Byam Museum which has been characterized as an unusually good local museum by authorities on such things. The people of Chelmsford can be justifiably proud of their collection of local historical artifacts.

— George Adams Parkhurst writes a monthly historical column for the Independent.