

The 'Road to the Summit' — in 1885

By George A. Parkhurst

The words summit meeting immediately bring to mind a face-to-face discussion between leaders of two countries. A century ago it might have had the same connotation... or, possibly, it might have alluded to a gathering on Chelmsford's Robin's Hill at the Summit House.

(Whether "Robin Hill" or "Robin's Hill" is correct has never been definitely established.)

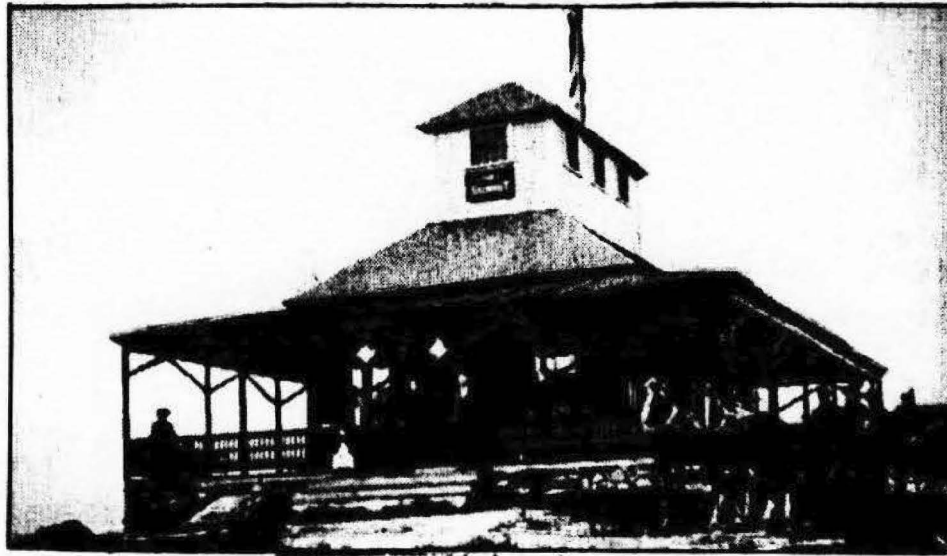
It was in May, 1885 that the road from Robin Hill Road to the summit was completed. (The street is now known as Summit Avenue.) This was as good an excuse as any for a party — not just a small family picnic but a full-scale celebration complete with food and music.

At 11 a.m., according to the local press, a flag pole was raised at the summit and old glory was run up and unfurled to the breeze while the North Chelmsford Band rendered the "Star Spangled Banner" and "Yankee Doodle."

The one sad note was the felling of the lone pine tree which had been a landmark for many years but had succumbed to old age. Appropriately, the band accompanied the felling with a funeral dirge.

Wilson Waters, in his "History of Chelmsford" 32 years later, stated, "A single pine tree formerly stood on the top of Robin's Hill, and formed a landmark which, it is said, was the first object sighted by vessels entering Boston Harbor." This writer is one of the many that doubts this idea.

"At 1 (p.m.), a collation was served in gen-



Robin Hill Summit House, Chelmsford

uine picnic fashion. At least 300 people were present at this time, men, women, and children being about equally represented, the latter enjoying an extra holiday through the closing of the schools."

The party broke up about 3 p.m. The crowd headed down High Street, stopping at the home of Mr. A. B. Woodworth where lemonade was served and the band played several selections before continuing to the Center village.

On June 18th of the following year, 1886, the *Lowell Weekly Journal* reported, "W. S. Simons, owner of the summit of Robin's hill, estimates that over 1,000 people visited that locality last Sunday. The summer house, now in process of erection, will be completed this week and opened to the public July 1.

"Mr. Simons will be prepared to furnish to visitors lunches, ice creams, &c. Nothing of a disorderly character will be permitted on

the premises, but it will be the aim of the proprietor to maintain a resort which will be patronized only by well-disposed persons."

The Summit House opened on schedule and the V.I.A. held an informal dedication on the night of the Fourth of July.

"There was a constant demand for mine host's ice cream and other refreshments." There was also a display of fireworks.

The Summit House proved to be a popular "tourist attraction" for people from Lowell and the surrounding towns as well as the local citizenry. Patronage was so good that it was nec-

essary to enlarge the building and the season was extended into November so that the colorful foliage for miles around could be seen.

Beginning with the 1887 season, Mr. Simons began "running a fine covered barge daily from the Central House near the Old Colony railroad station (in Central Square) to the Summit House."

The barge carried 14 people and ran in connection with trains to and from Lowell. The following year, horse sheds were built on the Summit House grounds.

"This needed improvement will be highly appreciated by visitors, whose teams will now have ample protection from both sun and shower."

Such simple, unsophisticated pleasures might not be as popular today, but... That's the way it was.