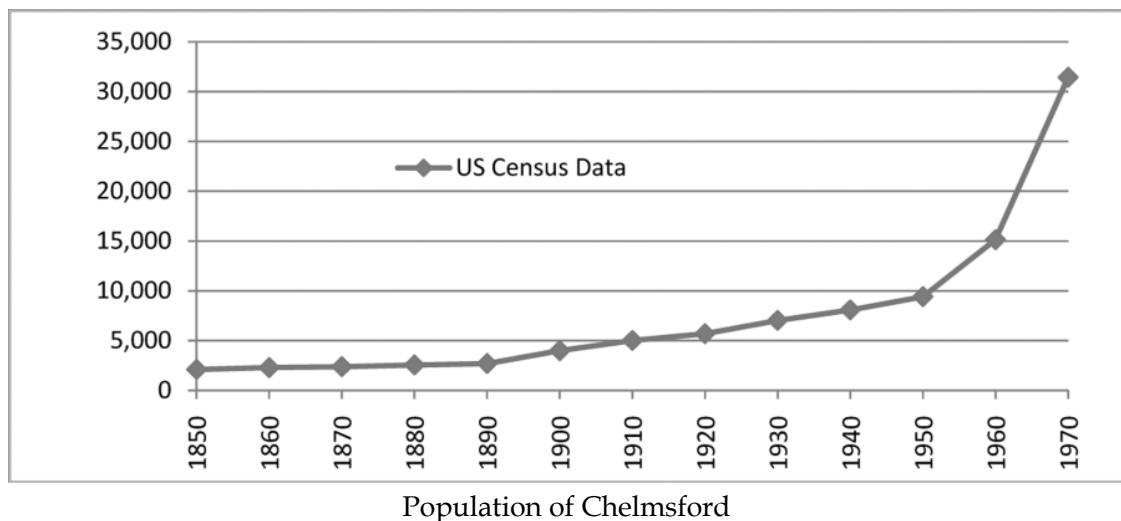


INTRODUCTION

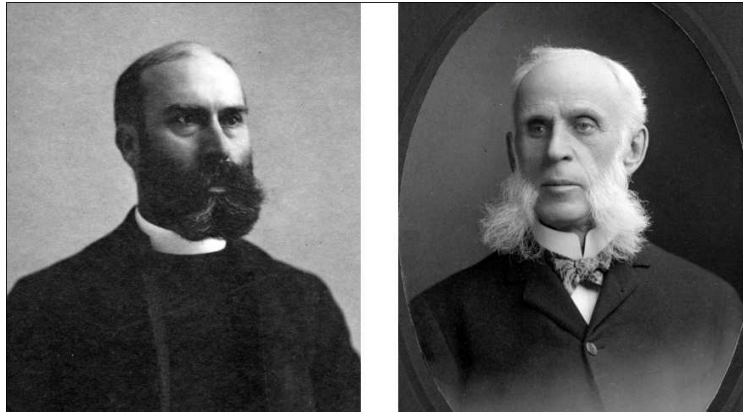
The period between the early and middle years of [the last] century (approximately 1910-1970) is like no other in the town's history. It forms the connecting link between Chelmsford as a small country town and Chelmsford as a large suburban community (often called a bedroom community). Asking, "Whatever happened in Chelmsford?" seems to imply that to be worthy of study a community history must be filled with unusual events and that there is little virtue in being "normal." Although Chelmsford has had its share of sensational happenings scattered over 300-plus years, the fact that it was an average Massachusetts town compelled to expand too quickly on too broad a scale is far more significant in the long run.



The choice of 1910 as a starting point for what can hardly be called more than a very modest addition to Dr. Waters' monumental History of Chelmsford published in 1917, was made for several reasons:

- (1) the Decennial Census of the United States, taken in 1910 provides solid local statistical data on many subjects such as the composition of the local population, income levels, employment, etc. while the decennial Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides similar data at 5-year intervals between the federal enumerations;
- (2) a Valuation of the Real Estate in the Town of Chelmsford was made by the Assessors in 1910, listing all real estate in the town, the names of the owners, and the "full and fair cash value" of the property;
- (3) the year 1910 is relatively close to the opening of World War I in 1914 and to this country's entrance into it 3 years later; and
- (4) although Dr. Waters wrote the introduction to his History in late 1916 after taking up the work in 1907 following the death of Henry S. Perham who began it in 1904, much of the narrative ends rather indefinitely during the years 1912-1915.

History of Chelmsford 1910-1970



Dr. Wilson Waters and Henry S. Perham

If our bridge over the 60-year period is to be built on a firm foundation, however, it is necessary to begin with something more than the description of Chelmsford in 1910 made possible by the use of these statistical sources. Except for his listing of key town officials (Selectman, Moderator, Town Clerk, Treasurer and Representative) in the Civil List (p.754-768) and occasional incidental references to towns officials, Dr. Waters has little to say specifically about the framework of town government and the development and functioning of the various individuals and agencies which carried on the work of town. What may seem to some as an omission or at least a lack of due emphasis on this subject quite probably can be understood on the grounds that his interest in writing lay in other areas than the political, and that social, economic and political elements in history have not always been given the prominence that they enjoy today.

Nevertheless, what the individuals and agencies concerned with town government did or did not do and how they met or failed to meet the challenges facing them were influences upon town government and what the town became. Other factors were: how and why new positions were created to meet new situations; to what degree the influence of the State through legislation and by other means was felt; what role the people had as voters approving or disapproving official actions and granting or withholding funds; families, interested in social activities, making requests of their government and seeking to expand its services or initiate new ones. And how they voted, what they wanted and the ways they spent their leisure depended a great deal upon their individual backgrounds of education, experience, employment and nationality.

Two examples may be cited of the unusual impact made upon the town by the presence of groups differing in characteristics from those already present within it:

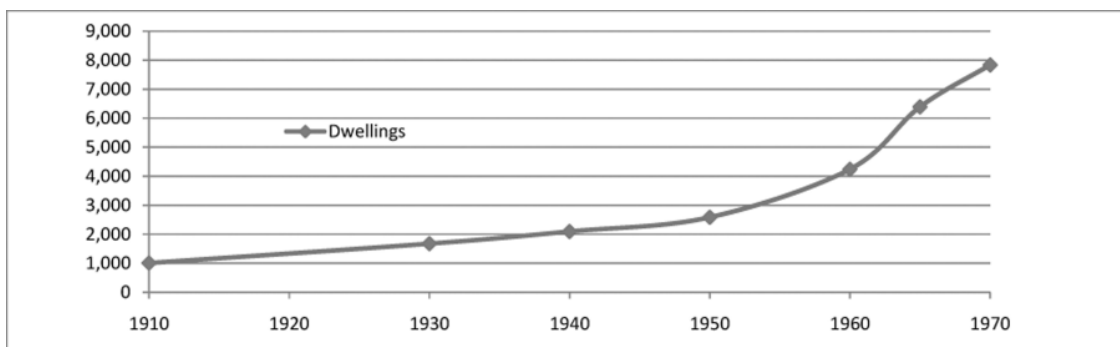
- (1) The mills in North Chelmsford, attracted by available water power, drew upon sources outside as well as inside the town for help who came bringing not only their "hands", as employees were called, but their differences of religion, nationality, education and income. To this combination of like and unlike backgrounds can be traced what was once a deep, even bitter, division between the North village and the rest of the town, now happily almost forgotten. But also from the fact that the mills were located there came establishment of the town's first water

History of Chelmsford 1910-1970

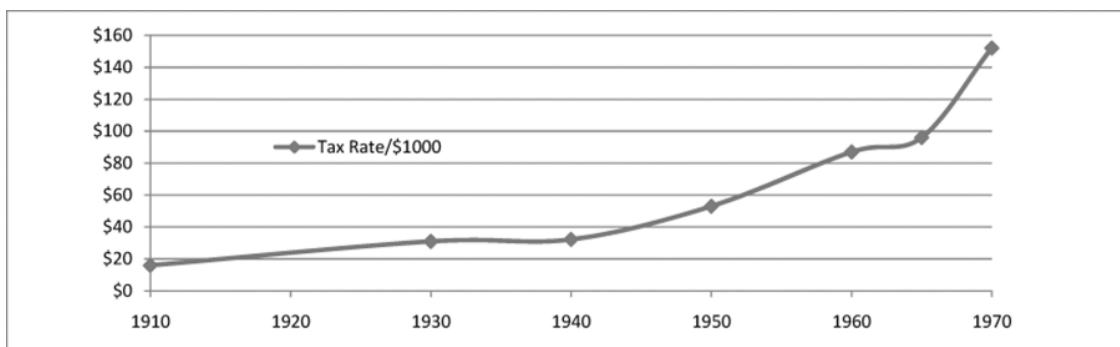
district (1907) the North Chelmsford Fire District, which provided a public water supply and more fire protections after several disastrous mill fires and helped eliminate the typhoid fever which plagued that village more than any other part of the town. From 1875 to 1917, too, the North and Center had separate high schools, and for part of that time the former provided courses considered suitable for students who would become workers and the latter offered courses which would enable its students to enter college.

- (2) The influx during post-World War II years of large numbers of new residents who were for the most part young, well-educated, widely travelled due to military service, parents of growing children, frequently of the professional or managerial classes, and with high enough income to warrant calling the community "affluent". These newcomers brought new ideas, added to the school population, organized clubs and sought more and better town-provided services. Many of their homes were built where cornfields or woods or meadows had been and their political affiliations of Independent or Democrat helped tip the balance even further away from the traditionally Republican position of the town's voters.

[The following charts] offer dramatic evidence of the contrast between the Chelmsford of 1910 and 1970:

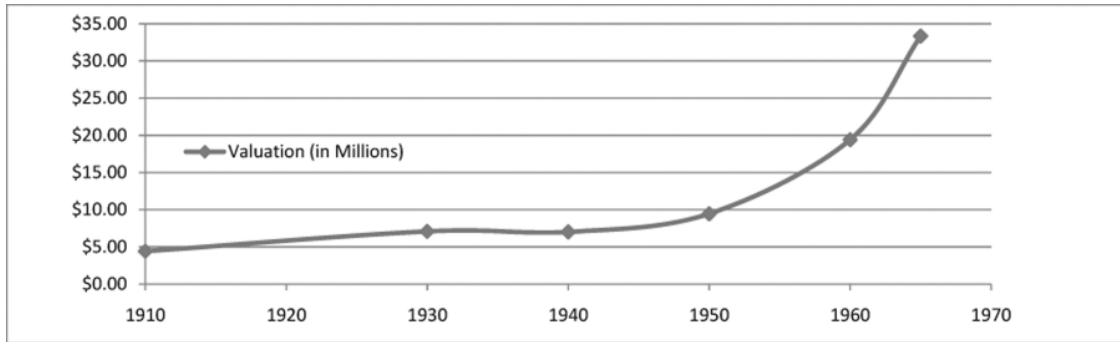


Number of dwellings in Chelmsford

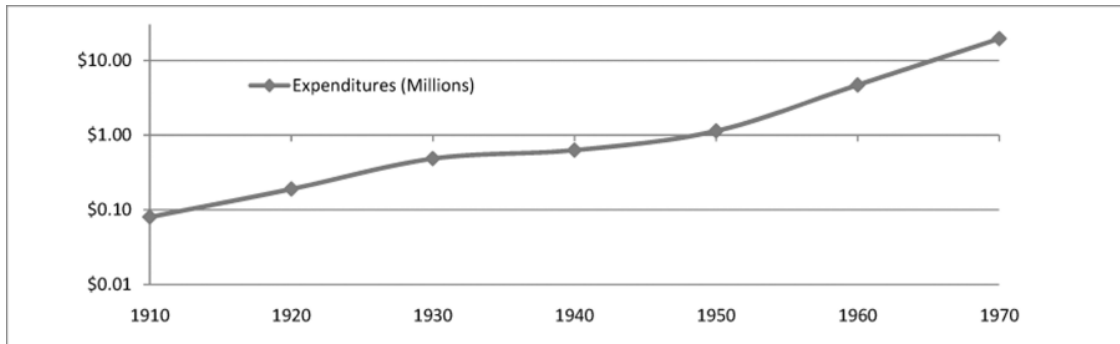


Tax Rate per \$1,000 Valuation

History of Chelmsford 1910-1970



Total Valuation (Millions)



Total Expenditures (Millions)

Each of the chapters to follow, composing Part 1 will deal with a town department and its development during the 1910-1970 period as well as its earlier origins as that may be necessary to understand the more recent past. Part 2 will be concerned with the broad social aspects of the same period; what the people were doing when they were not at town meetings or otherwise carrying on the business of the town.