

Page 601 from  
Rev. Wilson Waters'  
*History of Chelmsford,  
Massachusetts*

In 1828, "Prayers were offered" by Rev. Wilkes Allen.

As a rule, the proceedings are quietly and decorously conducted. On rare occasions, a heated controversy breaks the monotony.

In 1829, at the close of the meeting, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the riot act, and the meeting was then dismissed.

Town Meeting was commonly held in the meeting house. In 1842, the basement of the meeting house was built by the Town, and meetings were held there. Sometimes, for lack of room, the voters were obliged to go out on the Common to be polled. See "Traditions," p. 455.

In 1820, it was voted that there shall not be any Town business done hereafter in the meeting house in the middle of the Town by candle light.

In 1852, it was voted to build a Town House in North Chelmsford, "not to exceed the cost of the present town house." The next year the thanks of the Town were tendered to Hon. Benj. Adams and Thos. J. Adams, Esq., for "their liberal, free and generous gift" of land for the building. Williams, Bird & Co. gave \$100 towards the cost of the house, which was \$1,847.66.

In 1853, the November Town Meeting and election were held at the North Village, as was also the annual March meeting the next year. The annual meetings were held alternately at the Centre and North villages for a number of years.

In 1871, it was agreed that all intermediate or special meetings be held alternately at the Centre and North.

In 1873, the Town voted not to build a Town House at West Chelmsford, and hold a portion of the Town Meetings there. Also not to build a Town House in the Centre Village to cost not more than \$10,000. Similar propositions were voted down in subsequent years.

In 1879, it was voted to build a Town Hall in the Centre Village at a cost not to exceed \$7,000. The next year the sum of \$1,000 was appropriated to furnish it.

In 1881, the Moderator, Edwin H. Warren, received a vote of thanks for the very satisfactory manner in which he performed the duties of the office.

In 1885, the Town voted that all future Town Meetings for Town business should be held in the Town Hall at the Centre of the Town.

In 1887, the Town was divided into three voting precincts. There are now four.

1894. In Town Meeting the voters expressed their cordial recognition of the strict integrity, conscientious fidelity and unfailing courtesy which have characterized the long term of office of Town Treasurer, E. H. Warren, with earnest wishes for his restoration to health.

In 1903, the Australian ballot was adopted.

North Chelmsford

North Chelmsford has just enjoyed the most interesting event of the season, and one long to be remembered - the opening of her remodelled town hall. The celebration took place last Friday evening, and was in every way a success. For nearly a generation the old structure has served for the civil purposes of the town, and also for most of the public gatherings of the village. It was built originally in 1853 and finished Aug. 25. The contractors at that time were Charles Swett and Seth P. Sampson for the mason work, Edmund Swett and D. Pollard for the carpenter work, of whom the only one probably living at this time is S. P. Sampson of the village, who participated largely in the present opening. It was a fine building in its day for a village of our pretensions, and, until the new town hall was built in the Centre, some eight years ago, was the best public building in the town, which includes the Centre, West, South and East, as well as North Chelmsford, but having lost her supremacy with time and change, she had greatly fallen in the estimation of the present generation. For years there had been talk about repairs, remodeling or a new building, which finally culminated a year ago last spring at town meeting in a motion put by Ziba Gay, which was heartily carried, to appropriate \$2000 for repairing the town house at North Chelmsford, and Ziba Gay and Geo. C. Moore of the North Village, Christopher Roby of West Chelmsford and P. P. Perham and Jonathan Larcom of Chelmsford Centre, were appointed a committee of five to execute the vote. After a year's delay and at the next town meeting \$1000 more was added to the \$2000 appropriation, with the same committee continued. The citizens of the village also contributed liberally. It was yet some time before a plan was settled upon. The contract was finally given to C. P. Barclay of Lowell, who sublet the plastering and tinting of the walls to D. M. Prescott of the same city. Work was commenced October 7th, and the building was completed Jan. 1, 1886. Looking at it as a whole, the change on the outside is not so striking as on the inside. The old building was raised 10 feet and the underpinning lowered one foot and a new story placed underneath. The front was cut away, and nearly 20 feet was added to it, and the old roof was extended out over the whole. The old windows remain the same in the hall proper, modern mullioned frames being placed in the new lower part and also in the front, both for the hall and gallery above, making three tiers of windows in front. There is one front main entrance, and one upon either side of the building in the rear, one leading from the street on the east side into a room to be occupied by the Spalding Light Cavalry, and the other leading into the extension on the west side of the building in the rear. As one enters the main door there is a room on the left, to be used by the selectmen, and to the right the main stairway, 6 1/2 feet wide, with ash rail and banister and Georgia pine steps. Opposite the entrance in this vestibule, which is 13 by 27 feet, are the doors into the lower or dining hall, which is 40 feet square and 10 feet 6 inches high. Here may be noted the strength of the main

hall above. Resting on strong oak posts are the great timbers, 12 x 12 inches, cased with inch pine that holds the joists of the upper floor. Beyond this hall in the rear is the armory for the cavalry; on the left a large square room, 23 x 27 feet, and the kitchen on the right, 23 x 13 feet, which room opens into a hall and stairway that leads up to the dressing room and platform of the upper hall. This dressing room above and the hall, stairway and lower rooms devoted to kitchen purposes are all outside of the main building in the new extension. This gives a platform in the main hall unencumbered, it being thus 40 feet long and 12 feet wide. This is quite an improvement. Coming up onto this platform from the dressing room and hall, we are in the main hall, which at once impresses one with the great change that has been made. The new hall is 76 feet long by 40 feet wide and 18 feet high, with a gallery on the front end extending into the hall 13 feet, just as it was in the original building. A new and polished birch floor has been laid. At the other and front end of the hall, looking from the platform are the double doors in the middle leading into the upper vestibule, a door on the right opening into the cloak or reception room, 13 x 13 feet, on the left a door connected with a passage and stairway in the front of the building leading up into the gallery. The side walls of the hall are tinted a salmon color, with a deep border at the top of dark maroon. The hall is wainscotted, as is also the hall below. The rooms and all the stairways are painted, with windows and doors, a dark sage green in the main hall, while all the rest is in drab particolored.

There was a very large gathering at the hall at the opening of the programme for the evening, many being present from Lowell, Middlesex, Chelmsford Centre, West Chelmsford, Westford, Tyngsborough, Dunstable, etc., etc. Promptly at 7.30 Chas. Flint, chairman of the committee of arrangement, called the assembly to order and announced that the first exercise was a bountiful repast, to be served in the lower hall at once. The hint was sufficient, and the tables were soon filled, 200 sitting down to the first table. This exercise was repeated by others during the whole evening, and it was estimated that 450 enjoyed this part of the entertainment, which well sustained the reputation of our village ladies in this particular. At 8 o'clock the exercise of the upper hall, under the direction of E. H. Shaw, began with some stirring selections from the North Chelmsford brass band, 22 pieces, followed by a quartette by A. E. & Miss Blanche Nichols of Lowell, [Alb?]ert Bearce of North Chelmsford, and Mrs. Emma Spaulding of West Chelmsford; and duet by Mr. and Miss Nichols; two songs by Miss Lulu Smith; with guitar accompaniments by Frank Brooks, both of Lowell; two recitations by Prof. C. B. Plummer; a song by Miss Emma Spaulding, with cornet obligato by Clarence Spaulding. At 10 o'clock the floor was cleared for dancing, the Queen's orchestra of seven pieces furnishing the music.

The decorations of the upper and lower hall should not be omitted. They were furnished and put up by S. M. Patterson of Lowell. The sides of both halls were festooned with red, white and blue bunting, and in the main hall from the central chandelier long streamers of red, white and blue, spangled with stars, stretched in all directions to the walls, forming a beautiful canopy. Back of the platform were tastefully clustered several American flags, and in the panel between the windows was a United States shield set upon half furled flags. About the gallery also were draped lace curtains looped with small United States shields, and the windows were curtained with flags and other drapery. The whole affair was a great success, doing credit to the very efficient committee, and the building certainly speaks well for the judgment, wisdom and untiring labor of the building committee, who served without a cent's worth of extra expense to the town. The net proceeds of the opening were over \$200, which go towards furnishing the hall.



North Chelmsford School and Town Hall, NORTH CHELMSFORD, Mass.





Cast of play performed by the Congregational Church  
in North Chelmsford in the North Chelmsford Town Hall  
pictured on the stage in the hall about 1922 ±.  
J. Leslie Merrill is at the far right in hte back row.  
[George L. Merrill has the original picture.]

January, 1998



## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Office of the Secretary of State  
Michael Joseph Connolly, Secretary

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
Valerie A. Talmage  
*Executive Director*  
*State Historic Preservation Officer*

October 6, 1987

Dorothy Altman  
Executive Office of Communities and Development  
Bureau of Housing  
100 Cambridge St. Room 1404  
Boston, MA 02202

RE: Old Town Hall, North Chelmsford, MA

Dear Ms. Altman:

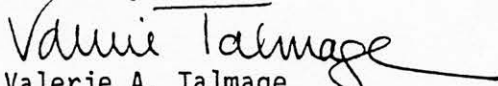
Thank you for the opportunity for Massachusetts Historical Commission staff to meet with the EOOD staff, the Chelmsford Housing Authority and MGIA Architects to review the above referenced project. As you know, the Town Hall is a contributing element to the North Chelmsford Historical District which is in the process of being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The building is significant for its role as a town meeting hall for over 100 years and for its important historic architectural qualities.

The original proposal for the site included removing a substantial portion of the Town Hall in order to reduce the square footage. However, as a result of the meeting held October 1, 1987, it is understood that EOOD and the Chelmsford Housing Authority will not pursue the housing project for this site. As the future of the Old Town Hall is unknown at this time, MHC encourages the Town of Chelmsford to consider a re-use scheme which would preserve the historic building's character defining features. MHC requests the opportunity to consult with the Town of Chelmsford on future development proposals for the site, and to review future project plans and specifications.

These comments are offered to assist in compliance with M.G.L. Ch.9, as 26-27c as amended by Ch. 152 of the Acts of 1983 (950 CMR 71.00).

If you have any questions, please contact Maureen Cavanaugh at this office.

Sincerely,

  
Valerie A. Talmage  
Executive Director  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

cc: Chelmsford Housing Authority  
Chelmsford Historical Commission

By ELEANOR PARKHURST

bers were interested in acquiring the



**FORGOTTEN PAST:** The old North Town Hall seems to have been forgotten. It sits across from the North Chelmsford Fire Station needing a coat of paint, new windows and other repairs. (Photo by Sue Ellen Woodcock)

# North Town Hall has been neglected

Since 1981 the North Town Hall's story has been one of failed projects, public and official disinterest, and gradual structural deterioration, yet it is one of the most significant of the town's old buildings.

In the more distant past, however, the hall, built in 1853, served Chelmsford well in many ways. It has been a community center, a polling place for Precinct 2 (1921-1965), the scene of North Chelmsford High School graduations until 1917 when the North and Center high schools were merged with the opening of Chelmsford High School in that year, it housed the offices of the school administration from 1967 to 1981 but left as a cost-saving measure to go to the Parker School. Annual and Special Town Meetings were held there, 1853-1885, and countless public events like the plays, movies, minstrel shows and Scout troop meetings recalled by an old resident made the building a busy place. After 1981, however, there was a downturn in its fortunes. An attempt to lease it did not succeed and it became a storage place for the Recreation Commission, a theater group and other organizations.

In January, 1986, the selectmen offered the building to the Chelmsford Housing Authority for family housing and four units were planned but the Authority was forced to return the building as "unsuitable for housing purposes" according to state standards and therefore ineligible for state grants. The deed given to the Authority was returned to the selectmen in 1988 after it had been registered in that year.

Late in 1989 a local resident and member of a Masonic Lodge in Lowell reported to the selectmen that he and other Chelmsford mem-

bers were interested in acquiring the hall for a lodge meeting place and other lodge activities. They would restore the building at their own expense (estimated at some \$50,000) and when not in use otherwise, the hall would be available for public use. They would be joined in the project by the local Knights of Columbus who were meeting with the Westford chapter because of lack of suitable space in town. Their suggestion had come during one of the joint K of C - Masons meetings held each year. The Masons would prefer to buy the building rather than take a 10-year lease since they would have a large financial stake in it that they would not like to lose. The selectmen seemed favorably inclined toward the project but felt that any interested individual or organization should have an opportunity to express interest in the building; they felt that bids should be obtained. Accordingly, in July, 1990, a Special Town Meeting empowered them to call for sealed bids as state law required.

To date, little or no action has been taken. Many events, large and small, have combined to make this relatively unimportant project given any priority a new charter has been adopted, a new Town Manager has been named, the recession has lingered and fiscal problems have increased. Perhaps it was thought that a higher price could be obtained for the North Town Hall if economic improvement could be awaited. At the same time, nevertheless, the recession has affected those who pledged financial support, the long delay between the initial discussions and the present has dampened enthusiasm, and as for the building itself, already-rotted window sills have fallen prey to the weather and

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## North Town Hall...

Continued from page 6

other parts of the building are being affected. One resident has said that in his opinion, it is in "deplorable" condition. And, of course, the value of the building as a source of revenue to the town is steadily being reduced.

Impressive as the hall's long record of community service has been, it would not be complete without making clear two other facts. It was the first town hall built here as an independent structure standing by itself. The Town Hall in Chelmsford Center at that period, an integral part of the church's foundation, later becoming its basement or vestry. In every other way the Town Hall was completely separate from anything connected with the church although until the separation of

church and town (1830) church and town meetings co-existed in the single space of "the meeting house." In 1879 the present Center Town Hall was built and became independent in every sense.

Perhaps most important of all, the North Town Hall was a product of an agreement reached in 1852 by groups from the North and Center sections of town in which the North residents agreed to abandon their drive to make their section a separate village on condition that a town hall be built there and that annual and special town meetings be held there in alternation with meetings at the Center.

Until 1885, when by a narrow margin, the town meeting voted that all future town business should be done at the Center Town Hall, the

pattern was followed. The pattern was repeated later by alternating high school graduations and receptions at the two halls already mentioned.

It is nothing less than disgraceful for a building with such significance for the town to be left to fall into ruin. The long-delayed bidding process should be begun. The interested parties of the original proposal should regroup and move forward but perhaps with less extensive renovation plans. Help from Nashoba Tech students should be investigated, donations of materials might be invited and while so many people are jobless, volunteer labor could be encouraged. Every avenue should be explored before the wrecking ball is called in; surely the hall deserves a better future than this.



# Will the North Town Hall be sold?

By AURELIA FALK

The cost of maintaining North Town Hall, a building the town no longer uses, has prompted Selectmen to consider putting it up for sale.

They were slated to vote on the issue at their Monday night meeting before the annual Town Meeting, but tabled it when they ran out of time. They are expected to take action on the sale tonight before Town Meeting reconvenes.

The historic Princeton Street building has been unused by the town since 1981 when school administration offices were relocated to the Parker School.

The expense of upkeep, according to Board of Selectmen Chairman William Logan, is why the town is seriously considering selling the building. He said the building is currently

being used as storage space by several town organizations.

"The upkeep of heat and electricity is just costing the town money," he said. "I think we should sell it (the building) and take those monies and use them elsewhere."

He said Town Manager Bernard Lynch recommended to the board that they put the building out to bid. That's what they will be voting on Thursday night.

Lynch said the current valuation of the property is \$438,000 for the building and \$153,700 for the land for a total valuation of \$591,800. In 1988 the value of the property was \$580,000 and it is unclear exactly why the valuation went up in a time when real estate values are decreasing.

Town Meeting voted to give selectmen permission two years ago to dispose of the property. If the vote is

taken tonight they plan on putting it out for bids although they don't expect the property will draw its full valuation.

The reason why the town has two town halls dates back to the 1850s when a faction formed in North Chelmsford and proposed the idea of North Chelmsford being incorporated as a separate town, according to Historic Commission member Jane Drury.

"North Chelmsford was a mill town with much more of a closeness to Lowell," Drury said. "It was almost as if it was a separate town because everything people needed was right there. There were schools, work, a post office, people had no reason to come to Chelmsford Center."

She said the condition of the roads, especially in the spring with mud,

Continued on page 9

THURSDAY, April 30, 1992

NEWSWEEKLY

## Board to sell North Town Hall

Continued from page 4

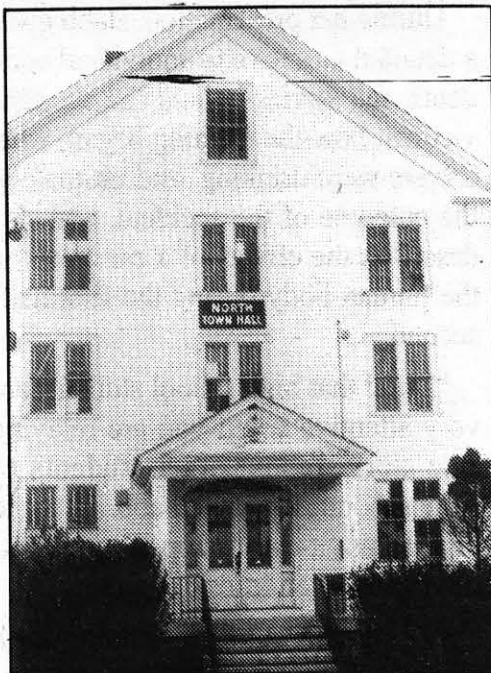
made it difficult for people to travel to Chelmsford Center for elections and Town Meeting.

Drury said that in 1851, Charles Blood, a manufacturer in North Chelmsford, petitioned for the division of the town to the state legislature. But there was also a local group which opposed the split.

"After several meetings between the groups, it was agreed upon that a town hall would be constructed in North Chelmsford," she said.

The town appropriated the money, \$1,847, for its construction in November 1852 and it officially opened on November 14, 1853 at a Town Meeting. The new building was about half its present day size.

According to Drury, it was agreed upon by the two groups that regular spring and fall elections, annual and



**TOO MUCH TO KEEP:** Selectmen are considering the North Town Hall.

special Town Meetings and other town government meetings would be

held alternately at the North Town Hall and Town Hall in Chelmsford Center.

The new town hall was used for meetings and elections until 1885. Other public events took place there, too. It was a type of community center hosting movie, plays and Scout troop meetings.

From 1921 to 1965, it was a polling place for Precinct 2. It was the site of North Chelmsford graduations until 1917 when the North and Center High Schools were merged with the opening of Chelmsford High School.

Since 1981, the building has been utilized as storage space for the Recreation Commission. In 1989, the Masonic Lodge was considering to buy it for a small fee, but according to Logan, the town decided against it.

Selectmen will meet tonight at 6:45 p.m. in the Parker School cafeteria to vote on the issue.

# Chelmsford wants to sell North Town Hall

By CHRISTOPHER SCOTT  
Sun Staff 5-11-92

CHELMSFORD — The North Town Hall — which hasn't served as a town hall since 1885 — may be assessed for \$591,000, but it's likely the town won't receive more than \$150,000 for the "old decrepit property."

Less than two weeks ago, the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to authorize Town Manager Bernard Lynch to prepare bid specifications for the structure, located just south of Vinal Square.

Lynch said during an interview that the specifications are nearly complete, and later this month or in early June the building that has been used for a myriad of purposes since it was built in 1853 will be put out to bid.

By late summer or early fall, whoever submits the highest bid will become its new owner, Lynch said.

Town officials first thought of getting rid of the building — which is zoned commercial — about two years ago. Town Meeting also voiced its approval. But then the real estate market crashed, and selectmen

decided to hold off until the market improved.

"While the market is still slow, we think the conditions have improved," Lynch said. "It's hard to say how much we might get for it, but I'm hoping for at least \$100,000, maybe a little more."

According to Jane Drury, who serves as researcher for the Historical Commission, the rear portion of North Town Hall was built in November 1853 for about \$1,800.

During the next two years, taxpayers shelled out another \$3,000 to expand the building to its current size.

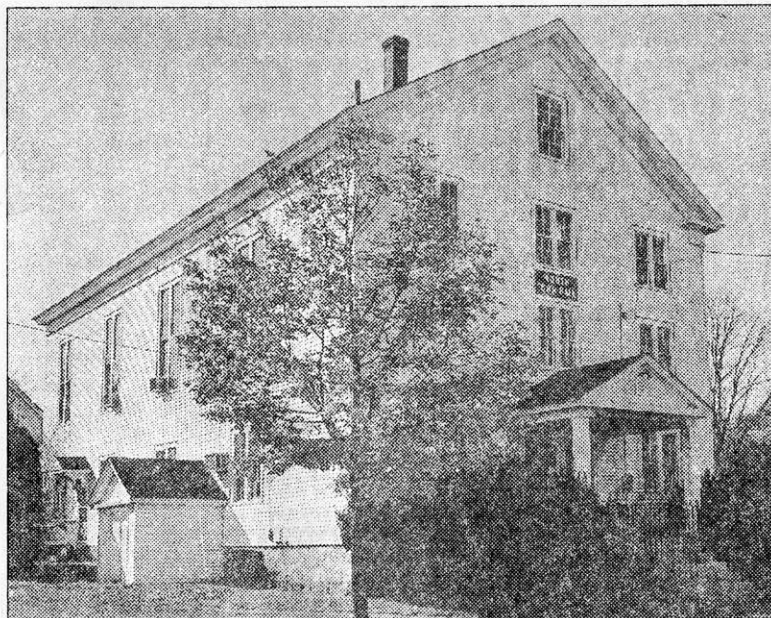
In 1885, Town Meeting voted to conduct all public business in another Town Hall that had been constructed on North Road just outside Central Square.

In later years, North Town Hall was used as a police headquarters, American Legion hall, polling place, School Department Administration offices and a children's theater.

Most recently, it was used as a storage bin for recreational equipment.

Selectmen, meanwhile, say the sooner the town can get rid of the property, the better.

"It's an old, decrepit proper-



Town looking to get about \$100,000 for North Town Hall.

ty, but I'm sure it has some value," said Selectman Peter Lawlor.

But whatever value it has, it will be decreased because there is no accompanying parking space, Lawlor said. "It's a tough property to market."

"The building is falling apart," said Selectman Richard DeFreitas. "Pretty soon it will probably have to be condemned."

"But I don't want to see it given away," said DeFreitas. "I would also like to see its facade preserved by whomever buys it."

Ideally, Selectman Jeffrey Brem would like to see a civic group purchase the building. But Brem acknowledged it would probably be cost prohibitive for such a group because it requires so many repairs.

## Masons make pitch for North Town Hall

The Board of Selectmen are planning to put the North Town Hall out to bid again and will probably allow the Chelmsford Lodge of Masons to buy it this time.

The Princeton Street building was put out to bid several months ago. The minimum bid accepted was \$75,000 and no one bid that much. The Masons bid \$1.

Mason Ronald Wetmore told selectmen the Masons are in need of a meeting place and they would be willing to fix up the decaying building.

Currently, the town uses the old building on Princeton Street to store equipment.

"You'd have right of first refusal," Wetmore said. "We're not looking to take a building and sell it."

He said the board could put a time restraint on the building,

too. That is, if the Masons don't make certain improvements within an allotted time period, the building would go back to the town.

Town Manager Bernard Lynch said the town has several options which include maintaining the building as a town building and use it as office space, try to sell it again, make a civic or cultural center or demolish the building and sell the land.

"I think it's dilapidated, a fire hazard and a danger for people who are using the equipment there," said Board of Selectmen Chairman William Logan, "It's time for us to get off the can and do something about it."

Lynch will present the bid specifications at the next selectmen's meeting.

-By Aurelia Falk

## Chelmsford sets price for old North Town Hall

SALE/From Page 11

there this week."

Re-advertising the building with another minimum bid requirement is "ridiculous," he went on, predicting that no one will express any interest "and we'll be back here in 30 days."

During the board's last meeting, Logan was also the only selectman willing to sell the building to the Chelmsford Masonic Lodge for \$1. It wasn't until other selectmen and Town Manager Bernard Lynch told Logan that such a move may have broken state bidding laws that he backed down.

Selectman Richard DeFreitas — who initially preferred the minimum asking price to be \$100,000 — moved last night to lower the \$75,000 figure to \$10,000.

But Selectman Peter Lawlor disagreed and moved successfully to hike the amount to \$50,000.

"I don't want to invite the ground robbers," said Lawlor. "I'm not interested in giving this building away for a lark."

According to the assessor's department, the building is assessed for about \$440,000, while the land it occupies has an assessed value of \$153,000.

The building has been vacant since 1981, when the School Department — which had been using it for its central administration office — moved out.

Since then, it's been used mainly for storage, mostly by the Recreation Commission.

Lynch suggested last night that perhaps that board should authorize a feasibility study on the building.

## Chelmsford tries again to sell North Town Hall

By CHRISTOPHER SCOTT  
Sun Staff 12-8-92

CHELMSFORD — For selectmen Chairman William Logan, the town can't get rid of the old North Town Hall fast enough.

### MORE NEWS OF CHELMSFORD/12-13

For Logan's four counterparts, there's no rush.

The board voted 4-1 last night to launch a new round of advertising for the sale of the wooden structure, stipulating that anyone willing to purchase it must pay at least \$50,000. Preference will be given to proposals to renovate the building over those to tear it

down to build a new structure on the site.

For several months earlier this year, the Princeton Street building was advertised with a minimum asking price of \$75,000. No one, however, expressed any interest.

With conviction, Logan agreed that the building should be re-advertised, but with no minimum asking price.

"We've been debating this for three or four years now," said Logan. "Let's get off the stick, guys."

Logan says the building is a safety hazard. "When's the last time a town safety inspector has gone up there?"

He said to Lynch: "Have you gone up there? I'm going up

Please see SALE/13

**"Tanglewood Farm"**

**BRADFORD O. EMERSON**

30 LANTERN LANE

CHELMSFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01824

FOR YOUR INFORMATION.

Dec. 12, 1992

Dear Peter,

After bending your ear Thursday evening, I would like to make a couple of observations which I think you might consider.

Your concern that the Masons is an all male organization is true, but does that that issue overshadow the merits of the intended goal?

I believe you to be a good Catholic. Have you considered leaving the church because of certain tenets that you may not believe in? Have you never belonged to any organization that is all male?

Peter - at no expense to the town, the Masons would restore an abandoned building, to a vibrant community facility. The idea has met with the unanimous approval of a town meeting: a unanimous vote of a Board of Selectmen (one abstention - me) and a meeting with neighbors that had no objections.

Other organizations, civic and fraternal, have expresses interest in a shared use.

We need possession (title) before serious money can be raised. We do have sufficient funds pledged to guarantee a successful project. Your support is needed and will be greatly appreciated.

Yours Truly,

  
Brad Emerson

## ANN HALL

## North West Notebook

## Need a town hall? \$50,000'll buy one

If you're in the market for some real estate, here's a real bargain in North Chelmsford that might spark your interest.

For just \$50,000 you can have a stately 120-year-old structure packed with history and close to stores and town facilities.

It has plenty of space - 6,028 square feet on each of its three floors, to be exact. And the top floor has an added feature that you probably won't find in any suburban ranch or cape - an auditorium.

This real estate bargain isn't a home, it's the old North Chelmsford Town Hall. The structure was on the market for several months last year at \$75,000, but only a couple of groups expressed an interest and neither one was willing to pay that much. Last month town officials dropped the price to \$50,000.

The old town hall was built in the early 1870s and used for 40 or 50 years as one of two town halls in Chelmsford, according to Chelmsford town manager Bernie Lynch. The other was located in Chelmsford center.

The reason for two town halls has to do with the way the town developed, Lynch said. North Chelmsford became an industrial area with large mills, while Chelmsford center remained agricultural. In deference to the town's split personality, town meeting alternated between the two town halls.

After the town offices moved to Chelmsford center, the North Chelmsford hall housed the school administration offices and later was used for storage, Lynch said. Since it was no longer needed for storage and the town could find no municipal use for the building, officials last year decided to put the venerable town hall on the block.

Lynch said townspeople consider the building historic, although it is not listed on the national or state historic registers.

It does have a few drawbacks; in fact, you could call it a handyman's special. Lynch speculated that the plumbing, electrical and heating systems probably have to be replaced. Besides that, he's not sure what the wood looks like under its vinyl siding, and it's also on a small parcel of land with no on-site parking.

People have talked about office or residential uses for the building, Lynch said. Purchase preference will be given to groups that want to renovate the building, rather than tear it down to build something else.

The local Masonic Temple offered the town \$1 for the old town hall, but Lynch said most of the se-



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / TOM LANDERS

### Stately town hall's available at a reduced rate.

lectmen feel the building is worth more. He doesn't want to make the mistake that officials in some other area towns made in the early 1980s when they sold off town buildings and now face the prospect of building new schools or school additions.

"If it means holding on until the real estate market turns around or a municipal use is found for it, then that's what we'll do," Lynch said. "[The decision] should benefit all the townspeople, whether that means municipal use or getting top dollar for other town services."

# Mix-up brings out potential buyers

1-28-93,  
For Chelmsford's North Town Hall

By CHRISTOPHER SCOTT  
Sun Staff

CHELMSFORD — The new round of advertising for the sale of the North Town Hall hasn't begun yet, but already about 20 people from throughout the region have expressed interest in buying the building.

How did they find out the building was for sale?

Town Manager Bernard Lynch thanks a Boston newspaper, which several weeks ago published an article on the dilapidated North Town Hall. But the accompanying photograph showed the fully renovated Chelmsford Town Hall in Central Square — which isn't for sale. Town business is conducted in the Town Offices, on Billerica Road.

"People saw the picture in (*The Boston Globe*) and figured

they'd be getting a nice-looking building dirt cheap," said Lynch. "Well, we told them that the wrong picture ran with the story and about the building that *is* for sale. About 20 people still expressed some interest."

The North Town Hall has its share of broken windows, peeling paint, and rickety woodwork. The Chelmsford Town Hall has been fully renovated and occupies a spot on the National Register of Historic Places. The town leases space inside the building to various business interests.

Late last year, the Board of Selectmen voted 4-1 to launch a new round of advertising for the sale of the North Town Hall, stipulating that anyone willing to purchase it must pay at least \$50,000.

For several months earlier  
Please see **BUILDING/11**

## Photo mix-up piques interest in Chelmsford building

**BUILDING/**From Page 9

last year, the Princeton Street building was advertised with a minimum asking price of \$75,000. No one, however, expressed any interest, Lynch said.

Lynch said he hopes to begin the second-round of advertising in about a week. The advertising period will last for about a month. Preference will be given to proposals to renovate the building over those to tear it down.

Those who expressed interest

mentioned various uses for the building, including office space, housing, and use by non-profit groups, Lynch said.

In a related issue, earlier this week the Chelmsford Masonic Association informed selectmen and Lynch the association is no longer interested in buying the building. For at least five years, the association has expressed serious interest in purchasing the North Town Hall.

Late last year, the association said it would pay \$1 for the structure, but retain its historical architectural style. Select-

men said no thanks.

"The Masons sort of felt that no one was listening or cared anymore," said Bradford Emerson, an association member.

The association's decision disappointed Selectmen Chairman William Logan, who unsuccessfully urged his counterparts last year to sell the building to the Masons for \$1.

"I'm disappointed because the Masons would have preserved the historic architecture of the building," said Logan.

Said Lynch: "I'm sorry the

Masons aren't interested in the building anymore, but I never thought that purchasing the building for \$1 was appropriate.

"That building is a town asset that benefits 32,000 people," Lynch said. "The best thing is for that building to be purchased, rehabilitated and paying taxes."

According to the assessor's department, the building is assessed for about \$400,000, while the land it occupies has an assessed value of \$153,000.

The building has been vacant since 1981,

# Sorting out Chelmsford's town hall confusion

1-24-93

Imagine Bernie Lynch's surprise when he opened his Boston Globe on Sunday, Jan. 10, and learned the Chelmsford Town Hall was for sale. Lynch, the town manager of Chelmsford, knew that the town was trying to dump - er, sell - the old North Town Hall, but there, as big as life, was a photo of Chelmsford Town Hall, a different building and one that, unlike the building that is really for sale, has been lovingly renovated and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The photo caption read, "Stately town hall's available at a reduced rate." The accompanying story correctly identified North Hall as the building for sale, but the photo was all wrong.

The next day, Lynch was maintaining a sense of humor about the mix-up. "The phone's been ringing off the hook," he said, laughing. People - mostly out-of-towners - were inquiring about this wonderful-looking building the town was letting go for rock-bottom dollar.

"There's a little problem," Lynch would tell the callers. "The building for sale is not the one in the picture." To his surprise, most callers said they would visit anyway and take a look at the building really for sale. "There's been a high level of interest," he said, somewhat amazed. Asked if the Globe would get a commission on the sale, Lynch demurred.

Now imagine Tom Landers' surprise when the Globe photo editor told him he got the wrong building. For Landers, who has been taking pictures for the Globe for 27 years, snapping the wrong subject is unheard of.

"I was sent to Chelmsford to take a picture of old town hall," he said. "I got to Chelmsford Center, found a building that was old, that looked like a town hall, and that had a sign in front that said, 'Old Town Hall.' It was pretty clear to me I had the right place. I took a quick picture and left. I wasn't even suspicious that it might be the wrong building."

Ah, but then Landers had not bargained for Chelmsford's habit of giving the same name to several buildings, a quirk that is likely echoed in many New England towns, where the natives just *know* which building you are talking about, and outsiders beware.

Old Chelmsford Town Hall - the one that is not for sale - is in Chelmsford Center and served as the home for town offices for nearly a century through 1981. Old North Town Hall - the one that is for sale - served as a sort of branch town hall for North Chelmsford (which, yes, is a part of Chelmsford) until earlier this century, then became home to the school administration offices. It has been used for storage since 1981.

So where are the town offices now? That's easy. They moved about 11 years ago to the old Chelmsford High School. Well, not really the old Chelmsford High School, but the old, old Chelmsford High School, built in 1917, which served as the high school until a new one was built in 1958. Then the older building became an elementary school and was referred to as the old high school.

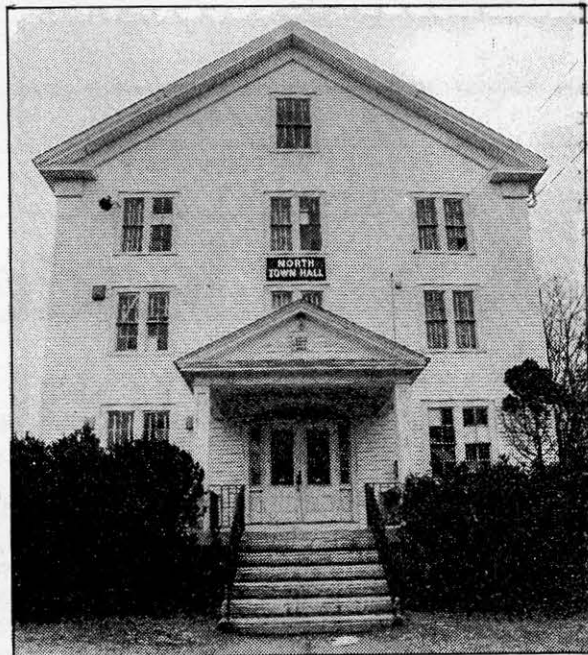
That is, until 1974, when another new high school was built and the high school became McCarthy Junior High School - and was referred to as the old high school. At that point, the old high school got downgraded (or upgraded, depending on your point of view) to the old, old high school. If you don't have a headache yet, continue.

While we are on the subject, you might be wondering where the school offices moved when they left the Old North Town Hall. They moved into a wing of the Parker Elementary School, which is, of course the old Parker Junior High.

If you grew up in Chelmsford, people can tell how old you are by which high school or junior high you attended. And if you talk about the old high school, you darn well better know which old high school you are talking about, just like you better know which old town hall you are talking about.

Bernie Lynch acknowledges people get confused about the various town halls all the time. When out-of-towners are coming to a meeting, he will put up a sign in the door at old Town Hall directing them to the right building in case they go there instead.

And things are going to get worse. Town officials are bowing to a request by town historians to put a plaque



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / TOM HERDE

**THE RIGHT ONE - The Old Town Hall in North Chelmsford is for sale.**



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / TOM LANDERS

**THE WRONG ONE - The Old Town Hall in Chelmsford Center is not for sale.**

on the old Town Hall building that says, simply, "Chelmsford Town Hall." If you are not from Chelmsford and do not know that the town offices are not in Chelmsford Town Hall anymore, that is your problem, I guess. Everyone knows that you can find the town clerk, the building inspector and the assessors' office in the Town Office building. (You know - the old, old high school.)

Tom Landers says he is usually careful to get a street address when going on a photo assignment to avoid just the kind of mix-up that occurred with the Chelmsford Town Hall picture. "When people try to give you directions instead of an address, they always say, 'You can't miss it,'" said Landers. "They'll tell you it's the building next to the fire station and the church, but then you get into town and there are three fire stations, all with churches next to them."

So, Tom, who's gonna trek back to Chelmsford to take the picture of the right building to run with the correction? "Well," said a laughing Landers, "I am. The photo editor said to me, 'At least you know which is the wrong building.'"

He still wasn't exactly sure where the correct building was, so I helped him out. "You can't miss it. It's right next to the fire station . . ."

*Christine McKenna is free-lance writer in Chelmsford.*

# Masons pull out of Town Hall talks

By AURELIA FALK  
Newsweekly Staff

CHELMSFORD - After five years of negotiating to purchase the North Town hall, the Chelmsford Masonic Association notified selectmen last week they are no longer interested in the building.

"We are disappointed that five years of anticipation, planning and public endorsement have failed to gain the support of town

officials," the letter stated. "Effective immediately, any previous offer, financial, written, or implied, is hereby withdrawn."

The Masons wanted to purchase the historic Vinal Square building currently used to store town equipment for a dollar.

The building was initially put out to bid last spring with a minimum bid of \$75,000. No bidder met the specifications. selectmen

recently requested bids again, this time with a minimum of \$50,000.

Selectmen Chairman William Logan said the town has received a few verbal bids from businesses who toured the building last week.

"They don't count until they're in writing," he said.

He added the town hopes to award the highest qualified bidder by the end of February.

1-28-93



ELEANOR PARKHURST  
51 ACTON ROAD  
CHELMSFORD, MASS. 01824

January 28, 1993.

Board of Selectmen  
Chelmsford, Massachusetts.

Dear Members:

I hope that you will agree with me that the North Town Hall is worth saving for public and/or private use whoever the new owner may be. I enclose a column from the March 5, 1992 Newseekly reviewing the many useful functions this hisoric hall has performed since it was built almost 150 years ago in 1853.

It is fully understandable that the town hopes t o gain financially from the sale of the building yet , while waiting for the real estate market to improve, the building has continued t o deteriorate and so decrease in sale value. Presently it is grossly over-valued ; its value will probably be substantially reduced in the next re-valuation process to a more realistic figure.

Parking is very limited; the zoning does not permit commercial use, and the State will not allow it to be used for housing because of its h istoric significance. The estimated cost of restoration is \$100,000 which would add to an owner's costs greatly; id demolished, perhaps costing \$20,000, and a new build- be put up on the site, the cost to a new owner would be sen greater.

Once restored, with a new kitchen, new plumbing and wiring, new widnows and a refurbished int

eriot and stage, the hall could become a center of community activity as one interested group has emphasized. This group would be joined in using the a ll by the

Knights of Columbus; when the building is not otherwise used, it

would be available ffor all other groups. The Masonic order, as you are aware,

includes the Order of the Eastern

Star for women, the Order of the Rainbow for younger women and the Order of DeMolay for y ounger me n.

With such a stable core, and the association of the K. of C., the hall would be well cared for and well protected; it would draw on the community groups as they might wish to come in for their activities.

The second round of bids will be called in February, I have learned; I hope that as you make your decision on these bids, it will be in your judgment for the best interests of the town in the long run. Please consider all the factors involved, free of personal or other cosiderations. I look forward to that decision and to a rejuvenated building which can continue its remarkable record of service to the town.

Sincerely,

2-4-93

## Uneasy fate for town hall

The selectmen's seemingly endless struggle to sell North Town Hall and the Masons' decision to abandon their effort to acquire it for \$1 illustrate just how difficult it is to save an historic structure in the absence of a wide consensus among town officials and citizens.

In light of this lack of consensus, selectmen don't have much choice but to do what Town Meeting directed them to: sell the vacant structure and put the cash towards other capital improvement projects.

It's a sad footnote unbefitting a hall that has served the town so proudly, but there appears to be little hope for a new chapter of community service for the structure.

The Masons' had the best idea so far for the building, promising to renovate it

and rent space to community groups. But they failed to generate the political and grass-roots support needed to achieve their goal. The 1990 Town Meeting directed the selectmen to sell the building. That vote effectively froze out the Masons since it left with selectmen the power to set minimum bids and the Masons aren't willing to spend more than a \$1 to buy it since they say it would cost \$40,000-50,000 to renovate it.

Maybe now that the selectmen have lowered the minimum bid to \$50,000 the Masons could re-think their position — especially if no bidders can be found at \$50,000. The building is zoned for commercial uses. Maybe the Masons could still buy the building and rent out space for private use at a profit, giving themselves a meeting hall and paying for their purchase with accrued rent.

But whether the Masons re-think their position - and it appears they've shut the door for good - selectmen ought to re-think the town's position if a buyer at \$50,000 can't be found.

The board might ask itself:

Is it worth it to Chelmsford to sell the building at any price?

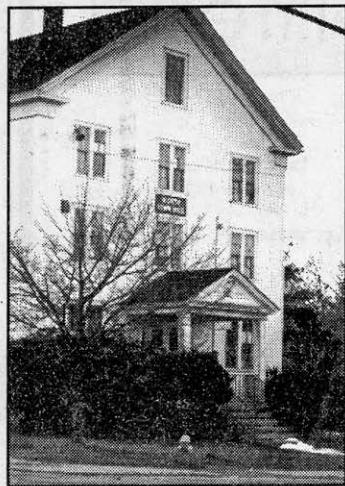
If so, why keep shutting out nonprofit buyers by setting such high minimum bids? Obviously the building isn't worth anything near its assessed value of \$400,000.

Is there a great enough need for space among non-profit groups in the town to justify giving them the chance to start a fund-raising campaign to save the building as a municipally run community center?

But once those questions are answered, citizens who profess to have a real concern for the hall still have to seize the opportunity if the current round of bids fails.

If no buyers come forward, the selectmen should stop nickel and diming and start developing ways to re-incorporate the building into the community while saving its architectural splendor.

The building's time has come and it would be a pity if another chance to save North Town Hall were swallowed up into history without leaving a trace of the honor of its past



North Town Hall



# A tale of two town halls

By ELEANOR PARKHURST  
Newsweekly Columnist

A comparison between Liberty Hall in South Chelmsford, a privately financed and operated hall, with the publicly owned town hall in North Chelmsford gives insight into their services to the community and their prospects for the future.

Historically speaking, town halls (or town houses) were first

known as places for all kinds of public assembly. That included social and governmental meetings. Much later they provided space for town offices.

In 1830, the First Congregational Society, now the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, was no longer supported by the town. It was supported by its own members. Thus, the First Congregational Society meeting house —

located in the center of town and which had been literally a place for all meetings, religious and secular — became a place devoted only to religious affairs by 1830.

Town Halls, however, were designed for all other meetings. If such a public meeting place was not provided by the town, private enterprise took over, as it did in

See TOWN HALLS on next page

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1993

NEWSWEEKLY

PAGE 7

## The separate realities of two Chelmsford town halls

Continued from previous page  
the case of Liberty Hall in South Chelmsford.

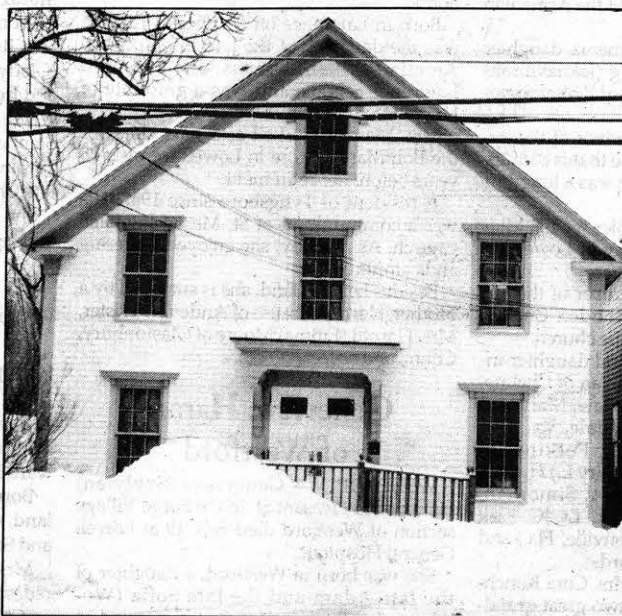
On Feb. 13, 1842, the "all-purpose" First Congregational Society meeting house was destroyed by fire. It was built in 1792. The town offered to reconstruct the basement out of its own funds with the proviso that it would remain completely separate from the rebuilt church and that it would be used for any and all public functions from town meetings to social events.

Agreement was reached and the new structure was dedicated on April 13, 1843. Thus, our first "town hall" came into being and remained in use until 1880, when the present Town Hall was built across from the church on North Road where it still stands. The Town Hall is not to be confused with the Town Offices located at 50 Billerica Road.

**North Town Hall**  
The North Chelmsford Town Hall was built in 1853, in response to public requests. It served as a town building. It was used for annual Town Meetings and other events until well after the Town Hall located in the town center, was completed. All annual and special Town Meetings were held at the Town Hall, although many social affairs were still held at the North Town Hall.

Early in the 1870s, the town voted not to build town halls in the West and South Villages as "town hall fever" apparently rose, but the people of South Chelmsford were not to be denied a hall.

In 1879, the South Chelmsford Village Improvement Association was chartered and Liberty Hall, its headquarters, was built by private subscription in the same location it occupies in the center of the S. Chelmsford village today. A total of \$860 was raised with gifts ranging from \$50 to gifts of \$21.50 and smaller. Most of the subscribers came from well-known families like Adams, Berry, Bean, Byam, Proctor, Parker, Park, Gerrish (the village storekeeper), Scoboria (owner of the land on which the hall was built), Dupee and Spaulding among them. The first officers were: President Matthias Hutchins, Treasurer Mary Lapham (who continued in this position for 27 years) and Secretary Warren



Liberty Hall, South Chelmsford

(Photos by John Lawlor)

Berry, who served in this and other positions for 29 years.

The main purpose of the Village Improvement Association was to improve the appearance and condition of the village, and to foster social activities for its members and their families. To improve the village, work days were held each Spring and trees and shrubs were planted, sidewalks built, and a good deal of general clean-up work was done. Dinner was served in the hall at noon by the ladies. Almost everything for the work and the dinner was donated, including uses of horses and dumpcarts and tools. Everyone took part in some way, young and old, and there was much talking and laughter to make the work seem lighter. More purely social events included the Christmas Party, the high point of the year; programs by local singing and acting talent as well as by a dancing bear; Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works, dances; and card parties.

Educational programs included talks on Temperance by traveling lecturers, travelogues, and much later, dancing classes and Candidates' Nights which drew standing-room-only crowds. Halloween parties were popular ways of oc-

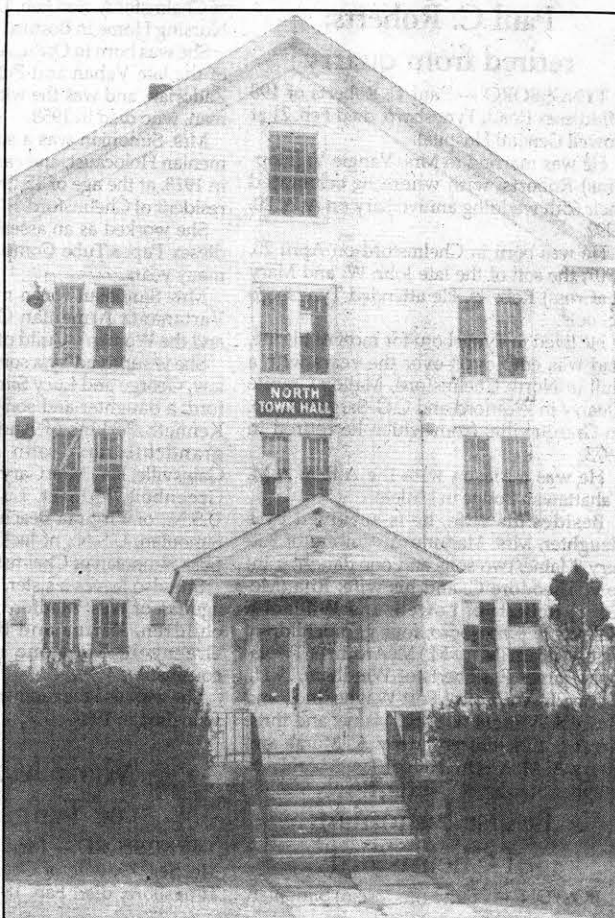
cupying the youngsters and preventing too many trucks that might go too far.

The hall was used as a polling place for years until the Byam School was built. Annual Village Fairs were held on the Common nearby, ending with a band concert, proceeds going to the Village Improvement projects. The hall provided entertainment for the World War I soldiers who wanted a break from life at Camp (now Fort Devens). 4-H Clubs met there after school as did Boy and Girl Scouts, Cubs and Brownies.

Gradually the Village Improvement Association's interest moved to improving and policing the public beach at Heart Pond, selling beach stickers and caring for the grounds. Hall sold for \$1.

Finally, as local interest in other village affairs decreased, the organization decided to sell its building to the First Baptist Church for \$1.

The church has completed restoration of the exterior of the hall and is now planning extensive interior improvements with the help of two Boy Scouts engaged in Eagle Scout projects. When all is finished, the hall will resume its old role as a communi-



North Chelmsford Town Hall

ty center, open to all groups, renewing the work of serving the needs of all comers. It will again be a vital part of village life.

Liberty Hall which is privately owned and the North Town Hall, which belongs to the town, are both well over 100 years old, both with remarkable records of service to the town.

In addition to its use by organizations for various purposes as Liberty Hall has also functioned, the North Town Hall has been used as a polling place, as a classroom when school enrollment required, and it has held the offices of the School Department. Separate futures

But the future of each one is likely to be quite different.

Liberty Hall looks forward to an

active productive future attractive in exterior appearance and soon to be brought up to date inside.

The North Town Hall, with a future apparently dependent on the interests of the highest bidder in the present second round of call for sealed bids, might once have become an important part of historic district including what would have been the largest complex of mills, employees' houses near by, sites of early industry, other significant buildings. But interest by North section residents could not be roused and the opportunity is lost to the section and the entire town.

The hall, virtually vacant for some 10 years is in a state of disrepair and possibly a candidate for demolition and oblivion.

5-11-93

# Lack of bids for building frustrates officials

By CHRISTOPHER SCOTT  
Sun Staff

CHELMSFORD — The way Selectman Peter Lawlor sees it, the town may as well "offer the North Town Hall to the Boston Bruins for a new arena."

Of course Lawlor is joking, but his statement shows the frustration that he, other selectmen, and Town Manager Bernard Lynch are feeling lately over their inability to sell the Princeton Street building, located just south of Vinal Square in North Chelmsford.

A second round of bidding for the building closed Friday at 2, and although 18 people were given tours of the two-story structure by Robert Deletesky, public buildings superintendent, no one submitted a bid.

The primary stipulation of the bidding procedure was that anyone willing to buy it must bid at least \$50,000.

For several months last year, the building — which has its share of broken windows, peeling paint, and rickety woodwork — was advertised with a minimum asking price of \$75,000. No one, however, expressed any interest.

Officials, however, were optimistic about the second round of bidding, especially after a Boston newspaper published an article on the town's effort to sell the building. But the accompanying photograph show-

## Chelmsford seeks buyer for building

BUYER/From Page 13

ed the fully renovated Chelmsford Town Hall in Central Square, which isn't for sale.

Nearly 20 people called Lynch, excited that such a prime piece of real estate was for sale dirt cheap. Lynch told the callers that *The Boston Globe* published the wrong photograph, but many of them still came to Chelmsford to view the building that was for sale.

"I was surprised and obviously I'm disappointed," said Lynch.

To learn why no one bid for the property, Lynch said he will contact each of the 18 people who expressed interest to find out why none submitted a bid.

Lynch said he'll also evaluate whether the building is properly zoned as commercial.

According to the assessor's department, the building has an assessed value of about \$400,000, while the land it occupies has an assessed value of \$153,000. The building has been vacant since 1981.

4-11-96

# Selectman Susan Gates leads the charge to preserve North Chelmsford buildings

BY BRENDA DONOGHUE  
STAFF WRITER

Many areas of North Chelmsford are rich in history, and Selectman Susan Gates wants to make sure people can appreciate the buildings, houses and parks for more than just the purpose they serve today.

If the town can afford to, Gates wants to preserve and renovate some structures in town, including North Town Hall and The Mill on Princeton Street and the bath house at Varney Park.

She also wants these structures, as well as the privately owned "Row Houses" surrounding the mill neighborhood, to be among those listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Workers at the mill lived in the "Row Houses" with their families. Putting them on the National Register of Historic Places is the least the town can do to recognize their significance, Gates said. And, if there are enough historical buildings and homes to do so, they could be placed on the Register as a district, she said.

Owners' property rights will not be affected by putting buildings or a district on the National Register, she added. Some people become concerned when they hear about the Register because they confuse it with the being in a local historic district, like Chelmsford Center, where property owners are required to seek permission from an overseeing board before altering or selling their property, Gates said. But that only happens in local districts, whereas the National Register is purely honorary, Gates said.

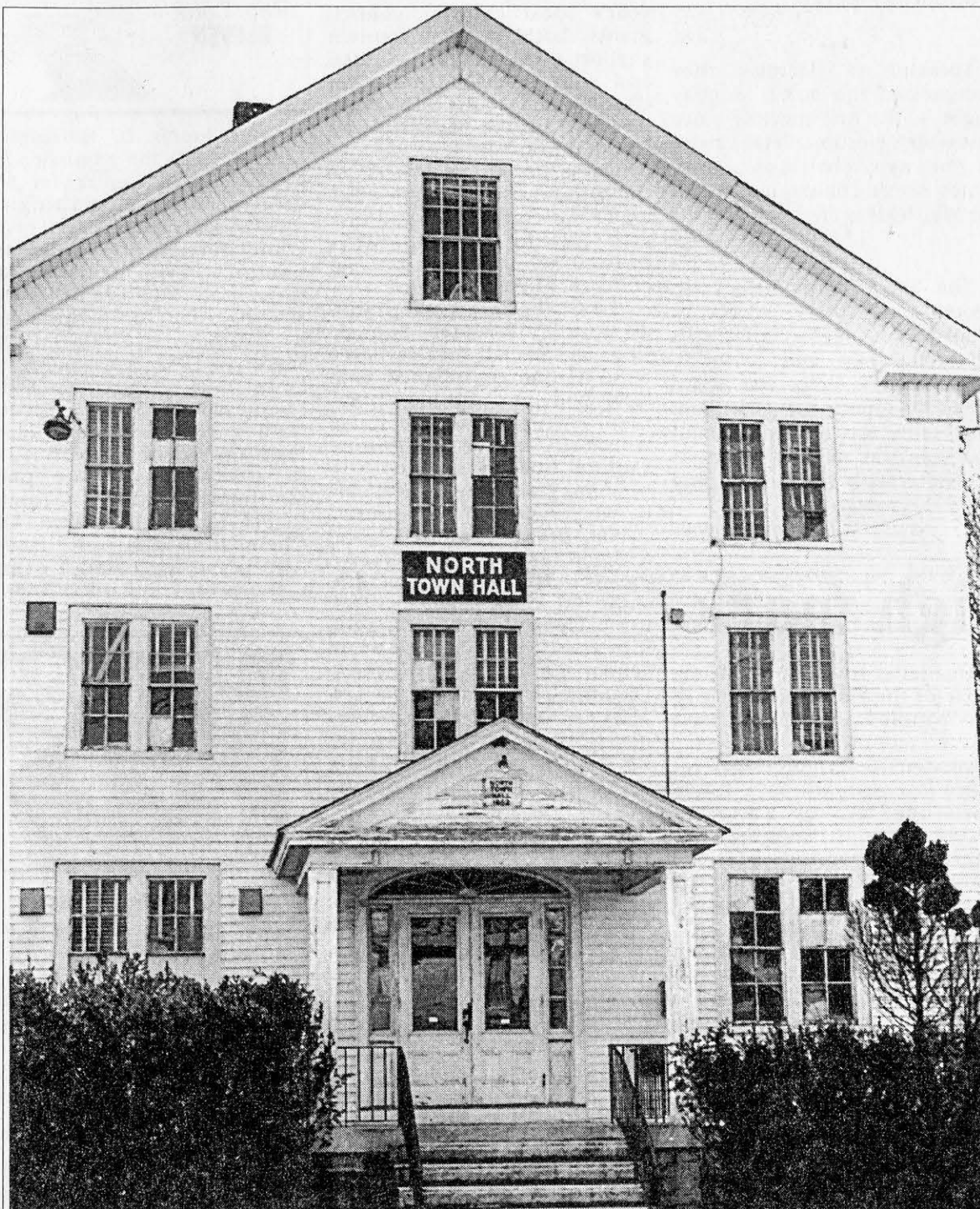
"The idea of preserving historic buildings isn't just to have a dusty old set of antique buildings in town. It's the idea of having a bond between people in the community and the town and we can make that connection by making people more aware of our history," Gates said.

Town Manager Bernard Lynch and Land-Use Coordinator Andrew Sheehan are helping Gates find ways to complete her goals.

They are also working with the Recreation Department to fix up Varney Park. While the department will concentrate on things like installing bleachers at the baseball field, rebuilding the playground and repairing the tennis courts, Gates' part of the plan focuses specifically on the bath house, which is now being neglected.

The outside of the bath house is now covered with graffiti. The inside includes a small snack area and changing rooms downstairs.

She hopes community volunteers will make this a "feel-good project" by providing the labor



FILE PHOTO

The North Town Hall on Princeton Street is among the buildings in North Chelmsford that Selectman Susan Gates would like to see listed on the National Register of Historic places.

and resources to renovate the building. This project would include adding a deck, making it handicapped accessible, installing a new counter and building up the snack bar, putting in game tables, tables and chairs and adding a service window. One fraternal organization has tentatively pledged its help, as has a local architect and Nashoba Valley Technical High School.

"One reason the kids go and vandalize it with spray paint is because it looks derelict," Gates said. "If it looks derelict and all run down, people will be like 'who cares' and let it get in worse condition. But people will take pride in the area if it looks good."

However, Gates knows other

parts of this preservation project could hit some obstacles. For one, restoring the North Town Hall could prove costly. It has been vacant for years since the Chelmsford Public School administration moved out of the building, which is in a state of disrepair. Lynch estimates restoration could cost \$500,000 to \$750,000.

The town will probably only be able to preserve it by using grants or selling it to someone who wants to restore it, Gates said. Town officials are looking into both options.

The sale of the building was authorized at a 1990 special Town Meeting, but the town didn't attract a qualified bidder when the building was put out to

bid, Lynch said.

"So now we're exploring the option of selling it to someone who wants to restore it. It's a matter of how much bang can you get for your buck by restoring it," Gates said.

Officials are also still trying to gather information necessary to qualify for the register. The Chelmsford Historical Commission has surveyed and researched some historically significant buildings in North Chelmsford, but the list is not complete.

This information must be gathered to be considered for inclusion on the National Register. Once it is completed, it could take a few more years before the sites are approved for the list,

# Chelmsford has new political odd couple

2/23/17

SAVING CHELMSFORD'S old North Town Hall has created an unlikely team — Town Manager **Bernard Lynch** and self-proclaimed North Chelmsford "Mayor" **Jeff Stallard**.

The political odd couple are forming a committee to raise

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## The Column

*Insider political news and views reported from around The Sun's circulation area.*

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By MARK ARSENAULT & PAUL SULLIVAN

money, supplies, and ideas for renovating the building.

Interested residents should contact Lynch at 250-5201 or Stallard at 251-0389.

A few residents have already asked to sign on, including: Selectman **Bill Dalton** and Town Meeting representative **George Merrill**.

"It'll keep George busy," Lynch said. "And he knows the building well, at least the exterior."

Merrill sat outside the North Town Hall 12 hours a day for at least a week gathering signatures for a petition that forced selectmen to call a December special election on the library expansion project.

# Re-Developing Our Resources to Safeguard Our History and Serve the Residents of Chelmsford



Chelmsford Town Hall

2004



Old North Town Hall

2004

Photos from Chelmsford Historic Commission - F. Merriam

# An Opportunity to Preserve and Provide



Both Town Halls are currently closed with no plan or funding to safeguard their historical significance.

In order to qualify for preservation funds from the State, there must be a viable use that will address not only upfront preservation – but annual operating funds to maintain the investment.

By re-developing these sites for housing, over \$1,000,000 of funding from Mass Historical Tax Credits can be used to preserve the exterior of the buildings. The preservation and restoration will be subject to the standards used on the most significant buildings in the United States.

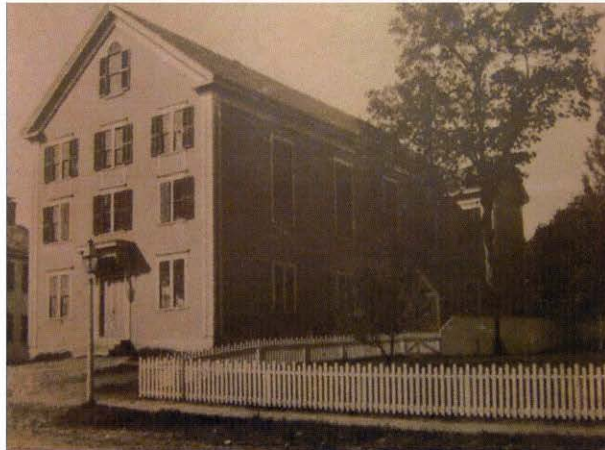
Not only does this plan look to preserve the buildings. It provides for new units that will house our residents, bring additional economic development to both centers of town, put the buildings on the tax roll and eliminate the need for on-going capital resources from the Town.



# Goals for Both Projects

- While working with the Historic Commission and District, restore and protect historic buildings with matching funds from the state as well as using Community Preservation Funds
- Provide new affordable housing opportunities to
  - Veterans
  - Single Individuals
  - Young Professionals
  - Disabled Individuals
- Increase number of residents living in downtown areas.
- Provide a mix of units that are subsidized and unsubsidized to promote a diverse economic mix.
- Put these buildings on the Tax Roll in Chelmsford
- Converting vacant buildings into housing will bring additional economic benefits to the “center” areas.

# The Residences at Old North Town Hall



Old North Town Hall

Date unknown

Photo from Chelmsford Historic Commission - F. Merriam

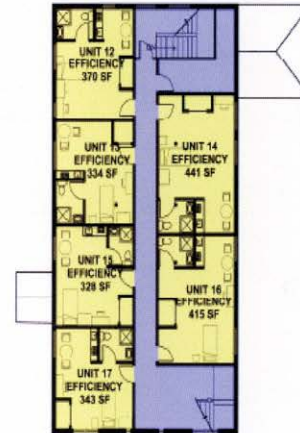
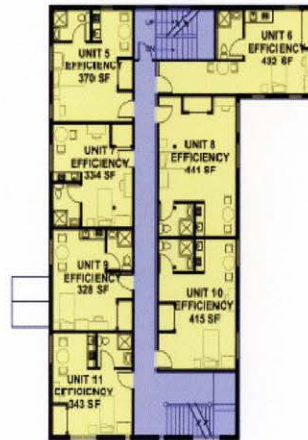
# Old North Town Hall

- Preservation and restoration to Federal Secretary of Interior Standards
- Analysis showed that a minimum of 17 units were needed to generate enough income for the long term cash flow and maintenance of the building
- All units will be studios designed for single person occupancy
- Project may be funded 100% through the Federal Stimulus package
- If it is not funded from Stimulus, \$3 million may be funded through the State
- \$500,000 from Mass Historic and \$500,000 from Community Preservation will be needed if Stimulus funds are not available
- All 17 will be rental units and provided with an on-going subsidy from the CHA
- All residents will be screened including credit checks, CORI's and landlord history.
- Preference to local residents and veterans

# Old North Town Hall

- All 17 studios will count towards the Town's 10% goal
- Project must go before the Zoning Board of Appeals for approval
- Long term lease for parking at the N. Chelmsford Fire Station will be needed. This is where parking was when the building was in use
- CHA is not looking for an immediate transfer of the property, but is requesting an "Option to Purchase" for \$1.00 from the Town to move forward. If funding is received, the transfer would occur at a later date
- Special Town Meeting action will be required
- Immediate action is necessary as stimulus funds have been requested and the CHA must have an architect selected by March 15, 2009
- If project does not move forward, the building remains the property of the Town.

# Old North Town Hall – Proposed Floor Plans



17 studio apartments

# Next Steps

- The CHA has a limited time frame in which to move forward with these projects due to priority funding from the Governor and the Federal Stimulus Package.
- The CHA is meeting with the Chelmsford Historical Commission on January 13, 2009 as a follow up from the December 30, 2008 contact
- The CHA in conjunction with other parties will hold a public meeting on February 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00 p.m. at the Chelmsford Police Station
- The CHA will present to the Board of Selectman on February 9, 2009
- Special Town Meeting needed in early March 2009 for transfer of properties as well as funding from Community Preservation if project is to move forward
- The CHA will work diligently towards securing funds over the next 3 to 12 months
- If funding is awarded, the CHA would be required to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals for both projects

If you have any questions regarding this presentation, please contact David Hedison, Executive Director, Chelmsford Housing Authority at [chelmha@aol.com](mailto:chelmha@aol.com) or [david@chelmsfordha.com](mailto:david@chelmsfordha.com)

# Press Release

March 2, 2009

6:00 p.m.

The Chelmsford Housing Authority (CHA) is committed to playing an integral role in the exploration and creation of truly affordable housing that can be accessed by all Chelmsford residents. With that goal in mind, the CHA will continue to explore options that will provide Chelmsford residents options if they wish to remain in our great community. The faces of our town are made up of young and old, rich and poor and those that fall in between. Access to housing must be available to all.

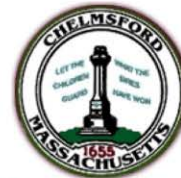
On November 5, 2008 the CHA Board voted to explore the viability of converting both Town Halls into housing, providing the opportunity of economic growth for both center and for the preservation of the historic façade of each building. The results of the feasibility studies came back on December 31, 2008. The CHA presented to the Board of Selectman on January 12, 2009 and they recommended a Special Town Meeting and that the CHA hold a public input session which took place on February 2, 2009. The Historic Commission was contacted on December 30, 2008 regarding these proposals and a presentation was made to them on January 13, 2009. The Community Preservation Committee voted to support both projects as they recognized the value of preserving their historical value as well as providing much needed housing to the center areas.

On all occasions, these plans were met with some resistance as well as support. Throughout the process, the CHA made it clear that it was our responsibility to provide options to the Town in addressing the goals set forth in the 2005 Affordable Housing Master Plan. Both of these projects contained key elements that were integral to the implementation and success of this plan. The Chelmsford Housing Authority has always considered the input of the Town leaders and the community.

It is because of this input that we recognize that there are people ready, willing and able to come forward with specific plans to renovate and/or revitalize both buildings. The neighbors of the North Town Hall led by Mathew Sheehan, Laura Lee, Karen Dussourd and Shelley Constantino have indicated that they have raised enough funds to cover the costs associated with the maintenance of the building for the next two years and a willingness to seek additional funding for the preservation and revitalization of the building. Their goal would be to see North Town Hall converted into a Community Center or even a mixed use of commercial and community space. They should be given the opportunity to explore these options and conduct their own feasibility study. Their fundraising efforts will assist the Town in meeting the day to day needs of maintaining the building.

The Center Town Hall supporters have also voiced their desire and ability to fundraise. The effort by Peggy Dunn and Susan Gates has been truly remarkable. Their passion and commitment to preserving the structure and making sure the building is fully utilized is commendable.

The Chelmsford Housing Authority voted unanimously on March 2, 2009 to suspend their efforts in redeveloping the Town Halls in order to give the community the opportunity to investigate options and implement their plans. If after July 1, 2011 the commitments made by members of the community have failed to come to fruition, the Chelmsford Housing Authority would be more than willing to revisit the proposals and present them to the community for consideration. At the end of the day, the CHA is interested in re-developing under-utilized properties before considering plans to develop on open space. There remains a strong need for truly affordable housing in our community and the CHA is committed to fulfilling its mission in serving those in need.



# Town Halls Utilization Study Committee

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Preliminary Report

2009-10-01



# Project History



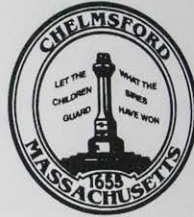
- **Nov 5, 2008 Chelmsford Housing Authority (CHA) Board votes to explore converting both Town Halls into affordable housing.**
  - **Jan 12, 2009** CHA presents feasibility study to Board of Selectmen (BOS). They recommended holding a public input session.
  - **Jan 13, 2009** CHA presents its plan to the Chelmsford Historical Commission (CHC). The CHC votes not to endorse the plan.
  - **Feb 2, 2009** Public input session is held by CHA at the Police Station to get feedback. Opposition outweighs support.
  - **Feb 28, 2009** The Town hosts public open houses at both Town Halls. A group of residents pickets Center Town Hall, protesting the CHA plan.
- **Mar 2, 2009 CHA suspends efforts to redevelop the Town Halls, to give the community an opportunity to investigate and implement plans. If after Jul 1, 2011 the community fails, the CHA would revisit its plans.**

# Project History



- **Apr 6, 2009** The Town Manager requests applications for an impartial Town Halls Utilization Study Committee (THUSC).
  - May 1, 2009 Town Manager and BOS approve five applications.
  - May 9, 2009 Members are given mission statement by Town Manager and BOS.
  - May 20, 2009 THUSC assigns officers, lists goals, plans public input sessions.
  - Jun 10, 2009 Input session is held at Center Town Hall with encouraging results.
  - Jul 9, 2009 Second input session is held at North Congregational Church.
  - Aug 5, 2009 Final inputs are received from Center and North Town Hall groups.
  - Aug 11, 2009 THUSC meets with Permanent Building Committee (PBC).
  - Aug 19, 2009 THUSC meets with Community Preservation Committee (CPC).
  - Oct 1, 2009 THUSC reviews Preliminary Report with Town Manager.



# North Town Hall Renovation



**TOWN OF CHELMSFORD MASSACHUSETTS**  
**Chelmsford Permanent Building Committee**  
**Chelmsford Community Preservation Fund**

Architect:  
Structural Engineer:  
MEPFP Engineer:  
Landscape Architect:  
Civil Engineer:  
Owner's Project Manager:  
Contractor:

Bargmann Hendrie + Archetype, Inc.  
JML Engineers  
Allied Consulting Engineers  
Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture  
Hancock Associates  
Vertex Construction Services  
M. O'Connor Contracting, Inc.



# MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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2013 Preservation Award

*North Chelmsford Town Hall*  
*Chelmsford*

*Rehabilitation & Restoration*

for demonstrating an outstanding commitment to  
historic preservation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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*William Francis Galvin*

WILLIAM FRANCIS GALVIN  
Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Chairman, Massachusetts Historical Commission





**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

November 6, 2015

Matt Hanson  
Chair, Chelmsford Board of Selectmen  
50 Billerica Road  
Chelmsford, MA 01824

Re: National Register of Historic Places

Dear Mr. Hanson:

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is pleased to inform you that the North Town Hall, Chelmsford, Massachusetts, was accepted on October 13, 2015, by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. A certificate recognizing the designation of this property in the National Register is enclosed.

For your information, an explanation of the National Register of Historic Places is also enclosed. If you have any questions or wish further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

We share with you a sense of pride that this historic Town Hall has been listed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Galvin".

William Francis Galvin  
Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Chairman, Massachusetts Historical Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brona Simon".

Brona Simon  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

cc: George Merrill, Chelmsford Historical Commission  
Tim Orwig, consultant  
Paul E. Cohen, Chelmsford Town Manager  
Edmond Roux, Chelmsford Planning Board

enclosure

220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
(617) 727-8470 • Fax: (617) 727-5128  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)




*North Town Hall*  
*Chelmsford, Massachusetts*

was accepted on *October 13, 2015* for inclusion in the

*National Register of Historic Places*

The National Register is the nation's official list of buildings, districts, sites, structures, and objects that retain their historical character and are important to our local, state, or national history. The National Register was established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is administered in the Commonwealth by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

  
William Francis Galvin  
Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Chairman, Massachusetts Historical Commission

  
Brona Simon  
State Historic Preservation Officer

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
A Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth