

# Brief History

Chelmsford, one of the Massachusetts Bay Colonies, was settled about 1653 by people from Concord and Woburn. In 1655 the Rev. John Fiske of the church in Wenham was secured by the Town and came to Chelmsford bringing some of his church members with him. The Town was granted its charter by the General Court in May 1655, together with Billerica and Groton. As a frontier town it had its share of Indian fighting, and then, as it has ever since, it provided soldiers for the country's battles.

From its early days, until after World War II, Chelmsford has essentially been a farming community. A number of small businesses, however, have waxed and waned over the first 200 years of our history, including such useful ones as iron smelting, lumbering and wood products, and the manufacture of lime, bricks and glass. Chelmsford granite, which came into prominence after the Revolution and was used in Boston and other cities, is still being quarried. Large woolen mills were operated in North Chelmsford from the 1880's until about 25 years ago. Within the past 20 years, a variety of small industrial enterprises have become operative in the industrial zones of the Town.

In area Chelmsford was originally twice its present size. In 1729 the Western section, almost half the area of the original plantation, left to become the Town of Westford. Thirty years after its charter, Chelmsford purchased from the Indians their land between the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, known as "The Neck" to increase its amount of arable land. "The Neck" eventually became the major part of downtown Lowell, being separated in 1826 to form the Town of Lowell, which ten years later became the City of Lowell.

This development, which started within the bounds of Chelmsford, is recognized as being the first industrial community which was planned as such from the outset. Also remarkable was the Middlesex Canal, running 27 miles from Middlesex Village (now in Lowell) to Boston. It opened in 1803 and continued until competition from the new railroads forced its discontinuance in 1852. The canal was the first of its type in the nature of a public utility and is considered to be the greatest single work of engineering improvement up to that time.

The farms of Chelmsford have largely disappeared between the years 1950 and 1980 and have been supplanted by extensive residential developments. During that time, Chelmsford was one of the fastest growing communities in the entire northeast. In view of this rapid growth some residents feel that it is appropriate, indeed urgent, that steps be taken to preserve at least a small portion of our older Town as a tangible physical link with our historic heritage, before change completely eradicates it.

Located in Middlesex County approximately 30 miles northwest of Boston, Chelmsford is a town of about 33,000. The town is named for Chelmsford, England and is the only town in the United States so named.

# Timeline

## **1653**

Chelmsford founded by citizens from Woburn and Concord.

## **1655**

Chelmsford incorporated as a town.  
First meetinghouse constructed in Town Center.  
Forefather's Burying Ground established.

## **1656**

Samuel Adams constructs saw and grist mill on Russell Mill Pond.

## **1669**

Thomas Henchman (sometimes spelled Hinchman) constructs saw mill on Stony Brook.

## **1718**

First one-room schoolhouse built on the Forefathers Burying Ground.

## **1736**

Lime quarries and kilns developed on what is now the Lime Quarry Reservation on Route 110.

## **1775**

177 Chelmsford men assemble on Town Common on April 19th to march to Concord at the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

## **1792**

Town establishes District School System. By 1800, 12 school districts in Chelmsford.

## **1794**

Construction begins on the Middlesex Canal.  
Social Library organized by local residents.

## **1798**

First Post Office in Chelmsford opens.

## **1802**

Chelmsford Glass Works established.  
New brick schoolhouse erected on Forefathers Burying Ground with bricks made in East Chelmsford.

## **1803**

Middlesex Canal completed connecting Chelmsford with Boston.

## **1810**

Chelmsford Granite Quarry opens.

The toll road Middlesex Turnpike from Boston to New Hampshire opens.

## **1820**

Deacon Farwell opens Scythe Factory, which becomes Roby and Company in 1853. Roby swords used during the Civil War.

## **1832**

Middlesex Canal Toll House constructed on Landing #8 at the head of the canal in Middlesex Village (Lowell).

Building moved to the Town Center common for Chelmsford's Bicentennial Celebrations in 1955.

## **1832**

Silver and Gay (later renamed North Chelmsford Machine and Supply Company), one of the first machine shops in the U.S. to manufacture worsted yarn machinery and inventor of the automatic ball winder (for twine), established in North Chelmsford.

## **1835**

Ezekiel Byam manufactures the first Sulphur matches in the United States at the Lucifer Match Factory in South Chelmsford.

## **1836**

First Baptist Church constructed in South Chelmsford.

## **1838**

Nashua and Lowell Railroad opens from Lowell to New Hampshire.

## **1853**

North Town Hall built on Princeton Street.

## **1859**

Revolutionary War monument erected in Town Center.

## **1862**

Men from Chelmsford, Dracut, Billerica, Tewksbury, and Tyngsboro muster into Company K of the 6th Regiment of Massachusetts to serve a "Nine Months Campaign" in the Civil War.

## **1866**

Harriet B. Rogers opens the Chelmsford School, first school in America to successfully teach lip reading and speech to deaf children. School moved to North Hampton in 1867 as Clarke School for the Deaf.

**1872**

Town purchases former Manning Tavern for use as the Town Farm (infirmary).  
North Chelmsford Library Association forms.

**1875**

Chelmsford Village Improvement Association forms.

**1877**

George C. Moore opens wool scouring establishment (later Selesia Mills), the largest mill in town, in North Chelmsford.  
Mill sold in 1912 to United States Worsted Company for \$3 million.

**1876**

Town Clock installed in the steeple of the First Parish Church in Town Center.

**1879**

Center Town Hall built on North Road. All Saints Church construction begins in Town Center.

**1881**

South Chelmsford Village Association forms.

**1888**

United Methodist Church constructed in West Chelmsford.

**1893**

Town establishes a Free Public Library, located in the first floor of Center Town Hall.

**1895**

Town constructs the Adams Library on former vineyard.

**1901**

Chelmsford Ginger Ale Company founded as Chelmsford Spring Company. Sold to Canada Dry in 1928.

**1917**

Chelmsford High School opens on Billerica Road.

**1918**

Influenza epidemic sickens 950 residents in Chelmsford.

**1920s**

Nickels family develops summer residences around Heart Pond in Chelmsford.

**1926**

St. Mary's Mission constructed in Chelmsford Center.

**1937**

Planning Board established.

**1938**

Town adopts first zoning bylaw.

**1947**

MacKay Library opens in renovated home of former town librarian in North Chelmsford.

**1955**

Drum Hill Rotary at the intersection of Routes 3 and 4 constructed.

**1959**

New High School (now McCarthy Junior High) constructed.

**1961**

Conservation Commission established.

First parcel of open space protected in Chelmsford when Harriett Bartlett donates a former 3.25-acre pasture to the Chelmsford Land Trust for use as Bartlett Park.

**1963**

Historic District Study Committee formed.

**1966**

Historical Commission established.

**1975**

Chelmsford Center Historic District approved.

**1989**

Legislative body of Chelmsford changed from an open town meeting to a representative one.

**2005**

Chelmsford celebrates 350th anniversary.