



**HOWARD W. ZEA
1916-2012**

The annual report of the Town of Plainfield for 2012 is dedicated to the memory of Howard W. Zea, who served the town as its clerk for 58 years and in numerous other capacities over the course of a long and productive life.

Howard became town clerk in 1943, assuming a portfolio of responsibilities ranging from registering dogs to recording births and deaths to maintaining the vast archive of town records dating from 1761. For the first 30 years of his tenure the town clerk's office was a small room off the Zea kitchen, and it might be said there were no office hours as such then—if he was home business could be transacted at any hour day or night, and people would often show up at 6 in the morning or 10 at night to register a car or secure a marriage license.

In 1973 the town completed construction of a new central school which included a wing containing offices for the town clerk and other officers and a fireproof vault to house its trove of official records. With the new facilities came regular hours for the town clerk, a radical change it seemed at the time, but it was in tune with the changing patterns of community life as Plainfield grew and prospered. Later town offices moved to the renovated Meriden town hall, with Howard presiding over ever-expanding duties coming from new laws and population growth.

Howard was honored by Gov. Jeanne Shaheen and the New Hampshire Executive Council when he retired as town clerk in 2001, having served the longest of any individual in the position in state history and also being recognized as the dean of town clerks in New England at the time. He was later honored by the Institute for New Hampshire Politics for his exemplary work in the conduct of federal, state and local elections over the lengthy span of his public service.

Beyond his service as a town officer Howard was a scholar and repository of all manner of Plainfield history. For an explanation of a peculiar local place name or the politics leading to the annexation of a third of the landmass of neighboring Grantham he was the person to see for he could be counted upon to offer a complete and interesting account. And his research into such obscure subjects as the original width of a highway right-of-way proved invaluable to fellow town officials on many occasions down through the years.

Howard Zea's devoted and distinguished service to the Town of Plainfield will inspire its citizens for generations to come.