

July – Time to Go Boating & Swimming

By Judy Haynes

Following are extracts from a July day in the early 1900s at Wachusett Reservoir.

“Constable Knight and Luther Rugg, Jr.
Stalled on Metropolitan Reservoir Till Wind Rises

BOYLSTON, July 21. – “I think the boat has stopped,” said Constable Charles B. Knight of Boylston to Luther Rugg, Jr. of Clinton. “What is the matter?” “No gasoline,” replied Knight. Silence followed. They were all alone on the expanse of water, the metropolitan reservoir. Above a few clouds floated contentedly.... “How are we going to get to shore?” queried Rugg, after they had floated along for a few minutes. “Haven’t any idea,” remarked the constable, surveying the half-mile or so of water that stretched away to the shore, “Can you swim?” “Not much,” replied Rugg, with a glance at the water, thinking involuntarily of the 200 pounds he carries around. “I am pretty good in salt water, but this isn’t salt.

Silence fell. The hours wore on. The sun died down beyond gray water banks in the west, and the little stars began to twinkle faintly. Suddenly Knight gave an exclamation. “What’s the matter?” Rugg asked, killing with a vicious swat, the 92nd mosquito which had alighted upon his neck. “The wind is rising,” said Knight. “Is that all?” murmured his companion, disconsolately. “All?” exclaimed the older man, “Why, it will drive us ashore.” His prediction came true. Little by little, the boat, driven by a soft breeze, moved along, until the keel touched lightly on the sand. The men arose, stretched their cramped limbs, and stepped ashore.” “How far is it home?” asked Rugg. “Only a few miles,” the constable made answer, as they strode off together through the forest, whence the hungry browntail moths had eaten all the leaves.”¹

Charles Sumner Knight was born 19 November 1872 in Weston, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. At age 29 years, he married Anna Eliza Rice of Westborough on 25 June 1902.² Charles was a Metropolitan Police Officer at the time of his marriage. Boylston Town Office records indicate he was a constable in Boylston until 1927.³ Known as Sheriff Knight, he served as a special agent of the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission at Enfield until his retirement in 1941. During his service he was deputy sheriff in Worcester, Hampshire and Franklin counties for the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoir systems which supply an average of 200 million gallons per day to consumers in Massachusetts.^{4,5}

Who was the Luther Rugg of Clinton in the boat with Officer Knight? The Massachusetts City Directory for Clinton indicates he is a reporter for the Worcester Telegram who boarded at the New Crossman Hotel in Clinton, Massachusetts!⁶ In 1914, he moved to 159 Front Street, Worcester, so it is likely the boating event took place between May 1908 when the Wachusett Reservoir was initially filled after being completed in 1905 and Rugg’s move to Worcester in 1913.⁷



**Police Lt. Charles S. Knight
1919**

¹ Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. Scrapbook Collection, 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts

² Marriage Records, Boylston, Massachusetts

³ Annual Town Reports, Boylston, Massachusetts

⁴ Obituary, Sheriff Knight, Holyoke Daily Transcript and Tangram, August 22, 1942, Page Four.

⁵ Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, <https://www.mwra.com/04water/html/watsys.htm>

⁶ City Directory, Clinton, Massachusetts, 1913

⁷ Rus, Diana, “The Forgotten Underwater Town in Massachusetts Where the Church is the Only Surviving Building”, <https://original.newsbreak.com/@diana-rus-561571/2978468019472-the-forgotten-underwater-town-in-massachusetts-where-the-church-is-the-only-surviving-building>



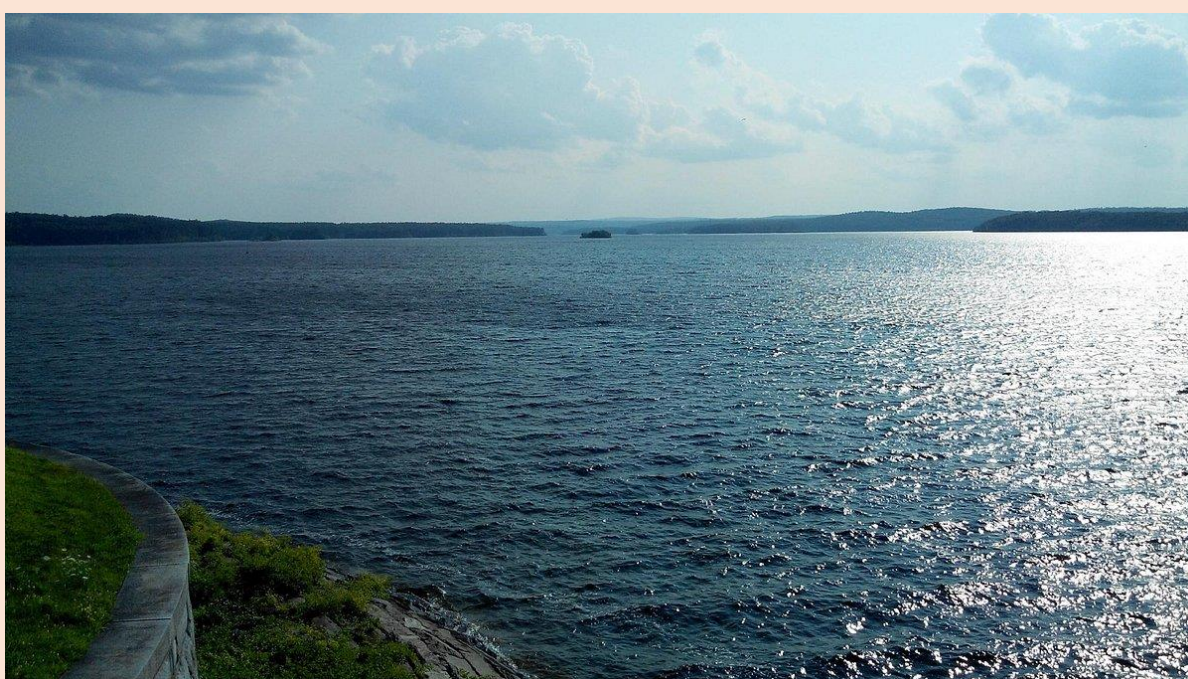
Engineering Force After Holing Thru From Shaft #3 West To Shaft #2 East ~ Pressure Aqueduct ~ Section 2 ~ Contract 74 Southboro ~ Photo Toland 1/23/32 (74) ~ 258

**Engineering Force for Quabbin Reservoir
Charles S. Knight, on right
1932**

At that time and still today, the Wachusett Reservoir, as drinking water, was protected; thus no one but the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) police were allowed on the water. This meant that no passing boats would be expected. No one would be around who could lend an oar or a rope to pull them ashore. Even today, only non-gas-powered boats such as canoes and kayaks are only allowed in the tributary protection zones which include West Waushacum Pond, the Quag, and Muddy Pond.

It wasn't just boating that was not allowed. Swimming was prohibited also, but that did not prevent some teens from making it a place to go, or even a tradition. In the oral history of John Peterson, he tells how he and his friends would sneak down to the water for a swim on a hot day or evening, so occasional mischief did happen.⁸ The teens would check when the MDC police would be there, learned their routine, and planned to outrun the men if it looked that they might be caught. He tells of one night when the MDC police were coming. The boys who had been swimming with little on; when hearing the officer coming, grabbed their clothes from the sand, ran into the woods, and John relates how it was a while before they could remove all the sand off their clothes and bodies.

Boating and swimming in water is one of summer's pleasures, so enjoy your summer, but be prepared. For your time at the Wachusett Reservoir, enjoy hiking along the beautiful marked nature trails, wildlife and bird watching, fishing from the shore (with a license, of course!) and bicycling the Mass Central Rail trail and marked trails. And please, no boating or swimming in the reservoir



Wachusett Reservoir

⁸ Oral history of John Peterson, 2014, BHSM collection