

Boylston’s Memorial Day



By Judy Haynes

Memorial Day has become known to us in Boylston as the last Monday in May. That date was enacted under the Uniform Monday Holiday Act during Richard Nixon’s presidential term in 1971 and was a day to remember all fallen soldiers from all wars. But historically it was first known as Decoration Day as flowers and flags were placed at the graves of the Civil War soldiers.



**Sarah Partridge**  
**First to Decorate Graves of**  
**Boylston’s Veterans**  
*BHSM Photograph Collection*

Virginia and Mississippi each claim to have been the first to celebrate by placing flowers on gravesites in 1866. In Boylston, Massachusetts, it was Mrs. Sarah G. Partridge, who is believed to have started the tradition of decorating graves. As stepmother to John W. Partridge, a private in the Signal Corp during the Civil War, who died in 1864 at the notorious Andersonville Prison; she honored the memory of John and his fallen companions by placing flowers on their graves.

It was not long after the Southerners claim in 1866, however, that General John A. Logan, head of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans, founded a Memorial Day in 1868 to honor the 620,000 who died in the Civil War. Logan chose May 30 as the holiday “because it didn’t fall on the same day as the anniversary of any particular battle.”<sup>1</sup> According to historian William Dupuis, May 30, 1872 Boylston held its first Memorial Day parade.”<sup>2</sup>

May 30<sup>th</sup> was the day for many years that the soldiers were remembered, and that date lasted from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1971 as noted above. That meant the day might fall on any day of the week and the holiday was planned accordingly. One of our oldest news clippings of 1879 outlines the activities as:

“Memorial Day was appropriately observed in Boylston.”<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after ten o’clock a.m. soldiers and citizens formed a procession on the common, followed by the Boylston Brass Band, all then marched to the burial grounds. There prayers were said by the Rev. H.S. Kimball. Following prayers, a dirge was played while flowers were appropriately placed. Once that was completed, they countermarched back to the Congregational Church for a special address. The day ended with a collation being served at the Town Hall, just off the Town Common.

Since Memorial Day then could fall on any day of the week, old clippings indicate there was a pattern of holding a patriotic sermon in the local churches on the Sunday prior to May 30, where Boylston’s fallen and all veterans were particularly honored; and likewise in the schools, on the last school day before Memorial Day, patriotic exercises were held.

MEMORIAL DAY SERVICES  
BOYLSTON

**MEMORIAL SERMON**  
In Congregational Church, Sunday, May 25th, 1919, at 10.45 a. m., by  
Rev. William G. Poor.

**PATRIOTIC SERVICES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
on Thursday, May 29, 1919, in Town Hall, at 2 p. m. Mr. Ware of  
Worcester, will address the pupils.

**THE REGULAR MEMORIAL DAY SERVICES**  
will be held on Friday, May 30, 1919. A procession comprising the  
Veterans, Sons of Veterans, Town Officers, Boy Scouts, Schools and  
Citizens will be formed at the School Building at 1.30 p. m., and led  
by the Worcester Brigade Band, will march to the cemeteries where  
the graves of the soldiers of Revolution, War of 1812, Civil War and  
Spanish-American War will be decorated with appropriate services  
by the School Children. The procession will then counter march to  
the Congregational Church where the address will be given by

**COMRADE J. BRAINERD HALL of Worcester**  
**A Veteran of the 57th Regt., Mass. Vols.**

It is earnestly desired that the soldiers of the European and of the  
Spanish-American Wars will join in the services and procession.

Since the last Memorial Day peace has dawned upon this war-  
stricken world, the God of Nations has crowned our armies and our  
allies with victory and we look hopefully forward to a speedy ad-  
justment of international affairs and a lasting peace among the nations  
of the earth, and so let us come to this day’s services with feelings  
of thankfulness as well as of sadness. Let us strew with the brightest  
and fairest of flowers the graves of our heroic and immortal dead,  
remembering that as good soldiers, loyal to their country in the dark-  
est hours of its national history, “they fought the good fight, finished

Boylston Memorial Day Program 1919  
BHSM Archive Collection

That program of events and parades held firm until 1918 and 1919 when the “Memorial Day Services: Boylston” no longer included any collation or lunch. A message from Herbert C. Hoover, Food Commissioner under President Wilson, had asked

*“the people to conserve food, especially meat and wheat, and President Woodrow Wilson’s proclamation, called upon all the people to make May 30 a day of fasting and prayer.”<sup>4</sup>*

This was honoring the sacrifices that were being made during World War I.

Residents gather  
to remember the fallen



The Rev. Paul Tougas, of St. Mary of the Hills, leads celebrants through prayers with the Rev. Dave Buchanan, of the First Congregational Church, during Memorial Day services in Boylston Monday. Buchanan, also the Fire Dept. chaplain, led prayers at Pine Grove Cemetery earlier in the day.

Today, 151 years later, our Boylston citizens and soldiers still gather to form a Memorial Day parade to the two burial grounds where the solemn process continues of saying prayers and decorating graves with flowers and flags. Once again food is acceptable to be served; thus, on Boylston Town Common there are various community organizations which hold booths with food to sell and information on how you may participate in the various group activities.



Boylston Militia march in Memorial Day Parade  
BHSM Archive Collection

<sup>1</sup> www. Six interesting Memorial Day facts.  
<sup>2</sup> *Boylston Historical Series*, Filgate, 2012, p. 470.  
<sup>3</sup> From the Scrapbook and newspaper clippings collection, Boylston Historical Society & Museum  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid. ca. 1918-1919



Vera Brigham and Charles Gray Sr. (back seat)  
 Betty Donaldson and Steve Slik (front seat)  
 Memorial Day 1980  
 BHSM Photograph Collection

The Larkin family are the organizers of today’s Boylston’s Memorial Day events with a whole day affair planned that includes a road race, crafters, vendors, entertainment and much more!

This year’s events begin with Katie’s 5k race sponsored by the Boylston Lions Club. The race kicks off at 9:00 am on Central Street in front of the Historic Town Hall with the proceeds funding scholarships for Tahanto females going on to a two- or four-year college degree programs.

The Memorial Day parade organizes at Pine Grove Cemetery at 10:00 a.m going up Scar Hill Road to Main Street and over to the Old Burial Ground and ends at the Veterans Monument on the Town Common; providing prayers and military honors for our fallen veterans and offering an array of music, marchers, and floats for the townspeople of Boylston.



The Boylston Historical Society will be offering a fun historic scavenger for all ages! Additionally, they will be selling a new publication *The Boylston Civil War* You will not want to miss a free tour of their new museum exhibit, “Technological Advances from Yesteryear” How did we tell time in the early 1800’s? Which Meeting House was in existence at that time? Did Boylston fight in the Civil War? Come journey into the past.

If you are interested in gardening, gravitate to the Garden Club table where they will be selling perennials and annuals that could decorate many a garden space around town. Of course, the day would not be complete without a “deacon dog” from the Congregational Church and slush from Jazziak’s. For those looking for a nice hot beverage and yummy sweets, stop by the Seniors table.

So come one, come all and join in the fun after you’ve paid your respects with solemn prayers at Pine Grove Cemetery and the Old Burial Ground. We are a community where the soldiers and sailors have always been remembered and honored on Memorial Day by families coming together to commemorate the veterans of this great nation. Please join us on May 27, 2024 for this annual community event on Memorial Day.