

From Modest Beginnings to the Wealthiest Man in Town!

by Patricia Kelleher Bartram



Levi Lincoln Flagg
daguerreotype photograph
BHSM Photograph Collection

The story of Boylstonian Levi Lincoln Flagg (1818-1907) is one of how industrious and diligent hard work carried a young man from modest beginnings to ultimate success. Levi was one of eight children, and the oldest son, born to Joseph Flagg and Martha “Patty” Hastings in Boylston in 1818. His parents had married in the town two years before, on the day after Christmas in 1815.

As a boy Levi attended the local schools and later went to work as a farm hand, laboring for neighboring farmers. His first such job, which he did for two years, provided a wage of \$8 per month along with board. He must have done a good job because at his next job he earned \$160 per year. With the money he earned and saved, he bought his father’s farm prior to 1850 and his parents moved to the next-door town of Berlin.

Marriage and Children

Five months prior to his 30th birthday, Levi married 24-year-old Caroline Elizabeth Barnes (1823-1872) in Boylston on 2 April 1848. She had been born in Berlin, the daughter of farmer Daniel Barnes (1795-1854) and Betsy Longley (1799-1881). Levi and Caroline went on to have eight children during their 24 years of marriage: Elinor Elizabeth Flagg (1849-1909); Christopher Lincoln Flagg (1850-1906); Arthur Flagg (1851-1939); Joseph Walter Flagg (1853-1924); George Augustus Flagg (1855-1928); Alice Jane Flagg (1857-1895); Jennie Lind Flagg (1859-1951); and Mary Martha Flagg (1860-1958).



Caroline Barnes
wife of Levi Lincoln Flagg
daguerreotype photograph
BHSM Photograph Collection

Successful Businesses

Levi divided his time between the farm and a wholesale and retail slaughtering business he developed. In addition, he owned a significant amount of real estate (farms, pastures and woodland) in Boylston and nearby towns. He built and owned many tenement houses and building blocks near or on Piedmont Street in Worcester. He was financially successful in all these endeavors. A newspaper article dated 30 October 1875 reported:

“At about midnight on Friday week, two sides of one beef and a part of another were stolen from the slaughter house of Mr. Levi L Flagg at Boylston.”

As evidence of his growing wealth, Levi had, by as early as 1870, amassed real estate valued at \$21,600 and had a personal estate of \$6,400. In 1896 he paid \$279 in taxes, the largest amount of taxes paid by an individual in the town of Boylston that year. In the 1900 federal census his occupation had changed from that of farmer to capitalist.



J. Walter Flagg
Son of Levi Lincoln Flagg
BHSM Photograph Collection



Market of Arthur and J. Walter Flagg
Worcester, Massachusetts
BHSM Photograph Collection

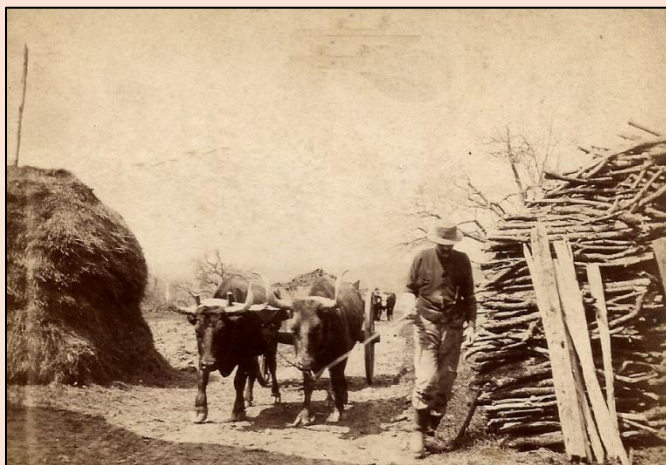
Trying Times

His life was not without difficult times, however. Most significantly, Levi lost his wife on 20 July 1872 when Caroline Barnes Flagg died in Boylston from inflammation of the stomach at the age of 48 years, 11 months and 4 days. Although all of her children outlived their mother, her early death left her three youngest children, all daughters, without a mother at the ages of 15 years (Alice), 13 years (Jennie) and 12 years (Mary Martha).



Homestead of Levi Lincoln Flagg
Boylston, Massachusetts
BHSM Photograph Collection

A decade later, daughter Alice Jane Flagg in 1883 ran off to marry one of her father's hired hands, George Hazard, a man of color, in Rochester, Strafford County, New Hampshire after a reported three-year clandestine affair. Despite how a mixed-race marriage likely would have been received in the late 1800s, the couple lived in town, and had four children. Son-in-law George Hazard successfully re-started a brick yard and built a large new home for his family. Twelve years after she married, Alice died in 1895 of the same illness as her mother had done 23 years before. After Alice's death, her two younger children, a son and a daughter, lived with their grandfather, Levi, and aunt, Jennie, on the Flagg farm, while Alice's two older sons continued to live and work with their father.



Christopher Flagg
Eldest son of Levi Lincoln Flagg
Working on father's farm
BHSM Photograph Collection

A second child, his eldest son, Christopher, who never married and lived and worked on his father's farm his whole life, died from chronic nephritis at the age of 55 years and 11 days on 21 May 1906.

As life progressed, Levi was active in public affairs. Politically, he was a Republican. He was the assessor in Boylston for 25 years, a representative to the general court, an overseer of the poor, treasurer, and served as a selectman in Boylston for a period of 30 years. Such a

long period of service in the latter position was called "a remarkable tribute on the part of his fellow-townsmen to his ability and good judgment, such as few men in any town of the Commonwealth have ever received." The public can view his portrait which is displayed in the Boylston Town Office building.

Levi's second youngest, Jennie Flagg, was the daughter who never married and returned home after a time away to help her father manage his farm and other businesses – as well as help raise her sister Alice's children - a practice she continued after her father's death until the end of her life. In fact, she had ownership of the farm after her father's passing. Much can be learned about that life from the cache of Jennie's papers and documents now housed in the collections of the Boylston Historical Society and Museum.



Jennie Flagg
Daughter of Levi Lincoln Flagg
BHSM Photograph Collection

Levi L. Flagg, who lived on his farm until the end, outlived his wife by 35 years, joining Caroline in death on 11 February 1907 at the age of 88 years, 4 months and 21 days. He died from pneumonia, from which he had suffered for seven days. His occupation was listed as farmer and the informant on his death certificate was his daughter, Jennie. Levi was buried with his late wife in Boylston's Pine Grove Cemetery. His obituary appeared in the Boston Herald as follows:

"Levi Lincoln Flagg, one of the oldest and wealthiest citizens of Boylston, died at his home there last evening, age 88 years. When a young man, Mr. Flagg resolved that he would become worth \$100,000 and live to become a centenarian. He achieved the former. He was a large owner of Worcester realty. For 15 years he was a selectman of Boylston, and was town treasurer seven years and assessor eight years. He was a representative to the General Court in 1884. Six children survive him."

Acknowledgements

Ancestry.com
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