

# Boylston in the News!

By Judy Haynes

The Boylston Historical Society is fortunate to have a number of news clippings dating back to late 1800s and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And we continue to keep news items up to date as they happen. As part of our news scrapbook introduction to our readers, we will bring you some of the more interesting news that happened long ago.

One could barely sneeze to make the local news. The oldest news clips included anything social, political, or local that was happening, including the weather. If a person were sick, had died, or was holding a party, it found its way into print. Since this is January, today's article will focus on the winter calendar.

Thus, January 12, 1886 it was noted

*"The news last week for Boylston was below zero. The coldest morning this year Tuesday 12 inst. Being 20 below zero in some places in town."*<sup>1</sup>

On January 17, 1897 a headline read:

*"Boylston People to Celebrate Remodeling of their Church"*

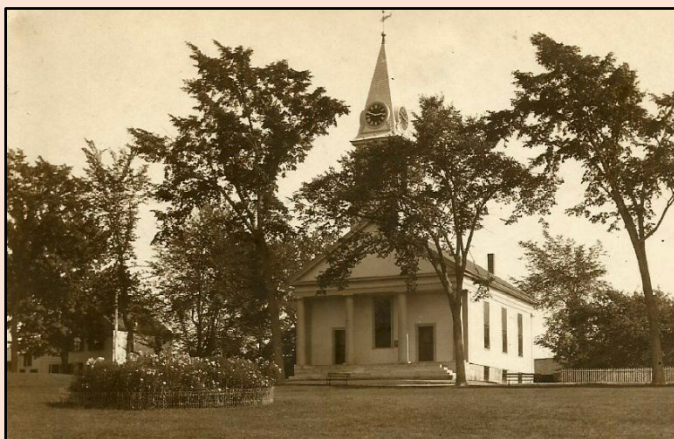
The Boylston Church had just finished making some interior church improvements and it was deemed appropriate to celebrate by holding a turkey dinner, followed by toasts to those who led the way.<sup>2</sup>

This may very well have been the start of an annual tradition, as items appeared each January for ten years similar to the following. The "Annual Reunion and Turkey Dinner" was announced and advertised. The dinner held January 28, 1904 was 50 cents.

This seasonal social event that drew hundreds of people wishing to enjoy a bountiful dinner the evening of January 18, 1906 may have ended the tradition painfully when on January 19, a headline read: "Collapse of Church Floor Injures Many. Fifty or more persons dropped into the basement at Boylston. None fatally hurt. The organist played hymns to calm the people." Between 50 and 60 people "dropped into the cellar" when "under the weight of a crowd of people" the vestibule weakened from the weight simply gave way.<sup>3</sup>



**Boylston Church -Third Meeting House**  
*This steeple blew off roof in 1903 storm*  
BHSM Photograph Collection



**Boylston Church - Third Meeting House**  
*This steeple with Town Clock was erected 1906*  
BHSM Photograph Collection

The event was so popular people came from towns around. "The Worcester end of the annual supper was arranged this year by Ex-Representative Edward A. Cowee, who had secured a party of about 100 from the city to attend the reunion in the evening. Most of them were from the Adams Square Congregational Church of which Rev. John E. Dodge, pastor of the Boylston church, was at one time pastor." [ Note: Pastor of the Boylston church was George S. Dodge. Whether this was a mistake in the newsprint or a relative who may also have served is not known.]



**Reverend Dodge, pastor & Boylston Sunday School Class**  
*The Museum is seeking identities of the members of this Sunday School Class*  
*please contact BHSM at [info@boylstonhistory.org](mailto:info@boylstonhistory.org) with any of their names*  
BHSM Photograph Collection

<sup>1</sup> Mary French Scrapbook collection. Boylston newsclips were saved by Mary French. Often no newspaper title was noted nor page mentioned, but many were clearly from a Worcester or Clinton paper.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Boylston Church Vestibule Floor Collapses; 31 People are Injured. List of Inured. Worcester, Mass. news, Friday morning, January 19, 1906, p. 14



“The accident happened about 7 o’clock, when there was a crowd of about 300 people in the church. A large party were eating supper at the time and those in the vestibule were waiting for seats at the tables. A number had just arrived in a special car from Worcester and another party in an electric from Clinton. From West Boylston came a large number in a bus. They had all gathered in the vestibule to wait their turn. Less than five minutes before the floor collapsed entirely several to the party noticed that it sagged several inches. Many fears were expressed regarding the safety of the floor, when a man in the party, thinking to alleviate the fears of the women, jumped up and down several times on the floor just to show them that everything was safe. After he had jumped a few times, the floor went through with a crash and every man, woman and child in the vestibule went headlong into the hole.” It was said they dropped 10 feet into the basement.

“When the crash came, I. S. Walker [or E.J. Walker from another clip], was acting as ticket taker, and was seated at the west side of the vestibule near the cellar stairs. Beside him was a small lantern. Oil was spilled from a lantern [when it broke as it crashed through the floor] onto some shingles, setting them on fire. Walker stamped on it and put it out. ‘I landed on my feet and wasn’t hurt a bit, though I burned my trousers a little in the fire.’”

“Robert Andrews of Boylston was one of those who went down with the crash and helped to put out the fire started by the lantern. He said ‘it happened so suddenly no one had a chance to shout [a warning]. Women screamed and the men started to do all they could to help. After it was over some of those who went into the hole were able to walk out, while some had to be carried out.’”<sup>4</sup>

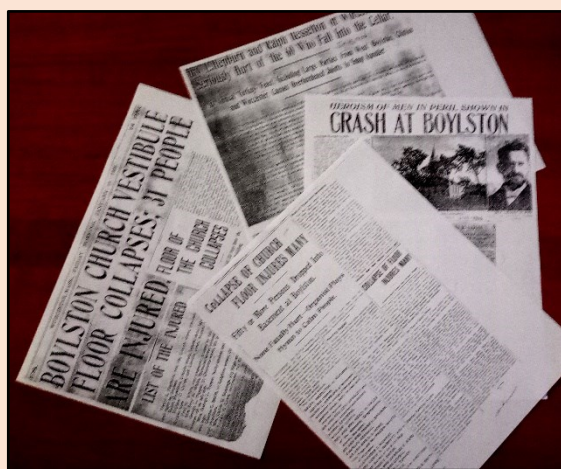
Another first-hand experience: “Horace H. Lowe of Clinton, who was one of the injured ones, said that he was in the center of the crowd in the vestibule when the floor collapsed. He felt himself dropping into the cellar and the next instant he was buried under a mass of people who slid down upon him from the funnel-shaped sag which the floor about the aperture assumed. Mr. Lowe was taken to his home after the accident.”<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Calvin Hastings recalled the incident “A second party crowded into the room and there were 65 or 70 of us there when the floor collapsed, and we went into the cellar. I was too much frightened to know what happened. I was helped out by two men. I was one of the first taken out, and got to Clinton on the first car, going directly home [to 513 High Street, Clinton].”

Fortunately, only 31 people were listed as injured, ten seriously, others less seriously. Men acted as heroes making sure every woman was taken out before the men who waited patiently for their extrication. “When the flooring collapsed, the carpet remained intact and served as a slide and also prevented the sharp ends of broken timbers from entering the flesh of the victims.”<sup>6</sup> Of the 31, there was a broken rib, several leg injuries, one concussion listed, some gashes, many bruises, but thankfully no fatalities.

Much of the news wasn’t this exciting, nor would we want it to be. This was an unfortunate accident as the inspector later ruled that the floor was quite safe for a normal crowd, but the weight of the sheer numbers simply was too much for the floor at one time.

We look forward to bringing you more samples of ‘Boylston in the News’ in the upcoming months. Stay tuned...



**Newspaper Clippings**  
Stop by Museum to read News Articles  
BHSM Newspaper Collection

<sup>4</sup> “Heroism of men in peril shown in Crash at Boylston.” News clip, not known from which paper.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> “Boylston Church Vestibule Floor Collapses; 31 People are Injured. List of Injured.” Worcester, Mass. January 19, 1906. P.14.

Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc, Photograph Collection, Boylston, Massachusetts

Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc, Newspaper Collection, Boylston, Massachusetts

Editor, Nancy O’Loughlin Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.