

# Entertainment

## Fills Cold February Nights

By Judy Haynes

*February is often labeled the coldest month in our annual calendar. In order to keep the social life active in the days before television, entertainments consisting of concerts and plays were found throughout the news clips. These were held in Boylston Centre at the Town Hall, the historic town hall where the Boylston Historical Society now calls home and houses an extraordinary collection of antiques, items of historical interest and a collection of news clippings in scrapbooks. Following are a few samples of life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

### February, 1875

Poster of “Young People’s Entertainment” was held at the Town Hall, Boylston Centre with a Programe [sic] of song, recitation tableau and a farce “A Little More Cider.’ Also, a pantomime ‘Coffee and Pistols for Two’ and another drama ‘Among the Breakers.’ Admission was 25 cents, reserved seats 35 cents and children 15 cents. How times and prices for entertainment have changed.

### Boylston. February 7, 1885

“We hope all will remember the ‘Children’s Concert’ to be given by Mrs. H. Andrews at the town hall next Monday evening, Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>.”

Mrs. Andrews is the same lady who played the Smith Parlor Pump organ currently on exhibit in the Historical Society Museum. For more information about the organ, stop by the museum for a visit or check out the article on the Historical Society website:

<https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/The Smith Parlor Pump Organ.pdf>

Mrs. Andrews, born 1 April 1838 as Henrietta Brigham was the eldest daughter of Henry Harding Brigham and Rebeckah Whitcomb Houghton of Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts. Henrietta was from a very active and musically talented Boylston family.

And true to form, the news clip of a few days after the Feb 9<sup>th</sup> notice, the following was reported:

“A public entertainment was given in the Town Hall Monday evening by the children of the public schools. The singing showed that much time and pains had been given by their teacher, Mrs. Henrietta Andrews who has had charge of the schools the past year. The hall was crowded and the music enjoyed by all.”

Public entertainment continued, but in the following news clipping, you will see that some 20<sup>th</sup> century entertainment included some “instructions” on that item today we couldn’t live without – the telephone!



**HENRIETTA BRIGHAM ANDREWS**  
Shown with Smith Parlor Pump Organ  
*She served as a piano performer,  
piano teacher & church organist*



**ROTARY DIAL WALL TELEPHONE**  
*Also seen candle in wall sconce that comes off  
to be candle carrier  
Photograph by Infrogmation*

“The Boylston Grange cordially invites you to attend an Evening of Entertainment at the Main Street Town House at 8.00 o’clock, Thursday, February 23, 1939. Motion Pictures showing Hurricane scenes, the drawing and insulation of copper telephone wires and an animated cartoon will be seen. The ‘Hear Your Own Voice’ equipment, a Dial Telephone Demonstration Unit, a brief instruction in the use of Dial telephones as well as other interesting exhibits will be featured. The same program will be held at 2.00 o’clock for school children.” Here “Town House” was the building the Men’s Club built and now stands next to the fire station. While the historic town hall could still house 40 – 50, the Town House was larger and became the more commonly used site for events.

Imagine having to learn about dialing a telephone, but on  
“March 8, 1939, the Boylston, Mass., service was cut over from magneto service to community dial service. This community of 190 telephones now has its ‘operator’ calls handled in Worcester”.

“The transition from manual to dial service was accomplished smoothly and the new service was inaugurated by the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, Mr. Jacob Hakala, making the first call to Mrs. Mary E. French, mother of our present Agent, Harold B. French, and who has been an important member of the family operating the Boylston exchange since 1906”.

“Boylston telephone history means practically the life story of Mrs. Mary E. French from 1906 to 1939. The first telephone service in Boylston was started in 1897 with one telephone line from a pay station to Worcester eight miles away. This lasted until 1905 when a telephone exchange with 15 subscribers was installed at the home of George Vickery on Central Street.



**LOCATION OF FIRST TELEPHONE EXCHANGE IN BOYLSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

*Vickery House  
Central Street  
BHSM Photograph Collection*

In August 1906, the exchange was taken over by Mr. H.H. French, husband of Mrs. Mary E. French. This service installed at that time was a wall type switchboard”. For telephone history in Boylston, see “What Number? A Brief History of the Telephone in Boylston”  
<https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/2023 Dec FFF/FFF12292023 Telephone.pdf>

“Many are the thrilling and amusing incidents that Mrs. French can recall during the past thirty-three years that she has given telephone service. Mrs. French’s good nature still is unfailing, but all she will say about herself is that ‘It’s a pleasure to do one’s duty and to have been of service to the public”.

“The planning and completing of this successful Boylston cut-over was carried out by and interdepartmental group comprised of Mr. Henry B. Phillips, Traffic: Mr. Geore F. Warren, Central Office Equipment: Mr. Joseph Morgan, Mr. Harrold Sargent, Mr. Michael E. Casey, Plant; and Mr. Robert W. Murdick, Commercial.”

*To get a sense of life in the previous centuries, come by  
The Historic Town Hall to view the news clips in person on a  
Sunday, 2 – 4 p.m. or other days by appointment.*

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Acknowledgements:

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Photograph of Henrietta Brigham Andrews: Photograph Collections, Boylston Historical Society Museum, Inc, 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts

Special Collections, Mary E. French Scrapbooks, Boylston Historical Society Museum, Inc, 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts, many dates were not noted on newspaper clippings

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