

# Spring Wild Flowers of Boylston

By Inga Milbauer

In *The Boylston Reader* William O. Dupuis compiled stories, poems, letters and observations about the town of Boylston from the early 1700s to 1997. One of the contributions, written by Louise Bray Walker, describes the flora of Boylston. The quotes below were taken from an eight-page typed document, *Wild Flowers of Boylston* by Louise M. (Bray) Walker, dated 18 June 1905. It begins as follows:

*“To a lover of Nature looking for treasures of the plant world he will find the woods and fields, meadows and waysides of Boylston, from early spring until late autumn, a continual source of delight.”*

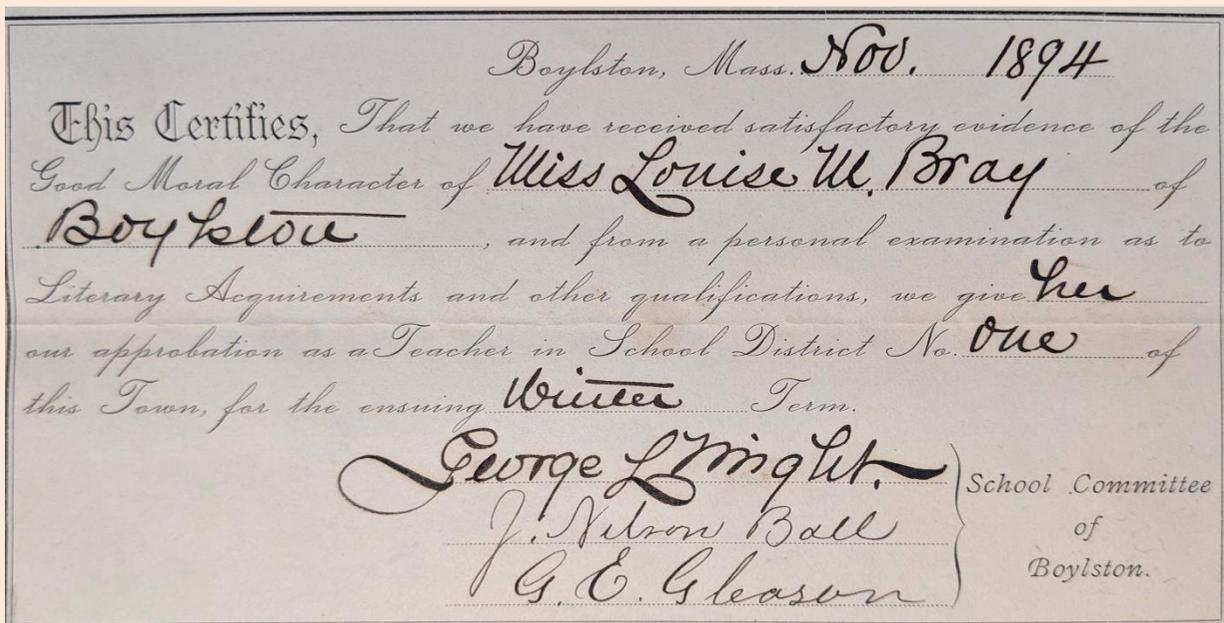
She writes that the study of botany has always interested her:

*“And now with young assistants, spying new flowers, bringing me, literally, bushels of field treasures all through the spring and summer months, taking long walks together, how can I find the study of botany dull.”*



**BRAY FAMILY AND HOME**  
**ONE OF THE HOMES REMOVED FOR THE BUILDING OF THE WACHUSETT RESERVOIR**  
*BHSM Photograph Collection*

Louise Maria Bray was born on 14 February 1871, the daughter of Charles Bray and Betsey Louisa (Cunningham) Bray. Louise grew up in Boylston. She graduated from the Worcester State Normal School in January of 1893, and taught in the schools of Auburn and Boylston for 2.5 years. The Worcester State Normal School was founded in 1874, the fifth teacher-training school funded by the State of Massachusetts. It became the Worcester State Teachers College in 1963.<sup>1</sup>



**APPOINTMENT OF LOUISE BRAY AS BOYLSTON TEACHER**  
**NOVEMBER 1894**  
*BHSM Photograph Collections*

Louise Bray married Edward Joseph Walker on 15 August 1895 in Boylston. The couple lived on a farm in Boylston and had three daughters: Beth Louise, Alice Ada, and Edith Merriane. Edward died on 23 March 1918, Louise died at age 90 years on 23 December 1961. They are buried in Pine Grove Cemetery in Boylston, Massachusetts.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worcester.edu/about/history>

Here are some excerpts of her writings about spring flowers she found while exploring the meadows and woodlands of Boylston.



**SKUNK CABBAGE**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

*“The first herald of spring was brought to me, I think on March fifteen.”... “My inclination has always been to turn a cold shoulder to the skunk cabbage, but this spring as I beheld clumps of ‘the hermit of the bog’, I was struck with the beauty of the coloring of the hooded blossoms. Such beautiful stripings of purplish red and green, it seemed to me a bunch of skunk cabbage hoods would be a subject not unfit an artist’s brush.”*



*“In April and early May we will find our meadows of Boylston bright with the golden blossoms of the marsh marigold, or cowslip as we are apt to incorrectly term them.”*

**MARSH MARIGOLD**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

*“During May we find violets in their prime. Perhaps the most common blue violet is the best known and most beloved by the children. The meadows are carpeted with the velvet blossoms. The tiny round leaved white violet is a near neighbor, and is faintly sweet scented. The lance lancet, too, is found in moist land. Its flower is white.”*



**COMMON BLUE VIOLET**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*



**WHITE VIOLET**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

*“The arrow leaved violet, blue in color, I have generally found on higher land, often in a dry wood.”*

**ARROW LEAVED  
OR NEW ENGLAND VIOLET**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*



*“The bird foot violet, unlike other members of the family, has leaves which are divided into linear lobes thus resembling a bird’s foot. Its lovely flower is especially striking, and is generally found growing in sandy soil. I well remember of our frequenting in childhood a pretty spot where these usually blue violets were a pure white.”*



**BIRD FOOT VIOLET FLOWER**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*



**BIRD FOOT VIOLET**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

♣ *“The downy yellow violet we find not far from our farm buildings. This variety being rather rare, is always greeted with delight. I presume there may be other varieties of violets in Boylston, but these six are all that I have ever gathered.”*

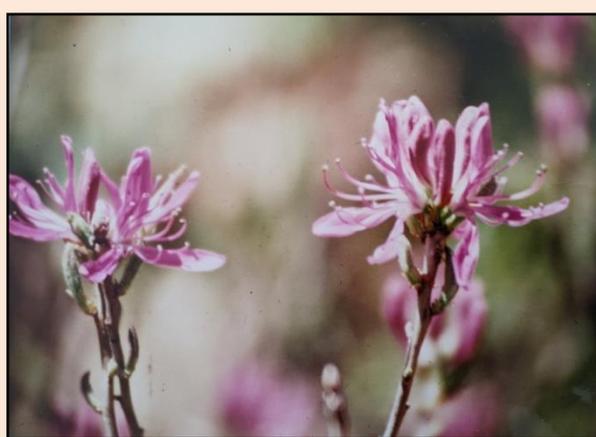
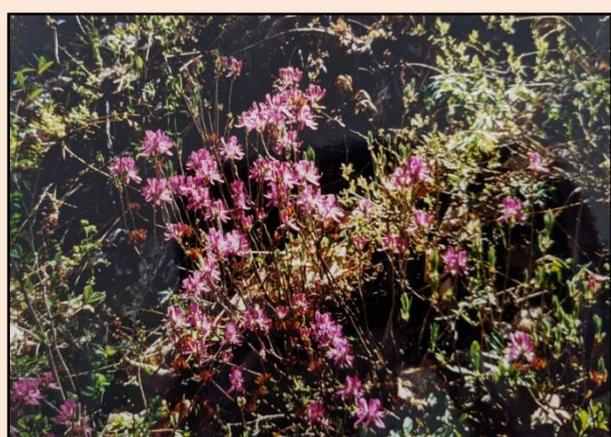


*“The yellow adder’s tongue, or dog’s tooth violet may perhaps be familiar to many. There have been several comments as to the unsuitableness of the name violet being applied to this bell-like flower of the lily family. In former years these flowers grew very plentifully in the borders of the dense wood between Sawyers Mills and then South Clinton. Some specimens brought to me this year were found near the Boylston end of the state road.”*

**DOG’S TOOTH VIOLET OR TROUT LILY**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

*“Before Nature is fully robed, one may chance to notice while on a drive along our country roads, shrubs in near by meadows, aglow with purplish pink blossoms. The Rhodora is a welcome sight in spring. As the flowers appear before the leaves, the meadows are made gay with these bright patches of color. On our three-mile drive to Boylston Center, the Rhodora is seen in four different places.”*



**RHODORA BUSH**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

**RHODORA FLOWER**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

*“I doubt that there is a flower more eagerly sought in Boylston than the trailing arbutus, or mayflower, as most New Englanders prefer to call it. This sweetest of spring blossoms finds a home in nearly all sections of the town, and during its season of blooming, many from neighboring towns visit its haunts.” “I have looked in vain for arbutus on our farm, but perhaps some day while on a woodland quest I may unexpectedly chance upon its hiding place.”* The farm Louise Bray refers to was situated below Mile Hill on what is now Linden Street in Boylston, where she lived from August 1895 to June 1918.<sup>2</sup>



**TRAILING ARBUTUS OR MAYFLOWER**

*Photography by Ruth M. Coyle*

The photographs by Ruth M. Coyle are part of an album of photographs she donated to the Boylston Historical Society. Her love of the outdoors inspired her hobby of photography. She photographed hundreds of flowers along the reservoir. “I knew every inch of the shore line and every road leading to it.”<sup>3</sup>

In January and February 2003, Judith Haynes interviewed Ruth Coyle as part of the Oral History Project. At the time of the interviews, she had lived in Boylston for 87 years. Ruth Mildred Donaldson was born in Boylston on 1 April 1918 in the home of her parents on Scar Hill Road in Boylston. Her parents were Edgar and Marion (Mitchell) Donaldson. She had two older sisters, and a younger sister and brother.

Ruth married John Bernard Coyle on 4 December 1943. John Coyle was born on 28 July 1914 in Clinton, Massachusetts, the son of John and Esther (Bannister) Coyle. Ruth and John had two children, John Jr. and Ruth Ellen. The couple had been married for 43 years when John Coyle



<sup>2</sup> *Wild Flowers of Boylston*, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. Boylston, Massachusetts, page 8

<sup>3</sup> *An Oral History of Ruth Donaldson Coyle*, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. Boylston, Massachusetts page 21

died on 26 December 1990. Ruth was 93 years old when she died on 21 November 2011. They are both buried in Pine Grove Cemetery.

The oral history of Ruth paints a vivid picture of growing up in the small town of Boylston during the twentieth century. Ruth was fond of horseback riding, and when she was twenty, she got her own horse. She could walk from her home to the farm where the horse was boarded on Diamond Hill Avenue.

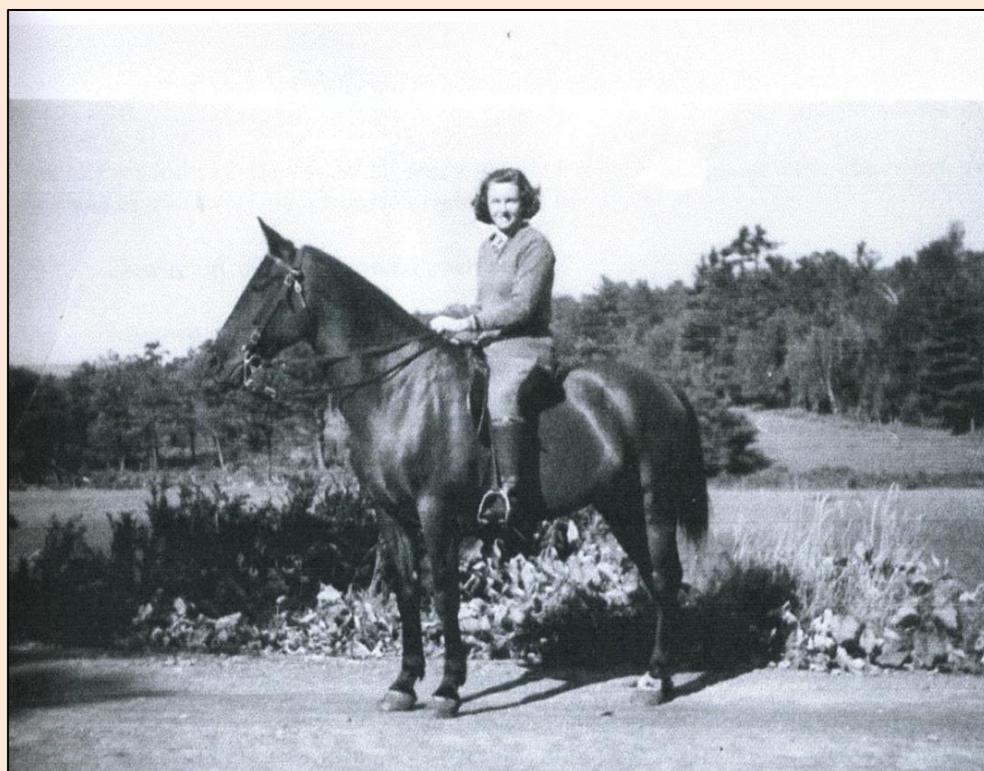
*“I had saddle bags and I put my lunch in, and the dogs that were with me – they had lunch too – so I would stop where we were going to eat and give the horse her food, and then I would give the dogs their food, and then by the time I got to my sandwich they were all ready to help me eat mine (laughter). The horse, too, she would try to take the sandwich right of my hand.”<sup>4</sup>*

During World War II she patrolled the reservoir:

*“I was the mounted patrol because I had a horse, so I had free rein to ride all over the place, which was nice, but I never saw anything.”*

To the question what they were looking for, Ruth answers

*“Sabotage, I think, because that is Boston area water supply.”<sup>5</sup>*



**RUTH COYLE ON HER HORSE, THISTLE**  
**1940**  
*BHSM COLLECTIONS*

The *Nature's Garden* collection of photographs and the *Oral History of Ruth Donaldson Coyle* are both available at our museum.

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Acknowledgements:

*An Oral History of Ruth Donaldson Coyle*, interview by Judy Haynes, Boylston, 2003  
Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. Collections, BHSM, 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts  
<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com>  
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<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59471026/john-b-coyle>  
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Photography by Ruth M. Coyle  
Editor, Nancy A. Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, Massachusetts

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 29-30

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 60