

April in Boylston – News

By Judy Haynes

The date of April 19, 1775 would be a turning point for the people of the Thirteen Colonies of British America, and Boylston's farmers would become a part of that event when a horseback rider came through town shouting "To arms! To arms! The war has begun!"¹



THE GROWTH OF OUR NATIONAL FLAG

1. COLONIAL FLAG, used chiefly by Colonies of New England previous to Revolutionary War
2. BUNKER HILL FLAG, used by New England troops at the battle of Bunker Hill
3. PINE TREE FLAG OF THE NAVY, used by the American ships early in Revolutionary War
4. RATTLESNAKE FLAG, used early in the Revolutionary War
5. FIRST NATIONAL FLAG, used in 1776, before the Declaration of Independence. The thirteen stripes signified the thirteen colonies.
6. STAR SPANGLED BANNER, current, the stripes signify the original thirteen colonies; and the stars, the present number of States

Lexington Alarm

Every pupil since then learns this was the beginning of the battles of the Revolutionary War when growing unrest due to various taxes and British control led up to the cries to break with English rule and become an independent country. It was 47 men of Shrewsbury's Second Precinct, later known as Boylston who would respond to the alarm. These brave men would gather and march with other Minutemen onto Cambridge for its fortification as this was the landing point of the British troops that early morning on route to Lexington and Concord to seize Patriot armament. In 1775, Boston was almost an island, with just a thin strip of land called Boston Neck connecting it to the mainland, so the water landing point at Lechmere Point, Cambridge for the British soldiers had served as the most direct route to Concord and Lexington.

Fast forward to April, 2025 we find a team of researchers busily working on a publication that will bring to life the names and families of these brave men who answered the alarm. In honor of the approaching 250th Anniversary of our independence (1776 -2026), genealogical researchers are gathering as much data as possible on these soldiers. Much of that 'wool gathering' is taking place at the building known as Boylston's Historic Town Hall, a place that has become the town's archive of historical documents and artifacts.

It was 55 years after the revolution's start, when in 1830 a building would be raised to provide a place for conducting local government and in just a few short years it would be utilized for continued learning; thus, once built, the second floor served as the Town Meeting House and on 11 November 1839, it was voted at town meeting to use the lower 2 rooms for a school.²

When the Second Precinct broke from Shrewsbury to become an independent town named Boylston in 1786, it was noted by a prominent Boston wealthy man named Ward Nicholas Boylston (1747-1828). That a town would so honor his family name, and being one of a charitable nature, he first left to this town a sum of 40 pounds in 1799. Mr. Boylston sent this sum to the selectmen with some very specific instructions for the monies use.³ The money was to be banked and invested until the interest grew to the point where a lot of land could be purchased and an edifice built, then it would become a reality. It was always to be used as the will stipulated or it would revert to his other legatees.

The town hall was to be built of stone, two stories high, of dimensions 30 feet wide and 45 feet in depth

“to be finished in a plain and durable style for the purpose of holding public meetings for a school house, and for other municipal purposes and not for any other use.”⁴

In addition to the initial 40 pounds, Mr. Boylston bequeathed by his will an additional amount of \$300. He died in 1828 and by 1830 the town fathers deemed enough money had gathered to buy the lot and begin building.

¹ Harlow, William T. Chapter XCIX "Shrewsbury" in *History of Worcester County, Volume I*, R.J. Lewis & Co., 1889.

² Boylston Town Meeting Records, Article V, November 1839

³ Ward Nicholas Boylston Will, 1826, Archives Collection, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts

⁴ Ibid

The town maintained the wishes of its benefactor and has used the hall continuously for town offices, a school, a library, and currently a meeting place for town organizations as well as an historical center where many of the town's original documents and other artifacts are housed. Its scheduling usage, repairs and oversight are handled by the town's Historical Commission. Should your group wish to use the facility for its meetings, contact boylstonhistoricalcommision@gmail.com



Historic Town Hall

A news article of 1982⁵ tells of volunteers “engaged in a labor of love” when they began stripping the interior of the [then] 152-year-old Town Hall to get it ready for a \$257,000 restoration project.”⁶ The work began in April of that year to bring the building back to its original condition. Partitions were removed from the town's offices in the building in order to make the second floor once again a large one-room chamber. The town then moved those offices to a former school building in Morningdale, and the hall took on its new role.



Two Men skim coat the arched ceiling in the upper level of the Historic Town Hall
Would anyone know the identities of these men?
Boylston Historical Society Photograph Collection

By 1985 the work was still ongoing, but the second floor of the town hall was turned over to the Boylston Historical Commission as “a lasting reminder of Bicentennial observance.”⁷ The town would celebrate its 200th anniversary (1786 – 1986) the following year with a multitude of events. For more information on the Boylston Bicentennial and to see photographs of this event, *see* <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/2025-03%20FFF/Boylstons%20Bicentennial.pdf>

Happy Birthday America!

In addition to the town's 200th anniversary of 1986, we come full circle to April, 2025 where the local historical researchers are gathering information to celebrate America's 200th in 2026. The book being written will feature the original 47 men and their families, those who answered the alarm in April, 1775. If you are interested in assisting with the research for this publication, please contact us at info@boylstonhistory.org. Watch for the announcement of this upcoming publication in the months to come!

⁵ Pacek, Stanley E. “Boylston Residents Uncover Town Hall's Past,” news clip. 1982.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Keyes, Beverly, “Boylston Historic Group is Housed in Town Hall,” news clip, 1985.

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Photograph of Flags, Wikimedia Commons, 1885