

## *New Acquisition!*

# *“The Story of the War of 1898”*

*Told by W. Nephew King, Lieutenant U.S.N.*

*By Inga Milbauer*

*One of the recent notable donations to the Boylston Historical Society and Museum is a first edition copy of “The Story of the War of 1898” told by W. Nephew King, Lieutenant U.S.N., published by Peter Fenelon Collier, New York in 1898. It was generously donated by Paul E. Freeman Jr. of Westborough, Massachusetts. Mr. Freeman is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation descendant of Mr. James McGrath who was a resident of Boylston and one of the seven Boylston men who enlisted in the Spanish-American War.*

In his historical essay ‘The Waters Rose on the Earth’ local historian George L. Wright depicts Boylston during the period of 1887-1906. He writes about the Spanish-American War as follows:

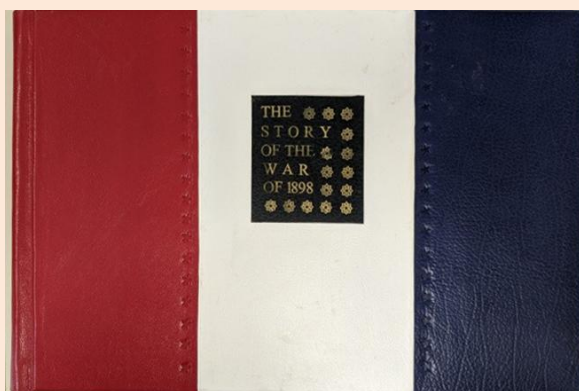
“On February 15, 1898 the battleship ‘Maine’ blew up in Havana harbor. The agitation of the Yellow Press and the many political ‘hawks’ forced this country into the Spanish-American War. On April 25, the Congress officially declared war on Spain, and the United States embarked on what Theodore Roosevelt called, ‘that splendid little war.’

The following young men from Boylston enlisted in the military service: Anthony Newell [Nuell], Walter Stone, Ernest Whitcomb, James McGrath, Ralph C. White, Felix Smith, and Matthew Jasper. All of these men returned from the war, with no casualties reported.”<sup>1</sup>

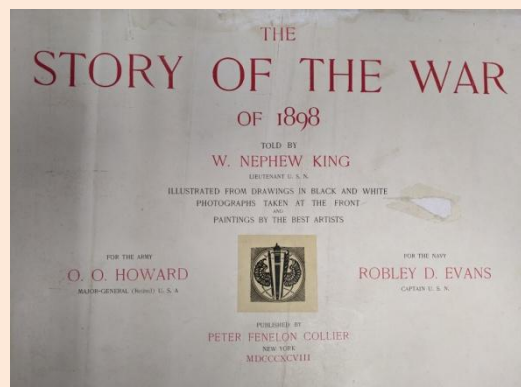
The Superintendent of the school district at the time was Charles L. Clay. He mentions in his annual report for the year ending in February 28, 1899:

“a period of time in which so many world-wide interests have hastened their culmination that history will doubtless record the year 1898 as the most memorable of the century now so near its close.”...“The year has seen us in conflict, begun and ended, with one of the oldest nations of Europe. For the first time in our history, American soldiers have embarked for foreign lands.”<sup>2</sup>

The donated book, *The Story of the War of 1898* by W. Nephew King, is bound in red, white and blue leather, and measures 13 5/8 x 20 7/8 x 2 ½ inches. It was restored by Old Working Books & Bindery, 18 Northfield, West Brookfield, Massachusetts. The cover and title page are designed by George Wharton Edwards.



**THE STORY OF THE WAR OF 1898  
COVER**  
*BHSM Library Collection*



**THE STORY OF THE WAR OF 1898  
TITLE PAGE**  
*BHSM Library Collection*

The illustrations were selected and arranged by Walter Russell. The publication has 322 pages with 52 full-page black and white illustrations, 16 color illustrations of which 9 are large fold out illustrations, and numerous black and white photographs. The author’s preface is followed by two introductions: an introduction for the Navy by Captain Robley D. Evans, and an introduction for the Army by Major-General O.O. Howard. These chapters are followed by the story of the war, written by Lieutenant W. Nephew King.



**ILLUSTRATION OF THE U.S. BATTLESHIP MAINE AT  
HAVANA, CUBA**  
**THE STORY OF THE WAR OF 1898**  
*February 14, 1898 - Painting by Henry Reuter dahl*

<sup>1</sup> *Boylston Historical Series* by Bruce Filgate, 2012, p.502

<sup>2</sup> Report of the School Committee of the Town of Boylston, 1899



**ILLUSTRATION OF THE U.S. BATTLESHIP MAINE  
AT HAVANA, CUBA  
THE STORY OF THE WAR OF 1898  
*February 15, 1898 - Drawing by W. Louis Sonntag Jr.***

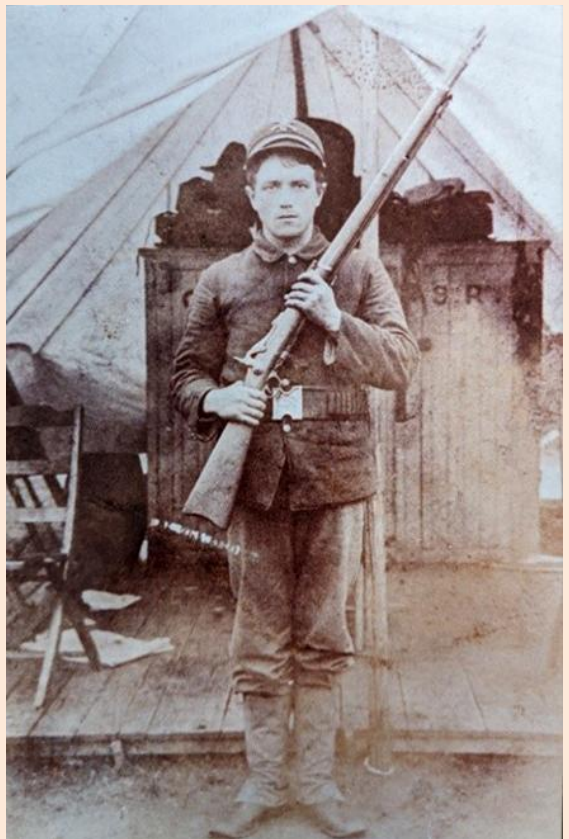


**The Day After the Explosion  
PHOTOGRAPH OF THE U.S. BATTLESHIP MAINE  
THE STORY OF THE WAR OF 1898  
*Photographer Unnamed***

As the author writes in the preface, “This story of our ‘Hundred Days’ War with Spain’ was prepared, not with a view of making it an exhaustive history, but, as the title itself suggests, an authentic narrative of our brilliant victory. The illustrations which adorn its pages are not only the work of well-known military and naval artists, but were mainly executed by eye-witnesses of the events portrayed, and no expense has been spared in their reproduction – both in colors and in black and white.”<sup>3</sup>

James McGrath was one of the photographers whose photographs are included in this book. Mr. Freeman indicated that the name James McGrath is not listed among the photographers cited in the book, since he was an assistant to the photographers. The original photographs of San Juan Heights and others, were among those found in his personal collection.<sup>4</sup> James McGrath enlisted in the Massachusetts 9<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Company G.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was mustered in between 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> May 1898 at South Framingham. At the time of mustering-in the unit had forty-seven officers and 896 enlisted men.<sup>5</sup> From Camp Dewey in South Framingham, the regiment went to Camp Algiers near Falls Church, Virginia. The regiment, led by Colonel Fred B. Bogan, was sent to Cuba on 26 June and arrived on 1 July 1898. The regiment arrived the same day the battles of El Caney and San Juan Heights were fought.



**JAMES J. MCGRATH  
1898  
*BHSM Photograph Collection***

“During the night of July 1<sup>st</sup>, the Thirty-fourth Regiment of Michigan Volunteers and the Ninth Massachusetts, two of the last regiments arriving from the United States, were ordered to the front. The former was assigned to General Kent’s division, and the latter to General Bates’, which had also arrived.”<sup>6</sup>

The United States and Spain agreed to an armistice on 12 August 1898. The 9<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry stayed in Cuba until 26 August when they left to return to the United States, arriving on 4 September 1898. The regiment mustered out on 26 November 1898 at Boston.<sup>7</sup> The Spanish American War ended on 10 December 1898 with the Treaty of Paris.

<sup>3</sup> *The Story of the War of 1898* by W. Nephew King, New York, 1898

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Paul E. Freeman Jr. & Joyce Simonis, 30 May 2025

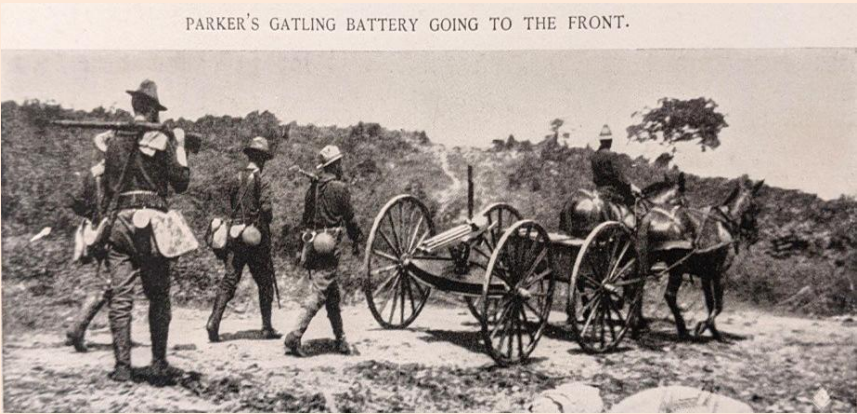
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.spanamwar.com/9thmass.html>

<sup>6</sup> *The Story of the War of 1898* by W. Nephew King, New York, 1898, p.250

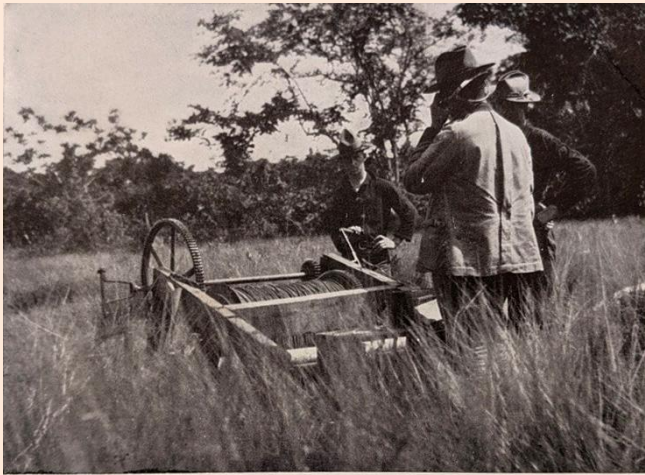
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.spanamwar.com/9thmass.html>



PARKER'S GATLING BATTERY GOING TO THE FRONT.



THREE OF THE SEVENTY-FIRST REGIMENT'S BOYS ON SAN JUAN HILL.



THE MILITARY TELEPHONE IN OPERATION.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

### THE STORY OF THE WAR OF 1898

Photographer Unnamed

## Irish Roots

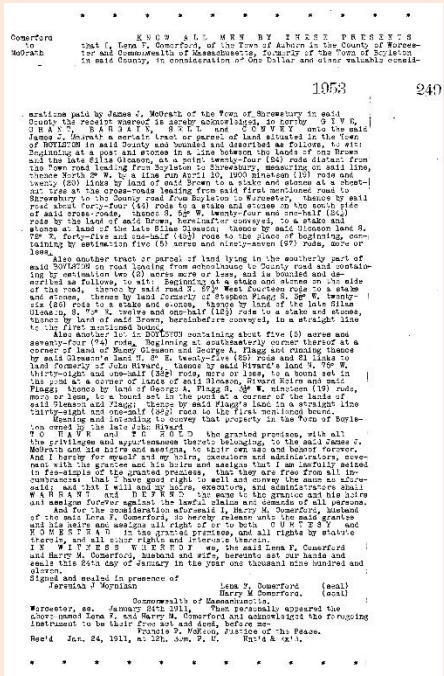
James Joseph McGrath was born on 26 February 1871 in Ballydwan, Kilmathomas, County Waterford, Ireland, the son of James McGrath and Bridget Keilly.<sup>8</sup> Bridget McGrath's brother was a chemist at the Dupont Company and sponsored James to come to the United States. James was approximately thirteen years old when he came to Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup>

## Marriage

There he met Mary Eliza Leland, the daughter of Asa Leland and Anna Madden.<sup>10</sup> Mary E. Leland was born on 4 September 1880 in Plymouth, Plymouth County, Massachusetts.<sup>11</sup> Her family were residing in Plymouth until 1890 and by 1893, they had relocated to Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts.<sup>12,13</sup> James McGrath and Mary Leland, both residents of Worcester were married there on 16 September 1896, with Thomas S. Hanrahan, officiating.<sup>14</sup>



**BRIDGET KEILLY MCGRATH**  
*Mother of James McGrath*  
BHSM Photograph Collection



## 1911 BOYLSTON PROPERTY DEED

### OF JAMES MCGRATH

Massachusetts Land Records

## Boylston Farm

In 1900, James McGrath, an iron finisher, was residing on Mill Street in Worcester with his wife Mary McGrath.<sup>15</sup> On 24 January 1911 James J. McGrath, of the Town of Shrewsbury, purchased 3 tracts of land in Boylston from Lena F. Comerford. The deed describes the property to be at the crossroads of the Shrewsbury Road [Rt 140] and County Road [Rt 70] from Boylston to Worcester to the Schoolhouse.<sup>16</sup>

The 1920 U.S. Federal Census of Boylston lists the farm on Main Street [Rt 70], Boylston as the residence of James McGrath, a machinist in the mill industry. Living with him were: his wife Mary; daughter Etta, age 17 years; son John, age 15 years; daughter Anna, 14 years, and his mother Bridget McGrath, age 88 years. Frank Dunham, age 34 years; Dennis Gleason, age 44 years; and John Wade, age 38 years were boarders.<sup>17</sup>

The McGrath family in Boylston owned and operated a large pig farm on what is now Route 140, between the intersection with Route 70 and Sewall Streets. “The 600-1000 pigs on the farm were fed with food scraps collected from local hospitals. The pigs were sold to Hoffman’s Meat Market in Clinton, Worcester County, Massachusetts”.<sup>18</sup> James’ mother, Bridget McGrath, died in Boylston in 1929.<sup>19</sup> The 1950 U.S. Federal Census lists James McGrath as farmer and head of

<sup>8</sup> Birth Registration of Ireland, Kilmathomas, County Waterford, Ireland

<sup>9</sup> Interview, Paul E. Freeman Jr. & Joyce Simonis, 30 May 2025

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Paul E. Freeman Jr. & Joyce Simonis, 30 May 2025

<sup>11</sup> Birth Record, Plymouth, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1880

<sup>12</sup> U.S. City Directory, Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1890, p 117

<sup>13</sup> U.S. City Directory, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1893 p 268

<sup>14</sup> <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/L7XM-KSX/james-j-mcgrath-1871>

<sup>15</sup> United States Federal Census, Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1900, ancestry.com

<sup>16</sup> Massachusetts Land Records, Worcester District, Book 1953 p 248-249

<sup>17</sup> United States Federal Census, Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1920, ancestry.com

<sup>18</sup> Interview, Paul E. Freeman Jr. & Joyce Simonis, 30 May 2025

<sup>19</sup> Massachusetts Death Index, 1901-1980, Bridget McGrath, ancestry.com



household with his wife Mary, his daughter Anna McGrath Dunham and son in law Harold Dunham. The photograph below shows the McGrath family, with James and Mary in the center.

Their adult daughters are seated on the floor, Anna McGrath Dunham (on the far left) and Etta McGrath Freeman next to her. Etta’s daughter, Mary Freeman Deschenes is seated behind her. The little girl in the front is Joyce Deschenes Simonis. In the back on the left is Paul E. Freeman, the son of Etta Freeman and Ernest Philip Freeman.



**JAMES AND MARY MCGRATH FAMILY**

*1940s*

*front row: Anna McGrath Dunham, Etta McGrath Freeman, unidentified child, Joyce Deschenes Simonis, Dorothy Freeman Martin; second row: David Dunham; third row: Mary Deschenes, James McGrath, Mary McGrath; Eleanor Freeman Moreau; backrow: Paul E. Freeman*  
*BHSM Photograph Collection*

**James J. McGrath, Spanish-American War Veteran, Dies**  
James J. McGrath, 88, of 26 Shrewsbury St. (formerly known as South Road), Boylston, died this morning in Rutland Veterans Administration Hospital.  
Mr. McGrath, a veteran of the Spanish - American War, was a noted runner in this area at the turn of the century.  
He had been a member of the former St. Paul's track team and won many medals and trophies in local meets.  
Born in Waterford, Ireland, he had lived in Boylston for 50 years.  
He worked as a press hand at Worcester Stamped Metal Co. for 20 years before retiring in 1936. He previously was employed at Thomas Smith Co.  
During the Spanish-American War he served in Cuba.  
He was a former member of Col. E. R. Shumway Camp No. 28, United Spanish War Veterans, Alhambra Council, Knights of Columbus, and the Worcester Eagles.  
His wife, Mary E. (Leland) McGrath, died in 1957. He leaves 50 descendants.  
He leaves a son, John F. McGrath of Wilmington, Calif.; two daughters, Etta M., wife of Joel H. Albinson, and Mrs. Anna Dunham, both of Boylston; 11 grandchildren; 35 great-grandchildren and a great-great-granddaughter.  
The military funeral will be held Saturday morning in Walter F. Kelly Funeral Home.  
A Solmen High Mass will follow at 10 in St. Mary of the Hills Church, Boylston. Burial will be in Hope Cemetery.  
Calling hours at the funeral home are 7 to 9 this evening and 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. tomorrow.

**OBITUARY**  
**JAMES J. MCGRATH**  
**VETERAN**  
*Evening Gazette*  
*3 May 1962*

**Spanish American War Veteran Leaves a Legacy**

James’ wife, Mary Eliza McGrath died on 15 August 1957 in Worcester, Massachusetts and was buried in Hope Cemetery, Worcester, Massachusetts. James McGrath, 88 years old, of 26 Shrewsbury Street, Boylston died on 3 May 1962 at the Rutland Veterans Administration Hospital, Rutland, Massachusetts and was interred in the same gravesite as his wife who had predeceased him.<sup>20</sup> The family farm was left to his children: Etta M. Albinson, Anna M. Dunham and John F. McGrath. In 1963, one parcel was conveyed to the Town of Boylston to be used for the Elementary School and the other two parcels were sold; the area of the second two parcels later became the locations of the Atlas News, Inc. and Butler-Dearden Paper Service, Inc.<sup>21,22,23</sup>

We thank Paul E. Freeman Jr. and Joyce Deschenes Simonis for their generous donation of the book described in this article, several photographs, and family artifacts to the Boylston Historical Society & Museum!

*Acknowledgements:*

*Boylston Historical Series* by Bruce Filgate, 2012, Boylston Historical Society, Boylston, MA  
<https://guides.loc.gov/world-of-1898>  
<https://www.ancestry.com>  
[https://sites.rootsweb.com/~scjssawv/Database/Massachusetts/9thInfantryRegiment\\_History.html](https://sites.rootsweb.com/~scjssawv/Database/Massachusetts/9thInfantryRegiment_History.html)  
[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63098267/james\\_j-mcgrath](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63098267/james_j-mcgrath)  
[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63098272/mary\\_e-mcgrath](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63098272/mary_e-mcgrath)  
Editor, Nancy A. Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, MA  
Library Collections, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, Massachusetts  
Photograph Collections, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, Massachusetts

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63098267/james\\_j-mcgrath](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63098267/james_j-mcgrath)  
<sup>21</sup> Assessors, Town of Boylston, Boylston, Massachusetts  
<sup>22</sup> At the Courthouse, Worcester Telegram, Wednesday, 9 May 1962, p. 20  
<sup>23</sup> Interview, Paul E. Freeman Jr. & Joyce Simonis, 30 May 2025