

## August News

# Boylston's Centennial

By Judy Haynes

*It was a perfect day to celebrate 100 years! The Worcester newspaper carried the details of “Boylston, Mass. August 18, 1886”.<sup>1</sup> What could be a better way than to open the paper and to read: “The day is perfect” and Boylston is filled with many visitors with exercises and events for all to enjoy. The special celebration began at sunrise with bells ringing from the church and the town hall and included a firearm salute. The buildings were decked out with red, white and blue buntings, decorated as though it was the Fourth of July! It was a celebration on the same scale of that special day, the Fourth, as Boylston was celebrating its foundation in 1786. It was an important event. The Town of Boylston was incorporated one hundred years earlier, carved from Shrewsbury's Second Parish. The first census of 1790 lists 839 persons living in Boylston, part of 111 families.<sup>2</sup>*



1886  
Main St. and Church St.  
Boylston, MA

### Woman and young child under Boylston's 1886 Welcoming Arch

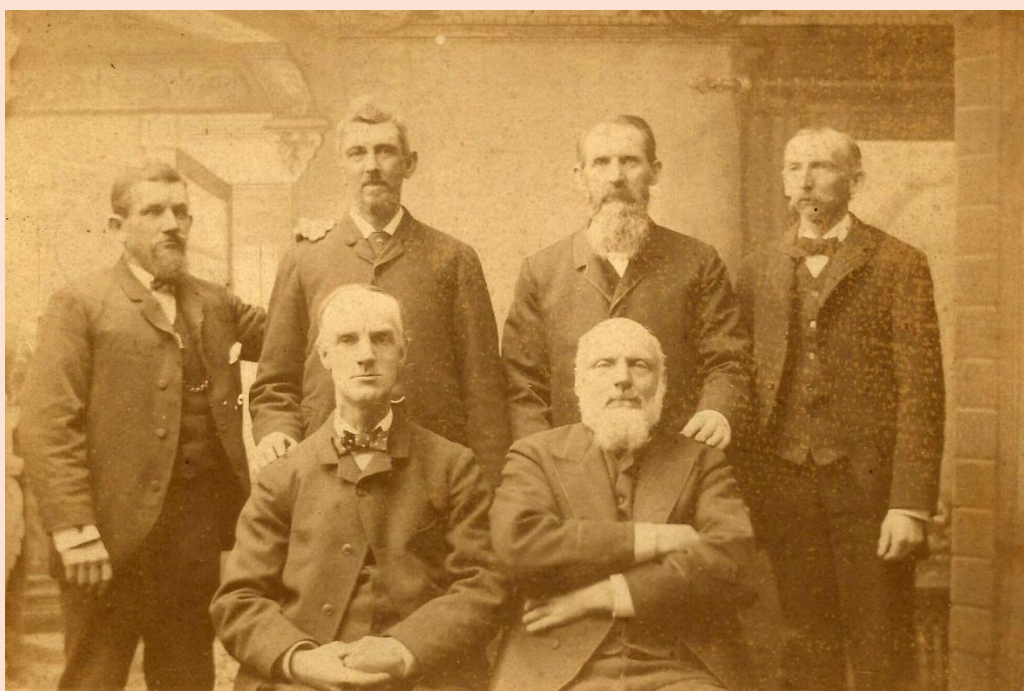
*Location: Main Street and Church Street*

*In background: Boylston Center School (on left) and Town Hall (on right)*

*Boylston Historical Society Photograph Collection*

### Her Roots

She was considered the ‘daughter’ of Shrewsbury and a granddaughter of a part of Lancaster, “the honored parents and guardians of Boylston in her infancy; to their early fostering care the daughter owes much of her growth and prosperity.”<sup>3</sup> Those words were from one of the speeches by John D. Andrews, Esquire., in honor of the town. This was just a few of the copious words from the various Centennial Addresses given that day.



### Boylston Centennial Committee

*Standing left to right: Lyman Kendall, William Andrews, John Warner, Albert Andrews*

*Sitting left to right: Nathaniel Kendall and Elmer Shaw*

*Boylston Historical Society Photograph Collection*

There were no less than twenty short and long orations presented by names familiar to Boylston; however, it began thus: The President of the Day, Hon. Phinehas Ball, would introduce Henry M. Smith, Esq. to be the Orator of the Day, “one of the sons of Boylston”<sup>4</sup> who would go on to expound on its history, giving credit to its territorial roots from “motherly Lancaster,” Shrewsbury and even

<sup>1</sup> *Boylston, Centennial Celebration, 1886, Worcester newspapers, from the Mary French collection, Boylston Historical Society*

<sup>2</sup> *Census of Massachusetts, 1790.*

<sup>3</sup> *Boylston Centennial, book, Press of Sanford & Davis, Worcester, MA. 1887, p. 69.*

<sup>4</sup> *Boylston Centennial, p. 18*



of Marlborough. He referenced Davenport and Ward’s history and cites the first few years and settlers with names such as “Brigham, Sawyer, Bennet, Starr, Bigelow, Hastings, Taylor, Ball, Newton, Keyes, Temple, Flag, Howe, Bush, Davenport, Wheeler, and Andrews.”<sup>5</sup>

**A Proper New England Town**

New England’s method of establishing settlements included a meeting house and a school as “central features,” and Boylston was no different; thus, it was considered a place of good morals and a place with advantages where there would be no “danger of bringing up a set of savages.”<sup>6</sup>

This was a common theme from many orators, that Boylston started small, rough, poor, but with the correct setup of church, schools and with hard work, the past one hundred years saw the town thrive and become “styled a rich town...clear of debt, [it has] several hundred pounds in their treasury.: It had ...large and good farms... great stocks of cattle and produce, beef, pork and grain, butter and cheese” enough that much could be carried to market.<sup>7</sup> It was for those first one hundred years an agricultural town, a very successful one by all accounts with the 1885 population of 834.<sup>8</sup> You will notice that the population didn’t change very much, and this was noted by speakers who indicated that Boylston would raise fine, productive men and women, who then went out in the world to make a name for themselves elsewhere, but who returned this day to celebrate the town they so fondly called ‘home.’ Phineas Ball, an ex-mayor of Worcester, was one such example.

It had little industry except for the successful mills in the Sawyer’s Mills section of town, which did well, but the town was largely a farming community. It was known for its orchards and particularly apple cider production. There were 30 cider mills in town and the cider here was of such” good reputation that a special town messenger was sent” [from Princeton] to obtain cider for one of their special events.<sup>9</sup>

**Temperance Prevails**

Many cider mills meant much drinking of apple juice, with some of it aged into the more alcoholic type of “hard cider.” Good clean water was not always available in Colonial days, and it was quite common for all ages of the population to drink beer and cider. Boylston was one of six towns in Worcester County that sold over 40,000 gallons. Actually, Boylston had 43,016 gallons of cider for sale in 1875.<sup>10</sup> When some took to the strong drink in an unhealthy way, it was the pillars of the church who created a strong Temperance Society within the village. This was one of the reform movements taking hold in the nineteenth century, and Boylston was a part of it. The town could even boast of having its own illustrious noted reformer, John B. Gough, who lived at Hillside and made his living sharing his experience in speech after speech telling how he escaped alcoholism and became temperate and in favor of abstinence.



**Centennial Celebration -1886**  
*Boyden House draped with bunting in background*  
*View from an early bandstand on the New Town Common*  
*Boylston Historical Society Photograph Collection*

**Fun & Games for all**

One hundred years’ success called for an all-day celebration of not just speeches, but a day that included something for everyone. After its opening salute there was a brass band playing, a parade, sports and fun games for all ages, games we seldom see now: wheelbarrow race, potato race, sack race, egg race, three-legged race, greased pole and tug-of-war with prizes for winners. A large tent was the site for the many speeches and later the dinner would be served in another tent that sat on that small common, a “triangular park” where the Powder House also stood.

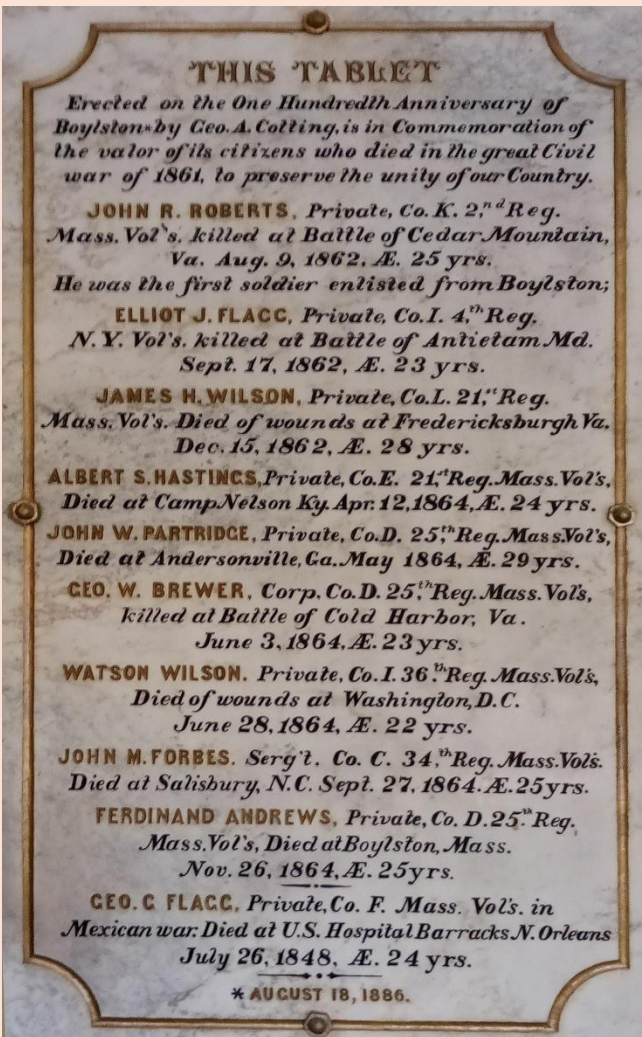
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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 24  
<sup>6</sup> Op cit, p. 25  
<sup>7</sup> Boylston Centennial, p.34  
<sup>8</sup> Census of Massachusetts, 1885, Wright & Potter Printing, Boston, 1888  
<sup>9</sup> Op cit, p.34  
<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts Census of Agricultural Products & Property, Vol. III, 1875



A Soldier’s Memorial

The veterans were not to be forgotten for the previous era included the Mexican American War of 1846, the Civil War of 1861-1865; and the oldest man present, 96-year-old Abel Farwell attended as a living representative of one who had served in the War of 1812. Eighty-one Boylston men served in the Civil War, and those who gave their lives were remembered. A white marble memorial tablet was presented to the town by George Cotting, Esquire and it named those seven who died in the Civil War as well as George C. Flagg, who served in the Mexican American War (1846-1848).<sup>11</sup> The tablet hangs today as it had those countless years ago on the wall of the Historic Town Hall, second floor.



Memorial Honoring Boylston Men  
Who died in Military Service during the Civil  
War and the Mexican War  
*Plaque Hanging in Historic Town Hall*

It was a grand reunion

It must have been quite the sight! Music, bands, games, speeches, colorful decorations, and a grand reunion of folks who came from far and wide to share their memories and learn of the history of those early years of their hometown. Home and reunion were spoken with warmth and fervor.



Centennial Celebration 1886  
Boylston, MA

Boylston Centennial Celebration - 1886  
*View of Scar Hill Road and Center School in background*  
*Boylston Historical Society Photograph Collection*

For those interested in reading the details, the Boylston Historical Society’s Fuller Library houses several copies of the 140-page book titled “Boylston Centennial.” We welcome your visits to a building that was also an important part of Boylston’s first century. It was erected in 1830 to serve as a schoolhouse and civic building for the townspeople of Boylston.

<sup>11</sup> *Boylston Centennial* book, presentation of the tablet, pp.11-16  
Editor, Nancy O’Loughlin Filgate, Director & Curator, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts  
Library Collection, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts  
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