

# Advertisement of a Not-so-Honest Rumseller

By Chloe Nehme

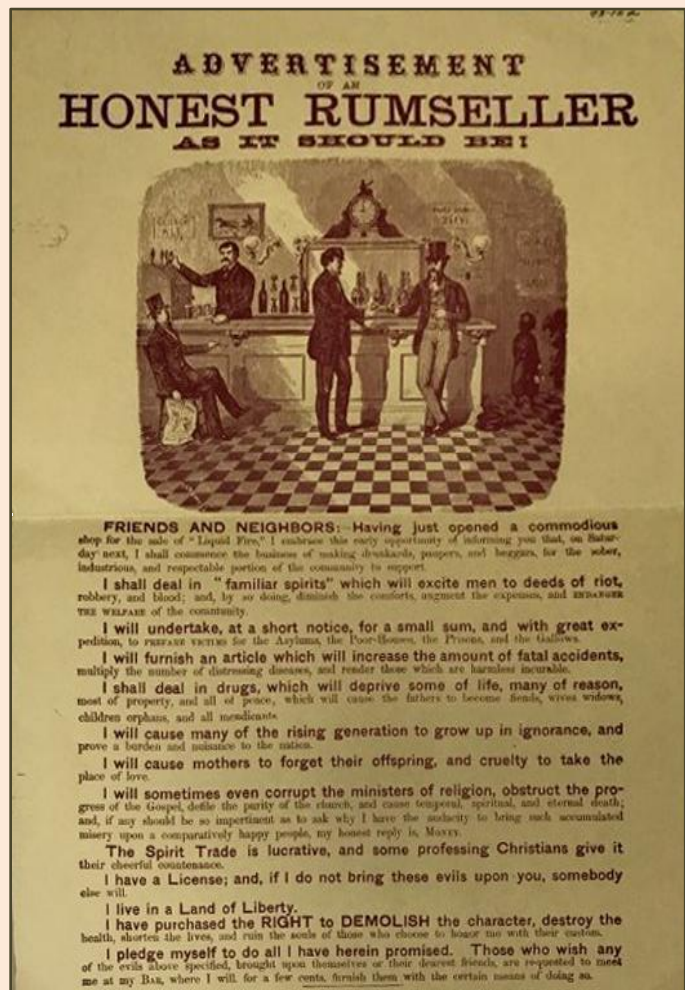
*Satire has had an endless history. Scholars date it back to Ancient Greece, with playwright Aristophanes targeting politicians such as Cleon in his plays.<sup>1</sup> When there are humans with the opportunity to create, there will always be satirical critiques that support social and political activism through irony. In American history, this is also the case. American political satire begins with figures such as Benjamin Franklin in the Revolutionary War, who employed satire in his essays criticizing the British monarchy.<sup>2</sup> Political satire like this continued on through the years, and became especially prominent in the 1800s during a multitude of social and political unrest. The Abolitionist movement, the Women's Suffrage movement, and, important for our story, the Temperance movement, all took place during this time. Satire, of course, was an important outlet of expressing dissent and critiques for those who were involved on both sides of the movements, and where today's Fascinating Find can be found.*

## Temperance Movement

'Advertisement of an Honest Rumseller' is an example of satire created in favor of the Temperance Movement. As the name suggests, this was a movement to limit alcohol use and encourage abstinence from it. Indeed, by 1767, the average New England family was consuming around seven barrels of hard cider, a primary alcoholic drink made using fermented apple juice.<sup>3</sup> Originally starting out as a movement for moderation, the Temperance movement moved towards total abstinence as it was supported by women who wished for their husbands to stop drinking as well as the religious reformers who believed drinking had detrimental effects on society.<sup>4</sup>

## Local Measures

"Boylston has been faithful and sympathizing in leading reforms, and benevolent measures...Her cider mills gave way promptly before the advance of Total Abstinence".<sup>5</sup> According to Henry H. Brigham, "We are a temperance people, and are all prohibitionists. When called upon to vote whether intoxicating liquors shall be sold in town or not, the vote is an unanimous No. Fifty years ago there were three stores and a tavern where rum was sold, and everybody drank it....Soon after that time the sale in all those places was voluntarily given up, and for forty years no rum has been sold in town, consequently very little of the effects of intoxicating drinks have been seen".<sup>6</sup> Boylstonian John B. Gough, a reformed alcoholic, became a world renown Temperance orator. Knowing this, how ironic it was when the land adjacent to his housed an arrest made during the Prohibition Era! It was during the era of the Eightieth Amendment of the Constitution; arrests were made at the Montraville Flagg estate for the possession of alcohol.<sup>7</sup>



**ADVERTISEMENT OF AN HONEST RUMSELLER  
AS IT SHOULD BE! -1880**  
Archives Collection  
Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc



**ALICE MAUD SEGERSTEN**  
Photograph Collection  
Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.

## Boylston Ties

This advertisement was donated by Alice Maud Segersten, born 22 March 1893 in Boylston, the daughter of George Hazard and Alice Jane Flagg. Her maternal grandfather, Levi Lincoln Flagg, a tavern owner, was the richest landowner in the town of Boylston at the time. After the death of her mother in 1895, Alice went to live with him and her Aunt Jennie.

Alice grew up to be a teacher and worked at the Colonial School in Pelham, New York. In 1931, she was part of a movement to further the spiritual side of education. Alongside the Worcester County Teachers Association at White Plains High School, she urged for the introduction of spiritual and theological studies within the school curriculum. This movement urged that it was "the preacher's job to give moral stability to students" and that a teacher should be like a pastor. Alice passed away in December 1978, but her spiritual education work is reflected in this document.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Knights* <https://classics.mit.edu/Aristophanes/knights.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psu.edu/news/research/story/probing-question-how-old-political-satire>

<sup>3</sup> Rutkow, Eric (2012). *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation*, New York, Scribner, pp 56-61

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/abolition-womens-rights-and-temperance-movements.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Historical Address by Henry M. Smith at Boylston celebration, Boylston Centennial, 1886

<sup>6</sup> Speech by Henry H. Brigham at Boylston celebration, Boylston Centennial, 1886

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/Elmwood%20place.pdf>

The text for this satire dates back to 1851, as a Temperance broadside. A copy was found in the papers of Reverend John Pierpont (1785-1866), notably the grandfather of investment financier, J.P.Morgan. Pierpont, a Unitarian minister hailing from Connecticut was well known for his involvement in the Abolitionist movement and Women's Suffrage movement, as well as his involvement in the Temperance movement.<sup>8</sup> It is commonly theorized that he had a hand in the writing of *The Drunkard*; or *The Fallen Saved*, an American Temperance play, and did not make his identity known due to the taboo against theatre in the Christian community at the time.<sup>9,10</sup>

### **The Broadside Promises**

The broadside outlines the promises from an 'Honest Rumseller'. Remember— this is satirical! These promises exemplify the average Temperance advocate's opinions on those who sell alcohol, portraying them as conspiring against honest citizens:

*"I shall deal in drugs, which will deprive some of life, many of reason, most of property, and all of peace..."*

*"I will cause mothers to forget their offspring, and cruelty to take the place of love..."*

Additionally, attacks against ministers who knowingly consume alcohol despite the goal of the movement are also made:

*"I will sometimes even corrupt the ministers of religion..."*

*"The Spirit Trade is lucrative, and some professing Christians give it their cheerful countenance."*

The broadside ends with a proclamation of the rumseller's rights, outlined satirically as such;

*"I live in a Land of Liberty.*

*I have purchased the RIGHT to DEMOLISH the character, destroy the health, shorten the lives, and ruin the souls of those who chose to honor me with their custom."*

The picture of said rumseller that accompanies the broadside joined it in 1880.<sup>11</sup> Since then, multiple copies and versions have circulated as prints for sale.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Alice Segersten, it has now ended up in the hands of the Boylston Historical Society as a relic of the past. Now, it remains as a product of its time, in which the history of satire and the American Temperance movement intertwined to create a piece of history that remains firm in its statement.

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### *Acknowledgements*

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Atkins Eliot, *Heralds of a liberal faith*, Volume 2, American Unitarian Association, 1910, p 185.

<sup>9</sup> Levin, Carol Simon; Dodyk, Delight Wings; Rich, Susanna, (March 2020, "Reclaiming Our Voice"

<sup>10</sup> "The Drunkard" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture: A Multi-media Archive* on the University of Virginia website.

<sup>11</sup> [https://digital.history.pcusa.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A139356?solr\\_nav%5Bid%5D=2a43204c505e8c2c9009&solr\\_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr\\_nav%5Boffset%5D=0](https://digital.history.pcusa.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A139356?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=2a43204c505e8c2c9009&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0)

<sup>12</sup> <https://artisticafineart.com/collections/art-prints/products/advertisement-of-an-honest-rumseller-silkscreen?variant=50837656600849>