

Boylston's War Precautions

The ARP Map

By Chloe Nehme

World War II was certainly a troubling time for the United States, although 'troubling' is an understatement. Following observations of the war taking place in Europe, in 1941 the country took precautions in order to ensure the safety of its civilians—even if the war was never technically fought on American soil. These precautions were in part inspired by those of the British, who had begun their precautions prior to Germany's invasion of Poland. Today we have an example of one of these measures. An ARP, or Air Raid Precaution map of Boylston.

Air Raid Precautions were a set of guidelines drafted by the United Kingdom to protect civilians and Gotha aeroplane bombers in World War I.¹ With Germany being an ever-loomng threat as World War II loomed near, they had to think about bomb raids, poison gas, emergency aid and rescue services, and more. Air Raid Wardens were assigned the responsibility for, among other things, managing incidents and providing ARP advice. Air raid shelters were set up in 1938. Instructions provided the location of the nearest shelters in case of an air raid. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, the 'Blackout' took effect. Managed by the Wardens, it instructed civilians to use cardboard, curtains, or paint to block out light coming from houses.² One of the duties of the Wardens was to map out potential air raid targets. They developed these ARP maps, sometimes with the help of artists, to be distributed to officials as well as civilians.³ These precautionary methods and maps were later utilized by other countries as well, including the United States. They were first set up in 1924, after the devastation caused by zeppelin.

By 1940, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had become increasingly concerned with the potential threat of the U.S. entering war. This had not been a worry during World War I - the military aviation scene was still too new to be a threat to the United States. However, this changed when New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia wrote to him after observing the Blitz in London:

"The new technique of war has created the necessity for developing new techniques of civil defense."

Thus, on May 20, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt by Executive Order 8757 established the Office of Civil Defense in the Office for Emergency Management of the Executive Office of the President.⁴ The Office of Civil Defense was headed by La Guardia. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Office of Civil Defense efforts were substantially increased. Like the Air Raid Precaution tactics, the OCD supervised a work force of mostly volunteers to oversee air raid procedures, blackout drills, and fire and medical rescue. Fortunately, as the war progressed it never reached American soil, so no longer being a threat, the cost of maintaining the OCD in post war reconstruction was viewed as prohibitive. The OCD was officially ended on June 4, 1945 by President Harry Truman.⁵ It was revived briefly in the Cold War in 1950 and brought forth the 'Duck and Cover' drill.

¹ Civil Defence: From the First World War to the Cold War, Historic England, Internet Archive Wayback Machine accessed 18 December 2025 <https://web.archive.org/web/20170228182456/https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/ihc-civil-defence/heag145-civil-defence-ihc.pdf/>

² How Britain Prepared for Air Raids in the Second World War, Imperial War Museums, The United Kingdom, <https://www.iwm.org.uk>

³ London Air Raid Map, Jo Ann Kelly-Graham, Dallas Genealogy Society, Irving, Texas, published 2022, DALLAS GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

⁴ Records of the Office of Civilian Defense, 171.1 Administrative History, 1940-1950, National Archives of the United States, Online Catalogue, <https://www.archives.gov>

⁵ Civil Defense and Air Raid Wardens, World War II American Experience, 845 Crooked Creek Road, Gettysburg, PA, WWII American Experience - World War II American Experience

Town of Boylston, Region III District 1 - Worcester

The ARP map in the collection of the Boylston Historical Society is just one example of the measures taken for the American air raid precautions.⁶ The map features Boylston, referring to it as Region 3 in Warning Center A in Worcester. It was revised on November 2, 1942. Labeled on it are houses, business, buildings, and roads. The roads are named and their designations include: paved main highway, secondary highways, improved gravel road, unimproved dirt road, and rough dirt road. The report center is listed as being the Town Hall.

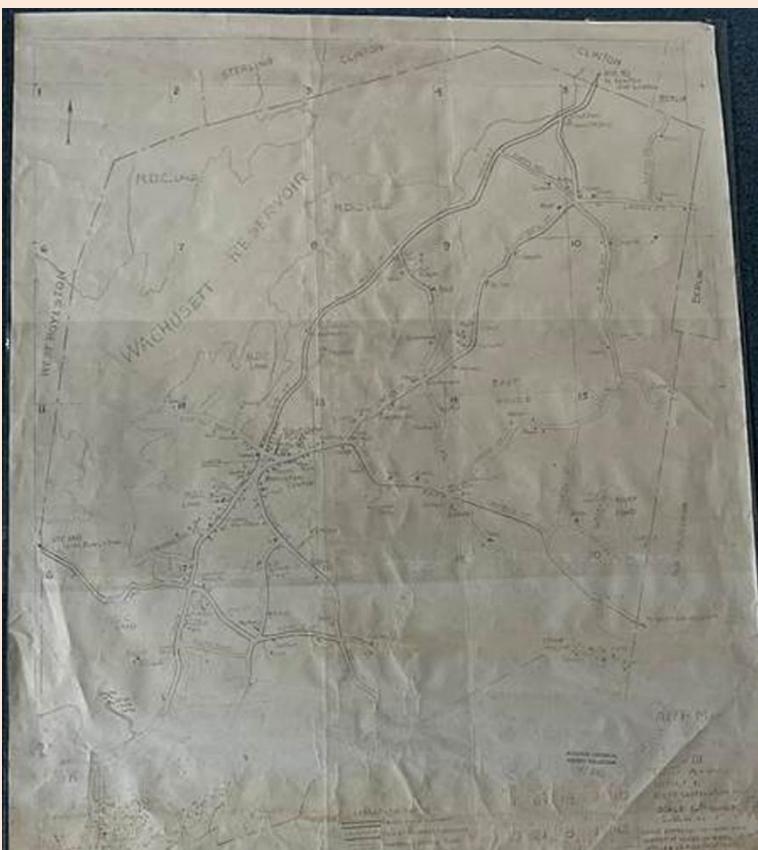


**Region 3 Warning Center A
Historic Town Hall**
*Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.
Photograph Collections*

Upon closer inspection we can see that this is indeed the Historic Town Hall, the home of the Boylston Historical Society and Museum. There is a building labeled as 'school' in Boylston Center. At that point in time, this would have been the Consolidated School, which had opened in September of 1904, being established after a vote on March 2, 1903 to replace the six District Schools of Boylston. The Consolidated School was in operation until 1955, being demolished in 1957, so it was in existence during World War II.

There were two air raid sirens noted on the ARP map: one siren was located on the corner of the Boylston Common between the town hall and the church and the second named, Warning Post B siren, was located along Main Street in the Morningdale section of town. Several additional business establishments are also noted on the ARP map, including the Brigham Gas Station, the Library, the Town House, Scott Wentzell's Dairy, and the Lunch Room.

Fortunately, these precautionary measures taken by the United States to protect its civilians were never tested since the war never ended up on our soil. However, the ARP map reminds us of a time when this was a very real threat to our town and country.



ARP Map – 1942
*Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.
Archives Collections*

⁶ Archives Collections, *ARP Map*, 1942, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
Editor, Nancy O'Loughlin Filgate, Director & Curator, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
Photograph Collections, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts