

A Very Cold January in Boylston

By Judy Haynes

January 2026 arrived colder than last year and we hear comments from many on how uncomfortable we find this cold weather. But our recent temperatures will seem moderate when one reads:

“Boylston, January, 1886. The news last week for Boylston was below zero. The coldest morning this year Tuesday 12 inst. Being 20 below zero in some places in town.”¹



THE CENTER SCHOOL – School District No. 1

Current Site of Boylston Public Library

House on left - Ward Cotton homestead

BHSM Photograph Collection

The holidays are over and the school youth everywhere have returned to classrooms. January and cold weather in the North have always gone hand in hand; thus, heat is expected and absolutely needed in the schoolhouse. Note the following requirements as stated in:

Rules and Regulations, adopted by the inhabitants of School District No. 1 in Boylston, January 5, 1852.²

Duties of the Teacher.

2. He [the teachers were primarily male then] is to see that the person, appointed for the purpose, builds a suitable fire in the morning in season to give the scholars a comfortable room at the beginning of the school; and also, to so regulate the heat and ventilation of the room, that the scholars shall be most effectually secured.”

And as a follow up:

“6. He is expected to see that the ashes, when taken from the stove, are removed and disposed of in a manner that shall not endanger the house.”

The teacher in 19th Century America was often ranked just below the minister in social importance. The expectations placed on them in their professional capacity placed restrictions on behaviors inside and outside the classroom. Their contracts governed classroom activities, as well as their marriage, dress code, curfew, public behavior and church attendance.³

¹ Newsclip from an unknown newspaper found in Mary French Scrapbook collection at BHSM.

² One page of “Rules and Regulations” found in Mary French Scrapbook of news items.

³ Curfews and Carriages: The Surprising Rules for Teachers in the 1800 and 1900s, theforgottensouth.com



HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1852 – SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 1

School Location is Current Day Historic Town Hall Building!

7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts

Photograph at BHSM with identifications: Charles F. Moore, Charles Longley, George Lyndon Sanford, Mary M. Flagg, Gideon Bennett, John Bennett, Eliza L. Moore, Elizabeth W. Bond, Ellen S. Flagg, Sarah E. Moore, Henrietta Whitney, Sarah Hastings, Maria P. Bond, Ann H. Barnes, Harriet H. Barnes, Clarissa M. Barnes, Sarah T. Patridge, Ellen M. Babcock, Mary T. Bush, Ellen E. Lamson, — Todd (visitor), Lizzie P. Sanford, Belle P. Flagg, Ebenezer Douglas (Teacher), Richard D. Douglas, Almira L. Wood, Mary A. Topliff, Amanda Davidson, Ann E. Newell, Horatio Ball, Henrietta M. Brigham, ——, George C. Bond, Augustin H. Bush, Samuel F. Bennett, Jerome Davidson, John T. Andrews, Ferdinand Andrews, Charles E. Sanford, Sawyer Ball, Elizabeth A. Andrews, John W. Patridge, Julia A. Andrews, Henry E. Newell, Mary Howe, William A. Moore, Lambert L. Howe, Maroe E. Flagg, Albert W. Andrews, Mary M. Andrews, Thomas B. Brown, Harrison Davidson, Edwin F. Longley, Frederick Andrews, Henry H. Lamson, Daniel Webster, Theodore Andrews, Charles B. Ruggles, Oliver M. Ball, Jonas S. Ball; Four students were absent: Nathaniel Kendall, Elliot Flagg, Nelson Flagg, and Julietta M. Brown

Fitting with the winter weather, we find under

Duties of the Scholars the following:

“3. Snow balling and the throwing of any missile whatever, in the immediate vicinity of the schoolhouse are strictly forbidden.”

Conditions of behavior are expected with profanity strictly forbidden, no knives allowed and damage or defacement of furnishings prohibited. No tobacco use is permitted and under rule number 7:

“wrestling, scuffling, stepping upon the seats, running or strength, is forbidden in the school house.”

Scholars were expected to keep the room clean and according to rule #10.

“The making of the fire, and the sweeping and dusting of the school room, are to be done by the scholars, unless some other provision is made for these services by the Prudential Committee.”

There were six duties expected of the teacher and 12 duties of the scholars. I suspect that every teacher, and perhaps families as well, were given the “Rules and Regulations” so there would be no question of one’s duties.

The next time we comment about the weather and think nostalgically of the ‘good old days,’ we need to recall it was a time when central heat in our homes and schools was rare. And on these frigid days, in our schools it was the teacher who kept the hearth warm and it was the Boylston students who cared for the schoolhouse fireplace as well as tended to the sweeping and dusting in the schoolhouse.