



Boylston's February 1885 and 1886 News

By Judy Haynes

February comes from the Latin word februa, which means "to cleanse." It was named after the Roman Februalia, which in the ancient Roman calendar was a monthlong festival of purification and atonement.¹ Today many of us recall a week in February when school winter vacations were held. Examinations often took place before this winter break, and this period of vacation was even noted in the newsclips from the 1880s.

One particularly noticeable difference between now and then is how very personal and public your life became. If you were away visiting or entertaining at home, your name(s) would show in the paper. If one suffered illness or an accident, that too was published. Deaths and obituaries were commonly noted, and still prevail in the news.

Following are samples of Boylston's 19th century news.²

"Feb 7, 1885: The Centre School closes next week."

"Feb. 21, 1885 The Centre School held its annual examination last Friday afternoon"

"February 1885: The High School closes next week."



THE CENTRE SCHOOL
BHSM Photograph Collection



THE TOWN HALL
BHSM Photograph Collection

"We hope all will remember the 'Children's Concert' to be given by Mrs. H. Andrews at the town hall next Monday evening, Feb. 9th."

The public did remember as the following clip indicated:

"A public entertainment was given in the Town Hall Monday evening by the children of the public schools. The singing showed that much time and pains had been given by their teacher, Mrs. Henrietta Andrews who has had charge of the schools the past year. The hall was crowded and the music enjoyed by all."

Sometimes the news could be rather startling or painful to read as this sample shows:

"Mr. Joseph Wright met with an accident last week while chopping wood, by cutting off a part of his forefinger."

"Mr. H. Winchester met with quite a loss last week, in the death of a valuable cow."

More commonly social notes such as this were printed:

"Mr. H. J. Warner is stopping at home for a few weeks."

Or visitors to Boylston:

"Mr. Holmes of Worcester is visiting his sister, Mrs. William Phelps."

"Mr. George Winchester and wife of Worcester are visiting at his father's"

¹ *The Old Farmer's Almanac* Almanac.com. Reprint from Boys Town, 2024.

² All newsclips are from the Mary French Scrapbook of news items held at the Boylston Historical Society.

Weather was commonly cold in Boylston in the 1880s; thus, a February 1885 clip read:

“The ice men have been busy the past week filling their ice house with good ice.”

It was on February 18, 1886 when John B. Gough of Boylston died. His obituary was carried in many papers around the country as well as in local papers. He had made his name for himself through orations, storytelling and temperance work. He lived in section of Boylston now known as Hillside where his home still sits today as a National Historic Landmark.



JOHN B. GOUGH HOME
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
BOYLSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
BHSM Photograph Collection

Tuesday evening, Feb. 23, 1886 news held one of the more original clips:³



JOHN B. GOUGH
BHSM Photograph Collection

“It remained for Joseph Cook, who is certainly dexterous with the dictionary, to call Mr. Gough ‘the greatest histrionic orator of his age.’ This is a more agreeable expression than to call him an actor-orator, although it means the same thing. We have found it difficult to characterize Mr. Gough’s peculiar talents as a speaker, and we rather like Mr. Cook’s phrase. It is often necessary for a writer to be exact in his use of words, that the reader may not miss his meaning, or any shade of it. In describing Mr. Gough’s platform eloquence, it does not so very much matter, since everybody knows and feels what it was. Mr. Cook also calls him ‘a disciplined thunderbolt,’ which is more imaginative and adds “Nay, he was like the matador in the Spanish bull fight, his anecdotes were the flags; his definite propositions were the sword thrusts into the side of the infuriated animal after it had been brought up by the flag. This does not strike us as very happy, although it was applauded. It is always dangerous to multiply similes. However, Mr. Cook’s remarks on Gough were original....”⁴

If you wish to see more of Boylston’s newsclips and get a feel of life as it has been lived over the years, please feel free to visit the Historic Town Hall to peruse the 19th Mary French scrapbooks on Tuesday and Saturday mornings from 9am – 12pm or by special appointment at other times.

³ *Tuesday Evening, Feb. 23, 1886, Worcester Telegram, clip from Mary French Scrapbook.*

⁴ *Ibid.*