

BOYLSTON GROUND OBSERVER CORPS DELTA-VECTOR 1-2 BLACK

by Gordon Hastings

In the early 1950s high on the ledge outcrop behind the Boylston Town House was erected a windowed watch tower with views of the four points of the compass. A casual observer might have mistakenly identified the structure as a fire observation tower which were common in largely forested areas of the country. Not so in Boylston. This tower was the home of the Ground Observers Corps. organized in early 1950 during the Cold War, it operated as part of the United States Air Force Civil Defense Service and was designed as a watchful human eye for enemy aircraft that might have entered the airspace below the radar.

GROUND OBSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

By 1952 there were some 750,000 Ground Observer Volunteers throughout the country ranging in age from 7 to 86 years old. Yes, I was one of them checking in at age 13 in 1954. My best friend Dave Libbey was also recruited by Boylston's Civil Defense Director John Coyle.



GROUND OBSERVATION TOWER



JOHN COYLE

John B. Coyle was a dedicated and enthusiastic supporter of the Ground Observer's Corps. He saw it as a natural extension of his role in Civil Defense. Finding recruits to man the observation tower for as many hours as possible was no easy task. However as soon as John Coyle pulled a set of shiny wings and an official membership card from his pocket I was enthusiastically on board!



JOHN B. COYLE

Born 28 July 1914- Died 26 December 1990

U.S. Military Service dates

2 July 1942 to 19 July 1946

18 June 1951 to 6 May 1953

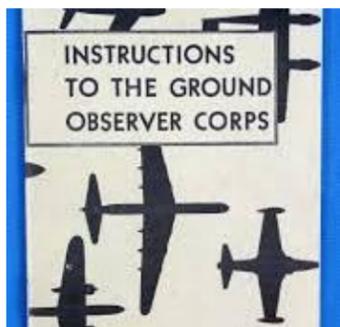
BHSM Photograph Collection

Skywatch

Libby and I qualified for weekend assignments as there was no conflict with school. Early on Saturday morning we would meet at Bud Keatings store at the top of Diamond Hill and stock up on State Line Potato Chips, Old Nicks, Paydays and Orange Crush. Bud Keating was the meat department at the Brockelman Market in Clinton before taking over the former Red & White Store in Boylston.



A walk-through back yards led to the steep switch back path in back of the Town House and the climb to the Ground Observer Tower. Imagine, two fourteen-year-old boys filled with pride and responsibility being on the lookout for enemy planes. On top of that we were entrusted by the Director of Civil Defense with the hiding place for the key to open the tower door!



From our high perch on a clear day, you could easily see Worcester to the south, Mt. Wachusett to the north, a glimpse of Boston to the east and the entire Wachusett Reservoir. Our job was to spot and report any un-authorized aircraft or groups of aircraft as outlined in the Ground Observer Guide. An instruction book was located on a podium next to the all-important black telephone which connected the Boylston Tower directly with the U.S. Air Force Ground Observer headquarters.

Frankly the skies over Boylston were not filled with enemy planes and on many days the six-hour shifts saw little activity but there was always certain predictability when the 3:30 PM Northeast Airlines flight lumbered along on its flight from Manchester, New Hampshire to Worcester Airport. Yes, we had to report all sightings according to an exact protocol.

Pick up the telephone and report: "One multi motor low north to south Delta Vector 1-2-black. Repeat One multi motor low north to south Delta Vector 1-2-black." "Roger and out," said an anonymous voice. Some days were busier than others, lots of single engine aircraft on the weekends but thankfully we never spotted an enemy squadron.

The Coyle's had a long legacy in Civil Defense even before its name was established. Ruth Coyle, John's wife, was an individual Ground Observer Corps of sorts. During WWII she patrolled the Wachusett Reservoir on horseback. Ruth's long history of community service included serving as Town Clerk for many years, including in the early 1960s when I was Town Treasurer. We had

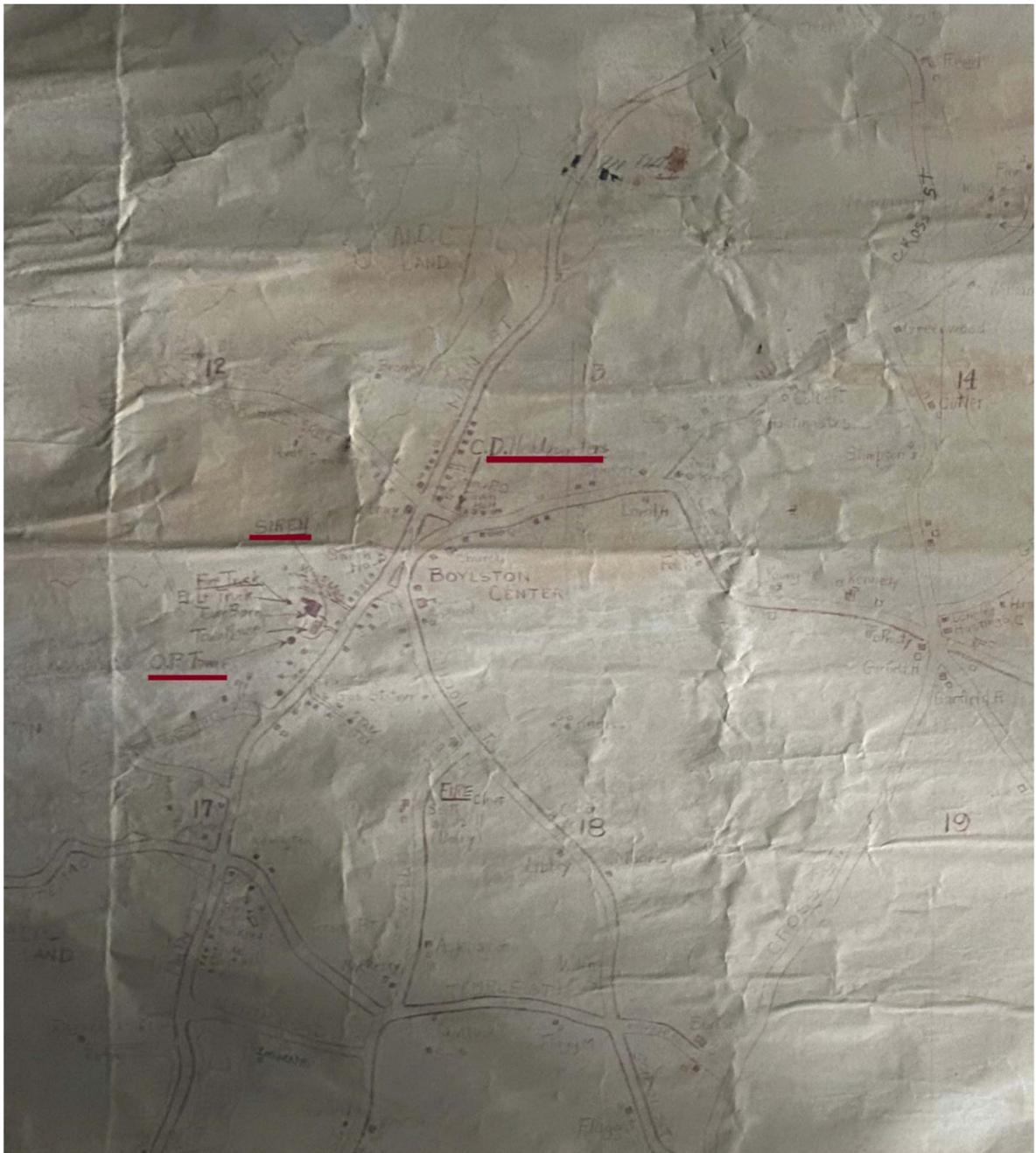
adjacent offices on the second floor of the Boylston Town Hall, the current location of the BHS Museum.



RUTH DONALDSON AND HER SISTER, ELLEN DONALDSON - c.1940
On 3 December 1943 Ruth Donaldson married John Coyle
BHSM Photograph Collection

Many hours of boredom and lots of candy bars in our coveted tower but those silver wings pinned to my jacket made me burst with pride. I do not have a count of the number of volunteers at the Boylston Tower and I am not sure a list was ever published. At its peak there were 1.5 million volunteers nationwide. The Ground Observer Program ended in 1958 with the advent of automated Army and Air Force radar systems.

If you or someone you knew was a member of the Ground Observer Corps, please let me know at ghhbcast@gmail.com



CIVIL DEFENSE MAP
Town of Boylston Mass. - Region III
Civil Defense Headquarters-Town Hall in Boylston Center
Civil Defense Ground Observation Tower – near Town House
BHSM— James C. Howley Collection
Teresa Prunier, donor

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Photograph & Archives Collections, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts