The Welfare of Animals

By Inga Milbauer

In Boylston, two troughs remain from times past. One in front of the Town Offices and one in the town center, near the Boylston Public Library. This second trough, located at the intersection of Main Street and Scar Hill Road, was donated by the Ladies of Benevolent Society of the First Congregational Church of Boylston. These troughs, currently filled with beautiful floral arrangement by the Boylston Garden Club, once played a very different role in the history of Massachusetts.

Legislature Enacted

When the Massachusetts General Court enacted its comprehensive legal code "The Body of Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony" in 1641, it included language concerning the welfare of animals.

> *"Off the Bruite Creature:*
>
> **92.** *No man shall exercise any Tirranny or Crueltie towards any bruite Creature which are usuallie kept for man's use.*
>
> **93**. *If any man shall have occasion to leade or drive Cattel from place to place that is far of, so that they be weary, or hungry, or fall sick, or lambe, It shall be lawful to rest or refresh them, for competant time, in any open place that is not Corne, meadow, or inclosed for some peculiar use."*[1]

In the early 19th century animal protection was expanded in the United States of America. The first state to enact a state law against animal cruelty in 1828 was New York, the second state was Massachusetts which passed a state law against animal cruelty in 1835.

The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) was founded in March 1868 by George Thorndike Angell. The impetus was an incident when in "February 1868, two horses — each pulling two riders over 40 miles of rough roads — were raced until they both dropped dead. Angell was appalled and took immediate action. His letter of protest appeared in the Boston Daily Advertiser, where it caught the attention of Emily Appleton, a prominent Bostonian who deeply loved animals and who was already nurturing the first stirrings of an American anticruelty movement. Within a month, with Appleton's backing, Angell incorporated the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA)."[2]

A campaign by the MSPCA led to the installation of water fountains and troughs throughout Massachusetts cities and towns in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In July 1868, George T. Angell wrote "*Our four-footed friends cannot speak their thanks, but will it not be a rich reward to see them slaking their thirst with cool water in the hot days of summer*?"[3] In 1872, the MSPCA successfully lobbied for a law "*that authorized selectmen to establish, pay for and maintain public drinking troughs and wells in towns*."[4]

Boylston's First Water Trough Expenses

Perusing the Annual Reports of the Town Officers of Boylston, the first mention of a public water trough in town had been in 1879. An expense of $4.56 is listed to L.L. Flagg "*to pay for pipe for the watering place near the Parsonage.*"[5] In 1881, A.E. Waterman was paid $12.00 for "watering trough and repairs."[6] Until 1886 no expenses are listed, that year C.S. Walton received $12.99 for "watering place."[7] Between 1887 and 1895 no expenses for watering troughs were recorded. In

JENNY FLAGG WITH "DANDY JIM" (HORSE)
AT WATERING TROUGH
L.L. FLAGG HOMESTEAD IN BOYLSTON
BHSM COLLECTIONS #1993.232.02

the following years expenses to maintain the watering troughs are reported. For instance, in 1896 a payment of $1.00 to J.T. Andrews for repairing the water trough is listed.[8]

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[1] https://history.hanover.edu/texts/masslib.html
[2] https://www.mspca.org/history/george-thorndike-angell/
[3] https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/2010/07/25/stone-trough-stirs-interest-in/51528646007/
[4] Ibid
[5] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March 1, 1879, p. 10
[6] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March 1, 1881, p. 20
[7] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March 1, 1886, p. 22
[8] Report of the auditor for the year ending February 21, 1896, p.22

Warrant Article for a Water Trough on Clinton Road (now Rt 70)
In 1898, article 18 of the Town Warrant reads

> "*To see if the Town will reimburse George Hazard for putting in a public water place on the Clinton Road near his brickyard; also to see if the Town will pay him for maintaining the same, or act anything respecting the same.*"[9]

No expenses were listed in the report for 1899, but the following year there were several expenses related to water troughs. John T. Andrews received $2.00 for "*repairs on watering trough on West Boylston road*." Two payments were made to Nathaniel L. Kendall, $2.29 for "*repairing watering trough on Worcester road*" and $2.64 for "*labor and pipe on watering trough*." George Hazard received $10.00 for "*maintaining watering place on Clinton road*."[10]

Boylston's Three Watering Troughs
In his report from 18 February 1901, auditor Chas C. Bray also mentions three water troughs: on Worcester Road, West Boylston Road, and Clinton Road. John N. Flagg was paid $78.21 for "*digging trench, pipe and trough, trough on Worcester road*". He was paid $21.91 for "*trough, and re-laying pipe for watering-trough on West Boylston road*", and received a payment of $38.85 for "*lead pipe, re-laying pipe and repairs on watering-trough on Clinton road*." In addition, N.L. Kendall received $4.48 for "*pipe and plumping, watering-trough*", and Geo. Hazard was paid $20.00 for "*maintaining watering place*." The total cost for that year was $163.45.[11] The following year only one payment made was to George Hazard, for $10.00.

In 1906, records indicate a new public water trough was installed at an expense of $111.38 for "*erecting and maintaining water trough*." H.C.F. Smith was paid $67.58 for '*labor on watering-trough and library walk*", J.N. Flagg received $32.30 for "*lime and cement for watering-tough*" and $9.00 for "*drawing stone for watering-trough*."[12] Throughout the following years, maintenance and, starting in 1911, "*pumping water for trough*" were recurring expenses, although not every year payments were made.

Another change to the management of the watering trough occurred in 1914. Town Warrant 27 reads:

> *"To see if the town will vote to convey water from the watering trough in the center of the town to the Town Hall, or act anything respecting the same."*[13]

The vote was to leave:

> *"the matter in the hands of the Selectmen to investigate the cost of installing an automatic system of motor and pressure tank at the school building necessary to convey the water to the watering trough and Town Hall, and report at some future town meeting."*[14]

At the town meeting on 2 March 1914, a vote was taken to extend its water system from the watering trough to the kitchen of the town hall. It was voted

> *"that the matter be left in the hands of the Selectmen to introduce water into the Town Hall building, according to their best judgment. Voted, to grant the sum of $400.00 for the purpose."*[15]

In the auditor's report under recapitulation, expenses of $85.08 were reported for maintaining water trough, and maintaining watering trough at Main and Cross streets, during 1912, 1913, and 1914 in the amount of $30.00.[16] As late as 1925, an expense of $92.07 for "*watering trough, current and repairs*" was listed in the auditor's report.[17]

When the use of cars increased and the number of horses on the road decreased, public watering troughs became obsolete. However, today in many towns in Massachusetts watering troughs can still be found.

An example of an elaborate watering trough can be found in Elm Park in Worcester, Massachusetts: the Chamberlain Fountain with the Fisher Boy statue. It was created in 1915 as a horse watering trough for Washington Square in Worcester. Louise Chamberlain commissioned it as a gift to the city. In 1956, it was moved to Elm Park. "Sculptor for the project was Edward O'Conner Sr., who kept a studio on Webster Street, and later in Holden. The granite pedestal was designed by Frances J. Kitteridge."[18]

WATERING TROUGH IN ELM PARK IN WORCESTER
September 2026
Photograph by Inga Milbauer

[9] Annual Report of the Town Officers of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March 1, 1898, p. 4
[10] Annual Report of the Town Officers of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March1, 1900, p. 31, 33, 36
[11] Annual Report of the Town Officers of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March 1, 1901, p. 28-33
[12] Annual Report of the Town Officers of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March1, 1906, p.49, 55
[13] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending March 1, 1914, p. 10
[14] Ibid, p. 20
[15] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending December 31, 1914, p. 21
[16] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending December 31, 1914, p. 99
[17] Annual Report of the Town Offices of Boylston, Mass., for the year ending December 31, 1925
[18] Informational Sign in Elm Park, Worcester, Massachusetts

The Ladies Benevolent Society Aids Animals

In Boylston, there remains a trough in front of the Town Offices and one in the town center, near the Boylston Public Library.

WATERING TROUGH AT TOWN OFFICES
BHSM COLLECTIONS #2006.16

The trough, placed at the intersection of Main Street and Scar Hill Road, was donated by the *Ladies of Benevolent Society* of the First Congregational Church of Boylston. The inscription on the trough reads:

"Blessed Are the Merciful".

The Ladies Benevolent Society was originally named *The Boylston Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions* when it was formed in 1815. This religious group was a charitable organization dedicated to supporting global missionary work. In 1885 the name was changed to the Boylston Ladies of Benevolent Society; meetings were held monthly and an annual fee of twenty-five cents was charged.

> *"The work seemed to increase from that time on. The organizing of an annual Fair, packing of missionary barrels, and using their proceeds to shingle the church and buy a new furnish, etc."*[19]

WATERING TROUGH WITH INSCRIPTION
1900
Located at intersection of Scar Hill Road and Main Street
BHSM Photograph Collection #1980.10.f

This photograph from 1900 shows the watering trough with Mr. Azro E. Waterman. He was the son-in-law of Capt. John Howe, a commander of the old Militia Company, and one of the Selectmen from 1817 to 1828. He operated a blacksmith shop and brickyard on the farm from 1807 until his death on 27 September 1842. The farm was then occupied by his sons, John and Silas B, and "*then came in the possession of Azro Waterman, who lived there many years. He served the town three years as one of the Selectmen, and as an Overseer of the Poor for ten years*."[20] George Hazard took over the farm and reopened the commercial brickyard in 1885.[21]

POSTCARD WATERING TROUGH WITH SYCAMORE TREE
Date unknown
BHSM Photograph Collection #1977.05.z

[19] A Record of the Ladies' Benevolent Society from 1840-1940 by Lena A. Longley
[20] Boylston Historical Series by Bruce Filgate, 2012, p. 181
[21] https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/John%20Howe%20Brickyard.pdf

POSTCARD WATERING TROUGH WITH LIBRARY
Date unknown
BHSM Photograph Collection #1984.542

DETAIL OF WATERING TROUGH WITH INSCRIPTION
Floral Arrangement by Boylston Garden Club
Located at intersection of Scar Hill Road and Main Street
October 2026
Photograph by Nancy Filgate

The late Ruth Donaldson Coyle recalled riding on top of the horse-drawn dump carts, bringing the sand from the pit at the end of Scar Hill Road for the concrete to rebuild the First Congregational Church after the fire on 4 February 1924. She was 5 years old at the time.

> *"Mr. Sam Butterfield furnished one of the teams, and it was driven by his hired hand Sprague Haley. One day he asked us if we would like to ride with him…The horses were rested on the hill, and watered at the watering trough at the Center which bears the inscription "Blessed are the Merciful", and which now holds flowers. On the return trip to the sand pit Mr. Haley always let me drive the horses, and that made me feel pretty special."*[22]

Acknowledgements:

Boylston Historical Series, Volume XII History of Boylston 1786-1886, by Bruce Filgate, 2012, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, MA

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/61970067/john-howe

An Oral History of Ruth Donaldson Coyle, interview by Judy Haynes, Boylston, 2005

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[22] Recollections by Ruth Coyle in *Like a Ship without a Rudder*, 1999, First Congregational Church records