

# Boylston's Centennial Celebration

1886

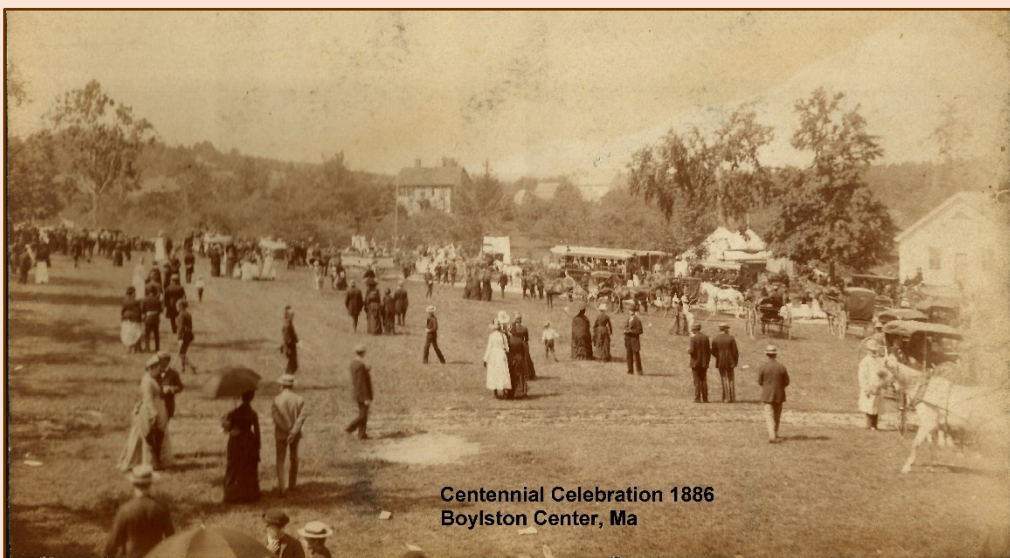
by Judy Haynes



**Boylston Centennial Celebration  
Town Common**  
*Abbot House in background  
BHSM Photograph Collection*

Boylstonians were awakened at sunrise with the ringing of bells on the Common and a salute by gunfire on Wednesday, August 18, 1886. The day “opened clear and beautiful, while cool breezes tempered the air, making the day perfect. The town had put on a holiday dress.”<sup>1</sup> The people didn’t mind being roused in this manner as this was to be a very special day. Back in March, Founders Day, it was decided that to honor the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Boylston’s incorporation (March 1, 1786) that the anniversary should be “properly observed...and one hundred and fifty dollars was appropriated towards defraying the expense.”<sup>2</sup> In April eleven committees were appointed to oversee everything from printing of invitations, to music and speech-making. It was to be a day of proper remembrance as well as fun.

Here in this small town of 834, according to the 1885 Census of Massachusetts, hundreds of residents would leave their farms and homes to join the festivities on the Common. Field sports were first on the “Programme” to be held in the morning and again throughout the afternoon. Laughter surely was heard as some would create a wheelbarrow race with two people, or pushing potatoes, one trying to carefully run with eggs, as well as apples and doughnut races, walking in sacks, running a three-legged race, and even a hurdling race was held. A First Prize of \$1.00 was awarded to each winner. These eight ‘races’ were open only to Boylston residents; however, the Greased Pole and Tug-of-War were open to all who ventured here from far and wide, with \$5.00 to winners of the Tug-of-War team and \$2.00 for the Greased Pole. There was no winner of the Greased Pole.<sup>3</sup>



**Boylston Centennial Celebration  
Town Common**  
*Cotton Homestead (left) and Center School (right) in background  
Center School location is the site of the Boylston Public Library today*

Interspersed with lightness and laughter were the more serious events. Music played at the bandstand, led by L.D. Waters and his 35 men of Worcester’s Brass Band. A procession of town leaders and groups were formed in front of the Town House (our current Old Town Hall) with Battery B leading the march around the Common, which lead the processional “up to the bandstand, where the services of presentation of the Memorial Tablet to the soldiers who fell in the Mexican and civil wars took place. This Tablet, ... a gift of George A. Cotting, Esq., ... is of white marble with a gilt band...”<sup>4</sup> It still graces the wall of Boylston Historical Society Museum; the names of those honored can be read upon visiting our site.

Exercises in the Speakers’ Tent included more music, invocation and prayer, reading the scriptures and the reading of the Act of Incorporation. Psalms followed, then a Centennial Address, an Historical Address which included the town’s beginnings, a description of the lands once thought to be “of little use” and it was recommended to settlers that one should “pass over it to a better place.”<sup>5</sup> Happily, the residents didn’t listen and began to turn it into a successful farming town with 108 farmers and 96 farm laborers by 1885.<sup>6</sup> Cider was produced in large quantities. People kept great stocks of cattle, especially beef and pork. Grains were grown, dairies making butter and cheese also helped Boylston become a prosperous farming town. Such prosperity was noted by speakers.



**Veteran's Memorial Tablet**  
*Currently on Display at  
Boylston Historical Museum*

<sup>1</sup> *Boylston Centennial 1786 -1886*, Press of Sanford & Davis, Worcester, Mass., 1887, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp.10 -16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>6</sup> State Census of Massachusetts, Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1885, p.356.



**Boylston's Centennial Celebration**  
*Town Common*  
*Center School and Scar Hill Road in Background*

A Poem of nine stanzas was written and read by William Davenport. He cleverly incorporated Boylston's history and charms in rhyme, and ended with words of hope and a bright future:

“Go on! And may thy future be,  
Bright as the hopes we have for thee.  
Nor cloud, nor shadow overcast.  
Nor Summer's gale nor Winter's blast,  
Dispel the hopes that round thee twine,  
Of happiness, for thee and thine.  
Our prayers to heaven will still ascend,  
To Keep and guide thee to the end.”<sup>7</sup>

Dinner was served at noon in one of the tents on the Common followed by more music, toasts, speeches from present and former residents; reminiscences and remarks were given by descendants of White, Brigham, Sawyer, Bennet, Starr, Bigelow, Hastings, Taylor, Ball, Newton, Temple, Flagg, Howe, Bush, Davenport, Wheeler and Andrews. The day concluded with a Band Concert on the Common. A final end to the day came at 5 p.m.

Some of the pioneer families mentioned above were recently featured in a new book, *Early Families of Boylston*, published by the Boylston Historical Commission, the Boylston Historical Society and the Boylston Public Library. It may be purchased at the museum with a donation to the Boylston Historical Society. *Early Families* and the *Boylston Centennial* book can give you more details of these families as well as a good portrayal of the history of our first 100 years. Both books are available at the museum for your enjoyment.

By 1986 when the Bicentennial came along, a whole year of activities celebrated Boylston's 200<sup>th</sup> year; events started in March with Founders Day and continued through special events in April, May, June and 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Boylston residents had not lost their ambition nor organization for putting on some grand events.

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#### Acknowledgements

Boylston Historical Society Photograph Collection

Boylston Historical Society Library Collection

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<sup>7</sup> Davenport, William N., Esq. of Marlborough, as Poet of the Day, in *Boylston Centennial*, pp. 41-49.