

# A Day of Thanksgiving

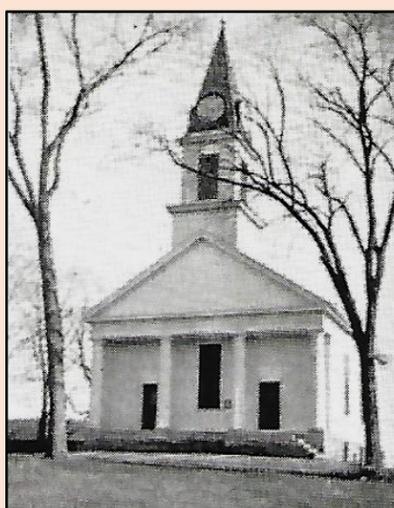
By Judy Haynes



Although Thanksgiving celebrations dated back to the first European settlements in America, it was not declared a national holiday until Abraham Lincoln proclaimed it such, the last Thursday of November, in the 1860s. As far back as George Washington, John Adams and James Madison, proclamations were issued urging Americans to observe days of thanksgiving for our general good fortune.<sup>1</sup> But it was President Franklin Roosevelt who decreed it to be the fourth Thursday of November. It is said, that he was pressured by retailers to make it that date to allow more shopping time leading up to Christmas. This sparked some controversy, but finally the House and the Senate agreed Thanksgiving would be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of this month.<sup>2</sup>

**B**oylston in 1905 noted in “The Telegram” on November 22,

“The Thanksgiving service will be at the Congregational Church vestry, Thursday at 11 o’clock. Reverend George S. Dodge will officiate.”<sup>3</sup>



**Boylston’s Third Meeting House** where The Congregational Church Thanksgiving services were held in 1905. Unfortunately, on 4 February 1924, this structure burned to the ground in a single afternoon.

The service would carry on the tradition of giving thanks. Following giving thanks in church, one joined at home with extended family for a feast, a celebration of the harvest and blessings.

A November 24, 1905 *News Item* announced that



**Montraville Flagg**  
Son of Montraville & Parney Flagg  
BHSM Photograph Collection

“Montraville Flagg will have his family at home. They are: J. Herbert Hallock, his wife [Daisy, daughter of Montraville] and son Palmer [Montraville’s grandson]; his daughter Marion. George Fuller and wife [Sybil, daughter of Montraville], George F. Hathaway, wife [Ellen, a daughter of Montraville] and son Wesley [grandson of Montraville]; Richard A. Flagg [son of Montraville] and wife [Ethel], Worcester; Mrs. Parney P. Flagg [Parney was the mother of Montraville], 93 years of age; Munson [son of Montraville] and C. Flagg [Clara, daughter-in-law of Montraville]. Four generations of this family will be seated at the table.”<sup>4</sup>



**Abbie Flagg**  
Wife of Montraville Flagg  
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And what was served at that family Thanksgiving table? We know that the Flagg family owned one of the larger farms, “*Elmwood Place*”, in Boylston, so the platter likely held a turkey or chicken, as Mr. Flagg owned 100 fowl and a poultry house as well as other animals.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Flagg was within the top ten highest taxpayers in Boylston. Much fresh produce and wonderful locally grown food surely was served, as the Agricultural Census indicated that Boylston produced Indian corn, apples, grapes, peaches, pears, strawberries, beans, cabbage, celery, cucumbers, lettuce onions, green peas, potatoes, pumpkins, winter squash, tomatoes and turnips.<sup>6</sup> The census even indicated two barrels of cranberries were grown in Boylston! The clipping did not contain details of the menu, but it is fair to speculate the menu contained many of these available products and many may have grown on the Elmwood property. It is not known if the turkey was a tradition at that dinner, but the records of that time indicate they had access to the bountiful Boylston produce.



**“Elmwood Place”, Boylston, Massachusetts**  
Farm of Montraville & Abbie Flagg  
BHSM Photograph Collection

The newspapers of the day could always be counted on to announce the local social news of the day. If one was a prominent family name, as in the Flagg family case, the guests were sure to be listed. One could learn who was visiting with whom, who had been sick, away on vacation, or any other incident of interest. Each bit of social gossip would make its way into the newspapers and was found to be acceptable for sharing.

The Boylston Historical Society & Museum wishes to continue the tradition of giving thanks to you, our members, and for all the goodness that we each enjoy in our homes and with our friends. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving this 2022 when once again we may gather together for a dinner that includes our extended families.

<sup>1</sup> www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving facts or fiction

<sup>2</sup> www.history of Thanksgiving.com

<sup>3</sup> BHSM newspaper clippings, Telegram, November 22, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> BHSM newspaper clippings, Telegram, November 24, 1905.

<sup>5</sup> Taxable Polls and Estates of the Town of Boylston, 1905, Coulter Press, 1905, p.6

<sup>6</sup> Census of Massachusetts, 1905, Vol. IV, Agriculture, the Fisheries and Commerce, Wright & Potter Printers, Boston, 1909.

Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. Photograph Collection, Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts

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