

Winter in Boylston

A Peek into the Historical Society Photograph Archives

By Inga Milbauer



BOYLSTON TOWN COMMON 1900
EAST VIEW
BHSM Photograph Collection



BOYLSTON TOWN COMMON 1910
SOUTHEAST VIEW
BHSM Photograph Collection

Prominent in the photographs above are the horse-drawn sleighs. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, a sleigh is “a vehicle mounted on runners for use on snow or ice, having one or more seats and usually drawn by a horse.” The English word sleigh is derived from the Dutch word “slee”, a variant of the Middle Dutch word “slede”.¹ Especially in the 18th and 19th centuries sleighs were used in winter to transport goods as well as people. Sleighs came in many different shapes and sizes, from one person or two person sleighs to larger bob sleighs, and sleighs to transport heavy loads such as logs or blocks of ice. Sleighs were still widely used and available to order from the Sears Catalog in the early 1900s.



VIEW OF CLINTON ROAD – CIRCA 1900
Photographer Ms. Turner
BHSM Photograph Collection



SAWYER MEMORIAL LIBRARY
NOVEMBER 27, 1921
BHSM Photograph Collection

The photograph above was taken on November 27, 1921, showing the damage in front of the Sawyer Memorial Library (known as the Boylston Public Library) due to a severe ice storm. As described in the Journal of the American Meteorological Society, *Ice Storm at Worcester, Mass., Nov. 26-29, 1921*, the snow that had begun to fall during the Saturday afternoon following Thanksgiving, turned to rain. The rain continued into Sunday, and Sunday evening the temperature fell to 25 degrees Fahrenheit. “By Monday morning the ice which had formed on the trees was nearly an inch thick on exposed branches and many of the upper ones had broken off and fallen to the ground. The rain continued all day Monday with the rising north-northeast wind, and the temperature just below freezing. By 5 p. m. it was dangerous to walk along the street so many limbs and wires were falling. A wild night followed. Sleet rattled and rain pattered and the ice laden trees creaked continuously. With the passage of each roaring gust, down crashed great branches from trees. The low clouds were intermittently lighted by vivid green flashes from trolley wheels. At daylight a thunderstorm with pink flashes of lightning awakened the people to a scene of sad destruction.”² The journal mentions that by Tuesday afternoon there was hardly a tree that had not been affected by the storm. “Large crews were kept busy keeping the main thoroughfares cleared of the debris. Tele-phones, electric lights, telegraphs —everything was out of order.”³

Another severe ice storm affected Worcester County on January 5, 1998. The storm started that Monday with light freezing rain throughout parts of New England. The freezing rain continued in waves throughout the week and ended the following Saturday.⁴ Ten years later a severe ice again affected New England on December 11 and 12, 2008, it was especially severe in north central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. “Widespread ice accumulations of 0.50 to 1.00 inch,

with locally up to 1.50 inches, were observed across interior portions of northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.”⁵ Governor Deval Patrick declared a state of emergency and mobilized the National Guard to help with the clean-up efforts.

An ice storm, however, has two sides: the destruction it can cause and it can produce beautiful scenes as well. The photographs below show Rocky Pond after the ice storm in January 1998.



**ROCKY POND AFTER ICE STORM
JANUARY 1998**
*Photographer Fred Brown
BHSM Photograph Collection*



**ICE COVERED TREE - ROCKY POND
JANUARY 1998**
*Photographer Fred Brown
BHSM Photograph Collection*

The photograph below is a view of the ice-covered tree in front of the historic John B. Gough House at Hillside. The photograph was taken by Robert Haynes on Saturday December 13, 2008. The original Gough mansion was built in 1848, and some additional rooms were added in the early 1860s. The downstairs included a parlor, conservatory, library and dining room. “*Hillside* was a working farm with several barns, three hen houses, and a carriage house. Gough kept 1000 chickens, numerous riding horses, cows, swine, sheep, and oxen. The land yielded grain, hay, vegetables and fruit in abundance.”⁶ The John B. Gough house was placed on the National Registry of Historic Sites in 1975.



**VIEW OF ICE-COVERED TREE LOCATED
BEHIND THE JOHN B. GOUGH HOUSE
DECEMBER 2008**
*Photograph by Robert Haynes
BHSM Photograph Collection*

As we approach the winter solstice on December 21, 2022, which is the shortest day of the year and the official beginning of the coldest season in the Northern Hemisphere, we will have to wait and see what this winter will have in store for us!

Acknowledgements:

¹ <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=sleigh>

² https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/bams/2/12/1520-0477-2_12_139.xml

³ https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/bams/2/12/1520-0477-2_12_139.xml

⁴ <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/new-england-marks-20-years-since-ice-storm/127941/>

⁵ https://www.weather.gov/media/box/science/December_2008_Ice_Storm.pdf

⁶ https://www.boylstonhistory.org/category/John_B_Gough/c82

<https://altamontenterprise.com/opinion/columns/glimpse-guilderland-history/12112019/sleighs-were-used-both-chores-and-revelry-autos>

<https://www.hhhistory.com/2017/12/sleighs-cutters-carioles.html>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sled>

Photographs from the archives of the Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.

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