

Winter is Coming, But Wedding Season is on its Way!

by Patricia Kelleher Bartram

While we prepare for and enjoy the holiday season, we are likely not thinking about weddings. However, about 40 percent of engagements occur between Thanksgiving and Valentine's Day, with December – especially Christmas Eve – being the peak time for getting engaged. That means wedding season is not far away.

In the early 1800s, weddings were mostly small, private affairs, often held at the home of the bride or groom's parents - unlike the "destination weddings" that are so popular today. Generally, only immediate relatives attended the ceremony, which was followed by a brief celebration. A wedding was a solemn event and often precluded music and dancing. It was certainly true that early weddings in Boylston were home ceremonies as evidenced by the fact that the first church wedding held in Boylston Congregational Church in more than half a century was on 14 October 1891. The bride, Hattie Louise White of Boylston, was a teacher in the Worcester Public Schools and her husband, Daniel Lynch, was "one of the prominent men of the town."



**First Wedding at
Congregational Church in
Fifty Years!**

Bridal Attire

Because a wedding was always seen as an important milestone, however, special clothes were warranted if they could be afforded. Bridal dresses of the time came in a variety of colors and even patterns, stripes, plaids, checks, or paisleys. Red was an early popular color for a wedding dress, but preferences, of course, changed with the fashions. For a time, yellow was popular in the early 19th century. It was not until after England's Queen Victoria wore a white gown when she married Prince Albert in 1840 that white dresses for brides became popular (although it is hard looking back from today's vantage how the dour-faced Queen Victoria ever lead a fashion craze!).

A 2021 article by Christine Schultz in The Old Farmer's Almanac recounted an early rhyme that discussed the meaning of colors for bridal attire (which did not provide many options for a happy marriage):

*Married in White, you have chosen right
Married in Grey, you will go far away
Married in Black, you will wish yourself back,
Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead,
Married in Green, ashamed to be seen,
Married in Blue, you will always be true,
Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl,
Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow,
Married in Brown, you will live in the town,
Married in Pink, your spirit will sink.*

Wedding Dresses in BHSM Collections

There are several wedding gowns in the collections of the Boylston Historical Society and Museum (BHSM), two of which are from the 1800s and both of which are from the red color family.

The first, currently on display on the Museum's second floor, is a circa 1876 wine-colored, silk wedding outfit in three pieces: a skirt, an overskirt, and a jacket. Donated to the BHSM collections 110 years later, in 1986, the jacket has a collar of lace, nine thread-covered buttons, and pleated trim down the front and on the cuffs. There is a metal stay on the back train, and the skirt had been adjusted to accommodate a larger waist than was original. At the hem, it has five rows of ruffles made from the same material as the skirt.



**Wedding Dress
of Martha Janette Brown
circa 1876**

This outfit was worn by Martha Janette (Brown) Coombs on the occasion of her 22 March 1899 marriage in Worcester to 27-year-old blacksmith Alfred Joel Brousseau. Although his first wedding, it was her second marriage. Her first marriage, in 1876, was to Ariel William Coombs (or Combs) and had ended in divorce following the birth of three daughters. Her marriage to Brousseau ended at her death from bowel cancer at home in Boylston on 19 April 1913. Martha is buried in Pine Grove Cemetery. About 18 months after his wife's death, Brousseau proceeded to marry his 38-year-old step-daughter (!), Lucy Jenette Coombs on 5 November 1915 in Stonington, New London County, Connecticut.



**Wedding Dress
of Alice Jane Flagg
1883**

Another wedding outfit among the BHSM collections, again from the late 1800s, is of taffeta in a deep burgundy color and in three pieces. While the under blouse is missing, the jacket and skirt made of taffeta were donated in 1972. The jacket has 16 buttonholes (about half missing the buttons), a fitted peplum to emphasize the waist, with a pleated collar and cuffs made of the same material. The skirt's waist is tiny, only about 12 inches across, and has a bustle, which was common during that time.

This second outfit was worn by 26-year-old Alice Jane Flagg, the daughter of Levi Lincoln Flagg and his wife, Caroline Elizabeth Barnes, at her marriage on 3 April 1883 to George Hazard (or Hazzard). At this time, Levi Flagg was reputed to be the wealthiest farmer in Boylston. George Hazard, a "colored" man, was a former laborer on Levi Flagg's farm. He was the son of Theodore Abram Hazard and his wife Cynthia A. Messer who owned what was

referred to as the former Harvey Kendall place. In published reports at the time, the bride, age 26 years, was said to be “a beautiful young lady” and “a graduate of the famous Oried Institute at Worcester” and that theirs was a clandestine courtship of three years. It is likely why the wedding took place in Rochester, Strafford County, New Hampshire, although it was said they were to have a public reception.



George Hazard Brickyard, near Main and Cross Streets, Boylston, Massachusetts

In 1885, George Hazard re-opened the brickyard that had been one of the earliest manufacturing enterprises in Boylston, but which had closed in 1842. For more information on this endeavor see The John Howe Brickyard article @ <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/John%20Howe%20Brickyard.pdf>

The Hazards had four children, but their marriage only lasted 12 years. It concluded with Alice’s death in Boylston on 17 March 1895 when she died from acute inflammation of the stomach at the young age of 37 years, 9 months and 10 days. George went on to live a long life, joining his wife in death in 1939 and being interred with her in Pine Grove Cemetery.

Sadly, wearing red did not bring either of these Boylston women long, happy marriages.

Acknowledgements:

- Ancestry.com
- Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc., Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts
- BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20181204-best-month-to-get-engaged-married-pregnant-and-divorced#:~:text=Ring%20in%20the%20year,Eve%20a%20particularly%20popular%20date>.
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- Editor, Nancy O’Loughlin Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc.
- Gravestones, Alice Jane Hazard and George Hazard, Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts, findagrave.com
- The Old Farmer’s Almanac, <https://www.almanac.com/content/why-are-wedding-dresses-white>
- Ultimate History Project, <https://ultimatehistoryproject.com/before-the-whiteout-wedding-dresses-and-grooms-outfits.html>
- Vital Records of Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts; Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts; Rochester, Strafford County, New Hampshire, digital images, ancestry.com