

Boylston Celebrates Fourth of July

By Judy Haynes

Independence Day, also known as the Fourth of July, commemorates the ratification of the Declaration of Independence by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. Thirteen colonies came together to fight for more freedom from Great Britain with the end result in our favor and the establishment of the United States of America.¹



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Depicting 42 of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence presenting its draft to Congress

Painting by John Trumbull

Original Oil-on-canvas purchased in 1819

and placed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in 1826

Wikipedia Commons Photograph

Patriotic celebrations were held in the years that followed to honor our new status, but that did not mean that every town planned festive activities. That changed, when once again the U.S. found ourselves at war with Great Britain in the War of 1812. Patriotic fever then took hold and festivities became more common. The United States Congress made it a federal holiday in 1870, and in 1941 it was expanded to become a paid holiday for all federal employees. Following suit, many businesses gave their employees the day off with pay, and many still do

So how did our Boylston ancestors celebrate? We look to the Mary French Scrapbook Collection of news items to learn the following. One of the oldest newsclips the Historical Society has in its collection is from **1883**, and if you wonder how they marked the occasion of the 4th, it was often with a ball game followed by a great meal:

“The game of ball here the 4th, between the picked nine of Worcester and the Highlanders of this place, resulted in favor of the Worcester boys.”²

Despite the loss, the attending public had the following to look forward to:

“The ladies furnished an excellent supper for the ball players at the Town hall, on the 4th, and nearly fifty patronized them. Owing to the hard shower in the evening, there were but few present at the Strawberry Festival; but what few were there were disposed of a large amount of strawberries and ice cream, and the proceeds for the afternoon and evening were very satisfactory, netting \$31.”



In **1885** Boylston news indicates: “There was nothing done in this town the 4th excepting firing by the boys and a picnic at Sawyers Mills, with fireworks in the evening.” One assumes that the “firing” of guns was a kind of salute to the nation.³

Perhaps in commemoration of 125 years (1776 – 1901) for this country’s independence, there was a full-page ad in the newspaper of 1901– under the auspices of the Village Improvement Society highlighting celebrations on the Boylston Town Common.⁴

The full page continued with “Picnic on the Basket Plan!” with ice cream and cake for sale, exercises, sport, and an evening capped with an “Elaborate Display of Fireworks.” It must have been a colorful and joyful day; one that included the entire family as the children were dressed to represent different states, a poetry reading was given, a recitation, a picnic dinner, and scrub games of ball.

1776 - BOYLSTON - 1901

The people of Boylston, under the auspices of the

BOYLSTON VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY.

Will hold an old-time

Fourth of July Celebration

ON THE COMMON, Boylston Centre,

THURSDAY, JULY 4th, 1901,

To which all the present and past citizens of the town, and all others interested, are cordially invited, and no pains have been spared by the committees in charge to make the occasion pleasant to all.

PICNIC ON THE BASKET PLAN!

Ice Cream and Cake for sale during the day.

Exercises and Sports on the Common

During the day.

In the evening there will be an

ELABORATE DISPLAY of FIREWORKS

Let all be present and thus show their patriotism for the day, and their love for the old town!

Charles R. Stobbs, Printer, 16 Mechanic St., Worcester.

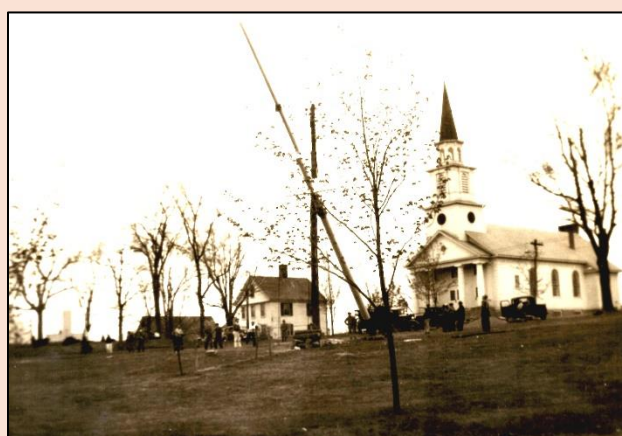
¹ Wikipedia, History of the Fourth of July.

² News item “Boylston” from unknown local newspapers, July 7, 1883.

³ News item “Boylston” from unknown local newspaper, July, 1885.

⁴ Full page news copy in Mary French newspaper scrapbooks.

On **July 4, 1902** the focus was on a new flag staff and flag for the Common Centre and its flagpole. Once again, the Village Improvement Society was in charge. They created a committee and collected \$321.60 for the new staff and flag. The work was overseen by William H. Vickery, James H. Woods, John N. Flagg, Charles Bray and Charles S. Knight. Acceptance of the flag was by George L. Wright, Chairman of the Selectmen. Wright was so active in 19th century Boylston his name is found heading many groups and activities. He was a writer of history and a great speechmaker. The news article continued for one and a half pages with Wright's full speech:



RAISING OF THE FLAG POLE
HOUSE AND 3RD MEETING HOUSE IN BACKGROUND
BHSM Photograph Collection



RAISING OF THE FLAG POLE
HASTINGS TAVERN AND STORE IN BACKGROUND
(left to right) John Stark Jr, George Boyden, Burt Garfield, Gilson, Myron Garfield, unknown, Brigham, McKenzie and unknown
BHSM Photograph Collection

a history of our country's flag, the symbol of our country's independence.⁵ For a detailed history of our flag, please see "Flag Day" in our Friday's Fascinating Finds article on our website under Artifacts: www.boylstonhistory.org.



(on right) **RAISING OF THE FLAG POLE**
HISTORIC TOWN HALL AND RED BARN RESTAURANT IN BACKGROUND
Names mentioned on back of photograph, Gilson & B. Garfield
BHSM Photograph Collection



CHARLES KNIGHT AND GEORGE WRIGHT WITH OTHERS
IN FRONT OF SECOND MEETING HOUSE
SECOND MEETING HOUSE WAS LOCATED WHERE SAWYER MEMORIAL LIBRARY NOW STANDS
(left to right) C. Fitzgerald, Bertha McGeachy, Charles S Knight, Miss Mary Doyle, Fred Longley, Hazard boy, George Hastings, George Twyne, Mabel Elms, John Fitzgerald, Elsie Mann, James Longley, Macomber boy, & George Wright
BHSM Photograph Collection

All children and young adults need not be told why we celebrate July 4th. It is one of our most important holidays, if not the most important, when the Declaration of Independence was declared in 1776. We learned at school how the colonists were tired of having King George III and his governors dominate our lives, tax us on items we felt unfair, giving rise to the cry "Taxation without representation!" The rebellious Americans said "enough" and rose to fight and break from England to become the independent country we know today.

The year 2025 marks 250 years from that fateful day of April, 19, 1775 when the shot 'heard round the world' rang out at Concord and Lexington; that was the day when fighting began with the British. The Boylston Historical Society has started and will continue this year and into next to focus on Boylston at the time of the American Revolution. A team of researchers are now sifting through the oldest documents we can find to write about the minutemen from Shrewsbury's North Precinct [today's Boylston], who answered the "alarm." Look for programs and events during the year that relate to the Revolution, including a book to be published in 2025. It will be filled with research as it pertained to our town and its veterans of the Revolutionary War. All this is to come in the year to follow. Stay tuned.

⁵ News item "Boylston" from unknown newspaper, 1902

Acknowledgements:

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Newspaper Article, Mary French Scrapbook, Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc. 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
Photographs, Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc. 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
Photographs, Declaration of Independence and Constitution, Wikipedia Commons