

NOVEMBER LIFE IN BOYLSTON 1796 AND 1797

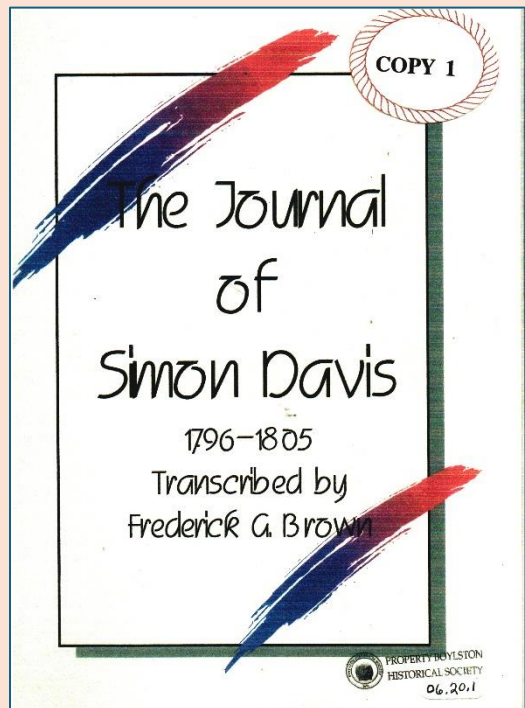
By Judy Haynes

Have you ever wondered what life must have been like in those long-ago days? A picture emerges from one man who kept a journal with day-by-day brief notes from 1796 -1799.

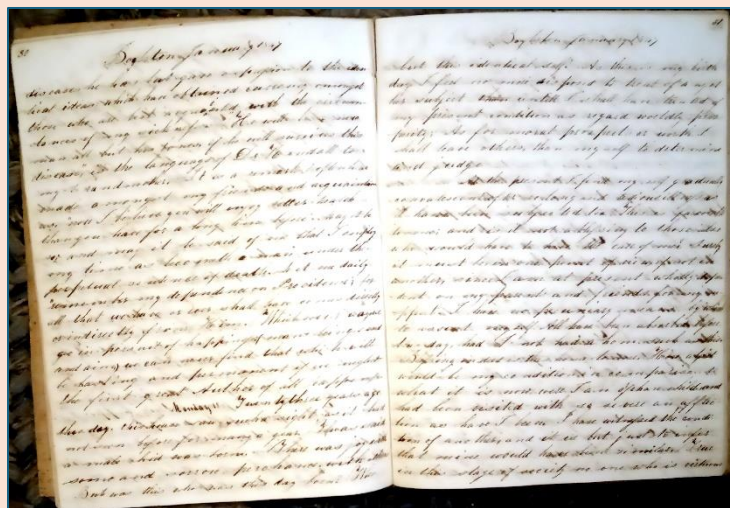
It was in 2014 that Fred Brown, one of our members and former curator and president of the Boylston Historical Society, took on the task of transcribing the hand-written pages of **Simon Davis**. Because of Fred's diligence and patience, we now have on our library shelves *The Journal of Simon Davis, 1796-1805*. In addition to the few years of day-to-day diary, Mr. Davis also kept copies of letters he wrote as well as Davis' memories written in more narrative style in 1805. The full and detailed transcription is available for your perusal in the Society's Fuller Library.

Simon Davis was born in Paxton September 2, 1765, the child of Deacon David Davis (1740-1824) and Abigail Brown (1742-1787). David Davis was a tanner by trade, a trade that young Simon absorbed and followed in his father's footsteps as a young adult. The family believed in education; thus, Simon was sent to school to learn to read and write, and write he did. He claims he kept a journal for 14 years, though only the above noted years, letters and writings of 1805 came to our attention. Nevertheless, a picture emerges of Boylston life in the late 18th century.

Simon married at age 24 years to Persis Newton on February 25, 1789.¹ A year later Simon and Persis welcomed Addison, their first son, and Simon would buy land in Boylston (land to become, in later years, West Boylston).² He worked so tirelessly to build a house for his family that they moved in by December 1790 where Davis became active in community and church affairs attending Meetinghouse services faithfully. Over the years his tanning business succeeded and he was able to provide a good living for his family. The tanning of hides allowed for the production of shoes as well as other leather goods.



THE JOURNAL OF SIMON DAVIS
Transcription by Frederick Brown
Fuller Research Library
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THE JOURNAL OF SIMON DAVIS
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This being November news, the “*Journal*” extractions for this article focused on those dates. Each day first he noted the weather followed by some activity, social life and community business. For example:

“Nov 8th 1796 – Tuesday - Cold raw air – Clouds but no rain – Rode to Worcester in company with Esquires Beaman & White & Meriam Biglow -Esquires commenced an action in order to recover what was taken from him for Minister tax last year & proposes petitioning of the Gen[eral] Court for the monies paid toward ye bell & the first Precinct might be refunded – Esq. Paine, however, advises that such a Petition will not be successful....”

The reference is to those who lived in the western part of Boylston and their plan to have their new meeting house recognized as the 2nd Precinct of Boylston. In 1793, Ezra Beaman had led a group to construct a 2nd meetinghouse in Boylston so they would be closer to the church services. The above diary entry of Simon Davis depicts that these individuals also expressed their dismay that they should be taxed extra for the First Precinct's bell and for the pay of their minister as they began actively seeking their own minister. It seemed unfair to them to have to pay for a bell for the first precinct and a minister when they were working on their own second parish building and obtaining their own minister. They had been granted approval of the 2nd parish by the governor in 1795.

¹ Sterling Vital Records, Marriages, p. 66

² Boylston Vital Records, Births. Davis, Addison, 2/12/1790.

November 13th news brought sadness to Simon's family when his second son Ezra was so very sick, and would continue to fail until he died on December 9, 1796.³ Many entries note sickness and the passing of various children and adults, a common occurrence in the 18th century. It was evident from his journal entries that a strong belief in God and the Church was ever-present in Mr. Davis' mind and was a help when losing a family member.

Going to Meeting[house] is mentioned frequently as he travelled either on foot or on horseback. It is quite surprising to read of his travels and work that took him from Boylston to Boston or Roxbury by horseback. Occasionally he would be accompanied with both horse and cart with goods to trade or buy, though I note he often stayed overnight at a tavern on some of his longer journeys. When the weather was really cold and snow aplenty on the ground, travel would be via sleigh. We can hardly talk about November without mentioning Thanksgiving as he did.



THANKSGIVING GREETING CARD

1911

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Thanksgiving was a time to give thanks and to attend church but unfortunately, they did not always enjoy a huge feast as celebrated today. Simon's diary recorded the following in 1796:



THANKSGIVING GREETING CARD

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*"no company – very little extra provisions to distinguish from other days – Wish, however, we may distinguish ourselves by Thankful Hearts...."*⁴

"November 30th Thanksgiving [1797] Pleasant sun but very cold & windy – at Meeting heard Mr. Nash [minister; 2nd parish] from Psalms 100th & 4th – Pertinent Discourse – 5 Deaths in Precinct ye year past – one observ'd that he went round his piece & mowed all down & made clean work – Alas Mr. Nash did a great deal in little time ...At home in even[ing]."

This brings to a close a few tidbits of November news from that long ago time in 1796 and 1797. In 2024 the Boylston Historical Society staff wishes you all with our "Thankful Hearts" a wonderful family filled day of Thanksgiving!

³ Simon Davis Journal, November 13, 1796 and December 9, 1796.

⁴ Simon Davis Journal, transcription

Archives Collections, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc. Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts

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