

Bells and Whistles Once Marked Daily Life in Andover

Now a Proctor bell will ring on Fourth of July

By Heather Makechnie
Beacon staff

Just think of all the sounds that used to help bind the Andover community together.

Perhaps it started way back when Joseph Fellows first settled in the Flaghole district. Just maybe he blew a corny oxen horn to communicate with his wife that he was still all right out there in the back pasture.

Certainly when the militia drilled at the Centre, there was a good deal of bugle blowing, and most likely a few stray cannon explosions as well.

When the Fourth Turnpike was built from Concord to White River, the great stagecoaches, hauling freight and passengers, would pull up to the shed, which is still part of Proctor Block. The teamster would often announce the arrival with a blast on his horn.

Then came the trains. Halcyon, The Plains, Andover, Potter Place, Gale Crossing; each station heard the blast of the train whistles as they approached. Andoverites could tell the time by those whistles. Says Paul Fenton, "There were always trains from the last half of the nineteenth century until somewhere around the 1960s. The trains had to blow their

whistles at every location where the roads crossed the rail tracks. When the morning train took milk to Manchester and Boston its whistle would blow around 7 AM. Then there was the noon train, the four o'clock train, and the Peanut that came through headed towards White River Junction around 7 PM. If anyone was outside working and did not have a watch, it was easy to tell what time of day it was when they heard the train whistle at the different crossings."

At both the Andover and East Andover Fire Stations, sirens were employed as part of the fire and civil defense warning systems. Again, Paul Fenton: "There were sirens in Andover and East Andover which were sounded whenever there was an emergency, whether a fire, a lost person in the woods, or whatever event might occur with which it was felt that help was needed."

The hame factory on Bradley Lake Road blew its whistle to mark the work periods of the day. Clyde Currier recalls, "Grandfather Eugene Currier [who built the house on Beech Hill where Clyde and Shirley raised their own family and live currently] used to say that at noon the hame shop whistle would blow for lunch, and he would run up the steep hillside [this was before there were other houses and properties; it was just fields then] and hurry

to feed the cattle before the 12:30 whistle blew to get back to work."

Clyde also remembers his mother, Etta Currier, blowing a police whistle when it was time for the children to come home to eat.

And how many remember any of the children's camps in Andover –

The Miller twins will ring the bell atop Maxwell Savage Hall at 10 AM and noon on the Fourth of July.

Kel-Dave, Ragged Mountain, Marlyn – and the sound of the lonely bugle blowing taps to the accompanying loon call?

In the Andover Historical Society's collection is a hand bell rung by the teacher at Cilleyville to bring students in from play and to call the class to order. But both Victor Phelps and Paul Fenton reminisce about the bell in the old Andover Elementary School, which is currently the Andover Library. Patrons in the library can still see the pull rope which disappears into the ceiling and then up to the belfry, where resides that same bell once used to signal the school periods.

Says Paul, "From time to time the older boys were allowed to ring the bell. Sometimes their exuberance caused them to turn the bell over and then they were required to climb up into the belfry and turn it back to its proper position so that it could be rung again." Victor Phelps chuckles, "The old Postmaster, Chuck Stone, used

to say about the morning bell which called the eight grades to that building, 'Hear the bell, run like hell!'"

When Andover High School opened in the fall of 1934, it had an electronic bell system. What progress!

Proctor Bells

Proctor Academy has had its share of bells, one of which was cast by Paul Revere and Sons. That one, unfortunately, melted to a puddle of bronze when the old Academy building burned. However, there is a bell in the belfry of the Infirmary building at the corner of North Street and Observatory Lane. Chuck Will, Communications Officer at Proctor, delights in telling this story:

"The white clapboard chapel on Proctor's campus has served as the Health Center for more than 50 years. For most of those years, the steeple was exposed to mold and mildew. I often complained about it as an eyesore. About 20 years ago, Proctor's Director of Buildings and Grounds informed me that the steeple was going to be rebuilt – so I could stop complaining – and that the bell was going to be returned to the belfry.

"The bell? There's a bell?" I asked. I was introduced to the prettiest bell I have ever seen, resting on a filthy dirt floor. Will Ames suggested that I might want to polish it up, so a few hearty men helped us lift it into the back of my truck. Wondering whether I could just rub some Noxon on it to get it all nice and shiny, I drove to Franklin to get the opinion of Lincoln Charles. The noted metalsmith gasped when he saw the bell!

"It's perfect!" he insisted, 'Look at the patina! Don't do a thing to it!'

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