

First Home In Andover Built 250 Years Ago

The following article was written by Ralph Chaffee 50 years ago and appeared in the Andover Town Report to mark what was then the 200th anniversary of the first settler in Andover. It was subsequently reprinted in the Franklin Journal Transcript of March 2, 1961.

By Ralph Chaffee

One day in the spring of 1761, a tall, powerfully built woodsman from Kingston, New Hampshire, came tramping up through the woods from the Merrimack River, exploring the countryside as he went along, in search of a place, to marshy land covered with a meadow of wild hay and blue flag (that we now call the Flaghole District). This was then part of New Breton, a tract of land granted to certain Proprietors. It was roughly defined, only partially explored, and uninhabited by white men. Here Joseph Fellows decided to make his home.

Only a few years before his arrival, two men from Stevenstown (now called Salisbury, and which had a few inhabitants before Andover) were captured by the St. Francis Indians while cutting wild hay in this same meadow and were carried off as captives to Canada. By 1761 the French and Indian War was over, and Joseph Fellows became the first of a group of hardy pioneers to settle in what is now Andover.

During that first spring and summer, Mr. Fellows cleared away a little land, built a log cabin, and raised a patch of corn. In the fall he returned to Kingston to bring his wife Margaret, a young child, a baby, and a dog to their new home.

At Webster Place on the Merrimack (then part of Salisbury) Mrs. Fellows became exhausted from the long march on foot up through the woods, and was obliged to rest for a day. Anxious to get home, Mr. Fellows continued on with the child and the dog. The next day, he returned for his wife and baby, leaving

the child at the cabin with his faithful dog as guardian.

Thus did Joseph and Margaret Fellows become the first to found a permanent home in Andover, soon to be followed, within a year or two, by others. Here they lived out their lives and raised a family of seven sons and two daughters. A daughter Margaret, known as Peggy, was the first white child born in town, on February 25, 1763.

Mr. Fellows and his descendents became leading citizens in the growing community. A patriot, as well as pioneer, he was one of the first to hurry to the aid of his countrymen in Massachusetts at the beginning of the Revolutionary War. His group arrived too late for the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, but took part in the defense of Bunker Hill. Among other engagements, he served under General John Stark at the Battle of Bennington. Joseph Fellows died on March 3, 1811 at the ripe old age of eighty-four.

Today, the approximate site of that first crude log home is marked by a granite monument erected by the townspeople in 1912.

About a quarter of a mile away, in a corner of what was once a cleared field, but now deep in the woods, lies a little walled-in cemetery, seldom visited and known to but a few today. In this quiet spot Andover's pioneer couple rest. With them here is their son-in-law James Randall, the first schoolteacher in town and the husband of Peggy, with his eight infant children. Tradition also has two friendly Indians buried there.

Another granite monument now stands in the center of the little enclosure, surrounded by the common fieldstones that mark the last resting places of the pioneers.

Above them all stand two groups of tall guardian pines, which have gently cast a carpet of needles over the graves for long over a century.

50 YEARS AGO

MARCH 1961

Here's some old news from the Andover, East Andover, West Andover, Potter Place, and Cilleyville "gossip" columns of the Franklin Journal Transcript, selected by Heather Makechnie.

March 2, 1961

The Regal Theatre will be showing a brand new Walt Disney movie Saturday through Thursday; *One Hundred and One Dalmations* – in Technicolor.

March 9, 1961

Exploding Meteor Seen in Andover

Two weeks ago, the officials of the Astrophysical Observatory of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, asked in the *Journal-Transcript* whether any readers had seen a bright meteor go over the area and explode early in the evening of February 16. It had been seen in the Northern skies from Boston.

At least one of our readers reports that he saw the meteor. His observations may be helpful to the society in their efforts to trace the "falling star" and possibly recover some of the fragments.

The witness was James Hersey, who lives in East Andover. He was in the yard of his place that evening – about 5:30 PM, when he saw what he thought was some kind of missile which had been fired from a plane.

"It was going toward the west or northwest out of the east," Mr. Hersey reported. "I had never seen a falling star that bright, so I didn't think this was a meteor. It seemed to be trailing fire and sparks. I called to my son to come out and see it, but before he could get out, it exploded and was gone. It seemed to me that it ended up somewhere north of Webster Lake, but how far away it was, there was no way to tell."

March 16, 1961

An increase of almost \$18,000 in Andover's school budget was voted at the annual school meeting. New construction costs accounted for most of it. It was decided that after the new school facilities are ready, the old Andover Village School will be used for a library, town clerk's office, and selectmen's room.

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