Taking a break from the Andover Historical Society's annual spring clean-up day in May, Pat Cutter relaxes in the Society's "secret garden" surrounded by the stone foundation that once supported the "mansion" of Richard Potter. The garden is just across the tracks from the Potter Place railroad station, now owned by the Historical Society. Photo: Larry Chase

A Secret Garden in Potter Place

Pat Cutter,
Andover Historical Society

Potter Place was a very busy village within the Town of Andover in the early 1900's. It was a railroad hub and had a large hotel, two village stores, a livery stable and many homes, large and small. In the early 1800's, before

A beautiful sign made by Frank Cellini who was a frequent vendor at the Andover Historical Soc. Old Time Fair, marks the spot of the Secret Garden in Potter Place. Cellini, who passed away last year, donated the sign to the society. Photo: Larry Chase

the Northern Railroad came to town, it was a quiet backwater and the home of Richard Potter, renowned ventriloquist/magician and subject of a new biography by Andover's John Hodgson.

Mr. Potter built a home that, although modest by today's standards, was called a mansion. Later that home was incorporated into a large Victorian house by Daniel Downes and was located across the tracks from the railroad station. Over the years, fires decimated Potter Place. The hotel burned for the second time in 1919 and Mr. Downes' house on September 28, 1923. The land and the remaining cellar hole remained vacant, but became an attractive dumping ground -- and the railroad station became the home of the Andover Historical Society.

Ken Reid and Bob Hamilton moved to Andover in 2002 and became lifetime members and advocates of the Historical Society. The neglected cellar hole held an attraction for them and they had a vision of a sunken garden, ideal for relaxation and contemplation. A year was spent hauling away concrete and asphalt chunks, tree trunks, a rusted auto-body frame, and accumulated trash. Trees, limbs and stumps were removed, caved-in stone cellar walls were rebuilt and several loads of soil were brought in. As Ken tells it, he took charge of the project and, in the background, Bob quietly did most of the work!

An ad in the Beacon brought donations of plants from local gardens, and many flowers and shrubs were brought in for planting. As time passed Bob and Ken "matured" and so did the garden.

Today, the garden continues to flourish, and it remains a simple gardening surprise in a most unlikely place. Many local folks and strangers alike have discovered the garden, and for some it provides a bit of a quiet respite from the chaos and problems of the outside world. If you are unfamiliar with the garden, you might want to check it out.

A display featuring the life of Richard Potter has been set up in the storefront of Emons General Store in Potter Place. Photo: Larry Chase

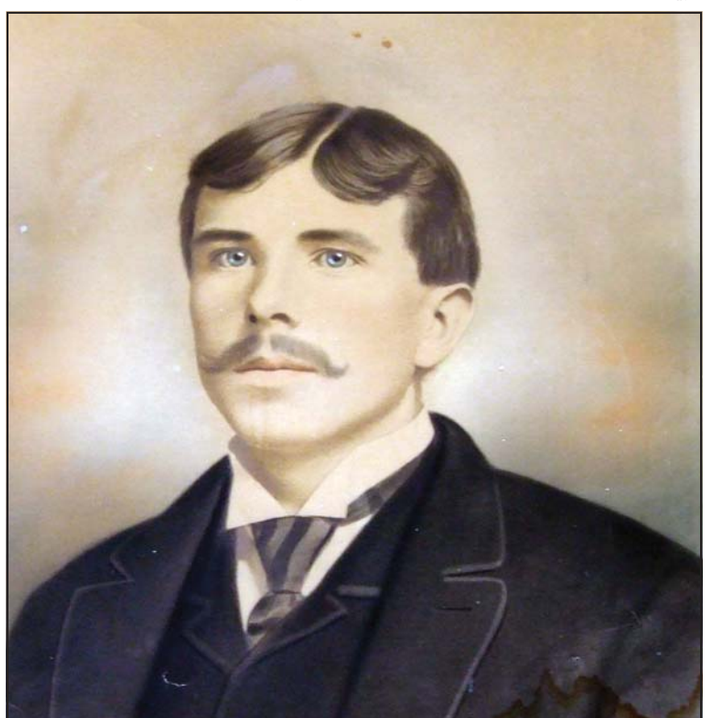
Richard Potter Featured in New Exhibit at AHS Museum

Larry Chase,
Andover Historical Society

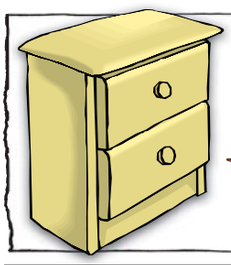
A new Andover Historical Society exhibit focuses on the life and times of Richard Potter, "America's first black celebrity," who made his home in Andover from 1815 until his death in 1835. Artifacts are on display in the exhibit room of the Potter Place railroad station and in a storefront window of the Emons general store. The station and store are open on Saturdays between 10 AM and 3 PM, and on Sundays between 12:30 and 3 PM. until mid-October. Both are open to the public at no charge, although donations are gratefully accepted.

Born in 1783, Potter became "the foremost ventriloquist and most celebrated magician of his time," writes Andover's John Hodgson, author of a new Potter biography. Hodgson also writes that the aim of his book is "to make Potter reappear," as Potter was "almost invisible in American cultural history." His book, "Richard Potter - America's First Black Celebrity," may be purchased at the Emons store.

A collection of historical artifacts from the World War 1 era is displayed for a second year in another storefront window of the Emons store.



PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN MAN, found in the Andover Historical Society's Lull House during a May clean-up day at the Society's properties in Potter Place. Lull House, in Potter Place, is named for Dorothy Mitchell Lull, who, with her husband, owned and operated the the Emons General Store and Potter Place Post Office for many years before her death in 2013. If you have information regarding the identity of the man in the portrait, please contact the Beacon at Mail@AndoverBeacon.com/. Photo: Larry Chase



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