

# The Andover Historical Society Celebrates Its 40th Anniversary

## A review of the first 20 years

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Andover Historical Society

In Potter Place lies a classic Victorian Style rural passenger train station built by the Northern Railroad in 1874. It was an important link to other communities and businesses during its time of operation. Today, the station serves as the headquarters and museum for the Andover Historical Society.

This Railroad Station complex is the heart of the Andover Historical Society's efforts to preserve, educate and share the town's fascinating history. The dedicated members of this society have worked hard to collect and archive stories, acquire and restore property, and preserve artifacts associated with the town of Andover.

Their work allows visitors to learn about the area and what life was like in bygone days. One wonders if those earlier organizers ever imagined the extent of the wonderful history center they would create right in Potter Place?

### The First Meeting

The Andover Historical Society was organized by George and Barbara Upton, Stannard (Jim) and Dorothy Dunn, Payson and Mary Lowell, and Kimball Elkins early in 1982. The first official Historical Society meeting was held in October of that year.

John Lessard, a resident of Hopkinton, had discovered an early settler's log boat in Hopkin's Pond in Andover two years prior to this. He now approached the town and offered to give the boat to the fledgling Society. It is not only the Society's first artifact but remains its oldest.

Charles and Elinor Taylor of Wilmot Flat, after reading an article in the Concord Monitor about the discovery of the boat and the new historical society, offered the trustees the gift of the station. The gift included the railroad station, a fully furnished station master's office, many railroad artifacts collected by Mr. Taylor, and the land on which the Richard Potter home had stood.

And the rest, as they say, is history. The Station was opened as a museum on October 9, 1983.

Over the next several years the Historical Society worked diligently to develop its historic foundation at the railway station. Many hours of time and effort went into planning and executing repairs and updates of the building; historic items small and large were acquired, including an unrestored caboos and rail snow plow.

They ushered in a return of an Andover tradition, the "Turn of the Century Fair," in August 1989. In addition, that year a bronze plaque was

placed at the rail station noting it was on the National Register of Historic Places.

Besides developing the museum, the Historical Society worked at Bog Bridge to improve the setting of the historic bridge on Powers Lane. They relocated fencing and planted flowers.

Back at the museum, an addition of a gift shop in the former "milk room" at the end of the museum was created in 1991. A display case was added to feature Andover Historical Society items for sale. The gift shop began selling books by Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon later in 1992.

Andover Elementary School donated a computer in 1993 to assist with cataloging items from their growing collection and to have better control and access to records.

The beginning of 1994 saw the Historical Society's assets increased significantly with the purchase of the Lull property, which included the general store and post office across the road as well as the Lull house beside it. The purchase was made possible by a generous gift from H. Everett Humphries.

In addition, the Chaffee family almost doubled the museum's collection with the generous donation of clothing, documents, photographs, and memorabilia collected by Ralph Chaffee during his lifetime.

The Historical Society was awarded an assessment grant from the National Institute for Conservation of Cultural Property to fund the services of two professionals to do an assessment of the collection and buildings. The assessment would take place the following year.

Also that year they began selling collectible Christmas tree ornaments featuring historic Andover buildings.

In 1995, the Society developed an extensive plan to repair the general store and post office building to allow its use as a museum in conjunction with the railroad museum across the street. An exhibit was set up for the Turn of the Century Fair to highlight these restoration plans.

The assessment of the Historical Society's property was conducted in July, and the 77-page report received that October would be used as a tool to direct maintenance and restoration of the buildings and to develop proper methods for maintaining the collection.

Renovations started in 1996 at the general store and post office building. Installation of a climate-controlled room in the station attic was completed to protect the artifacts, photographs, and papers. In 1997 the original general store sign was restored, the original enamel Andover railroad station sign was returned to Andover by Jack Alden of Concord, Massachusetts, and the museum received a new coat of paint.

A major milestone in 1998 was the completion of the 15-year period for verifying their custodianship of the Potter Place Station to the Taylors – a milestone similar to "burning the mortgage." The Historical Society lobbied for maintaining the bridge over the B&M tracks in Maple Street in East Andover, aware of their role in preserving history within Andover not just at the museum.

A couple of maple trees were planted by the Brewsters along Cilleyville Road adjacent to the station grounds as well as roses and burning bush on the knoll.

A presentation took place in 1999 by Susan Hastings, Officer-in-Charge of the Andover Post Office, in recognition of the Historical Society's efforts to preserve the history of the railroad in the community. They received a framed enlargement of a special set of stamps entitled "All Aboard." This special stamp edition features images of a number of well-known historical locomotives and was issued to commemorate the history of railroading in the United States.

Also in 1999, work was initiated to catalog all the items in the Historical Society's collection. Each item was given an accession number and location card. They also agreed to devise a website, "the wave of the future" as noted in the meeting minutes.

A Highland Lake Inn tour, one of the oldest dwellings in East Andover, was organized with the Andover Service Club and open to the public.

The "Turn of the Century Fair" changed its name to 19th Century Fair in 2000. Work on the Lull and Post Office properties was a priority, and in January of 2001 the first Board meeting was held on the second floor of the general store and post office building.

Also, 2001 saw the completion of all the museum holdings entered into a computerized cataloging system. The main floor of the general store and post office became part of the museum dis-

play area and opened to the public.

By 2002, the museum began having visits from fourth grade classes from several towns, allowing the museum to introduce local history to the children. Work began on creating a brochure for the Society. And as always, improvement projects on the buildings and grounds continued throughout the year.

It was also the celebration of the 20th year of the Andover Historical Society. At the October meeting it was reported the museum had 2,932 items accessed to date. It was announced by the Historical Society's Vice President, Ed Hiller, that the Society had offered 62 programs with speakers over the last 20 years to the town on a variety of topics ranging from the histories of farming, skiing, railroading tools, Indiana archaeology, to stone walls, to the history of Governor Batchelder's Highland Farm on Taunton Hill.

This has been a brief overview of the first 20 years of the Andover Historical Society. It is impossible to truly detail all the research, thought, and planning, repair and restoration, collecting and cataloging that has occurred by the dedicated members of the Society within this article.

Andover and its residents are very fortunate to have so much of their history preserved.

Hopefully you will be inspired to visit the museum this summer, whether it's for the first time or one of many visits.

Enjoy the wonderful slice of history the museum shares with our community within its buildings, the caboos along the track, or sit among the flowers in the Secret Garden of the cellar hole of Richard Potter's house across the tracks.

Mark your calendars so you don't miss the Old Time Fair celebration at the museum on Sunday, August 7. The museum is open every weekend throughout the summer: Saturdays from 10 AM to 3 PM and Sundays from 12:30 to 3 PM. See you there! 



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