Overlooking Flaggers Pond on the west side of Andover is possibly the oldest stone structure in America. A huge, mysterious pile of granite boulders deliberately stacked on top of each other, about 70 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 15 feet high, it is called Turtle Mound.

But it is not just a pile of rocks; there are features two eye-like chambers on either side and a rock-lined tunnel that cuts through one end of the mound. The chambers are about eight feet in diameter and ten feet high inside. Standing stones have been erected in a pattern on top of the mound.

The mound has an ancient look to it. From colonials, they were called root cellars. "The story of one old English colonist is a reminder of their old English rock gardens left behind in Europe. Did the colonists have better things to do than construct such immense stone structures?"

A 17th-century Andover resident gives the mound an earlier origin story. He told me that when he was a boy and visited the mound, it was thought to be an Indian sweat lodge. Indicating the mound was already here when the first colonists arrived. However, the Algonquin Indians of the area were not known for making any buildings out of stone.

The only serious research at Turtle Mound was conducted by Yale archaeologist Frank Cline in 1951. He spent a season at the site digging four test trenches. The site's results were published in his book, "The Search for Lost America," summarizing Cline's findings. About a foot below the surface of one of the chambers, Cline found a layer of stones forming an oval pattern. Below that, a layer of human bone fragments, mixed with charcoal, indicated an ancient cemetery and burial ceremony.

The only artifacts were all made of stone, including spear points, axe heads, hammer stones, and drills. Cline found the stone material pointed to a date of 3000 B.C. Unfortunately, no radiocarbon dating of the bone or stone was done. Recent radiocarbon dating of charcoal at the American Stonehenge archives gives dating to 2000 B.C.

So, either American Indians were building megalithic structures thousands of years ago, remarkably similar to stone works in Europe, or Andover was home to ancient Bronze Age builders from Europe. Either way, there is much work yet to be done by historians and archaeologists.