

# Turtle Mound

A Look at Andover

by Tom Draheim

Overlooking Haggerts 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's called Turtle Mound.

But it's not just a pile of rocks, there are features: two cave-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



above, the mound is shaped roughly like a turtle, thus the name. Giant, 300 year old pine trees seem to grow out of the mound. If Turtle Mound was in Western Europe, it would be studied for what it appears to be: a Bronze Age (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.), probably Celtic, burial mound. The final resting place of some Celtic king, buried with his earthly treasures under tons of rocks, impervious to would-be grave robbers.

Being in America, Turtle Mound poses a problem for historians. Susan Allport, in her book *Sermons In Stone: The Stone Walls Of New England*, attributes the large stone buildings and chambers around New England (such as America's Stonehenge in nearby North Salem, New Hampshire) to the early English

colonists. They were "built as root cellars" she quotes a Vermont archaeologist. Turtle Mound appears to be much more than a root cellar.

A Phillips Academy museum curator told me he thinks the mound was built by early English colonists as a reminder of their old English rock gardens left behind in Europe. Didn't the colonists have better things to do than construct such massive stone structures?

A long-time Andover teacher 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 swear 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 Glynn in 1951. He spent a season at the site digging four test trenches. Salvatore Trento in his book *The Search For Lost America* summarizes Glynn's findings. About a foot below the surface of one of the chambers, Glynn found a layer of stones forming an oval pattern. Below that a layer of human bone fragments, mixed with charcoal, evidence of an ancient ceremonial burial and cremation.

The only artifacts were all made of stone, including spear points, axe heads, hammer stones and drills. Glynn thought the stone material pointed to a date of 3000 B.C. Unfortunately no radiocarbon dating of the bone or charcoal was done. Recent radiocarbon dating of charcoal at the America's Stonehenge site gave dates going back 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. In either case there is much work yet to be done by historians and archaeologists.