

Captain Robert Andrews: American Patriot

by Patricia Kelleher Bartram

*This article is one of a periodic series of “portraits” of some of
Boylston’s earliest families and key figures.*

Robert Andrews Jr. was born 8 November 1722 in Boxford, Massachusetts. He was the son and namesake of his father Robert Andrews Sr. (1690-1751), a farmer, and Deborah Frye (1691-1761), who had married in Boxford on 10 March 1719/20. Robert Jr. was baptized on 11 November 1722 in Topsfield, Massachusetts, and was one of several children born to this couple, all born in Boxford.

Marriage, A Move to Central Massachusetts, and Children

At the age of 24 years, Robert was married to Lucy Bradstreet in Topsfield on 19 March 1746/47 after marriage banns having been published in Topsfield about six weeks prior on 25 January. He was of Boxford, and she was a resident of Topsfield at the time of their marriage. Lucy was the daughter of Simon Bradstreet IV (1682-1738) and Elizabeth Capen (1695-1781) and a descendant of Simon Bradstreet (1603/4-1697), who served as the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1679-1686 and again in 1689-1692.

For a short period of time after they wed, the couple lived in Brookfield, Massachusetts, where their eldest child, a son named Robert after his father, was born on 17 December 1747. The family then moved from that town and settled in the North Parish (the area now known as Boylston since its incorporation in 1786). Their second child, also a son, Samuel, was born in Shrewsbury on 14 February 1750. Six more children followed: Daniel, 22 July 1752; Elizabeth, 15 February 1755; John, 29 May 1757; Lucy, about 1759; Asa, 11 May 1762; and Jotham, 18 December 1766. Except for Robert III, the remaining seven children were born in Shrewsbury.

Life in Shrewsbury’s North Parish

Robert, Lucy and their family settled along the Nashua River in what was known as the Pleasant Valley section of town (now under the Wachusett Reservoir). There, with the help of his seven growing sons, he established a substantial sized farm. As evidence of this, at the time of his later death, his farm was 470 acres and valued at £2353.



HOMESTEAD AND FARM BUILDINGS OF CAPTAIN ROBERT ANDREWS

*Property lost to the Wachusett Reservoir
BHSM Photograph Collection #1980.159*

Robert was active in town affairs, serving as a Selectman (1774-76, 1779). Life was not without heartache, however, as he and Lucy lost their daughter Elizabeth, who was just shy of two years old, on 28 September 1757.

Increasing Unrest

As the Andrews family farmed, and their children grew, England’s American colonies were becoming increasingly displeased with new taxes being leveraged on them as a way for England to pay its debts following the Seven Years’ War between England and France (1756-1763). The Stamp Act of 1765 taxed all paper documents in the Colonies and widespread opposition ensued, including incidents of mob violence. Despite the increasing unrest, the English Parliament passed the Townsend Acts in 1767, further increasing taxes taxing the Colonies on importations on glass, red lead, white lead, painters’ colors, paper and tea, thus further increasing the rage of the Colonists. These actions by the British, and others, inspired many into political activity and ultimately toward what became the struggle for independence.

Militias and Answering the Alarm

During these years, in anticipation of possible armed conflict with the British, various towns began regularly drilling and arming their local militias. Their members were called “Minute-men” as they were expected to be ready at a minute’s notice. In 1774, Shrewsbury purchased an “iron field piece” (cannon) and related ammunition for use by the town. At the same time, the town formed two militia companies, one being formed in the Second (or North) Precinct.

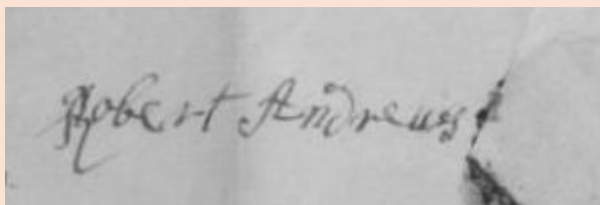
They were finally called into action in Massachusetts on the morning of 19 April 1775 in answering the Alarm raised by the conflict with British soldiers at Concord and Lexington. Shrewsbury responded by sending 128 Minute-men, including a company of 47 men from its Second Precinct of which Robert Andrews Jr., at 53 years old, served as Captain.

By the time the Alarm reached Shrewsbury (said to be about 10:00 a.m.), coupled with the distance, Shrewsbury's men missed participating in the conflict at Concord and Lexington, but marched on toward Cambridge, where they assisted in building fortifications. Within a month an estimated 14,000-16,000 volunteer soldiers were in Cambridge, which officially became the Patriots' military headquarters when George Washington took command of this newly formed Continental Army on 2 July 1775.

Captain Robert Andrews Jr. served for one month before returning home to his farm in the Second Precinct. Captain Andrews was not the only Patriot in his family. Four of his sons – Robert III, Samuel, Daniel and John – also served in the Continental Army during what became the American Revolutionary War.

Death and Burial

On 11 November 1789, at the age of 67 years, Captain Andrews life was cut short. His death record says he was “crushed to death by a cart wheel.” Further elaboration in the local newspaper said he was “driving a team through a pair of bars... (and) accidentally thrown down before one of the wheels of the cart, which running over his head, killed him instantly.” A sad and gruesome death for a man of leadership and patriotism. He was interred in Boylston's Old Burying Ground.



SIGNATURE OF CAPTAIN ROBERT ANDREWS SR.
as it appeared on his will dated 18 March 1789
ancestry.com

At a Town Meeting on 1 March 1790, it was agreed to allow his heirs to erect a tomb in the Burial Ground to his memory. It now remains in his honor with the following inscription engraved.



ANDREWS TOMB
Old Burial Ground
Boylston, Massachusetts
Photograph courtesy of Bruce Filgate

In memory of Captain Robert Andrews who was born November 3, 1722 and fell asleep November 11, 1789. Lamented as a kind and tender husband and father, an industrious and useful member of society, a serious professor of the Christian religion and of appointed integrity in every station, public and private, in which he acted

*When thou, no friend, no dying voice could hear.
Or drop around thy bed the parting tear
Yet shall thy loving virtues come to mind
And preach to all, be just and kind.*

In 1978, the Boylston Historic Commission placed the following words on a tablet at the foot of the tomb:

In memory of
Capt. Robert Andrews
1722-1789
Commander of the local Minutemen
who responded to the call
of April 19, 1775
BE KIND AND JUST

Acknowledgements:

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- familysearch.org
- findagrave.com/memorial/8029359/robert-andrews
- History of the town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts: from its settlement in 1717 to 1829, with other matter relating thereto not before published, including an extensive family register, A.H. Ward, Boston, Massachusetts, 1847, digital image, familysearch.org
- mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/cambridge/
- Photograph Collection, Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc. 7 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
- Thomas's Massachusetts Spy, Worcester, Worcester, Massachusetts, digital image, genealogybank.com
- vlp.cah.ucf.edu/ourveterans.php#ourvets
- Vital Records, Boxford, Essex County, Massachusetts, digital images and transcriptions, ancestry.com
- Vital Records, Topsfield, Essex County, Massachusetts, digital images and transcriptions, ancestry.com
- Vital Records, Shrewsbury, Worcester County, Massachusetts, digital images and transcriptions, ancestry.com
- wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon Bradstreet
- shrewsburyhistoricalsociety.org/artemas-ward