

Parson Barnard Self-Guided House Tour

Welcome to the North Andover Historical Society's Parson Barnard House built in 1715. The house you are visiting today is different from most historic house museums: Each room in this house represents a different time period, from 1715 to 1830. Only the four front rooms are open to the public, so we will not see the whole building today.



Thomas Barnard built this house around 1715, for 50 pounds and the bricks from the parsonage that had burned down in 1707. The bricks were used to fill the walls of this house to both insulate them and slow down any house fire. Reverend Barnard came to Andover as the assistant minister in 1682 and did not become the senior minister until Francis Dane's death in 1696/7. Thomas died in 1718, only three years after the completion of his new house.

Let's go inside and upstairs to his room (*turn right at the top of the stairs*) and see how the house looked when it was first built.

Entering this room, you may notice a rug on the table. Rugs were the property of only the very wealthy at this time, and were meant to be displayed proudly as a sign of wealth, not to be walked across. The wide floorboards were cleaned by sweeping sand across them—imagine what that would do to a rug!



Have you heard of the expression, "Sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite"? You can imagine where the bugs would be: in the mattress or what then was considered "bed." The bed, filled with straw or unusable fleece, sits on the wooden "bedstead." What needed to be tight on this bed are the ropes. In fact the expression "turn in" also comes from these old rope beds, as the bed wrench would turn the old knots in order to tighten the ropes so that new knots could be tied.

The large "bed roller" would really only be useful on down or feather bed. It is said that it would take about 15 years to collect enough small down feathers from the average flock of geese—no wonder feather beds were one of the most expensive items a family would own.

The original windows in this house were small casement windows with leaded diamond panes similar to this (in stand on top of box on chest). Thomas's son John had all the windows changed to these sash type in the 1750s.

Please cross the hall to see what other changes John made in the house...

John Barnard was the next minister to lead the First Parish Church, and he lived in this house for 40 years, until his death in 1757. The most unusual furnishing combination in this room is the bedstead and a dining table. The family did not eat all their meals here, in fact the whole family probably never ate here.

As minister, John was one of the leaders of the community, as the Puritan church and town government were essentially one during his lifetime. He would use this room, with its wonderful view—and did you notice that this side of the house is actually bigger than the other?—away from the hustle and bustle of the household to entertain his friends and colleagues. The custom was to eat the main meals of the day at breakfast and then again at noon, while the third meal of the day would be more like our lunch. Since most meetings would be in the afternoon or evening, this pre-cooked meal could easily be transported up those stairs and delivered to John's guests.

Even the eating utensils are different—the forks are pointy and meant to spear meat from a common serving bowl or trencher. The knives were often used to eat from—in fact New Englanders used to eat off their knives for so long that many early novels of the 1800s used that fact to poke fun at New Englanders!

Although these curtains do not close, we know that John's bed had a set of full curtains, which would keep the sleepers warmer at night. During the day, when the bed was not in use, they would shut it off from sight. The very fabric of the curtains was also a sign of wealth and status. The small bed stored underneath is a trundle bed, used by 2 to 3 children and moved closer to the fireplace for warmth at night.

In addition to the windows John replaced, he added shutters. But they are inside, not outside the windows because they serve as temperature control devices. Early windows had no storm windows or screens; these shutters helped keep the heat in (and the snow out) during the winter and the sunlight out during the hot summer months.

As you leave, you might notice that this fireplace wall is not carved but rather created from applied moldings—a decorating trick worthy of any HGTV show today.



If you go downstairs and to the left you will see what happened next in the house's history...

After John's death in 1757, Dr. William Symmes was called to the ministry at the North Parish Church. In 1759 he married Anna Gee, a well-to-do woman from Boston. When Anna died in 1772, he married Susannah Powell two years later.



Anna was well to do, but Susannah was wealthy!!! At age forty, she had never married, and as an only child, had inherited the entire family fortune at the death of her parents. When Susannah moved to the North Parish of Andover and saw the plain house she was about to live in, she did what any of us would do—she remodeled and redecorated.

Notice the walls are straighter and the corner posts are hidden from view. Susannah had new outer walls installed to modernize the room. She also created window seats and improved the shutter design. There are many more textiles used in this room—curtains, a rug on the floor, and even an upholstered side chair. The paneling in this room is carved in the latest fashion, not a trick of the eye as was found in John's room upstairs. Reverend and Mrs. Symmes also had what was a luxury of the time—a tall case clock.

During the American Revolution, Dr. Symmes donated his salary to the town to help pay for the soldiers fighting the war. Those strange-looking weapons in the corner are a reminder of the Nation's birth and freedom and might be used in parades to celebrate the earliest of American Holidays: July 4th or Independence Day.

William and Susannah both died in 1807, within a few months of each other, and are buried in the Old Burial Ground on Academy Road.

Please cross the hall and see our final room...

This room dates from the time of Simeon Putnam, the headmaster of Franklin Academy from 1818 until his untimely death in 1833. "Old Put" hailed from Vermont and was known as a hard master to please.

The first thing you notice about this room is that the walls are covered with wallpaper. Mrs. Symmes had installed wallpaper in this room around 1765, but her paper was very expensive because it was hand printed in France and imported first to England and then to the colonial Massachusetts, where it was subject to a special tax. The paper of Mr. Putnam's time is not as expensive because it



was printed in America by machine. It represents the changes to come, as the very industrial revolution that built cities like Lowell and later Lawrence, would change life right down to the furniture people sat in and the dishes they put on their tables. The furniture and the clock are also products of this revolution and you can see how different they are from Mrs. Symmes's possessions.



This ends your tour of the history of the Parson Barnard house. If you have any questions, please ask us. We would love to talk to you about North Andover history and the North Andover Historical Society's mission to keep local history alive.

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