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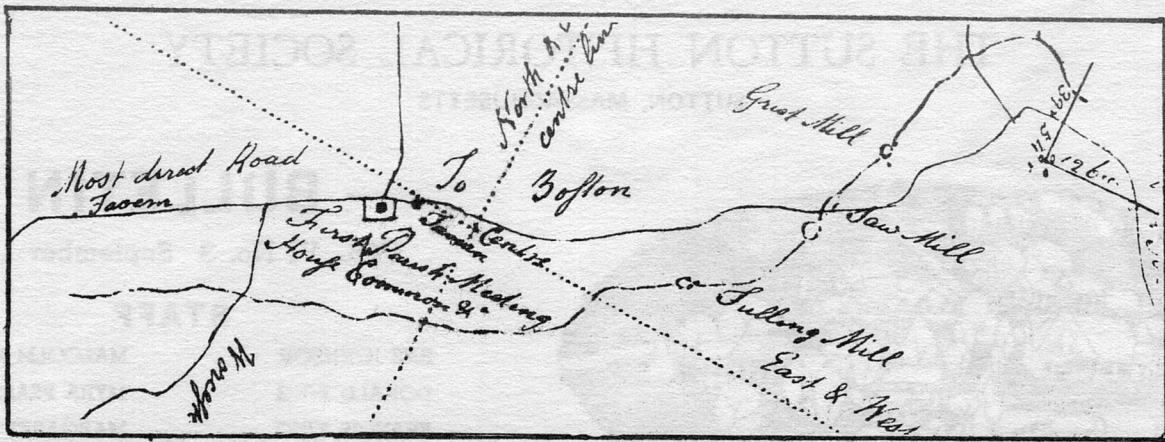
THE MILLS AND SHOPS OF COLD SPRING BROOK THE HOUGHTON GRIST MILL - 1797 - 1927

By William B. Brierly and Daniel S. Smith

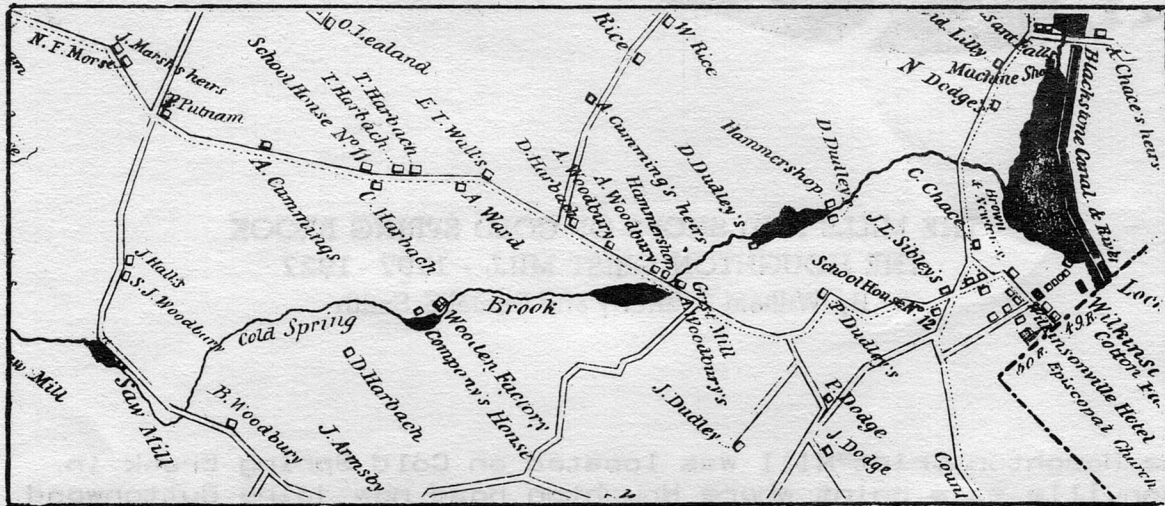
The Houghton Grist Mill was located on Cold Spring Brook in Wilkinsonville at a point where Houghton Road now joins Buttonwood Avenue. Although the grist mill has been designated the Houghton Mill it would be more appropriate to call it the Hall-Dudley-Woodbury-Houghton Mill. The mill was originally built on Woodbury Pond in 1797 but was moved to the Buttonwood Avenue site in the mid-1800's. Only the mill foundation, the flume or canal as it was known, and fragments of the original dam remain today. The mill buildings and contents were swept away during the flood of 4 November 1927.

The grist mill, along with a saw mill, was first built by Captain Josiah Hall in 1797 on the east bank of Cold Spring Brook at the outlet of a pond later known as Woodbury Pond where Woodbury's Woolen Mill was later established. The record¹ shows that on 6 April 1813 Captain David Dudley**who already owned a grist and saw mill on Dudley Pond, later a part of Houghton Pond, purchased from Captain Josiah Hall for \$5500 in gold, his land, and another saw and grist mill. Then Captain Dudley together with Charles Hale, and Luther and Leonard Woodbury began to manufacture scythes there in 1813¹. We are told that the business continued for several years until the business was sold to Asa Woodbury who continued to manufacture scythes.

The Plan [map] of Sutton 1795² shows an older saw mill at the outlet of Woodbury Pond and the grist mill at Dudley Pond. The Map of Sutton 1831³ depicts a grist mill owned by Asa Woodbury on the east bank of Cold Spring Brook at the outlet of Woodbury Pond and the Woodbury hammershop on the west bank. The map also shows D. Dudley's hammershop on Dudley Pond where his grist mill formerly stood on the west bank and an unidentified building on the east bank at the outlet. The date when the Woodbury Grist Mill was moved to the Houghton location as recorded in the History of Sutton,¹ is not presently known.



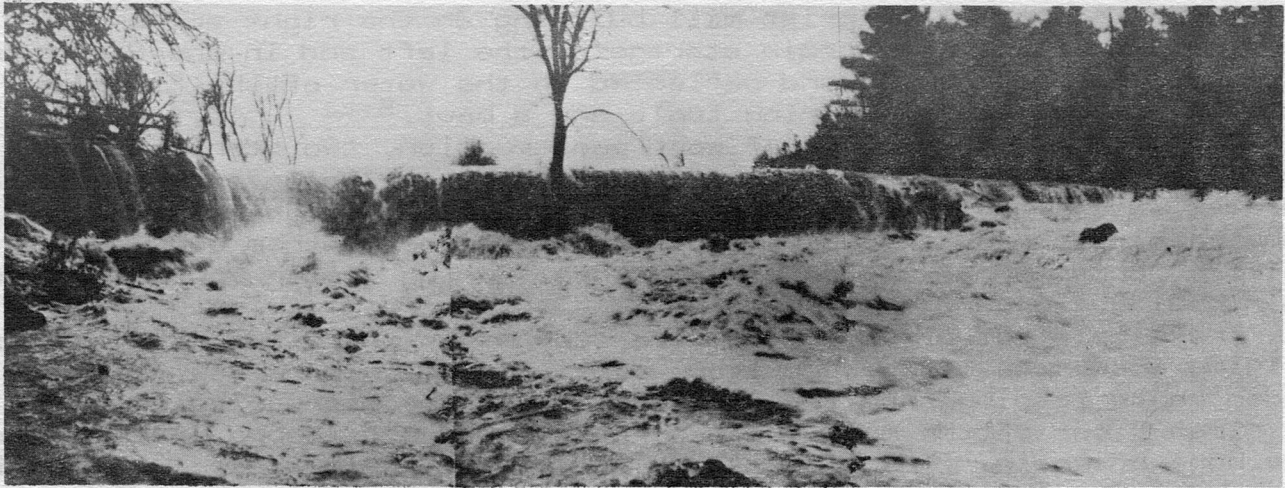
SUTTON MAP 1795



SUTTON MAP 1831 (maps not north oriented)

Examination of the deeds⁴ casts some light on the changes in the mills and indicates the sequence of ownership of the mill property. On 16 April 1847, Joel Houghton of Grafton, Trader, for \$2250 bought from Horatio N. Hyde (Book 421 Page 437)⁴ a certain parcel of land containing by estimation 2 acres with all the privileges of the same with all the machinery in the mills, being the same estate conveyed by Peter Dudley to David Dudley, Jr. by deed dated 3 December 1805 (Book 263 Page 391)⁴ and by David Dudley Jr. to Robert Fuller of Cambridge, merchant by deed dated 28 October 1828 (Book 262 Page 359)⁴ and by Robert Fuller to Robert G. Taft of Uxbridge by deed dated 27 November 1843 (Book 384 Page 358)⁴ and by said Taft to Horatio N. Hyde by deed dated 13 March 1845 (Book 395 Page 603)⁴ and by deed from said Hyde to Joel Houghton as stated above.

In some of the deeds a grist mill and a saw mill are specifically mentioned, in others the word "mills" is used. On the property purchased by Joel Houghton there was a grist mill which had been converted into a hammershop and a saw mill and later a grist mill which had been moved from its original location on Boston Road. It is also known that not only did Joel Houghton grind corn in the grist mill, but he originally made cotton batts and sold them under the trade name of "Rosedale Batts." One of the authors (DSS) remembers seeing stencils for Rosedale Batts in the mill building when he lived in the Houghton House in his early life.**



Houghton Pond Dam at Flood Stage, Nov. 3, 1927

faction. Three people were chosen to arbitrate the case, John McClellan, Warren Wilder, and J. B. Hartwell. The arbitrators met on 7 October 1875 at Houghton's Mill to hear the case and on 12 October 1875 an agreement was reached and subscribed to by the parties concerned. Joel Houghton agreed to pay and agreed to the following "Agreement and Award" [Book 1012 Page 285]:⁴

- \$140 for damage of right of way
- 81 for damage by flowage to 3 acres of land at \$27 an acre
- 18 for damage to trees and timber
- 7 for damage to a water privilege by flowage
- 4 for right to enter and repair embankments on John Dudley land
- 5 for damage by flowage to a well or spring and to the house occupied by E. Bashaw
- 25 for interest on damage payments in arrears on the \$140

It was furthered agreed that the roll-way would be lengthened and maintained, and water level maintained at a level no higher than an iron pin imbedded in a firm rock on the northeast margin of the mill pond and northerly of the old red house formerly owned by David Dudley. A right of way across the dam and a right to bridge the watercourse by John Dudley was agreed upon for use of both parties and Joel Houghton was given the right to use John Dudley's earth and rocks for maintaining the dam.

On 20 August 1860 [Book 630 Page 457]⁴ and again on 21 November 1860 [Book 682 Page 377]⁴ Joel Houghton had extended his property by purchases from Nathaniel and Adeline Dodge. In 1870 he built an "English Cottage"¹ [Figure 2] on Buttonwood Avenue about 172 feet east of the grist mill. He later built a barn and spring house across the street - all of which are still standing. He removed his family from the Dudley House now occupied by Channing Smith, Jr. where all his children had been born. Mrs. Houghton died two years later in 1872.

In 1893 Joel Houghton died and his son Henry bought the mill on 5 April 1894 [Book 1439 Page 207]⁴ and he and his brother-in-law Daniel E. Brown continued to operate the mill.⁵ Henry moved his family from Millbury but he continued to work for Augustus Winter at the Millbury Grain Co.⁵ Daniel E. Brown with the assistance of George Pickford [Henry's father-in-law] ran the mill.⁵

In 1914 Henry Houghton died and his wife Keziah Pickford Houghton and daughter Lottie, Julia's husband Irving L. Stowe continued to

Figure 1. shows the grist mill building on the right and an attached building used for grain storage on the left and in the distance on the flume near the dam and reflected in the water of the flume, a small building used for storing tools and a boat.⁵

The mill buildings were of wood construction, two stories high with shingled roofs. In the basement of the building on the right was a breast water wheel fed by water from the flume through a four foot in diameter pipe. Mrs. Irving L. Stowe remembers her father and Uncle Daniel E. Brown chopping ice off the wheel during winter months so that grain could be ground.

The single set of millstones was located on the first floor of the building where the office and store were located. There was also a wooden chute leading from the second story of the storage building to the first floor of the mill building which was used to bag oats and to move bags of grain. The first floor of the storage building contained bagged grain. The second floor had bins for oats and other grains.



Joel Houghton Cotton Batting and Grist Mill

Figure 1

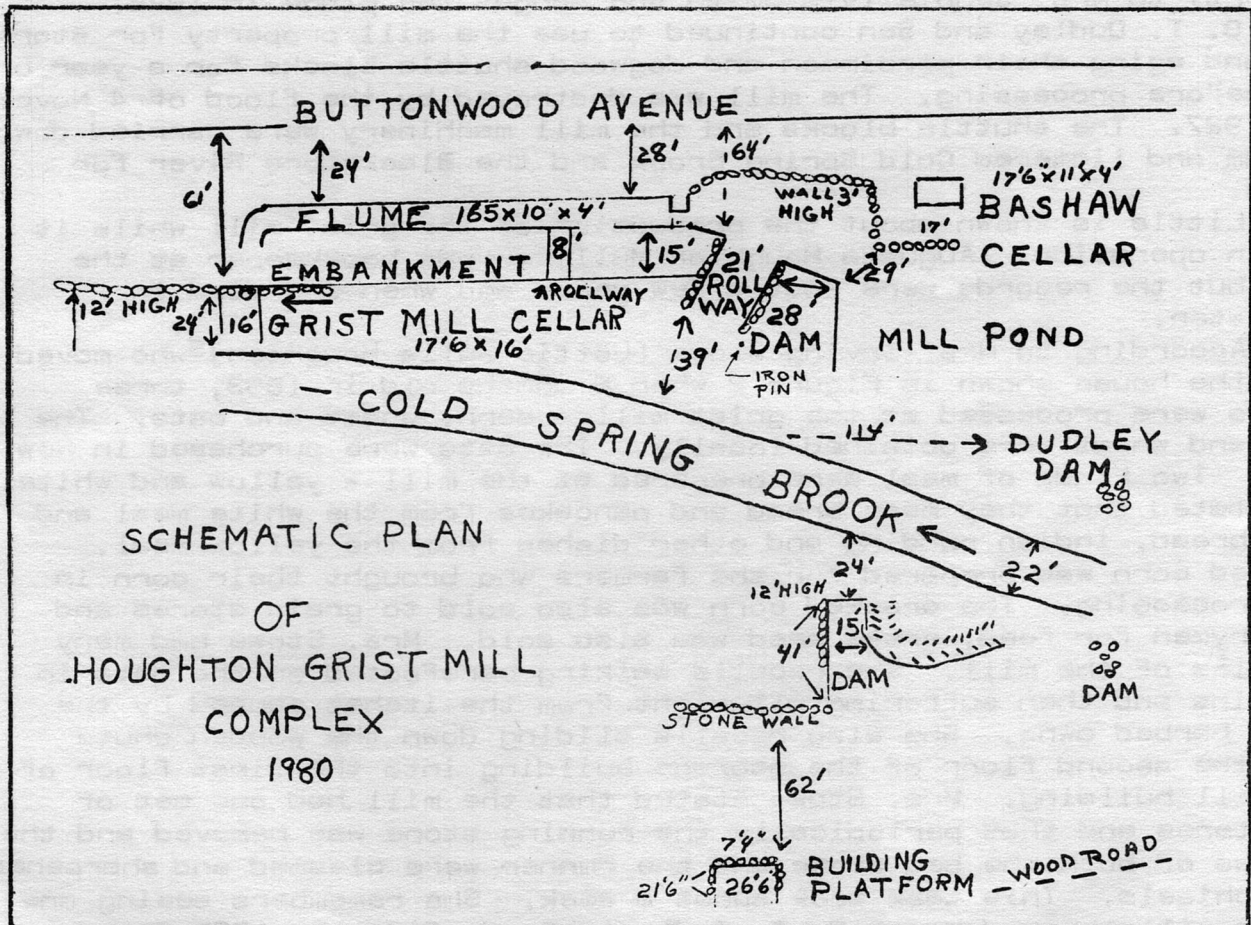
The flume or canal as it was called by the Houghtons, was 165 feet long and led from the eastern end of the dam, paralleling Buttonwood Avenue. It flowed along a narrow strip of Chase land about 20 feet from the road.

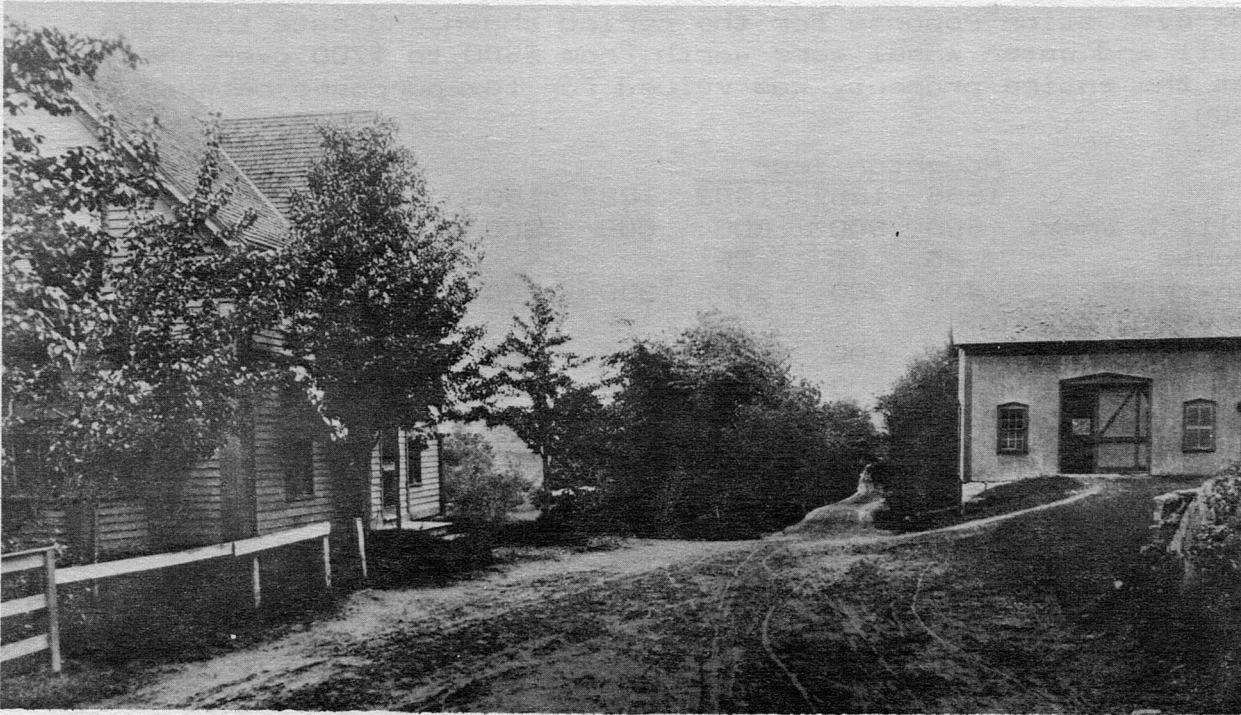
The dam constructed by Joel Houghton was 160 feet long, from 15 to 28 feet wide at the top and served as a roadway to Dudley land and orchard on the west side of Cold Spring Brook. The Houghton Pond was considerably larger than the old Dudley Pond and about 10 feet deep. The remnants of the Houghton Dam are now about 12 feet above the valley floor. The dam was constructed of stone with earth fill. The old log dam of Dudley Pond was located about 114 feet upstream of the Houghton dam. Channing Smith, Jr. pointed out for one of the authors the remnants of the dam that his uncle John Dudley had shown him in his youth. Life was not easy and problems were manifold in the life of the miller. Joel Houghton's life was no exception. Several years prior to 1875, he rebuilt the dam so that he would have a larger reservoir of water for the mill. During an excessively heavy rainfall the new dam backed up water so that 3 acres of Dudley timber land were flooded, the right of way over the dam was made impassable and water entered the cellar and contaminated the well of the Bashaw house which was only 45 feet from the dam. So serious was this flooding that John Dudley sought legal satis-

Tax evaluation reports for the period shown indicate that the grist mill and water wheel were worth from \$600 to \$700 over the years and that the entire property was valued for tax purposes between \$3000 and \$3200.

ITEM	Houghton Year							Dudley	Vachon
	1885	1887	1892	1897	1902	1912	1916	1919	1919
Grist Mill & Wheel	600	600	600	600	600	600	700	400	
Store House	25	25	25						
Stock-in-trade	400	300	300	300	500	500	500		
Machinery							100		
House	800	800	800	800	800	800	900		900
Barn	200	200	200	200	200	200	300		300
Land 2 acres and water power	1100	1100	1100	1100	1100	1100	1500	100	200
horse	100	100	100	75	75	125	125		
Evaluation	3225	3100	3125	3075					
Tax paid	40.70	41.06	37.16	42.59	55.40	70.54	106.34		37.20

Grist and saw mills were the first essential mills established to provide support to the early settlers. These mills, together with blacksmith shops, were followed by fulling and other textile mills. The products of these mills not only provided the basic requirements for subsisting in a harsh world but they were the most elementary beginnings of ways to ease the stress on human life. Houghton's Mill for 120 years was one of those services that contributed to the EARLY development of Sutton and surrounding towns. It also served as a micro-cultural point where information and ideas were exchanged.





Joel Houghton "English Cottage" about 1900

Figure 2

operate the mill until the property was sold in 1918. The property was divided into two parcels: the grist mill and the water rights were sold to D. T. Dudley and Son, and the house and barn with the attached land was sold to Thomas and Allida Vashon who then leased the property to Mrs. Jennie Tyla Smith who bought the place in 1922.

D. T. Dudley and Son continued to use the mill property for storing and aging their persimmon and dogwood shuttle blocks for a year or two before processing. The mill was destroyed by the flood of 4 November 1927. The shuttle blocks and the mill machinery were carried down stream and littered Cold Spring Brook and the Blackstone River for miles.

Little is known about the production of the grist mill while it was in operation. Augusta Houghton Mulliken was bookkeeper at the mill but the records were lost a few years ago when she died in Worcester.

According to Mrs. Irving Stowe [Lottie Julia Houghton]⁵ who moved into the house shown in Figure 2 when 8 months old in 1893, three grains were processed at the grist mill - corn, wheat and oats. The corn and wheat were obtained locally. The oats were purchased in New York. Two kinds of meal were prepared at the mill - yellow and white. She stated that they made bread and pancakes from the white meal and corn bread, indian pudding and other dishes from the yellow meal. Cracked corn was prepared for the farmers who brought their corn in for processing. The cracked corn was also sold to grain stores and poultrymen for feed, grass seed was also sold. Mrs. Stowe had many memories of the mill. She recalls walking barefooted on the oats in the bins and then suffering all night from the itches caused by the oats' barbed awns. She also recalls sliding down the wooden chute from the second floor of the storage building into the first floor of the mill building. Mrs. Stowe stated that the mill had one set of millstones and that periodically the running stone was removed and the furrows of both the bed stone and the runner were cleaned and sharpened with chisels. This task took about a week. She remembers seeing one of the millstones down at D. T. Dudley's Pond after the 1927 flood.

An eight hour period of rainfall on the third and fourth of November 1927 had manifested into one of destructive capabilities. The 5-inch rainfall had filled all the ponds on Cold Spring Brook.⁷ All the dams below Clark's Reservoir were filled beyond capacity with subsequent overflowing of the water. Dams went out at Pleasantdale, Woodbury Pond, D. T. Dudley & Son Pond and Houghton Pond flooding the entire valley and cutting all roads and destroying bridges. This was the calamitous end of Houghton's Mill.

The grist mill, like all man-made monuments succumbed to the brief but overwhelming forces of nature. These vestiges of a vibrant past will not be forgotten.



Houghton Grist Mill foundation and four foot pipe flume to water wheel

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- * Grist - to gnash the teeth, to rub away, to grind down grain that is to be, or has been ground
- ** Capt. David Dudley was the father of P.T. Dudley, Shuttle Manufacturer
- *** The 1857 Henry Walling Map of Worcester County shows the J. H. Houghton Batt Co., located on Cold Spring Brook

MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM REVIEWS - (A Short Synopsis)

July - Forty-five Society members and guests gathered at the Eight Lots School House on July 1, for a potluck supper and business meeting. Discussion about the Waters Farm Preservation project and what participation the Society would be most effective within their limitations. The Waters Farm Preservation Committee consisting of two members of the Historical Commission and three from the Conservation Commission, are all members of the Historical Society. The Society voted a sum of three hundred dollars toward funding an anticipated publication of a "Waters Journal."

August - On August 5, members and guests met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Coulter, Boston Road, for a potluck supper and tour of their eighteenth century home they are restoring to period style. Guests were from Brooklyn, Conn., Lake Worth, Fla., and Millbury, Mass. Features in the home represented the determined and dedicated effort by the Coulters toward authenticity in restoration.

September - This meeting was held at the Manchaug Baptist Church (now deeded to the Society) on September 2. Heavy plastic panels were installed during July on the outside of the two leaded stained glass windows to protect them against possible vandalism. Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred Stockwell rendered an informative slide presentation and commentary on a trip through Scotland.

1980 - JULY, AUGUST and SEPTEMBER - WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

M/M Walter W. Aldrich
M/M Donald K. Bean, Jr.
M/M Ted Bousquet, Sr.
M/M Maynard B. Henry
Mrs. Eleanor Hodge
David Kendrick
M/M Roland M. LaChance
John L. Lundrall

M/M William Mahoney
Dr. Richard A. Montague
M/M John Perry
M/M Brooks Putnam
Mrs. Evelyn B. Ross
Richard & Judith Trudell
M/M Charles Whalen
M/M William Whittier

Editorial note - The authors devoted many hours of research to compile information on the featured article in this issue. Any less coverage would have depleted the historical significance of the text and its illustrations. Therefore, as a community service the Society is publishing an eight page BULLETIN for the first time.

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