

# THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## — BULLETIN —

VOL. X NO. 2 JUNE 1984

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### A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUTTON

by — Flora E. Dudley

Ed. Note: This condensed history of Sutton by the late Flora E. Dudley (town historian) was intended for a 1976 Bicentennial publication which never materialized. It is printed here as a service to the community.

Many years before the white man came to Sutton, the Nipmuc Indians roamed over our rolling hills and fished in the many natural ponds and streams. They had a village near the location of the present West Sutton Church. This area was known as Manchaug and was several miles away from the Manchaug of today.

In 1681, before Sutton was established, a grant of 2,000 acres was given to William Stoughton and Joseph Dudley. Stoughton was Lieutenant Governor for nine years, and Dudley was Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay for thirteen years. This tract was known as "Manchaug Farm." Stoughton's half included all of West Sutton, the old Town Farm and the present George Thompson place. This Stoughton half became a part of Sutton, but not until 1734. The Dudley half went into the Town of Oxford.

An Indian named John Wampus, owned many acres north of Manchaug and east of the Blackstone River. Wampus went to England in the 1600's and while there deeded a large part of his holdings to a man named Pratt and also made provision for some of his white and Indian friends in a will, "John Wampus, alias White, Indian", died in 1679. Pratt tried, in vain, for many years to claim his property.

On May 15, 1704, Governor Joseph Dudley signed the grant which means so much to us today. It marks the birthday of our town. The official document specified that the eight-mile square area in the Nipmuc Country, should be made a township and the name should be "Sutton." The land was granted to ten persons, including Edward Pratt. The original boundaries were Worcester, New Oxford, Sherbourne (now Douglas), and Marlboro. Certain conditions were to be met in this historic document of 1704. A four mile square section, known as Hassanmisco, should be reserved for the Indians, thirty families should be settled within seven years after the war with the Indians and income would be provided for the preaching of the Gospel and for teaching the children to read and write. Also, a survey was to be made and a plan approved.

The Proprietors to whom the Town was assigned had their first meeting in Boston in 1714 and each man was allowed one or more sixty acre units of area. A careful survey was made in 1715 and the first three families built their cabins in 1716. Benjamin Marsh settled near John

Newton's present home. Here the first white child, Abigail Marsh was born. Elisha Johnson built his cabin near Perley Aldrich's old mill on Boston Road and Nathaniel Johnson's home site is uncertain. The first winter was very severe. Elisha's wife and children would have perished had it not been for a friendly Indian. Elisha had started for Marlboro for supplies before the storm.

By 1717 thirty plots of forty acres each were laid out and claimed by newcomers who could have a farm for the asking.

The first Town Meeting was held in the Eight Lots District on December 1, 1718. This gathering was at John Stockwell's. The property is now owned by Fred Clark. The foundation of the little house can still be seen. The business for the day was to elect the first town officers and to make plans for building a meeting house. For many years the church and town affairs were conducted by the same group.

The first meeting house was built on the west side of the Common, facing East, and was about 40 feet by 36 feet. Everyone was expected to attend church, and "expected" had a stronger meaning than now. The townsmen were assessed for the expense of the church building and the preacher, and later, a list of pew holders and owners of pews served as a census of the males in town.

The little church was soon too small, and another was erected on the Common in front of the present Brick Block, in 1751. This one burned in 1828, and the present building was dedicated in 1830. Although the town and church governments had long since separated, this building was used for public gatherings until the Town Hall was dedicated in 1884.

Very early in the history of our town, settlers in outlying districts began to ask for their own place of worship and voting center. Petition after petition was received and rejected. Finally in 1728 a group in the eastern section of the township was allowed to leave and join Westboro. Next a few settlers joined an Upton group, then in 1778, Auburn, or Ward, separated, then Northbridge in 1780. Oxford in 1793, Millbury in 1813 and Grafton in 1842.

Meanwhile, some of the people yearned for a different form of worship. The first to separate from the Congregational Church were the Baptists, in 1735. Over the years, different denominations organized, and we now have seven churches: the Congregational, West Sutton Baptist, Manchaug Baptist, South Sutton Baptist, St. Anne's Catholic, St. Mark's Catholic and St. John's Episcopal.

The Town Meeting form of government has, however, continued from the earliest days and enthusiastic voters still express themselves regularly. Much interest has been shown in State affairs. The Town has sent fifty-eight citizens to the Legislature.

Sutton has an enviable war record. Sixty-five Minute Men and two hundred fifteen Revolutionary soldiers answered the call to arms. Our most noted Patriot General Rufus Putnam, is honored by a monument at his birthplace. One hundred eighty-five men wore the uniform in the Civil and World War I conflicts and have tablets of honor at the Town Hall. The new Memorial School was dedicated to the three hundred five men and women who saw service in World War II and special honor is shown there to the eight who gave their lives for their country in that conflict. Our Town has also been well represented in the recent drafts for military service. When the statistics become available these men and women will undoubtedly be suitably honored.

The grant of 1704 provided for teaching the children to read and write. The income from two hundred granted areas was to be used for this purpose. The first efforts in this direction were probably "dance" schools, held in private homes. In 1730 it was voted to keep school in four different parts of town, one month in the Town Plot and one month each in three other places. The Town Plot was six acres, reserved in 1738 for the training field (back of Kenneth Shaw's) the burying place and the meeting house. Within this Plot a six-rod-area was reserved for

a school house. This is the space at the north side of the church near the old well, (now covered). History tells us the first school house was built here. By 1831, ninety-nine years later thirteen district school houses had been built to accomodate the children. One of these is still standing, due to the efforts of the Eight-Lots School Association. A part of the Old Stone School is still erect and some of the other school buildings have been made into homes.

In 1950 it was decided to change the school system and the three centers were organized. Sutton Center, Wilkinsonville and Manchaug, with bus transportation for the pupils. The high school was moved from the building erected in 1908 to the new Memorial School, and later a new Elementary School was also built on Memorial Field.

The General Rufus Putnam school in Sutton Center was later opened for the Sutton Library and the quarters for the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Although the district schools are no more, the district names still continue. The Sutton History Vol. II, published in 1952, presents the information about the homes and families by districts: Harback, Hathaway, Eight Lots, etc. from 1876 to 1952.

Sutton has also a Vol I History, 1704-1875, 836 pages annals, anecdotes, family records and pages and pages of fascinating reading. This book was out of print for many years but has recently been reprinted and is now available to all.

Our early settlers saw the possibilities of power in the many streams and natural ponds in the region. The Blackstone and Mumford rivers and Ramshorn, Singletary, Dorothy and Manchaug Ponds were of great interest to the settlers.

Naturally, grist mills and mills of many other types were built on the streams, and later, dams appeared and small business made way for the factory.

David Wilkinson, on his way from Providence, saw the Blackstone River. He bought the East Sutton area and spent a fortune building Wilkinsonville mill, church, bank, store, hotel with auditorium, and many tenement houses near the Blackstone Canal. This canal opened the same year, 1828, and was used to carry freight and passengers to Providence from Worcester and discontinued when the railroad came through. Cotton products were made in Wilkinsonville for 81 years. In Manchaug, the Manchaug Company and B.B. and R. Knight also had cotton mills for many years.

The well known Asa Waters Shop was in Sutton on the Blackstone River until Millbury was set off in 1813. It was in this shop that Thomas Blanchard, one of the greatest inventors, conceived his idea for making the irregular gun-stock.

The once busy textile villages are now residential.

Since 1919 the Purgatory Chase State Reservation of 180 acres has been a recreation area for thousands every year and hundreds of boys have camped in the adjoining seventy-acre John H. Dudley Forest dedicated in 1950 to the "outdoor life of the American Boy."

The newest recreation area is the Pleasant Valley Country Club, probably nationally known because of the Tournaments. Some days bring an audience of 30,000 people to see the greatest in golf, the near great and the hopefuls, try for the thousands and thousands of dollars in prizes for their skill.

As early as 1797 a committee was chosen to lay out a good road from Boston to Woodstock through Sutton. There are over ninety miles of good roads in town at present.

In spite of disasters - the hurricane, tornado, several bad floods and fires - Sutton has retained its scenic beauty. Many city-dwellers have decided to build their homes on Sutton's rolling hills. Its history and beauty intrigues us all.

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June 1984

**MONTHLY MEETINGS – By Betty Pentland**

**FEBRUARY** - After a short business meeting, the guest speaker, Ronald Goodrich, proceeded to render a most informative discussion on the mystical value of stamps and coins. Much to the enlightenment of many of the Society members, he revealed how valid is the reality of values in contrast to commonly accepted ones. A very interesting program.

**MARCH** -The Society voted to jointly sponsor with the Millbury Historical Society a fall entertainment program featuring a program of historical magic by Richard Potter. Sheila O'Brien was the evening speaker with an unusual presentation on Hearing Aid Dogs with slides and demonstrations by her trained dog, "Molly." She explained their system of training selected dogs to act as ears of hearing impaired persons; thus enabling them to enjoy a new sense of freedom and independence. A professional staff train the dogs for a period of three to five months in basic obedience to respond to such sounds as a door knock, doorbell, smoke alarm, telephone, baby crying and to many other daily sounds which the dog by its action transmits that information to its deaf master who is required to live for two weeks at the training facility to establish rapport with their acquired dog.

**APRIL** - A motion was made and accepted to pursue for the Society the acquisition from the Town of Sutton the old High School land site on Singletary Avenue. An article to this effect appeared on the 1978 warrant, but was defeated in respect to the uncertainty of usage by the Town. Now, with the new Municipal Center a reality with facilities for town offices, Police Station, Fire Station, and Library, it is presumed the general public reaction will be more favorable. For the program, James Visbeck, manager of the Isaiah Thomas book store in Worcester, described the status of rare books, first editions, used books, unusual paperbacks, autographs, etc. He explained the procedure for collecting and identifying collectable books and the colorful printing of children's books when the original lithograph was carved in soapstone.

**JUNE** - A rainy day fleamarket sale at the Blacksmith Shop netted \$183.40 and a follow-up sale the following week the proceeds were approximately eighty dollars. The Society voted to acquire an amplifier and microphone for speaker usage. Myra Pearson presented a slide illustrated program of the Holy Lands with narrative cassette tape purchased on her trip there in March.

**1984 – FEBRUARY TO JUNE – WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

- |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Edmond and Elizabeth Bacon | William and Wendy Perry   |
| Daniel F. Cooney           | Roland and Kathy Sabourin |
| Alfred and Judith Myers    | Clarence and Corine Swart |
| Jeanne K. Oldie            | George E. Wolfe           |

**IN MEMORIAM**

\* Lois Taft \*

**From**



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