

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

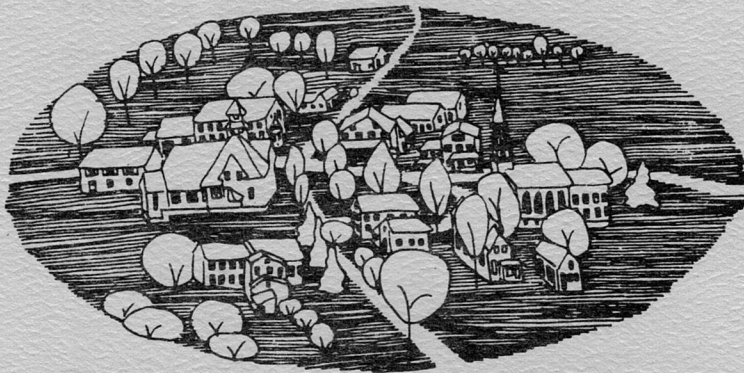
SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

— BULLETIN —

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TWICE TOLD TALES

by Dorothea Waters Moran

Waters Farm in West Sutton has always been a part of me, even though I never lived there all year 'round. Home was always New York, but my father taught music in the New York schools and had the summer off, so every year come June, we three, my mother, father and I, headed for the Farm to Father's great delight and Mother's somewhat grudging acquiescence. To a little girl in pinafores our method of transportation was very exciting. Somewhere in lower Manhattan we boarded a steamboat bound for New London. Sailing up the East River and along Long Island Sound was a great thrill, though I soon had to leave these joys and get ready for a night's sleep in a bunk in our stateroom, for we would land very early the next morning in New London. There we boarded a train for Millbury where the farmer met us with the carryall and we plugged the seven miles through the woods to the

farm which is about a mile beyond the village of West Sutton.

Our farmhouse was big and rambling. It had about twenty-four rooms; the main part was built in 1757 and was on top of a hill at the end of nowhere. One of the els was partitioned off for the French Canadian farmer, Ludger Lemoine, and his wife and two daughters, Rosie and Freesie. Rosie was a year older than I and Freesie (short for Philomenia) was two years older. There were two houses between us and the village, both built by my ancestors, one the Ebenezer Waters house, built for a daughter but now occupied by Eliza Bullard and her uncle Marcus Hill. Eliza was 80 years old and though she lived with her uncle they never spoke to each other. The second house had been built in 1839 for Richard Waters, a younger son of the family, though this younger son was more of a naturalist than a farmer, and soon after his death his widow sold out to a French Canadian, Pierre Leveiller, otherwise known a Peter Wake, who had a

daughter Annie. Thus for my mother there was no social life on our side of the village and precious little even there, nor were there any children for me to play with except Rosie and Freesie when they weren't commanded by their mother for help in the kitchen. But Father was a throw-back to the old days; he delighted in hitching up the horse and driving around Sutton, calling on the old people and hearing their stories.

The country store in West Sutton was typical of most country stores of that era. On the one side were yard goods and the sewing appurtenances, while on the other side were the groceries, molasses, cheese, kerosene, vinegar, as well as the penny candies and soft drinks. At the back was the U.S. Post Office, and there were always a few men in the store who dropped in to pass the time of day or to wait for the mail and news. At that time the mail came twice a day, so if perchance a letter had come in the morning requiring an answer, that answer could be sent off that same afternoon.

Presiding over the store was Henry Bullard, an elderly gentleman (or at least he seemed elderly to me) with grey hair and a flowing beard and an air of dignity. Rumor had it that he was the richest man in the county as he held mortgages on so many of the farms around. He had bought the Ebenezer Waters house from my grandfather and had installed his sister Eliza and uncle Marcus, who clerked in his store. On occasion I would be sent down to the store for

an emergency item, and I invariably went "cross-lots" over the fields to make the distance seem less than a mile, and I always stopped at Eliza's in the hope that she would offer me some of her homemade cookies.

Some years later, when we had automobiles and I was sixteen or seventeen years old, I wrote to Boston, unbeknownst to my parents, for an application for a driver's license. Examinations were not mandatory in those days; one had only to be vouched for by a leading citizen of the town. Who better than Henry Bullard, the leading citizen of Sutton! Although Henry had no idea whether I knew how to drive a car or not, his ready response to my request I will always remember: "You're Sam Waters' granddaughter and I'd vouch for you any day." And I've been driving cars ever since!

Eliza was quite a character. She was a great talker; she knew the ages of practically everyone in town as well as the stories about their families. She was a small woman, considerably bent over and when her sunbonnet was seen bobbing along the road on the way to our house, Father knew he was in for an afternoon of entertainment. Like all good New England Baptists, Eliza wouldn't think of missing Sunday church. One Sunday, which happened to be a Communion Sunday, her keen eyes spotted a dead fly in the Communion Cup. Without hesitation she took a hairpin from her hair and removed the fly. "Why not," she said, "I had just opened a fresh box of hairpins

that morning."

Our household at that time consisted of Father and Mother, my grandmother Waters and Grandfather when he was on vacation; when he was not he would come down from Boston by train to Millbury every Saturday morning and my father would always meet him at the station and drive him the seven miles to West Sutton. This meant of course that they both had to arise very early Monday morning to drive back to the station. Grandmother didn't wholly enjoy farm life, so when Grandfather was not on vacation she would invite friends from their winter home in West Newton, such as the Simonds or the Morrises, to come with their families for an extended visit. Thus there was usually a full household at the Farm all summer. At that time our house had no telephone, no running water, no bathrooms, no central heating. Each bedroom had a wash bowl and pitcher and slop jar, and when necessity called one went out to a three-holer which was attached to the farthest end of the woodshed. Several years later this outhouse was put inside the woodshed, so one did not have to go outdoors, though the three-holer remained the same, the holes graduated in size, the smallest being too inconvenient for the average adult. However relatives and friends were always coming to visit and I seem to remember our, part of the house always full of grown-ups. We never knew who might be dropping in on us next. A farm was considered a place of abundance with limitless supplies of

food, a fact which was not always true, as witness one Sunday when a carriage full of people arrived at dinner time. Instead of skimping on the meal, Mother had the farmer kill a couple of chickens, which turned out to be a great mistake. It seems chickens should hang a while before being roasted or they will be tough - and these were tough!

Another guest we had one day came on foot! Charles Flagg, who was a fourth or fifth cousin of my father, was the head of the genealogical department in the Library of Congress, and as my father was an ardent genealogist they had carried on a lively correspondence although they had never met. In looking up some of his ancestors, Charles had spent some time in the town of Grafton, then going a step further he decided to look up his Waters connections. So he walked the 11 miles from Grafton to Sutton! It so happened that my mother's younger sister Harriet was visiting us at the time. He and Harriet soon fell in love and were eventually married and I was the lucky flower girl at their wedding. My mother, perhaps in an effort to introduce a bit of foreign language into the New England twang, had taught me to call her sister "Tante Harriet", and I well remember when anyone asked me about my Aunt Hattie, I would indignantly retort, "She's *not* my Aunt Hattie, she's my Tante Harriet."

The main event at our farm took place on Saturday, when the entire household went down the hill to

Manchaug Pond to bathe (a mile going down but a mile and a half climbing up). A substantial lunch was put into the farm wagon, along with bathing suits and possibly one or two elderly relatives who found walking through the woods difficult, and once at the lake Father would go to work on a small boat bobbing on the shore. The boat had sort of stove-like arrangement in the center run with naphtha, and with an ungainly stove pipe extending up through a canvas awning. He would then ferry us in two or three rides to Buxton Point, a lovely spot on the far shore, where we would have lunch and enjoy the view. After an hour -- one must wait an hour after eating before going into the water -- the ferrying process would begin again and we'd all be taken to the big island in the middle of the lake, which had a beautiful beach and which it was said belonged to nobody. In those days bathing suits were substantial articles of clothing. Instead of the abbreviated shorts of nowadays, my father's suit was very like the long underwear of today except that it was of dark green wool; and I can still see Grandmother in what amounted to a woolen dress almost down to her ankles. I was allowed to stay in for ten minutes -- for fresh water is enervating -- and so I never learned to swim until many years later. But, at least we'd all had our weekly bath!

Sunday was ice cream day. Mother would produce the necessary custard and Father would get out the cakes of ice which had been packed in sawdust under the woodshed. After

carefully putting coarse salt with the ice, he would grind and grind until the custard was frozen. I would complete the operation by licking the dasher.

One Sunday I remember was a little different from the usual. Cousins from Southbridge were our guests and one of them, Henry, had heard his wife and my mother commenting on how lovely were the water lillies in Phelp's Pond, a small body of water on the way to the village. So early in the morning, Henry got some of the young men in the house to walk down to Phelp's Pond, strip off their clothes and wade in to get some of the lillies. On returning to shore their clothes were nowhere to be found. It seems a member of the Phelps family who lived in the village was slightly demented though he was allowed to wander about freely. He soon appeared and confronted the naked men, saying "Now wouldn't you look nice walking down Fifth Avenue!"

This same Cousin Henry was an avid fisherman, and one day when Father had come downstairs early in the morning, he found Henry sound asleep on the couch in the living room, fully clothed. Henry had taken it into his head quietly to go fishing the evening before, but climbing up the hill from the lake was more than he had bargained for, so rather than wake his wife at nearly midnight, he lay down on the couch and fell sound asleep. Father's sensibilities were deeply troubled at this deviation from the norm. He believed that at night

one went to bed and in the morning one arose, and any change in this procedure was something to be looked into and dealt with if necessary. However, Mother felt quite differently. Henry was a grown man, and if his wife had no compunctions about his spending the night in our living room, why should we!

Perhaps in those days window screens hadn't yet been invented. At any rate I remember my father equipped with hammer, tacks and screen cloth, hammering that cloth around the windows in our part of the house. However no such niceties bothered our tenant farmers; they had other ways of getting rid of the flies. Every afternoon, after the hearty noon-day meal, the women folk washed up the dishes and the kerosene lamps and scrubbed the floor, while the men relaxed under the trees before going back to work. Then the exodus of the flies began. The room darkened, the shades drawn, the front door opened wide, and the flies and the mosquitoes were literally flailed out of the room. The flails were actually strips of heavy paper, cut from the flour sacks the farmer bought each month. I enjoyed taking part in these goings on. With a flail in each hand, we began in the darkest corner of the room and swished our way to the open door, and after several of these swishes there wasn't a fly left in the room.

In fact I enjoyed the activities in the farmer's quarters much more than those in my own. Mrs Lemoine, the farmer's wife, would clean the top of

the stove until it is shone, then she would put a slice of bread directly on the the stove to toast and when done she would butter it and add a sprinkling of sugar. I thought this most delicious. Whereas my grandmother would slather a piece of dry bread with molasses, give it to me and say, "Now go, run out and play," which I did but first I always buried that dreadful bread and molasses under the lilac bushes.

Evenings in the farmer's part were equally alluring, and I always sneaked from our part to theirs when I could. Generally it was a game of cards accompanied by much noise and slapping of cards on the table, though what the game was, at this point I have no idea. Occasionally everything stopped for a moment when someone pharted. Now this is a perfectly normal bodily function, albeit one that you and I do our best to conceal, but which the Frenchmen considered highly amusing. In fact if one of them sensed an irruption imminent he would hold up his hand and stop playing until the minor explosion took place, whereupon everyone would applaud and the game would resume.

The farmer was supposed to grow enough vegetables not only for his own family but for ours as well, and the remainder he would peddle in the small village of Manchaug, about three miles away. He was of course at a disadvantage having only daughters and no sons, but he kept a hired man when he could afford it and my grandfather paid him pretty well for the vegetables we ate. So generally

about once a month he took his remaining produce to Manchaug to peddle, and I always wanted to go too. We took the back road down through the woods; a road, by the way, my great-great-great grandfather, John Waters had built at the behest of neighbors, as a short cut to avoid going around the village of West Sutton. For this, John Waters had his taxes rebated for that year, as shown on the old documents still at the farm.

Grandmother Waters used to take me to the Baptist Sunday School and I can remember the boys and girls walking around in a circle singing "Pennies for Heaven" and I used to wonder how the coins Grandmother had given me could possibly find their way up into the sky.

When I was around four years old, my father had me baptised in the Roman Catholic Church, though it was two more years before my parents actually joined the Church themselves. A far cry, you will say, from the rock-bound Baptists all the Waters clan were. My father at age 14 had played the organ at all the home hymn sings, at the various prayer meetings and the local Sunday School. Later he graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music and got a job at a Connecticut School to teach music and later went to New York to be an organist and choirmaster. So his attitude toward religion had considerably broadened. That year we went up to the Farm as usual, but Mother felt it would be prudent to say nothing for a while

and let matters ride. But come Sunday Father went to Oxford to the Roman Catholic Church instead of the West Sutton Baptist Church; the true convert is a much more avid follower of his new-found philosophy than those who are born to it. Now the news was out and the fat was in the fire! The stupefaction, the anger shown by my grandparents, the bitter reproaches were frightening. My father had disgraced the Waters name, and we were banished from the Farm!

Nearly a year of estrangement passed before the family wrath tempered; then we were invited to the Farm for one week. Another year and we were invited for two weeks. Eventually we got back to the old routine, more or less, but not, however, without the most eloquent Baptist preachers being invited to the Farm as house guests to convince my father of the error of his ways. But Father was never convinced though the arguments at times came dangerously near the breaking point.

When I was 10 years old my mother produced a son, an event which was a profound joy to everyone, especially to my grandparents, and this fact helped to draw the family together again, in spite of the religious differences.

In 1911, grandmother Waters died as the result of an automobile accident. After some years of living alone unhappily, my grandfather married again, a woman with the good bible name of Vashti. I remarked I'd never heard that name before, whereupon Grandfather said

"You see, Roman Catholics just don't know their Bible." So the religious bitterness still rankled.

In those days I wasn't interested in religion. Discussion of the merits of one church over another bored me. I much preferred to go out and be with my friends Rosie and Freesie. In fact on Sundays when they dressed up and went to St. Anne's church in Manchaug, I wanted to go too. St. Anne's being a Roman Catholic Church, Father had no objection. I remember the church well. The women, dressed mostly in black, filled the front part of the church, while the men waited outside, laughing and joking, until one minute before the service was to begin, then they would file in and sit in the back pews. In those days the Mass was said in Latin, but the hymns, the sermon and the prayers were all in French, and I soon learned to say the Lord's prayer in French. We generally went afterward to visit and perhaps have a bite to eat with the farmer's eldest daughter who lived in one of the workers' tenements with her husband and little son. Both parents worked in the mills, as did most every other grownup in town, for Manchaug was a French mill village.

At that time our farmer had two horses, Charley-horse who trotted along sedately and a heavier work horse for plowing the fields; several cows including Imogene, a Jersey who gave us several quarts of rich milk every day, and a small flock of chickens. Two of the chickens were always together, so Mother promptly

named them Tish and Susie. Susie was a little White Leghorn, rather run of the mill, but Tish was a Rhode Island Red of definite personality, who showed her independence of spirit much like the Letitia for whom she was named, a character in a Saturday Evening Post series that intrigued Mother. One day Tish decided to climb a tree and refused to come down, ignored all honeyed words or offers of food. My father, a man of direct action, decided something should be done, so he started to climb the tree too, but as soon as he was within reach of his prize, the prize would hop to a higher branch. This went on until there were no more higher branches, whereupon Father grabbed Tish by the tail, but Tish, undaunted, simply flew off, leaving my father with a fist full of chicken feathers. For a time Tish went around looking rather naked, but eventually she grew another tail and was her old independent self again.

I remember another occasion, many years later when we had automobiles, Mother drove home one day with two baby pigs. She said a proper farm should have pigs, so she bought them and put them in the front seat of the car. They were pink and clean and cunning, and I wish they would stay that way forever. But of course, like all pigs, these soon grew fat and cumberson and in the autumn our thoughts turned instead to breakfast bacon and other delicacies.

I gave little thought in those days to how meals were prepared. The markets were in Millbury, 7 miles

away, so a supply of food was laid in once a week. Cooking it was a challenge. We had no running water, not even a pump in the kitchen; water was brought into the house from the pump in the yard and two buckets of it were kept filled and stood beside the sink in the porch room. This was the first room in the north el, and was so called presumably because it had originally been a porch before the el was built in the early 1800's. The second room of the north el had a chimney and therefore a stove and here is where the cooking and baking were done. All this meant the wood fires had to be kept going and we three little girls often had our play interrupted by calls to fill the woodboxes. Local help seemed undismayed by these inconveniences; they probably had it much the same at their home. But when we brought up help from the city, my mother had some difficulty explaining what to do and how to do it.

Somehow I never seemed afraid of roaming around the fields and through the woods when I was alone and Rosie and Freesie were helping their mother with kitchen chores. I remember investigating a series of stones laid out geometrically at the end of the North pasture, and I learned later they were planted by my grandfather as a young boy to play some sort of game. I also remember hearing about Grandfather being sent down to the woods, as a young man, to watch over the charcoal pits, where he would stay for days at a time, sometimes in midwinter, taking with him food, warm blankets and his violin.

But playing around the house was fun too. We three girls would race around the house, barefoot on warm days, though I can't remember any special games we played. In those days there weren't the expensive toys children demand today. True, there is still on the shelf in the dark buttery a shovel and pail, one or two balls, a croquet set and a miniature engine. And best of all there is the ingenious toy made by grandfather Waters, who had quite an inventive flair. The toy is a little man who turns a wheel as big as he is, and the wheel grinds the "cement", pouring it neatly into a bin. Grandpa had carved the little man, about six inches tall, out of soft wood, and the "cement" was generally sand. I have no idea how old Grandfather was when he constructed this toy, but it is still intact and works perfectly and is a joy to all children. As Grandfather was over 82 when he died in 1927, the toy must be nearly 100 years old.

Our farmhouse, as I said before, was built on the brow of a hill and about 100 yards from the front of the house are two retaining walls, one above the other, built by great uncle Richard about 1839. These sturdy walls are made of fieldstone, of which there was plenty around, and they somewhat resemble the terraces one sees in the hilly countries of Europe. Each wall is about 15 feet high and great uncle Richard had so designed them that a flight of stone steps juts out from each wall. Blackberry bushes, brambles and tall weeds have now somewhat obscured these steps, but when I was a small girl, the steps

were always clear, and I always loved to climb down them and get into the pastures below. There we three girls would sometimes play a game called "Poison"; one jumped from stone to stone and whoever missed her footing and stepped on the grass was "poisoned" and went to the end of the line.

Even now, I sometimes go to the parapet and mentally gorge myself with blackberries and pick all the little wild flowers, the white snowy everlasting, the sticky burdocks which I always made into little baskets, the miniature mint leaves and the tall sumac which was, and still is, taller than I am.

GENERAL RUFUS PUTNAM HALL

-Sutton Historical Society Museum-

On September 11, at a Special Town Meeting the voters approved Article I which granted the Sutton Historical Society permission to occupy the General Rufus Putnam Hall and make use of the building under the supervision of the Historical Commission. It was stipulated that the Society would be responsible for maintenance and repairs to the building.

Renovation procedures had been in progress since June when an office area to be shared jointly by the Waters Farm Preservation Group and the Historical Society began the first phase of construction.

Following the completion of the office the work program for establishing a museum area in the old library space on the first floor was started about August first. A target date for a public opening on the weekend of the Blackstone Valley Homecoming Heritage Day program October 3-5 required a tight schedule of activity.

Several members of the Society have applied themselves to completing the museum project October 3. First, all the old book cases were taken apart and lumber salvaged to reuse. Then the clean-up crew began their work of repainting and varnishing the floor. Several show cases were refurbished where glass was broken and refinishing required. A team of museum personnel have been busy laying out the displays and identifying the exhibits.

The museum itself is the first segment in utilizing the building. There are several other projects to be completed to fully re-establish the Rufus Putnam Hall, built in 1825, as a landmark of presence in the community.

MONTHLY MEETINGS-

APRIL - Meeting was held at the Manchaug Baptist Church, President Carilyn Philbrook presided. Donald King reported the BULLETIN mailing list had been revised. Daniel Griffith revealed the destination of the proposed mystery program for the May meeting because of a fee involved per member. Malcolm Pearson reported on the prospect of the Society acquiring the South Sutton Baptist Church which was for sale. A group of Society members decided to inspect the church for that possibility. Rae Johnson said a copy of the Gerber family geneology was presented to the Society by Dorothy Mollieur. Retiring President, Carilyn Philbrook, who is moving to New York state, was presented with gifts by Vice President Daniel Griffith. She was the Society's' first woman president and BULLETIN editor. Strickland Wheelock spoke informally about bird migrations, statistics and other characteristics of bird life.

MAY - The Society members met at the Manchaug Baptist Church and drove to Stanley Woolen Mills in Uxbridge for a tour of its facilities after a brief business meeting. Plans were discussed about the June 7 Blacksmith Shop fleamarket. This year tables will be rented to persons for sale of their merchandise.

JUNE - The Fleamarket Day, June 7, was held with a bake sale by Society members. The food sale and rental of the tables netted \$272.02.

JULY - A potluck supper was held at the Eight Lots School. William Holst reported that the Phyllis MacLaren repair fund to the school had reached \$820.00 and a special bank account had been established for the funds. A schedule for volunteers to cut grass at the Blacksmith Shop was discussed. Also, discussed was a request by a group of Baptists to use the Manchaug Baptist Church for services. The Directors will review this situation at their next meeting. Preliminary plans were made for organizing the Rufus Putnam Hall as a museum. The DAR on June 19 voted to release all of their artifacts in the DAR Hall for display purposes by the Historical Society. Mrs. Bernice Anderson spoke about Shays Rebellion.

AUGUST 5 - The Society met at the Blacksmith Shop for a potluck supper. A fleamarket and food sale is planned for Labor Day. President Griffith spoke about the Blackstone Valley Heritage Homecoming weekend, October 3, 4, and 5, program which includes the opening of the Societies' museum.

SEPTEMBER 2 - The Society members met at the Manchaug Baptist Church. President Griffith reported that preparation of the Rufus Putnam building as a museum was progressing on schedule and meeting the October 3, 4 and 5 date is a reasonable probability. Also, the Blacksmith Shop will be open on these dates to the public.

JULY TO OCTOBER- WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

M/M Stephen Leclaire M/M Thomas Yurcich
M/M Frederick Hallowell Marie Reil

IN MEMORIAM

Margaret Irene Barnett

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