

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

— BULLETIN —

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ENTREPRENEURS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

By- Grandson, Stephen Benjamin

Stephen Edgar Benjamin and Mary Grace Stevenson were married in Worcester on October 17th, 1927. Ms Stevenson was a former school teacher, and Mr. Benjamin was a mill executive for the National Crash Manufacturing Company in Millbury. He was commonly called Ed Benjamin. Others simply called him Ben, due to the fact that when he signed his last name on forms as a Government Inspector during World War One, only the "Ben" was legible. The rest trailed off into a scribble.

Ben had a rather startling appearance at first sight. A large scar ran across his forehead, a reminder of a kick from a horse that was pulling a milk wagon. Ben was about three years old at the time. Ben also had a wounded hip from a severe auto accident before he was married. Newspaper accounts at the time gave his little hope for recovery.

When the Benjamins were first married, they lived in the Stevenson family home in Worcester. With Mary's share of the sale from the Worcester home, and Ben's sale of his summer home on Kendrick's Island, Lake Singletary, the Benjamins bought the former James E. Stockwell farm on Boston Road. The original property stretched for some fifty acres from Boston Road straight through to the shores of Lake Singletary.

Both Mary and Ben liked the idea of living in the country in a farming community. Ben had friends in Sutton through working in Millbury, and also through his ties in the Masons. Both Mary and Ben had hopes of using the large house in some way that could prove useful, although at the time neither of them knew what that would turn out to be.

When the Benjamins first looked at the house in 1927 the former owner James Stockwell and his wife had since moved to Worcester. The house had been vacant for a few years and ivy had grown over the front. The ivy had grown into broken windows to the point where there was as much ivy inside the front rooms as there was outside the house. The house had only two electric lights and no indoor plumbing. There was an outhouse behind the ell. The house had no central heating, and was heated by



THE SIGN OF SUTTON HOSPITALITY



NEWLY WEDS- Stephen
and Mary Benjamin



IVY COVERED FARM HOUSE

fireplace and wood stove into the 1920's. The Benjamins realized the house was in bad repair.

As renovations started it was discovered that in some of the rooms the carpets were piled five and six thick. It seems as the old carpets wore out, the former owners had simply put a new one on top of the old one and tacked it down. The ivy and rugs were stripped from the house and were taken out into the back yard and burned. The house was scraped and painted. Existing shutters were repaired and painted. Other shutters were discovered stored in the barns and were returned to their original positions on the house. A coal furnace was installed in the basement. It was later converted to burn oil in the late 1930's. Mary's daughter Betty remembers always being able to get a few pieces of coal for her snowman's "eyes" in the winter. The cellar also contained a large wooden box filled with sand that was used as a root cellar for the storage of vegetables.

The Stockwells had left behind many items. A beautiful horsedrawn buggy was discovered in the barn and was placed outside on the lawn as a decoration. Over the years it fell into disrepair. In the large attic



SINGLETARY FARM RENOVATED

By Appointment Only

**Teas and Luncheons
Served until 5.30 P. M.**

\$.65 to \$1.25



Dinners

Served from 2.00 to 7.00 P. M.

Creamed Chicken \$1.25

Roast Chicken \$1.50

Singletary Baked Lobster \$1.50



Bridge Clubs

Business or Professional Groups

Showers - Weddings

MENU (prices !!!)

of the house, a black lace parasol, a wooden wheelchair and several large wooden trunks were left behind. In later years Betty would play and wonder who these things belonged to.

As renovations progressed, the rooms were painted and papered one by one as money afforded. Makeshift curtains were made from "crash" distowels, a white cotton/linen material that Ben manufactured in the Millbury Mill.

The rooms were wired, lights, and electricity were added to all rooms. indoor plumbing was installed including a full bath upstairs and a half bath downstairs. In later years, the Benjamins realized what a luxury they had, as many people still had outdoor "privvys" in the 1930's.

For furniture, Mary painted some of the bureaus that were left behind to match the color schemes of the rooms.

The property had a shallow well located to the northwest of the house behind where the LeClaire house now stands. The plumbing had also



WAITRESSES- l-r, Sally Townsend, Margurite Hugo, Barbara Batcheller, Dorcas Hall, Ruth Farady, Nancy Shea, Olive Noe, Joy Putnam, Mary Stevenson, and Betty Ross been connected to the Sherman house to the East in the early 1930's. The Sherman family had dug an artesian well. If the water level of the shallow well went low in the summer, by the switch of a few valves and pumps, water flowed over from the Sherman well. Good neighbors have always been around in Sutton!

The Benjamins moved into their home in 1929. As the depression began the mills in Millbury began to fall. By 1930, the mill "had pretty much gone under." In April of 1931 Ben came home and announced to Mary, "the mill is really gone." It was at this point that the size and location of the house finally came into play.

Mary's friends and family had been urging her to try a "tearoom" at the house. At the time, she didn't think she could handle such an undertaking, but her husband was out of a job, her daughter Mary Elizabeth had just been born, and the Depression was under way. Through a network of teacher friends in Worcester and Ben's Masonic friends, hand written notices were sent out announcing the opening of a tearoom in May 1931. It was to be called "Singletary Farm."

It is interesting to note that Mary put everything in her name at first so that if the venture failed, it would not be reflection on Ben. Also, 1930's values did not find it masculine for a former mill executive to be running a "tearoom."

A group of eight women teachers from Worcester were the first to reply. They requested to use the house to play bridge before dining on a dinner of chicken salad. Mary prepared it as if Royalty were coming. She used her own best china, silver and linens. Friends quickly discouraged this practice. As parties grew, Mary would buy the additional pieces as

Keep a-smilin' when you're weary
 If the road seems rough and long
 When your sky seems dark and dreary
 Add a chorus to your song!
 No use frowning - no use crying
 If things don't turn out just right.
 All Kiwanians keep a-tryin'
 Never faltering in life's fight
 M. S. B.

MARY'S POETIC TALENTS

May 23 - 1931
 William J. Perry
 Thomas M. Perry
 Mildred P. Macfarlane
 James E. Macfarlane
 Arthur Ekinig
 Glen J. S. S. S.
 L. F. Sampson
 Marie Ray Macfarlane
 A. W. Davidson
 Alice S. Perry
 Eunice Perry King (Mrs. B.S.)
 Francis Sampson
 Harold J. Mac
 Harmon C. Perry

GUEST LEDGER

they were needed. Her dishes and place settings were always tasteful and she made it a point to entertain as if the people were her own personal guests. Each party was specifically designed, and theme parties were popular for various civic groups.

The first group was highly successful and as the guests predicted, word of mouth spread the news quickly. The reservations were always full. All dinners were booked by appointment by letter, Western Union Telegram, or by calling the three number phone number 763.

During this first season of 1931, disaster struck. Getting ready for an evening's entertainment one night, Mary was deep fat frying at the stove. The phone rang and Mary was distracted for too long. The kettle of fat on the stove caught fire. Alone and afraid of burning down their home, Mary picked up the flaming kettle and tried to carry it out of the house. It was a hot humid summer day and the back door had swollen shut. As she tried to kick the door open, the burning fat splashed and spilled out on her arms and legs. She finally got outside, saving the house but was badly burned in doing so. She struggled to the phone and called for help.

Mary stayed in the hospital for an extended period. With no insurance, a loan on the stove, a one year old daughter, and a new business, the outlook was bleak at best. Always an optimist, she realized the business had to continue. Late in the summer of 1931 the Benjamins started taking in weekend guests.

During this period, Ben had started an insurance business of his own. At the urging of friends and fellow Masons he bought a small existing insurance business. He had his office in what is now the laundry in the ell section of the building. Desk space was shared with the ice boxes and dessert tables. The office was kept in this part of the house because it offered private entry from a door in the rear of the ell. It was warmer in the winter as the heat was shut off in the front part of the house. Ben sold a little real estate in the early years of the business, but the insurance sales eventually took over. During World War Two, Ben sold damage contracts. An original policy hangs in the present Benjamin Insurance Agency. Ben also ran the Tax Collector's office from the home. He was Tax Collector from 1934 to 1950. Of all the years he ran for office, he always received the highest vote of the election. He used to joke to Mary, "I have to take the people's money away, but they still seem to vote for me!"



ROOSTER CLUB MEMBERS

THE COMPANY WILL APPRAISE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

WESTERN UNION (50)

CLASS OF SERVICE: This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless the indicated character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.

RECEIVED AT: 26 Franklin St., Worcester, Mass.

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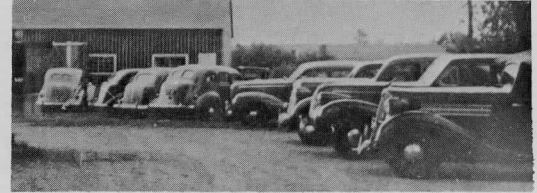
MRS STEPHEN BENJAMIN=

TRY PHONE OR MAIL SINGLETARY FARM SUTTON MASS=

SIGNS: TL=Day Letter, NM=Night Message, NL=Night Letter, LC=Delayed Cable, NLT=Cable Night Letter, Day Telegram

MINUTES IN TRANSIT: TELETYPE DAY LETTER

NYC RESERVATION



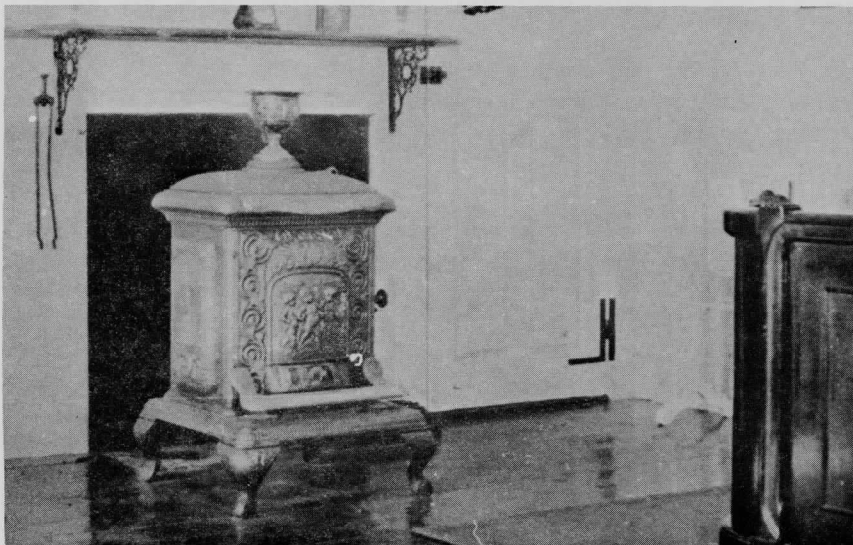
GUEST PARKING

The 1933-34 season saw the restaurant in full swing. The season usually ran from Patriots Day in April to Thanksgiving. Thirteen waitresses were employed in 1934.

The kitchen had three different stoves. The original black kerosene stove was used mainly as a warming table for the hundreds of pecan, clove and cinnamon rolls. Most of the heavy cooking was done on a household four burner electric oven. A gas stove was also used. Mary used to tell of cooking on one stove, transferring food to the other to keep it warm and constantly juggling the temperature of both to get everything to come out even. Amidst all the commotion, daughter Betty was allowed to roller skate in the kitchen!

The ell had two large ice boxes, and one small electric coil refrigerator. A commercial ice cream freezer was bought later. Ice for the ice boxes used to come every other day or so from the Harris Ice House in Millbury. Meat and produce were delivered by Sutton resident, Roy Miller, from his Millbury grocery store. Live lobsters and seafood were picked up at Forbush's Fish Market on Green Street in Worcester. Ice cream came from Donovan's in Millbury and Montrose's in Worcester.

Since Mary's burning accident, Ben did most of the heavy cooking. The tearoom had grown into a full fledged restaurant and function center. Ben did all the boiling of lobsters and deep fat frying. Mary did all the baking and broiling. Waitresses were responsible for setting up tables,



WOOD STOVES HEATED THE GUEST ROOMS



Singletary Farm

Sutton, Mass.

We hope that you'll enjoy your stay,

We hope you'll hate to go away.

If you like what we serve and like what we do,

We hope you will send to us friends who are new.

Mary Stevenson Benjamin

BUSINESS CARD-SUTTON STYLE

Dec. 1987

cleaning up and washing dishes. They were also responsible for what they broke. The girls were paid a dollar a night and split tips evenly. Many a young waitress nursed her tired feet late into the night after carrying heavy trays up and down the stairs. Waitresses all wore "dimity" dresses of the same pattern, in different colors made by the girls. They were happy to get jobs during the Depression.

Complete dinners in 1934-35 included appetizer, soup and dessert and could be bought for \$1.50 or under. Inflation eventually raised the price of the Singletary boiled lobster dinner to \$1.75. Summer guests could stay a weekend for under \$20.00. Some of the regular guests included Arthur Langevin, the head engineer on the construction of the Sutton section of Route 146. H. D. Knox from the Wall Street brokerage firm of H. D. Knox Co. was a frequent guest from Thursday night to Monday mornings.

The old hay barn on the property was used by many local organizations, schools and civic groups. Ping pong, dancing and socializing in the barn were orders of the evening before dommer. A coin operated juke box usually provided the music.

The original barn was a hay barn with lofts intact leftover from the Stockwell farm. This structure blew down in the 1938 Hurricane. Many stranded motorists were forced to stay at Singletary Farm until the roads were cleared. A massive Elm tree in front of the house fell, and did damage to the front portion of the house roof. A new barn was built on the same site as the old barn, but it was designed more as a function hall. A stage was built at one end as well as a small kitchen.

Many town organizations held square dances and fund raisers in the barn. At one square dance on a particularly bright moonlit night, town resident Rudolph Nunnemacher led the square dancers out of the barn and around the grounds square dancing under the stars.

Guests were encouraged to bowl and play lawn tennis on the green. The Worcester Archery Club held meets in the back field.

Many wedding receptions were held at Singletary Farm. The brides would use an upstairs guest room to change into traveling clothes. From here, they would step out the window onto the flat roof of the back porch to throw their bridal bouquet. No liquor was served at the restaurant as there was no license, but usually a small toast to the wedding party was allowed. Mary, being an exceptional gardener and groundkeeper was always able to find a four leaf clover in the lawn and would present one to the bride on her wedding day for good luck.

During the off season, the Benjamins renovated the house and did the rooms over. The heavy usage made for necessary yearly upkeep. It also allowed Mary to apply her many artistic talents in changing decor. During the off season the house and barn were still open to the Sutton organizations, teams, Grange and women's club meetings.

The Rooster Club of Sutton had many of its meetings here. This club started when five or six couples including the Benjamins went to a Masonic Halloween party. Mary won a live rooster as a door prize and had to go to the front of the hall to blaim it. As she carried the crowing, flapping rooster back to her table, club member Maude MacLaren decided to donate one of her farm chickens along with Mary's rooster for a dinner at Singletary Farm the following night. A few other couples joined for the dinner making the eight couples of the Rooster Club. For years later the club met to play bridge and the losing couple would always host the next party at their home. Mary had even written a song book entitled "Our Crows", a book of rooster verses set to popular songs. I am told that the original rooster was quite tough and the group had many good natured laughs abpit the incident over the years. Many good friendships were formed in this group that lasted many years.

(cont'd. bottom p7)

DOROTHEA WATERS MORAN 1895 - 1987

DOROTHEA'S LEGACY

By Ralph Gurney Jr.

What impact will be realized in the year 2000 by the birth of a baby girl on March 29, 1895 in her great-grandmother's home in Brooklyn, New York? The baby's father is Walter Waters, a son of Sutton, now an organist. The mother is a pretty young girl, Ada Belle Valentine Waters, who has returned to her grandmother's home for the birth of her first child, which was common in those days. The baby, Dorothea, in later years became well known to us as Dorothea Waters Moran of the Waters farm in West Sutton.

The year 1974 was of significance to the Town of Sutton, as this marked her decision to give to the Town the entire farm consisting of 103 acres, including the family home which was built by her great, great, great-grandfather, Stephen Waters, in 1757 and the contents and records, to be used for education and preservation. This is a one and only gift of its kind and irreplaceable, as the facts and records show.

The land was purchased in 1720 by a Richard Waters and has been in the family continuously until 1974, when given to the Town of Sutton. The home, built in 1757, had a north ell added in 1830, and, in 1840, a west ell was added to shelter John Waters and his third wife, Hittie. This wonderful old house has withstood the elements for over 230 years, and today stands ready again to express itself through teaching and the education of our children in the way people lived in the 1700's and 1800's, known as "Living History."

Down in the easterly direction in the onion field among the trees, if one looks closely, one will notice the old stone quarry which still contains the last, large stone post that was to be used but never taken out, and the wedges are still there, which allows us to see how it was removed.

The dam is still standing (now the Beaton property), but the mill is long gone which cut the lumber from the local forests which in turn built many a home and barn.

The records tell us that Stephen Waters developed the Sutton Beauty apple, and yes, folks, there are still a few trees standing. A future project will be to start another small orchard in Stephen's honor. It is noted that there were thousands of these trees which blossomed and produced fruit sent all over the world.

It is said that way down in the forest, upon a close look, one will notice here and there, a large depression and a small pile of stones which indicated where Dorothea's grandfather, Samuel, went as a young teenager to spend a week or two tending the charcoal pits, and this product was sold in Boston. What about the pile of stones? Well that is the remains of Sam's fireplace where he did his cooking, and it is said that, every few days, his brother would bring down some food to keep him going.

Now the years have rolled on, and Dorothea feels that this farm has a purpose in life, and she wants it to have meaning for future generations.

I personally believe that there is a great trestleboard in the Creator's hand and things will be revealed in their time, at the proper moment.

The year 1802 found Simeon Waters of Sutton taking his young bride to Livermore, Maine, to establish a farm out of the wilderness. In 1987, we were privilege to make a contact with Billie Gammon of Washburn-Norlands Foundation, which sits on some of Simeon's old farm land, now containing over 400 acres. At this farm, they teach "Living History," and you can stay overnight or go for the day and live as they did in the 1800's. When Billie Gammon found that someone from Sutton was around that could place old "Sim" in our local family, she was thrilled. She has been down to Waters farm and has allowed us to go up there and video the teaching programs down here. Dorothea was made aware of the Washburn-Norlands programs and intended to go to Maine this summer to visit Billie and see the teachers in their period dress teaching the children of today as they did in 1850.

With the cooperation of the Sutton Conservation Commission and the Board of Selectmen, the door has been opened for the active participation of the Sutton Historical Society as the umbrella of direction for a Living History Center at the farm in Sutton.

In the future, you will see funding under way, programs and plans, both short and long range, spelled out, and the barn replaced. The old farm will be spruced up, and, as it served to raise generations of hardy families in the past, it will show our generation and those to follow how New England has served in the development of America and the World.

It is impossible to attempt to place a value on this gift to the Town of Sutton, for how do we measure the value of a 90-acre water shed which continues to protect the beautiful Manchaug Lake in the valley? In the future, one will be able to walk down paths through the woods, here mankind can stop a moment to listen and to reach out to touch Creation. On this land, a family had its share of failures and successes. This old home rejoiced in the birth of 27 babies, and it was the secluded comforter of 19 precious souls who were called home to their Creator.

1987 commemorated the 92nd year that Dorothea had come to her home in Sutton for the summer season and to celebrate the 8th Annual Waters Farm Day. Her health was rapidly deteriorating, so she returned to 21 East 10th Street in New York City on September 30th. We visited with her on October 13th and talked to her on October 23rd and 24th, and, on Monday morning the 26th, she passed quietly on to her Eternal home.

Sutton, as a community of grateful people, will miss this tiny lady and the pleasure of her annual visits, but she has left us a gift and legacy which shall never be forgotten. She was 92 years young, and her spirit will always reign over Waters Farm.

The decision to close Singletary Farm to the general public in 1941 came partly because the undertaking had gotten so large. The largest group served over the course of the ten years of operation was a party of 110. The beds in the upstairs guest rooms would be knocked down and stored in the attic and tables and chairs would be set up in those rooms. Another event that prompted the decision to close was the rationing of certain items during World War Two. Butter, meat, coffee, sugar and gasoline were all rationed items.

By 1941, Ben's insurance business had developed and was becoming self sustaining. The Benjamins had lived through the Depression not with great profit, but they came through it owning the house and property. They had had also made many lasting friendships along the way.

MONTHLY MEETINGS -

SEPTEMBER - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall. On the lowest bid of \$750.00, the Society voted to install three gas space heaters, one each in the hallway, museum area, and meeting hall. The fleamarket on Labor Day raised \$238.28. A new porch floor installed and the columns were reconditioned by civic spirited volunteers in the community. Three hundred ninety eight BULLETINS were mailed to members, some located in twenty-eight states. The Manchaug Baptist Church (owned by the Society) was re-roofed at a cost of \$5,100. In observation of the Constitutional Bicentennial John Virostek, our speaker, discussed in detail many interesting aspects of our National Constitution.

OCTOBER - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall and elected to one year offices the following; President, Daniel W. Griffith, Vice President, Janet Smith, Recording Secretary, Barbara Weaver, Corresponding Secretary, Mary H. Arakelian, Treasurer, Pennie Linder, Assistant Treasurer, Mary H. Arakelian, Curator, Ruth Putnam, and Assistant Curator, Marieta G. Howard. Also, elected on the Board of Directors were; Betty Keene, Francis Donnelly, and Stephen LeClaire, The future status of the Manchaug Baptist Church was discussed. The Speaker for the evening was Shirley Cooney, a Douglas Animal Pound owner and an authority on Whippet dogs, their history and characteristics. She rendered advice concerning a choice of dogs and their care.

NOVEMBER - Meeting at the General Rufus Putnam Hall, the Society held a short business meeting. The space heater units were wired into service and are proving to be quite efficient. Raymond Smith, Sutton Highway Surveyor, will regrade and pave water runoff which previously leaked into the building basement. The Speaker, James P. Whittall, Director of archaeology for the Early Sites Research Society, presented a dual projector slide lecture on the aspects of pre-Columbian voyages to North America.

DECEMBER - The Society met in the General Rufus Putnam Hall and held their Annual Christmas Auction. After a brief business meeting, auctioneers; Daniel Griffith, Helen Ordnung and Bud (Ralph) Gurney proceeded to stimulate the members into hilarious purchasing evening of fun in which \$254.50 was raised.

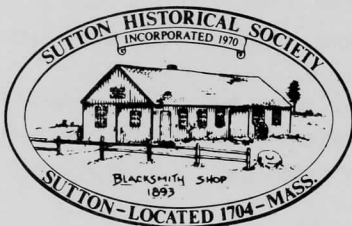
SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER - WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

John and Alta Eaton	Martha Larsen
Sandra Harris	Carolyn V. Mills
Sharon Hobey	John C. Petraglia
John and Siiri Jonasch	Mr. and Mrs. John Virostek

IN MEMORIAM -

*John Hartness	*Dorothea Waters Moran
*Roland C. Marando	*Alvin B. Swindell

From



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