

# THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS



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## More Than a Gravestone

By Ben MacLaren

My grandfather was Fred L. Batcheller. Every Memorial Day Sutton's Boy Scout Troop 143 participated in a trip throughout town on Harold Whittier's school bus visiting the graves of veterans. Jim Smith was our scout master. Gramp was always off in the background at all but Howard Cemetery. There he would meet me as I got off the bus. We scouts all carried jars of flowers with which to decorate the graves. My jars were pint Atlas canning jars that my mother could no longer use for canning because of a chip or scratch on the edge that would prevent a good seal. She ran her finger around the edges until she found the half dozen or so jars that I needed.

My flowers were white and purple lilacs cut from the large bushes in front of Milestone Farm where I grew up. Gramp helped me cut and arrange the flowers in the jars. This is a part of Memorial Day that has stayed with me even though I have not been a scout for nearly fifty years. Each year Gramp discussed the smell and beauty of lilacs and how "awful too bad" it would be if the lilacs were late in blossoming and not ready for Memorial Day. Each year he told me that Captain Luther Little planted the bushes when he built Milestone Farm "in 1837 or thereabouts." He wondered where the captain got them.

As we walked from the bus at Howard cemetery, Gramp would say, "There's Uncle Henry Rice's grave. He was an inventor, the Dobby chain ya know," or "that's Deacon John Marble's grave. He had the first good team of Morgan horses in town. That was the best team I ever worked." Only at

William H. Hutchinson's grave did he stop as though to give special notice to a life unfulfilled. He arranged ahead of time that this would be my grave to decorate. Every year it was the same. His eyes would well up with tears as he knelt down. Every year he would say, "This was Uncle Edwin's boy. He was only eighteen when he was killed. Awful shame, awful too bad. I was a little shaver when I first was told of him dying in the Civil War and all."

As taps were played, we scouts stood at attention, each at a different grave, but I could see Gramp as he knelt offering his quiet prayer. His big, bushy mustache would wiggle as he prayed because, even then, he had too few teeth to hold his upper lip firm. He would unashamedly dab at his eyes with the big red handkerchief he always carried. It started every day neatly folded in his back pocket, but soon was damp with a farmer's sweat. Only on Memorial Day was it wet from tears. Despite a life with its share of hardship, I saw him cry only at William's grave.

I learned then that Memorial Day is more than a day off from school. It is a most special day



WILLIAM M.  
HUTCHINSON

dedicated to those who gave their lives, or a limb, or an eye, or just their time to the freedom of others. It is the day for people like Gramp to say, "Thank you, good and faithful servant."

The Army of the Potomac, under General Ulysses S. Grant, and the Army of the Northern Virginia, under Confederate General Robert E. Lee, with a total of 170,000 men, fought three of the Civil War's most costly battles in just one month: the Battle of the Wilderness, May 5 and 6, 1864, the Battle of Spotsylvania, May 8 through May 19, 1864, and the Battle of Cold Harbor, June 1 through 3, 1864. William Hutchinson was destined to become one of the 81,000 casualties in this horrific fighting as it raged its way past Cold Harbor, Virginia, a dusty crossroad between the Totopotomy and the Chickahominy Rivers.

The final charge of the Union troops against the fortified troops of the Confederacy at Cold Harbor was a blood bath even by Civil War standards. General Grant would later say that this charge was a horrible mistake and the only one he would not order again. The "Cold Harbor Syndrome" was an aftermath of that charge. From that day on, any soldier who had witnessed, participated in, or even heard of the horror that was Cold Harbor was less willing to charge a fortified position. The glory had been drained from the frontal charge as the blood ran from 7,000 bodies.

At 4:30 A.M. on June 3, 1864, the battle began. It was over by 5:30 A.M. There had been 7,000 Union casualties and William was one of them — dead at 18. He had crossed the Rappidan River on May 3, 1864, when the Union Army's spring offensive began, as a boy, a raw recruit. He died a hardened veteran just one month later as a man with experience few of us will have need to gain. At the Wilderness he saw his wounded comrades burn to death as they lay helpless in the dry, tangled, spring brush that had been set afire by burning linen from their rifles. His commanding officer, General John Sedgwick, was killed at Spotsylvania. There were never enough ambulances. Men lay dead and dying on the road as he moved on toward Cold Harbor and his own agonizing death. His uniform was new with shiny brass buttons when he left the winter encampment near Washington, D.C., and crossed the Rappidan River. Now it was torn and dirty and splashed with blood.

William H. Hutchinson had died as a private in Company G 25th Infantry Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, VI Corp, Army of the Potomac during the charge on rebel fortifications. Of the 310 men who started the charge, 217 fell. The 25th had led that charge. The carnage of that hour was unequalled elsewhere in the war.

William was just 18. This in itself was not exceptional. Of the 2,500,000 who served the Union, 1,000,000 were 18 or younger. That he died was

also not exceptional: 360,222 Union men died. Whatever heroism, or lack of it, he may have displayed was not enough distanced from the ordinary to single him out. He served, suffered, and died — that is all.

Some of William's extended family shared his fate. Orlando W. Batcheller of Sutton was 18 when he was killed at Antietam on September 17, 1862. Private George Batcheller of Millbury died with William at Cold Harbor. Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Batcheller of Grafton was with the 13th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers at Cold Harbor when he received the wounds from which he died several years later.

William doubtless knew Edwin A. Martin of Oxford, who died at Cold Harbor, and James O. Bartlett, also of Oxford, who was at Cold Harbor in the 25th Regiment with him and died in 1866 of wounds he received there. Nurse Clara Barton of Oxford was there.

William's family was prominent in Sutton. They were farmers since first coming to Sutton before the Revolutionary War. They were also civic leaders and good, proud, caring people. His great grandfather, Bartholomew Hutchinson, was a lieutenant during the Revolutionary War. Hutchinson Road is named for these early Hutchinsons. William's grandfather, Simon, married his second wife, Sophia Batcheller, following the death of his first wife, Vandalinda, who died after giving birth to six children, one of whom was William's father. His father was Edwin, who helped to write Sutton's first town history. His mother was Mary Ann Waters Hutchinson of the Waters' Farm people. His brother Charles, who continued on the family farm, was a school committee member and a church deacon at Sutton's First Congregational Church.

The Hutchinson homestead, which was torn down in 1990, was located on Hutchinson Road one-half mile from Boston Road, past the old Hutchinson Cemetery, on the right. At one time it was considered to be one of the best farms in Sutton. When William lived in the old house, the farm included one mile of Lake Singletary shore property.

When William enlisted, the town of Sutton was paying an enlistment bonus of \$700.00. A private in the army was paid \$16.00 a month and, if married, received \$3.00 a month more. There were those who enlisted for the money, but probably not William because his family was well off. He may have been bored with farming, and at age 18 the blue uniform with brass buttons was irresistible. Maybe the girls were more apt to go for a buggy ride after services at the Sutton Congregational Church with a military man than with a farm boy. Perhaps he was just plain patriotic and believed it was the right thing to do. He was not alone. Two hundred and twenty-three Sutton men served during the Civil War. Twenty-one of them joined him in death. William may have been

influenced by his older and out-going uncle, Benjamin Lincoln Batcheller. Benjamin was an Abolitionist who had worked hard for the election of Republican Abolitionist John Fremont in his losing presidential campaign against Democrat James Buchanan. He was in the House of Representatives just before the war. He left his farm and family to serve as a procurement officer for the Union army during the war. William's fondness for his uncle and Benjamin's staunch support of the war against slavery must have had an effect on his thinking.

The agony at Cold Harbor should not be all that was Private William H. Hutchinson. Part of each of us should share his grave. Those of us who were trained for combat but never saw it can only imagine how it was. Those who avoided it will never have room for William. Those living and dead who have joined William in knowing combat are a brotherhood brought together by the sad confused times of war. There are those in every struggle who will let others bear a disproportionate share of the price. William carried the extra load even before he died.

William's father was a civic person, but his diary for 1864, the year his soldier son died, does not mention war. The last time Edwin Hutchinson saw William was when he went to Fort Warren to visit his son on March 16, 1864. The entry in his diary on June 3, 1864, the day William died, tells how he worked all day on the town road with his oxen and tip cart. He was paid \$5.00. He also "cradled" the rye.

The next mention of William was on June 23, 1864, when Edwin "commenced hoeing in the upper orchard. Had news of Willie's death." There is no more about William until July 3, 1864, when he wrote, "Mr. Lyman preached the sacrament in the forenoon. Willie's funeral in the afternoon." No more of William; he was gone.

William's death must have affected his father, but from the daily entries in his diary we might assume that the war was of no concern to him. Edwin Hutchinson mentions visits with others, attending church temperance meetings and school committee meetings. He also tells of going to the Republican Convention in Worcester and church conferences in Millbury. There was no mention of the war, William, slaves, black people, or the threat of a breakdown of the United States.

Was he uninterested or angry that William had left the farm? After all, Sutton was hardly a bastion of slavery. William probably never knew a

black person. The only record of a black slave transaction in Sutton was in 1741. Peter Isaac was sold as a "mulatto man." Peter was later proven to be a free man and the 120 pounds paid for him was refunded by the Reverend Dr. David Hall. Sutton people apparently were better at dealing in cattle and axe handles than in the slave trade. There were countless indentured servants, but no slavery in Sutton.

When William enlisted in 1864, the *Worcester Spy* was an antislavery newspaper, Gov. John Andrew was a Republican and Abolitionist, but the romantic innocence of 1861 was gone. Veterans with one arm or with an eye missing were everywhere. It seems incredible that the tales of pain and hardship still were not enough to take the glory and matchless valor of battle from an 18 year old farm boy's fantasies. Did he feel responsible before God to fight and die for abstractions? There is little doubt that he was patriotic. Forty-five percent of the Union men were farmers; patriotism was in evidence at every farm meeting and fair. But was that enough?

To some extent William must have grappled with the simple truism that the fate of his society could not be separated from the fate of slavery. He would join the fight even though it meant suffering and sacrifices. That it reached such a terrible intensity was not a consideration. His month of combat was the worst of the war.

We should not forget him now. There are no descendents — only ancestors for Private William H. Hutchinson of Sutton, Massachusetts. We must save a place for him if we are to be worthy of his sacrifice.



GRAVESTONE  
HOWARD CEMETERY

## EIGHT LOTS SCHOOL

In June the roof was re-shingled with extra grade white cedar shingles which should last about thirty five years before being replaced. The last and third coat of paint was applied. Last fall after scraping and wire brushing, a primer and finish paint coats were applied by workmen Jim Swart and Chet Klevic.

Ellie Hutchinson's (no relation to William Hutchinson) father, Willam Barry, Sr., a surveyor, researched the Registry of Deeds and located the first record of a land transfer in 1784 to the Town of Sutton for the purpose of "building a school". Thus, apparently after many years of speculation a basic date has been established as to when the school was originally built.



## MONTHLY MEETINGS-

NOVEMBER 5, 1990 - The Society met at the Manchaug Church at 8pm with twenty one persons attending. Lacking a Directors quorum at the Annual Business Meeting the meeting was held later in October when Society officers were elected as follows: President, Malcolm Pearson, Vice President, Daniel Griffith, Recording Secretary, Janet Smith, Treasurer, Mary Arakelian, Assistant Treasurer, Pennie Linder, Corresponding Secretary, Mary Arakelian, Curator, Marieta Howard, Assistant Curator, Ruth Putnam, Historian, Mary King. The process of selecting officers was discussed. Voted to hold the monthly meeting on the second Tuesday in November to avoid conflict with Election Night. Richard G. Provenzana of Peabody reviewed the activities of Hiram Marble, a former Suttonian, who researched in the 1800's the mysteries of Lynnfield's "Witches Caves" in which treasure was presumed to be buried. Nothing was found. After refreshments the meeting adjourned at 10:30pm.

NOVEMBER 29, 1990 - A special business meeting was held in the General Rufus Putnam Hall to review By-Laws pertaining to the election of officers with eight persons attending. Several suggestions were presented for future action.

DECEMBER 12, 1990 - The Annual Christmas Auction was held in the General Rufus Putnam Hall with thirty eight persons attending. A motion was made and unanimously voted to express gratitude to Barbara Weaver and Ruth Putnam for their efforts in making and installing new draperies in the meeting hall. Auctioneers, Daniel Griffith and Donald King induced the members to buy articles donated for a total of \$233.75.

February 5, 1991 - The Society met in the General Rufus Putnam Hall with nineteen persons attending. The Leominster Historical Society after reading a news article about the Eight Lots School House invited members to visit their restored school house. Action was delayed until warmer weather. Stuart Baker of the Blackstone Valley conservation group discussed the environmental aspects of the valley from Paxton to Rhode Island. He illustrated with maps and slides. After refreshments the meeting adjourned at 9:30pm. (TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE)

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS-

*Scott E. Bennet  
Mary A. Cassidy*

*Robin M. Drumstas  
M/M David Farnham  
M/M Roland Nentwich*

*M/M Paul Lavoie  
Richard A. Labonte*

### IN MEMORIAM-

*John D. Brigham, SR  
Helen M. Brown  
Albert Fulton  
Maynard B. Henry*

*Erna I. Hoover  
Victor A. Karacius  
Esther R. Lewis  
Fredrick Swenson*

*Harold E. Swenson  
Philip B. Walker  
Arthur W. Watchorn*



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