

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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History of D.T. Dudley & Son Company Wilkinsonville, Massachusetts

By Mrs. Gertrude Chase
1966

The history of the D.T. Dudley & Son Company, manufacturers of shuttles and shuttle irons for looms, is important for the foundations of businesses in the United States. This business began in 1825 and has continued in active production through the years to the present time in Wilkinsonville, Massachusetts.

The extreme need for this business was known in the Colonies for many years, as cotton was shipped to England, processed and woven and then sent back, as cloth, to the Colonies. The need and desire to have the cotton processed here was more and more acute.

Home looms and individual hand processes were in use, especially with wool and flax. (There is a tablet set up in Beverly, Massachusetts, stating that the first cotton mill in America was built in 1787 and that it was visited by General George Washington. It was powered by a team of mules driven around a turnstyle.)

During the Industrial Revolution in England, which began in 1760, textile machine methods were being developed with rapid strides. Attempts to set up mills in New England were made in several locations, but progress was slow and difficult. Genius, inventive skill and business ability were essential.

A man named Jedediah Strutt, one of the most distinguished of the early textile industrialists in England, had Samuel Slater as his apprentice for more than six years. Strutt was in partnership with the great Arkwright, builder of weaving machines.

In 1789, Slater, then 22 years old, having heard of the extreme need and desire for skills such as he had and having a very complete memory knowledge of machinery design, shipped out, as the son of a farmer, and came to the Colonies.



SHUTTLE SHOP AND POWER HOUSE pre-1927

Very early, he was called to different locations to consult and advise. One of these was a mill belonging to Moses Brown of Providence. The first mill is recorded as the Slater Mill in Pawtucket, built in 1810.

Then it was found that the Blackstone River, rising in Millbury, Massachusetts, and flowing through Pawtucket, was highly favorable for building dams to provide power for the waterwheels. Consequently, many textile plants sprang up along the course of the river.

One such location, deemed especially desirable, was bought by David Wilkinson, whose sister Hannah was the wife of Samuel Slater. It was bought in 1823 from Asa Waters, who had already developed water power there.

Wilkinson built the first building there that same year and added more in 1828 and in 1832. During this time he built a hotel, St. John's Episcopal Church, and a bank, as well as houses and a store for the workers. Consequently, the village came to be known as Wilkinsonville.

In 1825 a group of men, Fowler, Pratt and King, started the business at Pleasant Falls in Wilkinsonville.

Successive ownership of the business was Sumner Pratt & Co., Wilkinsonville Shuttle Co., Chase and Dudley, Chase and Wilder, Wilder & Co., and finally D.T. Dudley and Son Co., and Dudley Shuttles, Inc.

In 1849 the old shop was moved away, and the business moved into a new shuttle shop, which had been built by Sutton Manufacturing Co., successors to David Wilkinson. The new shop was near the Wilkinsonville railroad depot and first occupied by Chase and Dudley. These men were Abraham D. Chase and David T. Dudley, who had been shuttle makers at Pleasant Falls.

Warren Wilder was also a shuttle maker, a member of the firm of Wilkinsonville Shuttle Co., and built the original shop on the present location in 1867. First, it was a partnership with David T. Dudley and son, Henry T. Dudley. This same year the partnership was dissolved, and David and Henry Dudley became the sole owners, under the name of D.T. Dudley & Son.

The business was to manufacture shuttles and shuttle irons for broad, cassimere, satin, silk and cotton by using power and hand looms. Their progressive methods resulted in making it one of the most extensive and valuable plants of its kind in the country, running constantly on orders and shipping to all principal points in the United States, Canada, Mexico and South America.

Their shuttles and shuttle irons for looms of every description ranked with the best made anywhere. The outfit of machinery, special tools, etc., was complete, and twenty or more expert mechanics were regularly employed.

Much of the machinery was built by mechanics in the shop and especially designed for the work they were to do. Especially skilled and of inventive mind was Daniel M. Chase, who built many of the machines. He began to do this when the business was at Pleasant Falls. About 1880 his son, Louis E. Chase, came into the business and he, in turn, used great skill and inventive genius in making machinery.

Louis E. Chase was born in 1859 and died in 1934. He began his apprenticeship with his father at the trade of shuttle maker. He was a skilled mechanic and was head of the iron department. He was a thoroughly practical man and his faithful attendance to business is the secret of the success and prosperity of the company. He spent his life perfecting and building up the business.

David T. Dudley was born in Sutton in 1817, the sixth generation of Dudleys who came from England about 1630. As a small boy, he enjoyed building a little dam in the brook near his home to turn a wheel for his little "mill." When he was 17, he went to work for the shuttle makers at Pleasant Falls and three years later was a member of the firm.

In the years following 1867, the business experienced good years and bad years. Men from Providence, Rhode Island, came into the business; and

finally about 1893, it was feared that the business would be taken from Wilkinsonville and moved to Providence. So, the men who worked in the shop combined to do what they could to keep the business here.

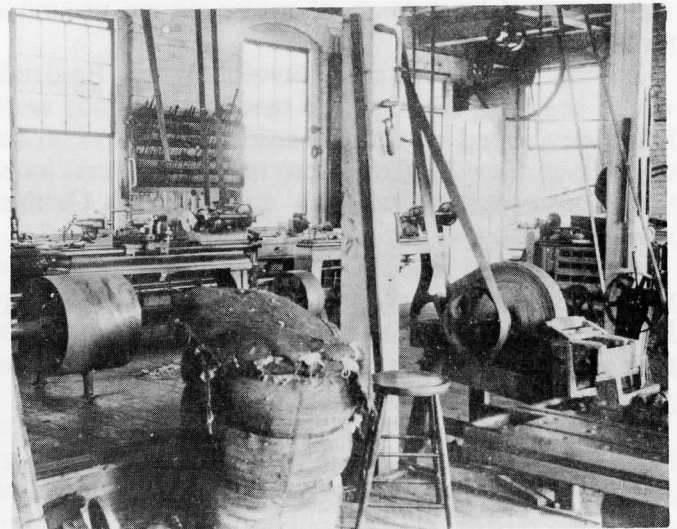
By this time, D.T. Dudley was no longer able to be active. His son Henry still owned a portion. So, on Nov. 15, 1894, a bill of sale was passed from Fred. A. Chase, Fred L. Chase and M. Eugene Gleason of Providence, "Transferring and delivering" all machinery, all material, and sole right to use the firm name of D.T. Dudley & Son Co. to Charles H. Norcross and Louis E. Chase for \$35,000.

In December 1894, the new business was incorporated under the rules of Massachusetts. The list of shareholders was 15, owning 248 shares of a possible 400. With this was a \$20,000 mortgage held by D.T. Dudley and one for \$2900 held by Louis E. Chase. In 1928 it became necessary to issue \$24,800 more in capital stock.

Henry T. Dudley, son of D.T. Dudley, worked mostly in the forge shop and was a very valuable member of the firm for many years. He had seen active service all through the Civil War, enlisting in the 15th Regiment of Worcester, Volunteers in Infantry. He was an officer all through the service — Corporal, 1st Lieut. and Captain. He was confined in Libby Prison and Andersonville Prison. He was wounded at Antietam, Gettysburg, Wilderness, and at Deep Bottom. He was discharged March, 1865, for "disabilities incident to starvation in Prison." On his return from service, in spite of physical limitations, he was very active in the business.

The various shuttle businesses of the country were closely associated with one another for mutual benefit. The American Shuttle Association was organized in 1887 with D.T. Dudley as its first president.

To quote from American Shuttle Association By-Laws, Article II. Object of the Association: "The object of this association is to establish uniform prices,



INTERIOR SCENE - 1901

not with extraordinary profits, but on a fair profitable basis, and to secure the interest of dealers as well as of manufacturers; to strengthen the bonds of friendship now existing between the members, and by personal intercourse at regular and special meetings to increase our confidence in each other." Quoting also under Article III: "The officers shall consist of a President, a Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and a Board of Five Directors, which Board shall also act as a Board of Arbitration. . . . The Secretary who shall be chosen by the Board of Directors shall have full power and authority to settle disputes among the members, his decisions, however, to be subject to appeal to the Board of Arbitrators. The Secretary shall not be a shuttle maker, or any person having any interest whatever in the manufacture or sale of shuttles."

The Association of Shuttle Iron Manufacturers was started in April 1899. The object of the Association was to establish uniform prices and for mutual protection of the member businesses.

Meetings were held in February, May, August, and November at convenient places, preferably at Worcester, Massachusetts, or at Providence, Rhode Island. The By-Laws of this Association were signed by Litchfield Shuttle, D.T. Dudley & Son Co., Charles A. Richardson-Richardson & Bottomley, Ezra Marble, F.A. Chase & Co.

Other shuttle businesses grew from D.T. Dudley & Son Co. Four Litchfields learned the business here before going to Southbridge.

Three Shembos learned the business here before forming Shembo Shuttle in Woonsocket. Sumner A. Dudley, another son of D.T. Dudley, went to Hopdale to start a business, and then later to Taunton. Fire burned two sets of shuttle machinery. The Taunton business continued, however, under the name of S.A. Dudley Co., and was later carried on by Sumner's son, Harry Dudley.

In 1896 D.T. Dudley died, and his mortgage was discharged when his estate was settled.

In 1900 a new, two-story, brick power building was built and equipped with a water turbine driving 50 KW and generator. In 1922 this was connected with New England Power Co. for reserve and break down. David Tebo came to be chief engineer and remained in that capacity until his retirement.

Daniel S. Smith began working at the shop in 1920, working in all the different departments. He learned the details of all the machines, their operation and their capacity. For several years he was general superintendent and also a member of the firm.

In 1939 he bought the W.A. Bashaw forging machinery located at Sutton Tool Co. In 1940. Smith bought the Bashaw real estate and rented the shop to D.T. Dudley & Son Co. until 1953.

In 1941 D.T. Dudley & Son purchased the machinery and business of F.A. Chase in Providence. They operated that business in Providence for six months. Then all the machinery was brought to Wilkinsonville, and much of it was stored at the Sutton Tool location. From then until 1953, Smith rented machinery from D.T. Dudley & Son Co.

In 1953 Smith went into business for himself at the Sutton Tool location, under the name of Rosemont Tool Co. This marked the conclusion of iron work being done at D.T. Dudley & Son Co. However, Smith remained a member of the firm, holding the office of president for a number of years.

Emile Normadin began work at the shop in 1902 and became an expert in shuttlemaking. He had charge of the wood room for many years. He left because of ill health in 1958, having worked nearly 57 years.

Norman Shaw came to work in 1933. He also worked in all departments and was thoroughly familiar with all the machines. He became a member of the firm and held the office of clerk from 1940 until 1962 (?). He left in 1948 (?) to become cost accountant with Whitin Machine Works.

Harold Swenson came into the business in 1940 and has become one of the most valuable men in the business. His skill precision of work and great knowledge of every phase of the business has contributed greatly to the perfection of the product. He is still a very important part of the business.

Paul Eaton came to work in 1959 and very quickly mastered many of the woodworking skills. He also was an important man in the business until his death in August 1966.

In 1916 Daniel M. Chase, son of Louis E. Chase, and grandson of Daniel M., the machinist, joined the business. He had grown up with the shuttle business, working, helping, observing all departments. He was a graduate of Becker Business College and had worked as a bookkeeper for M.J. Whittall Ass'n. But when World War I broke out, he enlisted and was in service from 1917 to 1919. He served in France for more than a year as First Lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps.

After his discharge from the army he returned to the shop and was an active member of the firm. He was skilled in all phases of the operations and was a moving force of the business. He attended Association meetings, called at other shuttle plants and had a very complete knowledge of the industry.

He purchased the 50 shares of stock owned by Capt. Henry Dudley and that, with other shares, made him the major stockholder. He was production manager and treasurer of the firm. He never drew a salary as an officer of the company, but did draw

only a meager compensation. He devoted his entire time to the business, performing the duties of an officer assisting in financial matters, office routine, operating and superintending machines. Without his foresight, tireless devotion and wise decisions in the years of 1950 to 1961, there were times when the business might have not been able to continue.

Disaster struck the business three times. First was the fire that occurred in the middle of the night, February 1885. The fire burned fast and with only individuals to fight it, the loss was nearly total.

They lost a two-story wooden building, 50 x 36 ft., with a basement in which was located a 40 horse power steel boiler and 35 horse power engine. Also lost was the iron finishing room, 40 x 36 ft., and attached to it the forge shop, 36 x 18 ft., as well as a steel house, 12 x 15 ft., for storing steel.

Across the trench, about 50 ft. away, was the storehouse, 40 x 30 ft., two stories high, which contained a large quantity of shuttle blocks. The two tenement house only 25 ft. away was saved. Fire worked its way to within 10 ft. of the dry blocks. These buildings were saved by men being stationed on the roof while water was handed to them in pails.

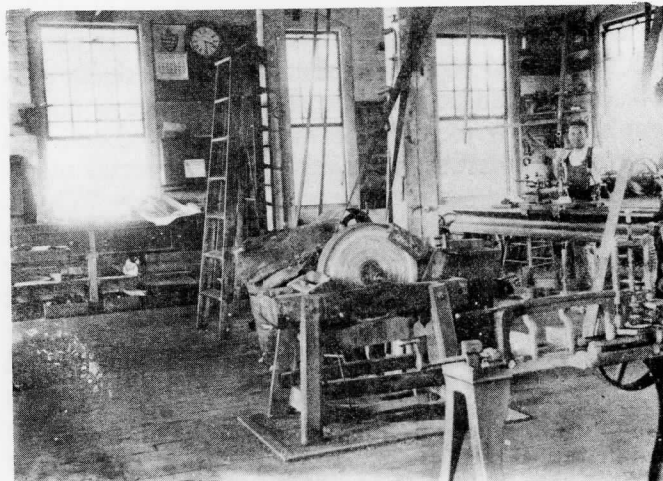
One remarkable thing about it was that only one person was injured. That was Capt. Henry Dudley, who entered the forge shop to save some tools. He was severely burned about the face and hands.

The loss was estimated at \$20,000 with \$7,000 insurance. Daniel M. Chase and Frank B. Smith occupied one building. Mr. Chase was the machinist who built many of the shuttle machines, and Mr. Smith was a woodturner. They lost all their tools and stock. Mr. Chase's loss was \$1800 with \$800 insurance.

When daylight came, D.T. Dudley said, "We'll build again to keep these good men in town." No time was lost. As soon as the frost was out of the ground, they began to rebuild, and so it was. These men worked with all their might, and the work of D.T. Dudley & Son resumed.

The next disaster was in November 1927, when flood swept through the two water courses that supplied the power. Clark's Reservoir went out. Pleasant Valley dam was washed away, taking two people with it. Millers Dam burst and the torrent of water burst the Houghton Dam and Shuttle Shop Dam with terrific flooding.

The main highway, 122A, was washed out. Shuttle blocks stored in the old grist mill rushed downstream — building and all. Some were found three villages away. This meant a big financial loss as well as disruption of production. Mud had to be cleared from machines, materials, bins, etc. The biggest need was to restore the pond. Under the direction of army engineers, the dam was rebuilt at the southwest end of the pond. Meantime, production



INTERIOR SCENE- 1901

continued, in spite of great difficulty.

The third disaster was the flood of 1955. This time, the dam at the shop pond, which had been rebuilt in 1928 under direction of the army engineers, went out and the buildings were flooded again. This time the dam was not rebuilt. All the power was supplied commercially from then on.

But D.T. Dudley & Son continued, in spite of disaster, always with their perfection of work. Their shuttles have always been of unequaled quality.

After 1953, D.T. Dudley and Son confined their business entirely to the making of shuttles. Daniel M. Chase was production manager and business manager. The officers of the company were President, Daniel A. Smith; Treasurer, Daniel M. Chase; Assistant Treasurer, Gertrude Dudley Chase; Clerk, Norman Shaw; Directors, Daniel S. Smith, Daniel M. Chase, and Gertrude D. Chase.

In 1960 Daniel M. Chase became very ill, but directed work and business from his hospital bed. Much of the book work he did in that manner, also. But, working constantly with him in this manner, was his wife, Gertrude. On June 30, 1961, he died.

But the business continued under the direction of Gertrude Chase, with the unequaled help of Harold E. Swenson as superintendent. He knew all the machines, all the operations, and would allow nothing but the best to be shipped out. Working faithfully with him was Paul Eaton.

In October 1961, Howard S. Pellatt agreed to buy and D.T. Dudley & Son Co. agreed to sell the buildings, machinery, stock and business. On January 1, 1963, Mr. Pellatt began operating the shop under lease and as member of the new corporation, Dudley Shuttles, Inc. On Dec. 28, 1962, the deed was passed, the corporation of D.T. Dudley & Son was dissolved, and Dudley Shuttles, Inc. became sole owners.

D.T. Dudley & Son had been in continuous business 137 years, the oldest shuttle business in the

United States, always putting out a product of highest quality. It takes time and experience to make a shuttle maker. The skill cannot be acquired in a short time. Many of the best men spend a lifetime in the skill.

Down through the years this business has been operating with many changes, but, as yet, the wooden shuttle is still the best method of carrying the filling across the loom in the making of cloth.

The earliest wood used for shuttles was apple tree. But later, they came to use dogwood and persimmon, both of which come from the South. Dogwood never grows to be a large tree and can never be planted in a grove or wood lot. It is always surrounded by other and often larger trees.

The following circular appeared on January 1 1842, when a group of men bought out S. Pratt & Co., Shuttle Makers:

The undersigned take the liberty to inform you that they have purchased the entire Stock, Machinery and Tools, lately owned and operated by S. Pratt & Co., Shuttle Makers, at Wilkinsonville, Mass. and

SHUTTLE SHOP EMPLOYEES- circa 1910

have formed a copartnership under the firm of Wilkinsonville Shuttle Co. for the purpose of manufacturing SHUTTLES. They will continue to make all kinds of Broad Loom, Cassimere, Satinet, Cotton, Power and Hand Loom Shuttles, at the shop lately occupied by S. Pratt & Co. Having all been long in the employ of S. Pratt & Co., and having a large stock of Apple-tree, Persimmon and Virginia Dogwood on hand, we shall be able and are determined to make as good shuttles as can be had at any establishment in the United States. All orders executed with as much dispatch as possible. The patronage of Manufacturers and Merchants is respectfully solicited.

*Charles King
Leonard Woodbury
A.D. Chase
D.T. Dudley
Warren Wilder*

S. Pratt & Co. return their thanks for the extensive patronage they have received and would recommend the above Company to their customers and friends.



For Sale

"Sutton Documents" (1681 and 1720-1778)

This 44-page booklet contains reproductions of 26 original documents and their exact translations. The documents include indentures, bonds, notes and deeds, military orders, petitions, power-of-attorney, and miscellany. Fully cross-indexed.

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Mail check to the Sutton Historical Society, 4 Uxbridge Rd., Sutton, MA 01590.

OUR ATTIC

By- caroline C. Dewells

*I spent the day in our attic
and the place is cleaner tonight,
but my mind is full of memories,
of years that have sped in their flight.*

*There's a record of much of our living
though all of the last many years,
in things stored away in our attic,
they remind me of laughter and tears.*

*The corner full of puzzles,
I consumed them all in flames.
The children have all gone away
they'll never come back to play.*

*A tennis racket discarded,
numerous shoes thrown away,
a figure or two remaining
from the summer they molded in clay.*

*A pair of Halloween costumes,
a scythe used by old "Father Time",
and a bunch of various things,
some with out reason or rhyme.*

*So many things I have handled.
And now this evening I find
my attic is very much cleaner,
but what will I do do with my time ?*

(Submitted by- Phyllis MacLaren)

MONTHLY MEETINGS-

FEBRUARY 4, 1992 - Cancelled, inclement weather.

MARCH 3 - The society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 p.m. After the secretary's and treasurer's reports were read the speaker, Nora Pat Small's subject, "If Walls Could Speak" identified early buildings by certain construction details and illustrated them with slides. Refreshments were served.

APRIL 6 - The society along with six other area societies were guests of the Millbury Historical Society that met at Saint Brigards Church Hall for a presentation of Five President's First Ladies as being an impressionist dressed in their respective period costumes.

MAY 5 - The society met at the Manchaug Church. The secretary's report was not read due to his absence. Janet Smith acted as secretary pro-tem. The treasurer reported a balance of \$4439.39 in the treasury. The reprint of the "Sutton Documents 1720-1773" are available. Beverly Anderson rended an interesting discussion on the history of inkwells and their several characteristics. Also, she displayed many types of inkwells. Refreshments were served.

JUNE 2 - The society met at the Manchaug Church. The secretary's report was read and the treasurer reported a balance of \$4616.80. Announcement was made that Dr. Hannah MacMillen had been elected to the Board of Directors. Thomas Eck, owner of the Upton Teas Shop discussed the history of tea used by various cultures and the growing of the various varieties. Refreshments were served.

JULY 7 - The society met at the Blacksmith Shop for a pot luck supper; Emergency doors at the Manchaug Church and at the General Rufus Putnam Hall building have replaced existing delapidated ones. The July 18th Flee Market was discussed. Appointment of a nominating committee consisting of Eleanor Hutchinson, Mary B. King, Albert Martin, and Helen Ordnung was made to present a slate of candidates for the Board of Directors to serve from 1992-1995.

AUGUST 4 - The society met at the Eight Lots School for a pot luck supper. The uncertain weather precluded the usual attendance although many did enjoy the evening.

SEPTEMBER 1 - The meeting was held at the Manchaug Church with 29 persons in attendance. Bud Gurney reported on his visit with Malcolm Pearson to attorney Arthur Moynihan to discuss a sub-lease agreement between the Waters Farm Preservation group and the society relative to the prime lease originating with the Sutton Conservation Commission who represent supervision over the Waters Farm deed to the Town of Sutton in 1974. The lease arrangement was decreed by a singular Massachusetts Senate Bill, S 1059, allowing the town to lease the homestead and a few acres to the Waters Farm Preservation group in the process of incorporation through the Sutton Historical Society for a period of 99 years. Marieta Howard, Ruth Putnam, and Dr. Hannah MacMillen were reported to the society as Candidates to serve on the Board of Directors. The 13 Star Flag in the museum was photographed to aid in verification of its possibility of being a late 18th Century flag, an on going research project. A video tape about Muster Field Farm Museum in North Sutton was shown. Refreshments were served.

OCTOBER 6 - The annual business meeting of the society was held at the Manchaug Church. The slate of nominees chosen by the nominating committee reported to the Sept. meeting were voted to the Board of Directors to serve from 1992-1995. A director's meeting will be held October 13th for the election of officers. Vaillancourt Folk Art Shop donated a custom designed crock with a picture of the Blacksmith Shop on its side to the society. Daniel Griffith spoke on chair caneing. He had specimens of the different ways of canning and demonstrated the techniques to create designs in the craftsmanship of various materials. The Flee Markets of July 18th and Sept. 7th netted \$637.00. Refreshments were served.

NOVEMBER 2 - The Society met on Monday at the Manchaug Church because the usual first Tuesday in the month was election night. The speaker, Warren Sinclair, President of the Gardner Historical Society, who had extensively researched the early and ongoing history of the Wachusett Mountain region told about many interesting episodes of the settlers and Indians. At the October 13th director's meeting the following officers were elected: Interim President, Malcolm Pearson, Vice-President, Daniel Griffith, Recording Secretary, Scott Bennett, Treasurer, Eleanor Hutchinson, Assistant Treasurer, Mary Arakelian, Corresponding Secretary, Mary Arakelian, Curator, Nora Pat Small, Assistant Curator, Ruth Putnam, and Historian, Mary B. King.

DECEMBER 1 - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with 26 persons present. The final drafting of the Waters Farm lease is being reviewed by the Town Administrator. The annual Christmas Auction was held with Daniel Griffith and Mary Colman acting as auctioneers. A total of \$274. was raised.

JANUARY 5, 1993 - The Society met in the General Rufus Putnam Hall with 25 persons present. The speaker for the evening, Chester Urban, spoke on the early methods of photography from 1837 to 1900 and their different formulation for the reproduction of subject matter on light sensitive materials and chemical development to produce visual images. His slides illustrated early scenes and the display of actual specimens of the craft were interesting. Refreshments were served.

FEBRUARY 2 - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with 39 persons present. A suggested revision of the By Laws were presented by Mary Arakelian in co-operation with Barbara Weaver for the society to review at a future meeting. A panel consisting of Evelyn Shaw, Ralph Gurney, Ben MacLaren, and Donald King moderated by Alex Belisle was the forum to speak about episodes in a bygone era of Sutton lifestyles. The audience response to the many unique and off the record happenings was spontaneous and spirited during the evening. The program was video taped to record the dialogue and audience reactions.

MARCH 2 - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with 29 persons present. Nora Pat Small advised the members that a new land trust plan for elder persons information is available and she will give particulars to those who inquire. The speaker, Tom Matson, reported on the research he is conducting concerning Henry Sibley, born in Sutton and his military record in the 1870's - 1880's dealing with the Indian wars in the western plains. He also related in detail about Robert Goddard's early experimentations in rocket research. The signing of the Waters Farm lease: Sutton Conservation Commission to the Sutton Historical Society and sub-lease to Waters Farm Preservation, Incorporated will take place at the Selectmens Meeting, March 16.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER-

Gary Dwinell

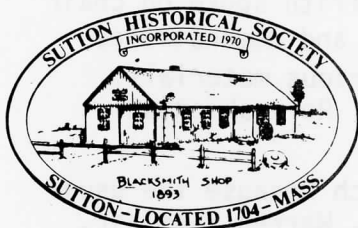
IN MENORIAM-

Fredrick L. Belfay

Astrid C. Keown

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