

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS



— BULLETIN —
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A FARMING ERA

By Stephen LeClaire

Nothing compares to the sound of summer when enhanced by the putt putt putt of a 2-cylinder John Deere tractor coming to mow the hay. Many suppers on our breezeway in the summer months were interrupted as we kids bolted from the table to run up the camp road by our house chasing the tractor.

For as long as I can remember the Perrys of Singletary Avenue mowed our hay. The mowing machine was attached to their John Deere model 430 and the tractor had a distinctive sound when it throttled down to make the corner into our driveway. The pitch rose again and echoed off the house as the driver shifted gears and throttled up again. The steady roar of the bigger Farmall tractor meant that the farmers were pulling a hay rake or baler.

I can remember sitting on a bale in the corner of one of the fields watching that baler go around and around the field. Its rhythmic churning as the engine strained to push the plunger and the clickety-click of the knotter every ten to fifteen churns completed the cadence. All of this was a soundtrack of summer. Sitting at the bottom of the hill field we saw the heat waves shimmer over the hill before we saw the baler, and then the sound would follow.

We named the fields as you came to them when you drove over the camp road. The field on the left side of the road was called the first field. The one across the road from that was the second field. Above that was the hill field and at the top was the last field. The Perrys always referred to the fields as

“over to Benjamin’s” as, indeed, it was my grandmother’s land. They called the camp road “the lane”, which derived from the time before any camps were built at the lake. The hill field was just “the big piece”, and the second field was “the bottom piece”.

We have pictures of Norman Perry doing the hay at our place, but I was too small to remember him. His sons Morris, Alden, George and Dudley are the ones I remember. Morris wore dark green work clothes having come from his job as a truck driver for the highway department. He usually wore a matching cap covered with hay chaff and most often held a pipe out one corner in his mouth. I thought all Perrys smoked pipes; at least Morris and Alden did. When Morris held a match to the pipe you could hear the gentle sup-sup-sup as he drew on the pipe. The smoke then curled out the other corner of his mouth.

I can still recall that pipe smell lingering in Dad’s office when Morris came to pay a bill. It makes me glad that’s all he left behind as he used to chew, too.

Back then tractors were a way of life in Sutton. John Deeres and Farmalls were popular with the Perrys. Morris Perry had one of each. His son, Donald, who was about my age, showed me how to tell which way a tractor went by the tire marks in the dirt of the camp road. The V-shaped marks of the rear tires pointed in one direction. I could never remember if it were toward the way the tractor went or where it came from. I was fooled by that method too often, and generally followed the sound. Small



Perry Farmstead — "THE MAPLES"

John Deere tractors like Morris' model 430, and his father Norman's model "M", had distinctive put-put-put sounds. The larger John Deere models A and B that the Perrys sometimes used had their own sound, too. There was the steady rolling whirr of the power take-off pulley, accompanied by the engine's platt-platt sound, followed by the idle down cycle, then another platt-platt as the governor kicked back on. Platt-platt, whirr-whirr-whirr, platt-platt, whirr-whirr-whirr. Those big old John Deere tractors with the two small wheels centered under the nose and the two huge rear wheels were classics. They never seemed to die.

The Perrys also had a 1939 Farmall. What a great old dinosaur that was. All heavy cast iron with metal spoke wheels, it started with a crank. No putt-putt sound came out of this tractor, just a steady roar. The cast iron steering wheel was connected to a rod that ran the horizontal length of the tractor's nose, meeting at a bevel gear that transferred the rod vertically down to the two small front wheels. The steering wheel could easily get wrenched out of the driver's hands if the front wheels hit a "chuck" hole in the field. This old behemoth could only travel at about three miles per hour, but had a gear ratio that provided incredible power. It could out pull anything, and was called upon to pull other tractors out of the mud if they got stuck.

Morris Perry had a newer model Farmall that didn't have to start with a crank, and ran a bit quieter,

but still had that steady drone sound distinctive to Farmall. This tractor pulled the hay rake and the baler.

The mowing machine had a long bar with a series of teeth with a blade that slid back and forth. The whole bar could be raised to a vertical position when the tractor was on the road. On the end of the bar was a board angled to turn the hay back over on itself after it was cut, making nice neat rows of fresh cut hay. Morris stopped the tractor in the barway to the field, throttled down the tractor and lowered the bar. He poured motor oil all up and down the bar from an old Clorox bottle. After lighting his pipe, he'd climb back up on the tractor, and off he would go around the field again.

When I was three or four the Perry's farm on Singletary Avenue was going full tilt. I remember riding in the car to Millbury and stopping in traffic as the cows were brought in from the pasture across the road to the barn. Mom stopped the car and let us go into the barn to watch. I went in through the big front doors to the main floor, and sat at the top of the steps to the downstairs area where the cows were kept in stanchions. I watched through the steps as the cows trotted in beneath me with a rumble of hoofbeats, mooing and bellowing as they were prodded along by the farmers.

There was a separate wing in the lower barn where the bulls were kept. Some of the bulls had rings in their noses. I was deathly afraid of going to look at

these bulls. Any animal that had to be kept separate, tied, and controlled with a ring in its nose had to be feared, or at least respected.

The Perrys kept their hay on the upper floor of the barn, stacked in bales piled up to the rafters. I watched them unpack truckloads of hay. They always had an array of old flatbed trucks that they backed up the ramp and through the barn doors. I can still remember the pitch of the truck's transmission whining in protest.

To unload the hay one man stood on the truck and unloaded the bales passing them onto the scaffold where the next man stood. In what seemed as fluid as a choreographed ballet he then passed the bale up to the next man who stood on a tier of bales a few feet above. This continued up to the last man high up in the rafters, who finally packed the bales into place. You hardly saw the last man in this chain from the floor, as the barn was dark and choked with dust. There always seemed to be ten or a dozen men working during hay season, all clad in different shades of denim overalls and caps.

The Perrys also cut corn which was stored in two large silos at the rear of the barn. The pungent aroma of fresh cut silage could be smelled from quite far away as it was ground up and blown into silos. Inside the silos were two big rotors that leveled off the silage. These rotors later helped to spill it out the small doors where it was shoveled into a hopper and wheeled to the animals. I liked to pick up small chunks of corn trying to find one that was a complete cross section of an ear. I heard the farmers joke that, as the silage fermented, they caught the runoff in a tin can and fed it to the pigs.

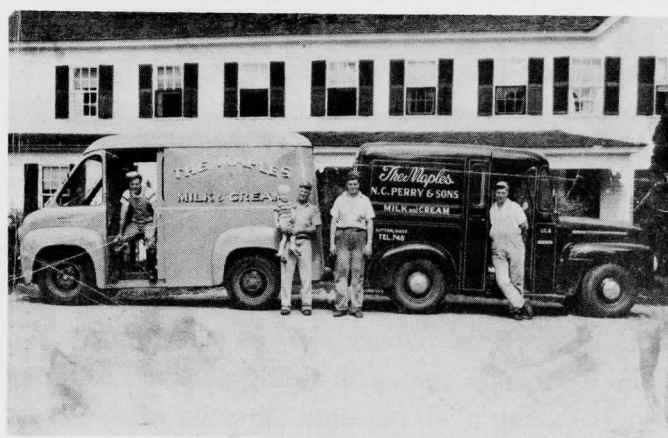
Corn season was always in the fall when I was in school, so I didn't get to watch as much as of haying, but I remember those old trucks going by loaded with sweet yellow and green corn.

The low cinder block building to the left of the main barn held the Perry's milk room. This room held the large stainless steel tanks for pasturizing the milk after it was pumped from the cows. The room was spotlessly clean and had a sweet milk smell. There was a walk in cooler with a big thick door that held all the bottled milk. The wooden crates with wire partitions held six or a dozen bottles each, and the bottles clinked lightly together when the milkman picked up the crate.

How the milk got to the milkroom is another story. Just outside the milkroom as you went into the lower floor of the main barn was the pumphouse. I envisioned this area as being straight out of Frankenstein's chambers. The huge iron tanks, pumps, and machinery were covered with cobwebs, wires, and pipes. The whole mess, while operating, was terrifying to small kids. The pump roared with a groaning rhythmic pulse as if it were the very heart of the barn. It seemed to start up with a mind of its own just as I happened to be walking by and I would always quicken my step to safely pass.

Back in the milkroom one of the farmers often got me a bottle of chocolate milk from the walk-in cooler. The bottles were small ones with cardboard caps pressed on top with the Perrys logo printed on them. Chocolate milk was thicker and sweeter than regular white milk. It left a good mustache on your upper lip as you drank it straight from the bottle while sitting on the wall outside the milkroom. The regular whole milk came in half gallon and gallon bottles. Mom had to wash the bottles before returning them to the milkman.

Perry's must have had a formidable milk route back then. I remember their milk truck pulling into the yard as I got ready for school. It was a short dark brown truck with a stubby hood. It held a single seat for only the driver. The cooler in the back held all the wooden cases full of milk bottles. The milkman filled his metal carrying rack with a half dozen bottles and carried the order into the house, usually right to the refrigerator. He then collected the washed empty bottles for return to the farm. Often he left three of those small chocolate milks for my brothers and me.



Perry Milk Trucks; l-r, George Perry, Norman Perry, Dudley Perry, and Alden Perry

I don't visually remember Alden or George Perry delivering the milk, but I do remember their hired hand, Tracey Horne. When Tracey the milkman arrived it was time to get off to school.

As my brothers and I got older we were actually able to help Morris Perry bring in his hay. The first job I was able to do was to roll the bales out of the way of the baler. If the windrows of hay had been raked too close together the baler dropped the bales in tight rows, and as the tractor came around the field I rolled the bales out of the way. Morris drove the Farmall pulling the baler and stopped with a squeal of brakes when he wanted a bale moved. He would point in my general direction and mumble something that he wanted done. It was hard to hear him over the baler roaring and a wad of tobacco in his cheek, I think he delighted in teasing us by making himself unclear. You had to keep asking what he wanted.

When I became physically able to actually lift a bale, the next job available was to help load the trucks. There was a special way of interlocking the bales on the truck so that they tied each other into the load and stayed on the truck. I remember loading hay onto Morris' 1940's Ford bulldozer truck. The flatbed body had ramps angled down to the ground at the back so that a bulldozer could be driven on and carried. Planks had been extended out over the ramps to lengthen the load of hay.

Occasionally the Perrys were short of help for loading the trucks. The driver put the truck in first gear and let it crawl along the rows by itself. The driver walked beside and helped throw the bales on. I thought this was pretty neat; the way the driver could stand on the running board for a few seconds to steer the truck and then jump off to pick up a bale.

The packer had the most prestigious job. Not only did he get to ride on the back of the truck, he was responsible for building a square load that would stay on the truck. He had to be strong enough to lift bales six or seven high to the top of the load. Seven bales high was about the maximum load on any truck. The load had to clear the overhead wires in the barnyard, and had to fit in the barn door. I had also seen a few loads get knocked off by low branches on the camp road.

The most fun came with riding atop the full load down the camp road, out onto the main road, and up to the barn. The empty truck sped back to the field, the crew standing on the back amidst the hay chaff swirling in the breeze.

I remember at the end of one season when Morris had promised to pay us. My brother, John, and I had worked as rollers and loaders. The last full load was slowly being driven out of the last field. Morris rode on the back of the load. John and I walked along behind as Morris dug into his pocket, pulled out a fifty cent piece, and said to John, "Here, don't forget to share this with your brother."

When John and I were in our early teens, we helped out with many chores at Morris Perry's farm. Morris' son Donald was a year older than John. He was in charge of the morning chores. John met Donald at the barn before school to help feed the heifers. Sometimes I would tag along. We gave the animals a scoop of grain, some hay, and water. Sometimes leftover pastry from Svea bakery in Worcester was added.

We had to feed the animals in the pasture down behind the lower barn, too. This is where we learned to drive. Morris had a 1953 Studebaker pickup that was taken off the road when he bought his new one. This was parked down at the lower barn and used during chores. We barrelled along the quarter mile of dirt road between the barns in the pickup. John had gotten pretty good at shifting the standard transmission, and, starting at the one barn, could get the pickup into high gear before screeching to a halt at the other barn. None of us were old enough to have a drivers license.

John got to drive the tractors before I was old enough to. I remember when we helped to empty the manure pits under the barn at Singletary Avenue. They hadn't been emptied in a long time, so we took load after load out for two or three days. The old Farmall and Morris' newer Farmall were both called into service. John drove one and Donald drove the other. I rode standing on the drawbar in front of the load of sloshing manure. There were a couple of John Deere tractors used including the front bucket loader. By the third day the bucket tractor was scooping out manure way up in the front of the barn. The tractor was so far in under the barn that you couldn't hear it for a few seconds until it backed out with a full bucket. The cool morning air caused steam to rise off the piles. I'll never forget the rich organic smell of rotting manure.

The tractors were able to get to our fields by traveling crosslots through the Perry's fields. From the Singletary Avenue barn the tractors went down past

the watering hole and up the lane into the Howard Lot. This small walled in field must have been owned by someone named Howard, but to us it was just "the Howard Lot." Next were the two long fields owned by Lewis Sherman and later his grandson Dudley Perry. There was a lane between these two fields that led down to Sherman's barn, but it had grown in. I remember Jack Perry driving the old Farmall up through the brush one year just to see if he could do it.

After these two long fields was our hill field, and this was where they were spreading the manure to fertilize the fields. The driver engaged the gears and the manure sprayed out in a high arch. One load lasted about once around the hill field. We also helped clean out the manure pits at Morris' Boston Road barn. This was harder because his lane ran along beside the barn with a stone wall on the other side. You couldn't drive a bucket tractor into these pits. The manure had to be loaded by hand. We dug into the hard crusty manure, load after load, until finally breaking through what we called the "piss wall" where the real soupy stuff was. Once the dam was broken a years worth of cow urine poured out and ran into the culvert. This was pretty gross but always exciting.

Sometimes a few rats would be hiding in the corners. Donald would try to bash them with a shove. As hard as he hit them the rats sank into the manure, only to resurface hissing and clucking, ready to attack. Now and then he got lucky and speared one on the end of a pitchfork. Donald was a pretty good shot with a twenty-two. We sat in the top window in the barn's hayloft and picked off woodchucks as they popped their heads up in the fields.

Donald belonged to 4-H, and raised some prize animals. I remember one bull he had named Noco. I don't remember it's weight, but it was supposed to be one of the biggest around. That bull stomped around the pasture letting everyone know who was boss.

Donald also had a small vegetable garden in the field next to the road to the lower barn. Here he grew corn that he sold on the sidewalk in front of the barn. I think he sold it for a dollar a dozen. He showed us how to make the leftover ears from the day before look fresh by spraying them with water and covering them with a damp burlap sack. A few extra ears were always thrown in in case there was a wormy one.

We enjoyed driving the machinery around the barnyard and helped to grease the hay rake and the baler. There was always a grease gun on the baler. The sticker on the motor of the John Deere baler said, "This equipment pays your salary — take care of it." They must have taken this to heart because the baler always started with only three or four cranks; even the first time it was fired up each year.

Taking care of the equipment also meant keeping it after it died. Down near the pond by the lower barn was the truck graveyard. It held the old trucks that would never see the road again. The nose and chassis of a model A and a 1930's vintage flatbed truck sat next to the woodpile. Its wooden parts had totally rotted off. The old bulldozer truck with "Morris Perry Trucking" painted on the side sat up on blocks fading in the sun. They had replaced it with a "newer" 1947 International that I think Morris said came from Arthur King's farm.

During the late sixties and early seventies John and I, also, worked for Harry Davagian helping to cut corn. We were not official employees or anything like that. It was just that whenever we heard a tractor or farm machinery running we ran off to investigate and usually wound up helping out. I don't think we were ever paid by Mr. Davagian. It was just fun to be part of the crew helping out. We did the same for Les Merrill when he cut Pierce's fields to the west of our house.

Mr. Davagian had an old Allis-Chalmers tractor with a closed in cab. It was painted orange. The engine and nose cowl sat off centered over the front axle. To us snobs who were used to the John Deere and Farmall tractors at Perry's farm this was an inferior

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and ugly tractor. Mr. Davagian also had an Oliver tractor that was slightly more acceptable because, at least, it was painted green like a John Deere.

I don't remember what make the cornpicker was. It had iron spoke wheels and two large points that directed the rows of corn, cutting a row at a time. The machine cut the stalks off at the bottom and tied them in a bunch. We walked along directly behind the machine and caught the bundles and laid them on a flatbed trailer pulled along behind the Oliver. When the wagon was full it was driven up to the big white barn on Boston Road. There were lots of stone-walls creating little narrow roadways leading up to the barn, and sometimes the tractor had a tough time negotiating the tight turns in the barnyard.

The stalks were unloaded off the trailer and fed into a grinder that blew the silage up a pipe and into the tall silos. This was the most fun. We kids climbed up through the barn scaffolds to the top of the silos and jumped into them, landing in the silage

as it was being blown in. If you didn't stand up quickly once you landed you could be buried with corn in no time. You had to be careful to close your eyes and protect your head. The large chunks of corn cob were being blown in on top of us at a tremendous velocity and they stung when they scored a direct hit.

Mr. Davagian had stopped farming altogether by the time I was in Junior high school. The school stored the scenery from the school plays and other items in his barn. In 1975 the barn caught fire. Since I lived so close, I was one of the first people on the scene. The whole framework, though still standing, was totally engulfed in fire. The night was clear and still except for the roaring fire. I watched in awe as the entire structure, in a serial slow motion, collapsed in on itself as the fire trucks raced down from the center station. I was one of the last to see the barn standing.

Letter from a reader of the BULLETIN

*The Sutton Historical Society
Atten: Ben MacLaren*

Your recent "The Way It Was" in the BULLETIN brought back many memories of my early days in West Sutton.

I attended grade school in West Sutton, eight grades in one room (probably eight lots. ED) My first teacher was Miss Lucy Phelps who was my Dad's teacher when he went to grade school.

After grade school I went one year to Sutton High School and rode Lewis Sherman's school bus which was a small truck with cover and a bench along each side.

I attended many dances at the Town Hall when Lewis Sherman was the constable to maintain "law and order." If a couple got too frisky he would march out onto the dance floor and put a stop to their antics.

During my Dad's early years he played on the Sutton basket with his brother, John Brigham, Arthur Donaldson and others.

After one year of High School I went to Worcester Boys Trade which I finished in 1930. I then worked for the H. T. Haywood Company in Franklin, Massachusetts and was there during the summer of 1938. I stayed there until 1940. I moved to Rockford, Illinois in 1960 and the company I worked for sent me to Fort Collins, Georgia. I spent 34 years with the Woodward Govenor Company, working in Rockford, Fort Collins, and Tokyo, Japan.

I have a sister, Louise Putnam living in Oxford and a brother, C. Harland, living in Rockford, Illinois.

Sincerely,

(signed) Charles M. Plummer

ed note —

The writer authored an article on "The Sutton Town Farm" several years ago in the BULLETIN

A SPECIAL GIFT TO THE SOCIETY

In December 1993 the Society received the gift of a loom... the first one ever acquired for the museum. A loom is not an unusual device; BUT the former owner and operator was *totally blind*.

Eugene Davis of Putnam Hill Road, in settling the estate of her sister, Leona Goguen, concluded that a vintage loom, especially one operated by a blind person, would be a symbol to other handicapped persons



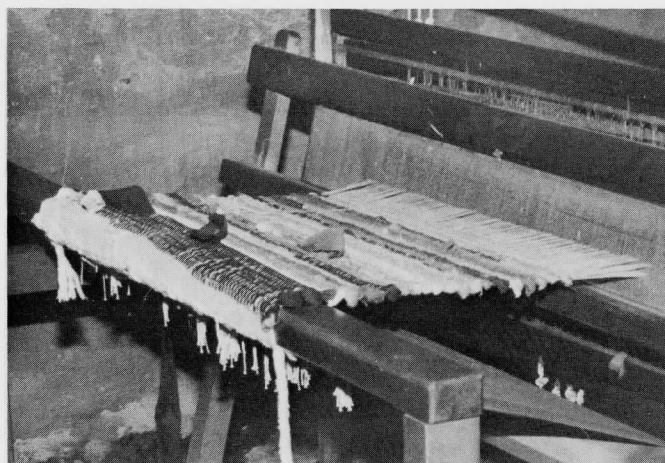
Leona Goguen holding loom shuttles

in the future. Thus, the loom will be displayed at the museum when the ongoing project of cataloging is completed and a plan of exhibit material is concluded.

Mrs. Goguen was an active and determined person who lived a useful lifestyle despite her being blind for twenty eight years. A system of Braille identification tags on kitchen items and a keen memory enabled her to perform cooking skills. Aided by rails to guide her instinctive delivery of a ball to the bowling pin set up resulted in a prize winning performance.

Mrs. Goguen learned weaving skills at the Perkins Institute in Watertown. Over a period of twenty years her skills developed to a degree that provided extra income for the household budget. Rug weaving was her primary product. Several innovations helped in the routine of weaving. One aid was to tap out with her foot the multiples of yarn strands or cloth strips in a given pattern. To measure the length of the rug woven a cloth yard tape was stapled every inch to determine by feel the work in progress.

As the loom stands in mute testimony to the hands on and unseeing eyes of its skilled and dextrous operator, one will ponder and be grateful to be created as a completely and fully capacitated person with all their faculties that nature has provided in life.



Mrs. Goguen's last piece of weaving

MONTHLY MEETINGS

January 4 - Cancelled due to inclement weather.

February 1 - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall. The guest speaker was Richard Kleber, National Park Ranger from the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Commission. He discussed the historical features of the Blackstone Canal. He stressed the problems of constructing the canal and the limitations of the two types of barges; passenger and freight, towed by horse power at about four miles per hour. His slides illustrated highlights of an interesting lecture.

March 1 - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall. The program was presented by the "Sons of Veterans Music", a fife and drum trio from Uxbridge. They played Civil War era field military music and rendered several encores of related music.

The Historical Society is presently involved with an ongoing inventory survey and classification of their museum artifacts, documents, costumes, photographs, and many items of Sutton's heritage. Our ultimate goal is to organize viable records for better determination in producing effective methods of preservation and to impliment a viable periodic display of Sutton memorabilia. To accomplish this project which is a "hands-on" experience of a potential familiarization into local cultural folklore. We will welcome volunteers to help achieve our commitment. If you are interested please phone Nora Pat Small, 865-2275 for details and assignment. Thank you.

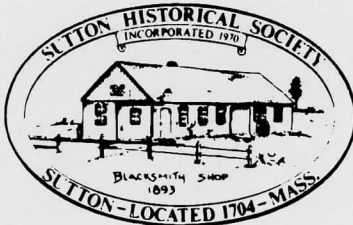
WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Leo Moroney

IN MEMORIAM

Marjorie C. Johnson

James A. Smith



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