

# THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS



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## Louise Ray Homestead

(HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL)

*PREFACE* — A provision in the Louise Ray will offered the Town of Sutton the first option to purchase this 18th century homestead adjacent to the Town Hall on the perimeter of the historic public common area. It was voted at the annual Town Meeting in May 1996 to purchase the property. An amendment to this article added the provision "...and after purchase to charge the Historical Commission with the responsibility and the authority to assure provision of nature of the property." —EDITOR

### HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL REPORT

The Mills' House 1729-1995 (Louise Ray House)  
Compiled by Donna MacLaren Rossio, July 1996  
for the Sutton Historical Society

Set on approximately 3.5 acres bordering the common and old cemetery, this house has been a significant structure in Sutton center since it was built in 1729 for the town's second minister. This house is the oldest building "on the common" and was first owned by Rev. David Hall whose 60 year ministry spanned Sutton's colonial period; then by his son, "Master Joseph" Hall, who sold the house to Rev. Edmund Mills and his son, Edmund J. Mills in 1819. The Mills' family owned this property through the 20th century. Each generation of these two families occupying the house played an influential role in the affairs of Sutton during their lifetimes. "The house could tell many tales of the long ago;..."(Sutton History, Vol. I, pg 247.)

The front door, facing north, allowed Rev. David Hall a direct route to the first meeting house located on the west side of the common facing east. When the second meeting house was built in 1751 opposite the "Brick Block" (Polly's Antiques) a continuous stone walk was laid from the front of this house to the south entrance of the meeting house. Some of the stones from the walk exist today in front of the Mills House. These stones were highly



EARLY 19TH CENTURY FRONT ENTRY  
FEDERAL DOORWAY WITH FAN LIGHT

revered as monuments to the past at the time of the writing of the Sutton's first town history in 1878 (see Sutton History, Vol. 1, pg. 75.)

The stone walls bordering the old Sutton center cemetery were built by Rev. David Hall in exchange for "herbage" and "pasturage" rights on land the town's Proprietor's had set aside for a burying place. During this time when Uxbridge Road did not exist, a county road ran behind the cemetery through Rev. David Hall's property; there is still evidence of the old county road on the property at 327 Boston Road, which was once part of property deeded by the town Proprietors to Rev. David Hall in 1729.

Rev. David Hall was born in 1706. Often referred to as Rev. Dr. Hall, he received a masters degree from Harvard in 1728 and the honorary degree of doctor of divinity from Dartmouth College. He followed a moderate course and was influential in church government, serving on numerous councils to settle disputes between pastors and congregations throughout New England. Rev. David Hall and his wife, Elizabeth (Prescott) had 13 children all born in this house; all became prominent and highly regarded citizens in their time. He died in Sutton at 83 years old in 1789; his wife died in 1803 at 90 years old.

Joseph Hall succeeded his father as owner of this house. Joseph, known as "Master Joseph," was educated at Harvard and dedicated to educating others. Joseph Hall died April 6, 1840 at 88 years old. His obituary in the "Worcester Spy" reads: "It is believed that he assisted more young men in their studies, preparatory to entering college, than almost any other person that has lived in the county of Worcester," Master Joseph Hall's gravestone is inscribed: "Teacher of the Learned Languages in this town for about 50 years and Town Clerk for nearly 30 years."

Soon after the death of Rev. Hall, the Rev. Edmund Mills was called to serve the town of Sutton. The Rev. Mills was born in Kent, Connecticut in 1752 and married the Mrs. Abigail (Moore) Packard on January 23, 1789. All six of their children were born in Sutton; Abigail's two children by her first marriage were brought up by Rev. Mills. The Rev. Mills lived in two other houses, both on Boston Road, in Sutton before purchasing the Hall House (since known as the Mills's House) with his son, Edmund John Mills, in 1819. The Rev. Edmund Mills died Nov. 7, 1825; his widow married for her third husband Rev. Nathaniel Emmons, D.D., of Franklin, MA. The Rev. Mills was "an uncommon man...universally respected and admired." He and Rev. Hall served the town of Sutton a combined total of 96 years.

After his father's death, Edmund J. Mills continued to live in the house until his death in 1889. Edmund J. Mills taught school for 16 years, was deputy sheriff for many years, was a justice of the peace and trial justice, served as Town Clerk and a representative in the legislature. It is said that Edmund J. Mills conducted more funerals than any other man in town, and his farm, that once contained a mulbedrry grove from which he fed worms to make silk, was one of the best of its size. The clergy were often entertained in the house and meetings of the Masonic Order were held in a second floor room with a star painted on the ceiling. (Although retouched, the star remains on the ceiling today.)

Edmund J. Mills married Sarah Tenney of Sutton in 1825. All of their six children were born in this house. Edmund's marriage to Sarah brought the influence of her prominent and well-known Sutton center family to the household.

Edmund and Sarah's youngest child, Sarah Maria Mills born August 18, 1841, never married and lived in the house until her death September 22, 1920. Sarah was an active citizen of town, serving as assistant high school teacher, member of the School Board, secretary of the Grange, trustee of the public library for 33 years and librarian for nearly 30 years. "Words cannot adequately express the influence the work of Miss Mills has had upon the town." (Sutton History, Vol. II, pg. 494.)

When Miss Mills' health began to fail in 1918, Franklin L. Mills, her brother, came with his family to live in the Mills Homestead. Franklin, born in 1836, was a civil engineer. He died February 14, 1919. Franklin's wife, Caroline (Morse) Mills continued to live in the house after his death with her daughter, Grace Mills Jordan and granddaughter, Caroline Helen Jordan.

Grace(Mills) Jordan, the only child of Franklin L. Mills was born November 14, 1891 and lived in the house from 1918 until her death in 1968. Grace Jordan served in the Sutton Public School system for 41 years as both teacher and principal in the Center and Wilkinsonville districts of Sutton. Mrs. Jordan was organist at the First Congregational Church for 50 years, choir director for 30 years and also was a music teacher, "giving lessons to countless boys and girls in the community." "Many residents here remember her as their teacher and as the teacher of their children and their children's children." (Obituary, The Evening Gazette, Fri., Dec. 27, 1968) She was also a member of the Grange (60 years), the DAR and the Mass. Women's Corps of World War II.

Louise Ray was born in Sutton, MA on March 26, 1906 and made her home with Mrs. Jordan. The youngest daughter of Herbert L. Ray, a prominent Sutton center resident, Louise spent a great deal of time in the Mills house as a child and the house became "home" to her. Louise Ray was principal of the Manchaug School in Sutton and the Burbank School in Millbury for 46 years. She also served in the Mass. Women's Corps during World War II. Louise Ray inherited the Mills' House after the death of her lifelong companion, Grace Mills Jordan, in 1968 and continued to live there until her death September 15, 1995.

There is probably no other house in Sutton whose history has touched more lives of its citizens than the Mills' House. The people who lived here nurtured the town, consistently serving the public from 1729 through the 20th century.

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# ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

by Nora Pat Small

*PREFACE* — Nora Pat Small, Phd, in *American Cultural History*, was a Sutton Historical Commission member and curator in the Sutton Historical Society before accepting a teaching position in Ohio last fall (1995).

The following is an excerpt from her, July 22, 1996, to Ben MacLaren, president of the Sutton Historical Society.  
—Editor

“I will try to summarize my initial impressions of the evolution of the place, but having had only a few hours to spend, I don’t claim this analysis to be the final word. To begin with, it is safe to say that the house has gone through many stages. I can say unequivocally that this place is a real gem. I fear that Sutton takes for granted its treasure trove of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses, not recognizing them for the truly rare collection that they are. If there is one thing I wish for Sutton, it is that its residents consider themselves stewards of a priceless landscape, built and natural. If the town were to put its collective energies behind the task, I’m sure that it could find a way to ensure minimal losses of its unmatched historical structures. Ah, well, that’s a topic for another time.

Back to the Ray house. I know that I have only just scratched the surface of its multitude of layers. The earliest part of the house appears to date to the early eighteenth century. It evidently had mid-eighteenth-century alterations, early nineteenth-century additions, and early twentieth-century alterations.

I will be more specific. The east and west ends of the main house (the main block, not including the ells) are very different in character. The oldest portion of the house is either everything east of the chimney stack (both floors), or everything east from, and including, the stair hall. The location of the chimney stack is a real puzzle for me. If that was the original stack, then I see no evidence of any early eighteenth-century framing in the eastern ends of the west rooms. It is possible that in the course of the early nineteenth-century remodeling, protruding framing was cut away to give the rooms a more modern appearance. On the other hand, it is also possible that the original chimney was removed when the house was expanded and a new stack built in the present location. In any case, the summer beams, exposed girts and plates, and two-story gun-stock corner posts in the east rooms indicate an early eighteenth-century date for that portion of the house. The false walls in the northeast rooms (first and second floors) are still a mystery.

Much of the boxing and molding in the east end of the house appears to date to the mid-eighteenth-century. I wonder if the old house was gussied up sometime around

1750 or so. If David Hall built the place in 1729 and lived there until 1789, he may have fixed it up after twenty or thirty years. It is conceivable that the Halls added onto the original house, but we cannot assume that they did so, even with thirteen children. Standards of privacy and “personal space” were different back then.

The current roof frame dates to the westward expansion of the main block of the house, but does not offer any solid dating clues (at least none that were visible in this cursory examination.) The five-sided ridge pole combined with principal rafters and purlins suggest that the roof was put on in the second half of the eighteenth century, but such framing would not have been unheard-of in early-nineteenth-century Sutton either. There is a fragment of what appears to be an end girt or chimney girt on the west side of the chimney stack. The filled-in floor boards in front of the stack suggest a possible location for an earlier stairwell.

The side ell roof has been raised over the old roof, which is still visible. Like the main house roof, this one has a five sided ridge and principal rafters. Instead of nicely tapered purlins, however, it has boards framed into the rafters. Combined with the evidence from the first floor—the 12/12 windows, the doors with raised panels on one side, flat on the other, the double-beading around the door panels and the stair balustrade—I would date this ell to the very early nineteenth century. The front stair hall was certainly remodeled at this time, as its Federal doorway and curving stair testify. The rear ell kitchen may date to the same renovation. Much of its hardware and woodwork suggest such a date.

The garage appears to be an early-twentieth century addition, and the shed behind it is somewhat later. I would guess that the expansion of the rear ell and the construction of the garage were contemporaneous. The craftsman details of the ell addition are, to my mind, every bit as valuable as the Federal additions.

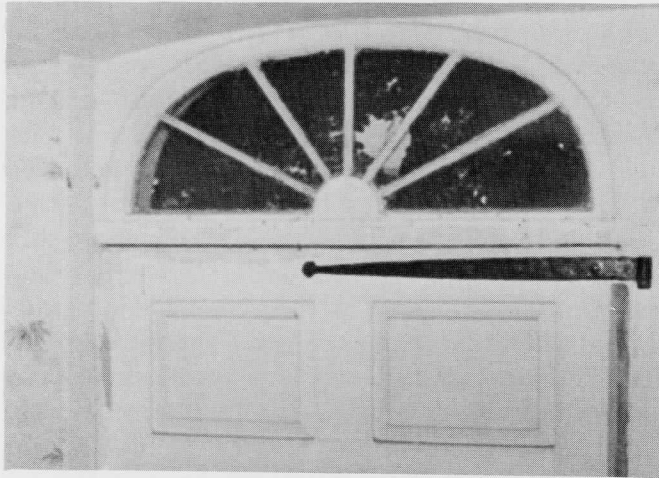
I could go on ad nauseum about all the wonderful details in this house, but I had better get my plug in for immediate preservation steps before I run out of time here. The cellars need to be ventilated and dried out. The floors have all been replaced already, probably because the old ones rotted from the damp. All large vegetation growing up against the house should be removed. It holds in moisture and its roots can damage the foundation. At the same time, I would recommend preserving as much of the historic landscape as possible. Ideally, someone should map the vegetation before much of it is removed. That same map could include other historic landscape elements such as the step stones that you and Donna and I observed. Come to think of it, this yard would probably make an excellent site for an archaeological dig. I noticed that in the back there is some asphalt or concrete that butts up



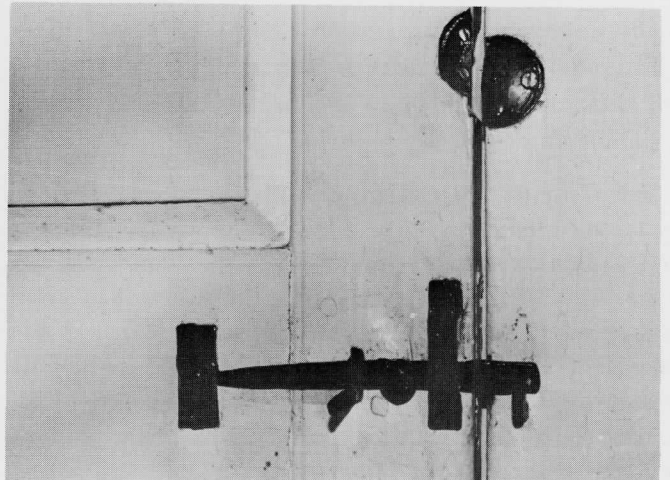
against the house. This should be removed as well. It too will hold moisture against the house.

I believe this house and site are eligible for listing on the National Register on both architectural and historic

criteria. It may be the most historic structure on the town common. It would be a shame if it can't be preserved one way or another."



EARLY 19TH CENTURY FRONT ENTRY FEDERAL DOORWAY WITH FAN LIGHT

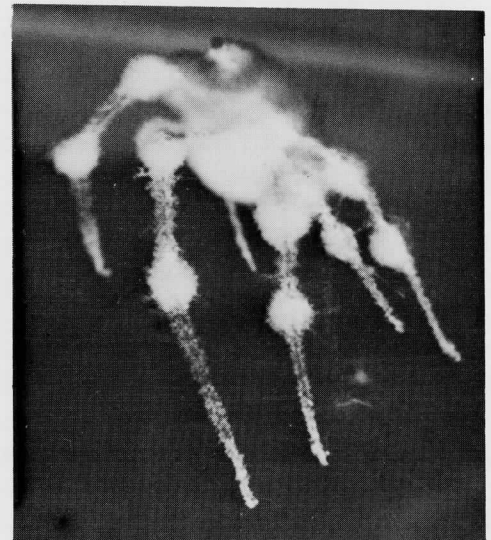


HAND-WROUGHT INTERIOR DOOR LATCH



UNIQUE 19TH CENTURY CIRCULAR STAIRWAY

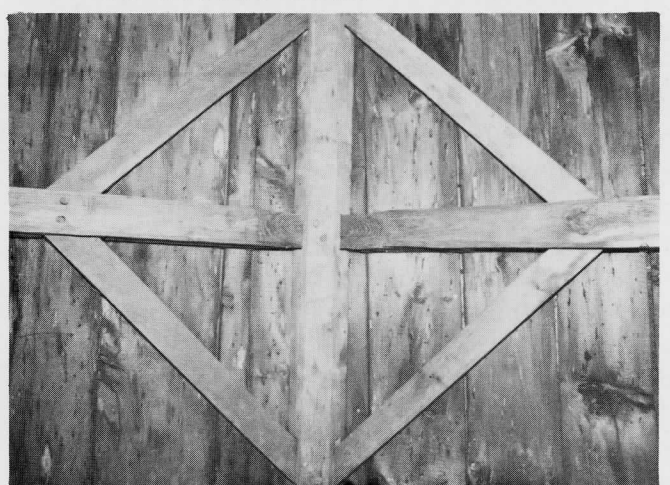
DETAILS  
IN THE  
LOUISE RAY  
HOMESTEAD



MUMMIFIED SPIDER SKELETON ON CELLAR BEAM



EARLY 19TH CENTURY SHALLOW BEDROOM FIRE BOX



ROOF FRAMING DETAIL. WIND BRACING OF 5-SIDED RIDGE POLE AND RAFTERS

## MUSEUM UPDATE

Nora Pat Small, Phd (Amer. Culultural Hist.), the former curator began identifying, cataloging and systemizing the collection until her departure in the fall of '95 to accept a position in Ohio. With a well established methodology the present curator, Paul Brosnihan, has efficiently itemized over 1000 items and established rotation of displays. The expansion of our genealogical records is another function. At the monthly meetings educational programs are being presented at 8 pm.\*The museum is located by Town Hall/Fire Station in the General Rufus Putnam Hall. The museum is open on Tuesday from 7-9 pm or by appointment with Paul Brosnihan. phone (508) 865-5377 for information.

\*The public is invited.

## 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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4 Uxbridge Rd., Sutton, MA 01590.*

## MONTHLY MEETINGS

**July 5** -A potluck supper was held at the Blacksmith Shop and plans were made for the July flea market.

**August 6** - The Society met at the Eight Lots School House for a 6p.m. potluck supper. The nominating committee report with their list of candidates to be published in September for action on at the Annual Business meeting in October.

**November 7** - The Society met at the Manchaug Church at 8 pm. A revised list of candidates for appointment to be the officers and board of directors was submitted and it was voted favorably to accept the list submitted. Joseph Barbato and Stephen LeClaire are upgrading information of the Civil War records in Sutton. The usual annual auction sale at the December meeting may be omitted because of diminishing interest. Plans for the Society to participate in the December "Chain of Lights" program were discussed. Francis T. Jacques, Sr., nee, Arrow Maker, gave an interesting talk on Indian culture.

**December 5** - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 pm. The Society will participate in the "Chain of Lights" program in Sutton by opening the Museum to visitors December 9th. John Gagne donated eleven glass negative of Manchaug to the Society from which Malcolm Pearson has made photographic prints for the Museum records. Several items from the Louise Ray estate auction were on display. At the Board of Director's meeting November 15th the following officers were elected; President, Ben MacLaren; Vice President, Carl Hutchinson; Treasurer, Eleanor Hutchinson; Assistant Treasurer, Carl Hutchinson; Recording Secretary, Barbara Weaver, Corresponding Secretary; Mary Arakelian; Curator, Paul Brosnahan; Assistant Curator, Ruth Putnam; Historian, Mary B. King. A committee was appointed consisting of Wayne Krause, Chairman, Barbara Weaver, Secretary, and Carl Hutchinson, Member to review the 1989 ByLaws and report any suggested amendments. Robert White from Millbury presented a tape of the Blackstone Canal and introduced Lois Karaceus who gave a reading.

**January 1996** - Meeting postponed due to inclement weather.

**February 6** - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 pm. Richard Kanary will replace Wayne Krause on the by-law committee due to conflicting activities. Harold Richardson, a teacher at Grafton High School provided an interesting display of antique wood planes and other unique colonial tools with a detailed description of each.

**March 5** -The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 pm. Curator Paul Brosnahan, reported on several donations to the museum and Blacksmith Shop. Martin Bowden, professor at Clark University, with three of his students rendered an unusual revolution on cemetery changes in respect to historical evolutionary customs pertaining to cultural influences that reflect transitions of life-styles.

**April 2** - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 pm. The by-law committee submitted a revised version along with a copy of the 1989 by-laws for comparison. Copies were given to members present for review and consideration. At the next meeting members will vote on their acceptance. John Petragila of Douglas discussed "Understanding Old Houses", a subject which encompassed three hundred years of dwelling development.

**May 1** -The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 pm. Paul Brosnahan reported on museum activities. Albert Martin and Malcolm Pearson have finished restoring the West Sutton Post Office cabinet of mail boxes, ca 1750 (?) - 1901 to be on display in the museum. By law committee chairman, Carl Hutchinson presented the rationale for the recommended amendments to the 1989 by-laws specifically the officers and directors nomination and selection procedures. Following this explanation the membership present voted to accept the amendments as recommended by the committee. Don Frabotta, an actor for twenty years, in the TV episodes of "Days of Our Lives" as a bartender, related about the many unscheduled instances of miscues in taping the show over the years in this "SOAP" production. He has now retired to live in this area.

**June 4** - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall at 8 pm. Two changes on the Society staff was announced. They are Donald King, former director and caretaker of the Manchaug Baptist Church (owned by the Society) to be assumed by Daniel Griffith. Also, Ruth Putnam, a director for many years and assistant curator resigned and will be replaced by Donna Rossio, having had a length of activity in museum inventory and documentation. Copies of the new by-laws will be distributed at the next meeting. Dawn Bennett has painted the lettering on a replica of the Blacksmith Shop sign which had badly deteriorated. The flea market date will be July 6. Donna Rossio spoke about paintings and stencilings on walls in old houses. Particularly in two houses in the Eight Lots Road area that have identical design created between 1810-1820.

**July 2** - The Society met at the Blacksmith Shop at 6 pm for a potluck supper. President Ben MacLaren announced the members for 1996-1997 as follows; Carl Hutchinson, chair, Barbara Weaver, secretary, Richard Kanary, Helen Ordnung, and Richard Lindstrom and Alyse Aubin. The surveying instruments used in 1830-31 for surveying the Sutton-Millbury bounds will be on loan from the museum to be on display in the Millbury Town Hall for a period of six weeks. James Moffat, cooper (barrel maker), demonstrated the process of crafting a barrel.

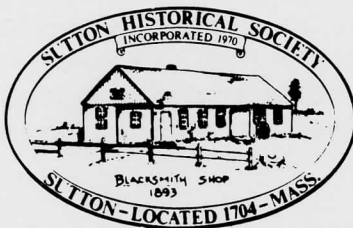
**August 6** - The Society met at the Eight Lots School House at 6 pm for a pot luck supper. The nominating committee reported a selected list of nominees for officer/directors for 1996-97 as follows; president, Ben MacLaren; Vice President, Carl Hutchinson; Treasurer, Eleanor Hutchinson; Assistant Treasurer, Carl Hutchinson; Recording Secretary, Barbara Weaver; Corresponding Secretary, Mary Arakelian; Historian, Mary B. King; Directors, Ralph Gurney and Wayne Krause (at the next directors meeting the curator and assistant curator will be selected as provided in the revision of the by-laws). Plans for the Labor Day flea market were discussed. John Sinacola spoke about beekeeping and as being a beekeeper.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Elaine Brehio      Phillip E. Smith      Charles Putnam      John Woodbury      Walter and Shirley Stockwell

### IN MEMORIAM

Dorothy Day      Arthur Ordnung      Amorel Henery      Doris VanTwyver      Louise Ray



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