

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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My Brother Ben

by Alice MacLaren Anderson

My brother Ben - Benjie to me - should have written a book. He was funny. He was articulate. And there wasn't much he didn't know about stuff that interested him, like Sutton folk, the town, our farm and our genealogy.

But he couldn't spell to save his soul.

I remember one time in particular when I was a kid. Ben had gone off with Doc Schwab and a couple of other guys from Sutton High on one of those summer-long jaunts that Doc would do for students he liked and had earned a good vacation.

Ben and Doc and the others had gotten as far as Mount Something-or-Other out west and stopped at the top to enjoy the view. Ben apparently had "to go" - which he did - and somebody took a picture of him - back view - of course, at the edge of the mount. Ben thoughtfully sent the print back to our parents, but not before writing on the back: "The paws that refreshes!"

Like I said, he couldn't spell.

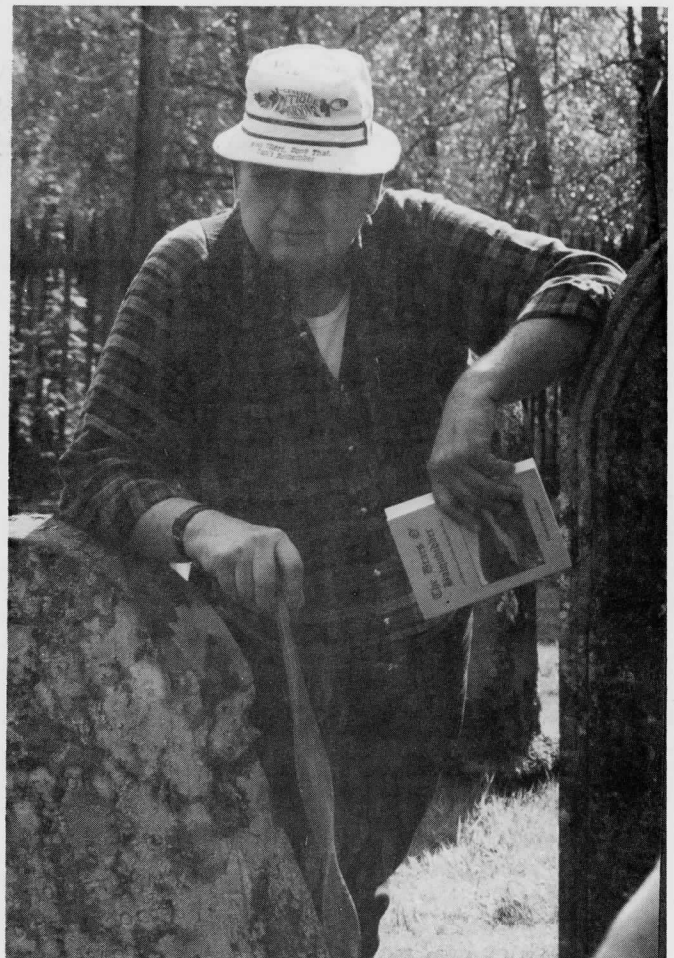
None-the-less, he should have written a book.

He was good with words. For effect, he sometimes used a little journalistic privilege. But he was good.

Occasionally he'd write something for the Historical Society's Bulletin. For several weeks afterward - even longer - people around town would comment about it. And they'd save it - like it was a piece of history or something. I guess it really was.

Take, for instance, a piece he called "The Way It Was."

"Faith Smith always sang the solo. I loved to hear her sing. Her brother-in-law, Channing Smith, was in



Benjamin MacLaren

Born 3/13/1932 - Died 6/28/1999

President of the Sutton Historical Society 5 years.

the choir, too. He was a note off and a word behind everyone else. I think it was because he 'followed' his brother, Tighe, who was in tune and on the right word. Channing sang with his teeth clenched shut to keep his dentures in place so the sound was more like a powerful hum. It came from his heart rather than his chest and

added another dimension to 'four part'."

"Women always wore hats to church. They usually had a feather sticking out somewhere and we all thought that was beautiful. Now society has progressed to realize that the feathers are better left on the bird."

In that same piece, Ben remembered watching Bucky Smith, climbing up the exterior of the new steeple at First Congregational Church, then standing tip-toed to replace the weather vane, blown off, like the steeple, in that famous Hurricane of 1938. Ben considered Bucky's work "more interesting" than parker chasing.

Ben and his pals did their share of parker chasing and he recalled those escapades as if they were safaris to Africa. His bright blue eyes would crinkle at the edges from the humor of it all and that ample belly of his would jiggle when he remembered roping back bumpers - or front, whichever would execute the better quick-stop - to trees, then running like Hades to watch with glee the parker's attempted fast get away. He said he never knew what suffered the most: the bumpers, the trees or the wounded male ego.

He was equally jubilant in tales about the placement of some unsuspecting farmer's outhouse on the Lund mansion lawn - an annual Halloween event. Ben and the troops would load a "borrowed" two-holer on his old Maxwell truck, they'd all climb aboard, and Ben would shift it into first, then second and third for the trip to Lunds'. The one-man part-time police department always looked the other way until the chief or his deputy answered the complaint the next morn, called the culprits to task, and the Maxwell would make the return trip.

The Maxwell never roared off to anywhere - in fact, it did its best to make 60 on a good downhill. Ben could slow her to 15 or 20 by shifting down, with a grind of the stick shift that stuck up from the floorboards like an old baseball bat. Using the brake could be risky business; downshifting always worked.

Like the old Ben-mobile, a Dodge K-car that he drove right up to the last few minutes of his life, Ben loved that old Maxwell. I've still got the newspaper clipping of it with Ben at the fore, hands firmly gripped on the small black steering wheel, his then-svelte body leaning toward forwards, with a grin as broad as those on the schoolmates who filled the front seat and rear body. The Maxwell, its bed built from scrap wood and pieces of iron for stability, was transportation through summer heat when the radiator boiled over and winter cold when it took ear muffs and heavy coats and blankets to make the run. Ben and his Maxwell were

part of the horizon then.

He drove the Maxwell to Cape Cod one summer - to the place in Truro that George Jordon, Dad's buddy, loaned us each year. He said it took him from morning to late afternoon to make the distance, but they made it - and back - on faith. Ben did a lot on faith and trust - sort of his trademark.

I always figured that Ben's attraction to junk - be it good or bad, valuable or not, stemmed from the Maxwell. He and our brother, Eddy, who helped engineer the thing - were as proud of that old green heap as if they'd masterminded a new Buick. He and Eddy and their cohorts wrote things on the side of it, like "Don't laugh, your daughter may be in it," and "To Worcester (or somewhere) or Bust," and "Driver's side," on where else, the driver's side.

I don't think he ever truly got over the demise of the Maxwell - and to tell the truth, I don't remember whatever happened to it. But he forever maintained a hospice for terminally-ill vehicles whether the many at MacLaren Inc. or the one or two he kept at home for transportation. Shiny didn't matter; almost-dependable did and he seldom switched to another until the last belch.

Generally his joyful wreck was filled with all manner of things. I remember one night when he arrived in the Ben-mobile to pick me up for a round of Saturday night Pitch with some old friends.

"Hey, Lampwick! Climb in," he said, pointing toward the back seat and the pile of old sofa cushions he was saving for God-only-knew-why. "Where?" I asked. "I guess you're gonna have to lay on top of 'em," he said, and waited patiently while I maneuvered up and over to perch like some hunched bald eagle treed over the Wachusett.

"Ready?" he asked. "Yup!" I said. "Didja close the door?", he asked. "How?" I asked. "I dunno, but didja?" he asked. "Nope!" I said. "Why?" he asked, then mumbled something about slipping the clutch on the uphill should do the trick. It did.

Benjie loved animals, particularly cats he dubbed with names like "Vartkis." And he thought nothing of slamming on the brakes to avoid striking down some small wild thing, often to the detriment of his front seat passenger. He figured a bumped head fixed. A dead animal didn't.

"Connie Crosier's folks had the first TV set in town. Before that, we went down to Millbury and watched Milton Berle on the set in the window of Sweet's radio store. Hours were spent there standing on the sidewalk.

Connie was very popular anyway, but someone less so could have become popular overnight if their parents only had the foresight to invest. It could have served better than a 'reputation'. Reception was a black and white snow storm. The antenna was always blowing off the roof taking squares of shingles with it. Weather announcers were girls with odd dimensions and a talent for writing backwards on the other side of a glass weather chart. I think that the big tall one was called Dagmar. It was really kind of neat."

Ben remembered a lot of things, like the day Jimmie Smith was driving the 1941 Ford fire truck and his false teeth fell off the seat where he'd put them for safe keeping. Morris Perry was following behind in the old Ford chain drive tanker, and ran over the teeth. Ben said the teeth thus became "forever a part of Hovey Hill."

Ben had pet names for everybody - some good, some he wouldn't repeat face-to-face. A Theta Chi Fraternity brother was Ing-Va, his dyslexia version of Irving.

He called me "Lampwick" - always did and always would have had he outlived me. I think he would have insisted that the nickname be included in my obituary. Anybody familiar with Pinocchio knows about Lampwick. But I never considered myself a bad influence on Ben - always seemed to me like it was the other way around.

Ben and Eddy picked on me - a lot. I was six years Ben's junior and eight years Eddy's. We grew up on Milestone Farm, the homestead there on Boston Road that's been home to the Batchellers for generations. We all had our chores. But if things slacked off it was the two of them against the one of me. A favorite game was "Push Alice Down The Hill In The Babycarriage - Head For the Stonewall." Ben thought it was hilarious.

Ben was a creature of habit. For instance, I always knew when he was thinking about something or was teed off at someone for what he perceived to be their poor judgement on matters political or otherwise. He would lean his elbows on whatever flat surface happened to be in front of him and twirl the self-made cowlick that had, over the years, made itself available to the big stubby fingers he'd inherited from our Dad. He'd do that for however long it took him to settle whatever complication was digging at him.

Ben was a man of many words when he was trying to get a point across, expounding like a Colonial preacher on a subject of cause close to his heart - and a man of few when the point didn't make its mark. Then he'd twirl his cowlick and mull it over, often, I thought,

to figure a new approach.

He was dedicated, a gentle giant of a Celtic man who held forth at the dangerous end of generosity giving away much more than he ever had. For some reason he believed others needed what little he had more than he did. He asked for little and expected little more than the riches of friendship and good conversation. He loved to meet up with folks "at the gas station" and often brought stuff there to spike interest. He could be found at the blacksmith shop, or the Blue Jay, or pouring over stuff at his beloved Historical Society, hunkering down with his pals of like mind. He found ways to get things done, like hiring the prisoners from Worcester County Jail to paint the Manchaug Baptist Church. He called them "my prisoners," and took coffee and donuts to them each day to "keep 'em happy." He liked to introduce them around, proud of the work he had found for them to do, like a father protecting a wayward child. To his way of thinking, not one had meant to do anything bad. "They just got a little waylaid."

Ben may have been degreed from Umass., but he held a Ph.D. from the University of Human Kindness.

Toward the end, Ben was pretty lame from a bad hip. And he couldn't see very well, anxious for the eye surgery that would give him back his books and important papers that were his teachers. He wanted to dig again into the old facts and stories of his town, and, much more, the stuff of his MacLaren ancestry. He longed for one last trip home to Scotland to dig some more. His roots, like Sutton and all that it was, is, and had been, were important to him, and he wanted to be there again. But life was too short; circumstance too long.

In his piece, "The Way It WAS," Benjie wrote this: "We can't go back in time and have our hair back just the way it was. Those scars left by life are there to testify to the way it was. We cannot deny the past. It enriches us equally as much as it broadens our back sides and lowers our chests. 'If I should die before I wake.' What a horrible prayer! But if I do, these are my memories: not all of them, but some. And that's the way it is." Indeed.

Memories of Ben MacLaren

by Paul Brosnihan

To go through life and have friends is a fortunate thing. To go through life and have Ben MacLaren as a friend is a blessing.

I first happened upon Ben at a political function in

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Millbury. I was introduced to him by a mutual friend. I sat at the table with the two of them, herself and Ben. She praised him telling me of his fine qualities. He sat there saying nothing, showing neither agreement nor disagreement at her words. He showed no embarrassment as she went on about what fine man he was. He just sat there expressionless.

It came out he was a Scot. She told me this as she was Irish, as I was, and she knew I'd understand he was a fellow Celt. Something made me hand him an Irish coin I had brought back from Ireland. It had the Celtic harp upon it and on the reverse an image from the Book of Kells.

A few years went by and our paths crossed again, and the crossing stopped in its tracks and the paths became one. For three years we went about the work of collecting and preserving artifacts for the Sutton Historical Society's museum.

"Ben, you can't sit and read every book, every scrap of paper. We'll be here for hours. We'll suffocate in this attic heat and the dust we're disturbing and surrounding ourselves with. Put the stuff in boxes and we'll look it over in the museum."

"You're right, you're right," Ben answered and then returned to his reading the paper he had just picked up. "Hopeless," I thought. "He's being himself as usual."

The two of us spent days in Sutton attics gathering papers and artifacts of Sutton's past. Three attics, two barns and a couple of houses we went through, gathering box loads of what Ben always referred to as "stuff."

Ben called it stuff, but he knew what he saw in front of him in the attics, the barns, the houses. He knew the past, knew his history, knew Sutton's history and past, knew America's history and he knew Scotland's history.

He came from English and Scot families. He leaned toward his Scot family. He did not give up on his English family but he leaned toward his Celtic past. It wasn't long before the two of us knew our Celtic past was strong in both of us and we talked about things on that basis. We listened to the same music, songs from the past of Ireland and Scotland, and used the English language as it was adopted by Celtic culture, not knowing we were doing so, but understanding our mutual phrasing and playing with the English language. All of you who knew Ben, knew he was a master of saying it just right and most times surprising the listener with the way he said his thoughts and meanings. He fascinated my young son Tim telling him stories of the past or just talking to him about ordinary everyday

happenings.

"What are you going to do with Bishop Wright's picture?" Ben asked me. We had bought some old framed pictures at an antique store in Upton. I wanted the frames to use at the museum. I had taken the pictures from three frames and had the fourth one in my hand to remove the picture. "I'm going to use the frames for something thing here in the museum."

"That's Bishop Wright," Ben said. "I know, I'm going to use the frame," I told him. "Put that picture on the wall here in the office," Ben directed me. "Ben, it's a Catholic Bishop," I said. "He was a great man," Ben said. "I remember him. He was the first one to get Protestants and Catholics talking to each other. He belongs here upon the wall, in my office," Ben insisted. "But, Ben it's a Catholic Bishop."

You see, I had a lot to learn from Ben, trailing along with him from attic to attic, barn to barn, house to house, conversation to conversation. "He was a great man, and got us to talking to each other," Ben repeated.

The picture of Bishop Wright is there on the wall facing the piles of papers on Ben's desk, accumulated over the years as Ben always got caught up in a book or scrap of paper every time he began sorting the piles.

Maybe the blending of mutual understanding Ben and I came to realize, and the blending of all of us over the past is symbolized by the Bishop's picture on the wall, placed there by Ben who always recognized the good in everyone, in all of us who came across his path, no matter our outward differences.

Bishop Wright would have been blessed to have Ben MacLaren as a friend. Yes, even a Bishop would have been blessed knowing Ben.

The Bell in the Sutton Congregational Church Tower

submitted by Deacon Jim Brigham from the Archives
of The First Congregational Church

April 9, 1865, the date of the surrender of Lee to Grant at the court house in Appomattox, Virginia. The news spread at astonishing speed (considering the facilities of the times) and everywhere, particularly in New England, the rejoicing was unanimous.

In many towns the Church bell was the instrument of public call for any good reason, and it was so in Sutton. Not satisfied with pulling the rope that hung in the balcony, the men climbed the tower, and, standing beside the bell, pushed the great ringer wheel, swinging

it to its full orbit. It was a glorious sound (how be it, a little hard on the ears) and they took turns making it peal out to the far countryside. When one man was weary, there was another to quickly take his place and the ringing went on and on. Any citizen who wondered "why" found a quick answer from someone going by, and so the people gave vent to their joy and thanksgiving.

There must have been some good-natured competition among the ringers. Letting the bell swing with its own 1600 pounds weight made a grand sound, but a push on the wheel added a further force to the clapper and thus the peal was increased. After some time at this, one strong hand gave the wheel an extra heavy push and after that a very slight difference in the sound came. As the ringing continued, the strange sound increased, until it wasn't fun anymore - feelings of the ringers were tinged with apprehension. The ringing stopped and the men descended.

The real test came on Sunday next, a sunny spring day. As the people gathered for services they noticed a definite change in the sound of the bell, and after much grave discussion it was decided that close examination was called for. This disclosed that the bell had been really broken.

The Sunday ringing was ordered stopped, and as the months and years came and went there was much talk about the bell and discussion of what further action should be taken concerning it. Finally, it was agreed that so valuable a piece should not hang there idle, and after full arrangements were made, the bell was gently lowered to the Common and hauled to the depot at Millbury. The Meneely Bell Company of West Troy, New York, would recast it and send it back to continue its melodious call for Sunday services and other events by the town. So it happened that in the spring of 1884 notice was received from the railroad that the bell had arrived and should be removed to its rightful place. Six span of oxen were brought and the bell placed on a stone-boat. The spring had left the roads soft enough for easy passage and the trip to the Sutton Common went easily enough. Next was faced the problem of how to raise it to its proper place in the tower. A retired sea captain, Luther Little, lived near by and from his stock of boat gear brought rope and tackle, and a rig was built outside the steeple, high enough above the bell room to bring it to the proper height. Finally, all was ready. The six span of oxen were hitched to the line and the call for action came from the drivers. But the footing in the Common was not as the road and after

many attempts it was finally admitted that the twelve oxen had more than they could handle. Many ideas were suggested and tried but they all ended in failure.

About this time the high school and "lower school," nearby, released the students for recess and the excitement on the Common quickly drew the boys and girls to the scene of the action. Seeing them, one of the men got a good idea. Why not have the young folks pull with the oxen? Lines were attached and a shout brought virtually every student to the scene. A bit of organization followed and when the command to "Pull" was given, all worked together and the bell began to rise. This brought a cheer from all the onlookers, anxiously watching, and further strengthened the pullers. With the creek of tight rope through old pulleys, the bell finally was lifted to the proper height and the guide ropes, manned by experienced workmen, pulled it into the proper section of the tower. Not long after that the bell was set in its proper place, with new ropes and guides installed, and its clear strong voice was again heard in the town.

Many persons had been involved in this rebuilding enterprise, whose names have been lost to us. But there are still some people in town who remember their "pulling part" in the bell's replacement, and this is written that future generations will not forget.

History of the Sutton Fire Department

This history of the Fire Department of the Town of Sutton Massachusetts was prepared in 1976 during the observance of the National Bicentennial of the United States of America, 1776-1976. The majority of this history was gathered by Daniel S. Smith. Some dates listed are approximate.

The Fire Department Bicentennial committee:

Chairman: James B. Brigham (Deputy Chief, S.F.D., Center Company)

Members: Daniel S. Smith (Retired Chief, S.F.D.),
Ellery B. Smith (Chief, S.F.D.)
Henry Plante (Deputy Chief, S.F.D., Manchaug Company)
Sidney Frieswick (Captain, S.F.D., Center Company)
John Peterson (1st Lt. S.F.D., Center Company)
George Richard (1st Lt. S.F.D., Manchaug Company)
Paul Maynard (S.F.D., Manchaug Company)

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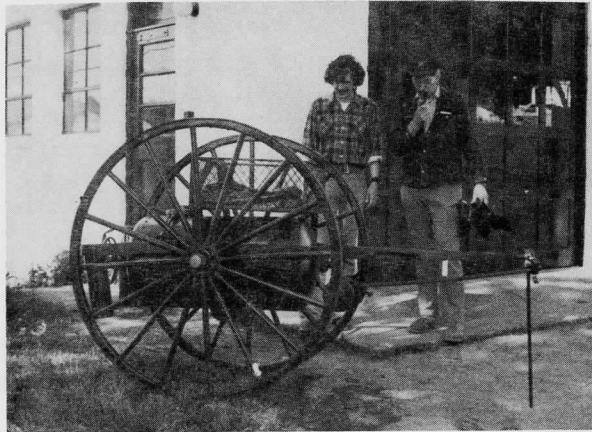
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Ernest Minor (S.F.D., Wilkinsonville Company)

The history of the Sutton Fire Department really began in 1905 after the south side of the town common was scathed by fire. The community tended its problems with bucket brigades, rakes, brooms and the like. It was a cold winter night near Thanksgiving, 1907. Three houses burned down in that holocaust.

The following year Sutton purchased two 25-gallon soda and acid chemical wagons. One was housed at West Sutton and the other in the basement section at the new school building in the Center, later known as the Sutton High School (which was razed in 1968). The town also bought two hose wagons, one each for Manchaug and Wilkinsonville, carrying 2-1/2" hose to lay from hydrants and water systems owned by the mills in the respective villages, until later years when private water companies took over the ownership.

The new equipment was hand-drawn, each with a short handle. Two men, one on each side guided or held back the equipment and another eight or more men were the horsepower on a long rope out front.

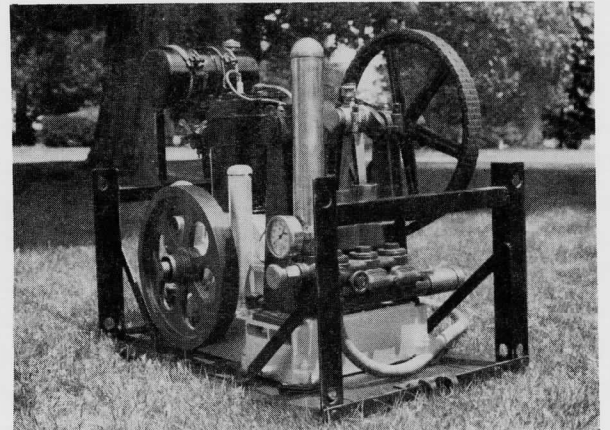


About this same time, Ransom H. Richardson was appointed Fire Warden holding the position until 1919 when S. Martin Shaw was appointed. The designation became Fire Chief and Forest Warden. Equipment in 1919 included the four hand-drawn pieces, about two dozen soda and acid 2-gallon fire extinguishers and shovels and rakes for forest fire work.

It was the spring of 1924 when the Great Manchaug fire struck. The fire spread quickly on a windy day of May engulfing two garages, the large Catholic Church and many private homes. It nearly wiped out the section south of the Mumford River known as "The Flats". The fire was fought solely with Millbury, Douglas and Whitinsville equipment pumping from Mumford River, but too late and too little to save much. Sutton's

equipment was useless. Unfortunately, Whitinsville's 750 GPM pumper, a 1921 Sea-graves, (later bought by Sutton in 1952) was out of commission with its wheels in Worcester being converted from solid rubber tires to pneumatic tires. Part of the catastrophe might have been avoided had this modern piece of equipment been available.

In 1926, Sutton bought its first power (gasoline) driven pump called a Fitzhenry Guptil. Mounted on skids and weighing approximately 600 lbs., it took 4 husky men to lift and carry it. Chief Shaw had a Reo truck at his farm and arranged a platform to slide the heavy pump onto the truck body during a fire call along with coils of 1-1/8" fire hose and two dozen 2-gallon soda and acid fire extinguishers, shovels and rakes. Another farm close by was Arthur Donaldson's; he also owned a Reo truck, and at times when the Shaw truck was loaded or out of order, Donaldson filled in for emergency. This process was slow. At times a fire got quite a start. A second Fitzhenry Guptil was purchased in 1927. It was placed in Manchaug at Napoleon Conley's garage and under his direction as a fireman.



Sutton bought its first truck in 1928, a G.M.C., 1 ton chassis with cab. It was probably the first fire truck in the area with a cab to protect the driver. The truck was stored at the Shaw farm, and its body was made of oak lumber felled from the farm, sawed at the family mill at West Sutton and built by Chief S. Martin Shaw and his Sons, Walter, Kenneth, Eliot and Norman.

The town's number 1 Fitzhenry Guptil pump was fitted into the G.M.C.'s body for easy removal as a portable, to set-up at a water supply. The large reel taken from the Manchaug hand-drawn hose wagon was fitted onto the G.M.C.'s body to carry about thirteen hundred feet of 1-1/8" hose for quick layout.

In 1933, it became apparent there was a need that water be carried on the G.M.C. for chimney and small

grass fires. The Farrar Co. of Woodville built a 125-gallon booster tank and permanently installed a 250 gallon per minute front mount pump. It provided quick water supply.

About 1940, we had a large forest fire off Lincoln Road near the Northbridge line. It burned out of control three days and was finally extinguished near Hicks Pond and the Purgatory State Forest to the West, and near Adam's Farm in Northbridge to the East. Also, on the third day, a separate large forest fire burned between Barnett, Mendon and Whitins Road to Oakhurst Road. Afterward, Sutton became fire conscious once more. Through the influence of Walter Shaw, who was taking part of his father's responsibility, the town voted to purchase a new fire truck from Farrar Company. This was a 1941 Ford, 1-ton, with a 300 gallon tank, 250-gallon per minute front mount Barton-American pump, hose reel for 1-1/8" hose and bays for 1-1/2" National Standard thread hose. Sutton was one of the first in the state to use 1-1/2" hose on trucks. The body was fitted with a compartment for the Fitzhenry Guptil pump with rollers for easy removal. This truck was put in service in September, 1941, and unfortunately, had a bad accident on the first fire call. At Ray Lane and Central Turnpike, the truck and a car collided, ripping off the front mount pump and damaging the front end, but it was quickly repaired and back in service.



When the new Ford arrived at the Shaw farm in 1941, the 1928 G.M.C. was transferred to Wilkinsonville. It was stored summers at Daniel S. Smith's barn on Boston Road, and in winter in a partially heated garage near D. T. Dudley Shuttle Co., owned by Daniel M. Chase. It was at this time that Wilkinsonville formed the first organized fire company in Sutton with bylaws. It was called Co. #3 because it was in precinct #3. Selectmen accepted it and the next year the company furnished the first fire department

report to be published in the annual town report. We should note here that when the new Ford truck arrived in 1941, the Fitzhenry Guptil was removed from the G.M.C. and put on the Ford..... but it wasn't long before we realized we were not always able to get the G.M.C. near enough water supplies to draft water. We went to the town in 1943 and purchased a four cylinder Hercules engine with 150 G.P.M. direct connected pump on skids. Although the outfit was heavy, it was stored on the G.M.C. truck and served admirably at several fires especially the Fred Batcheller barn fire in late December, 1943. With snow on the ground we were able to tow the skids to a water supply in the pasture. The pump supplied enough water for two 1-1/2" fire hoses with good pressure.

In 1942 Sutton purchased another 1941 Ford almost identical to the one at Shaw farm and housed it in the Conley garage in Manchaug. About this time a stall was outfitted in the basement of Town Hall with overhead doors to house the Ford from the Shaw farm. This made a fair distribution of equipment throughout the town with one piece in each precinct.

S. Martin Shaw resigned as Fire Chief in 1944 after being appointed for the 25th year. That April, Daniel S. Smith was appointed Chief and Forest Warden. One of his first efforts was to have joint meetings of the three precincts, allowing the men to become better acquainted and to work together as a unit. Organized departments were soon formed in the #1 and #2 precincts with bylaws and officers. It worked well.

The state law at that time did not permit the towns to insure fire equipment against accidents. Driver's were required to take full responsibility. Chief Smith insisted that the drivers be protected by insurance and the town paid him a salary of \$300.00 which he used to insure the drivers. In the early 1950's the legislature authorized towns to insure drivers. The salary was then withdrawn from the chief at that time. The chief worked unsalaried until 1967, when a vote at town meeting gave him \$1,500.

Apology

Sincere apologies to Malcolm D. Pearson for any inaccuracies or misleading statements found in the July 1999 article "Ebenezer Waters Tomb, April 1, 1999", by Bud Gurney. Any inferences that Mr. Pearson acted contrary to the Massachusetts state laws regarding burial sites were incorrect and unintentional.

**February 1st meeting - 7:30 pm, in our Manchaug Baptist Church
Ranger Chuck Arning - History of the Blackstone Valley**

**March 7th meeting - 7:30 pm, in our Manchaug Baptist Church
Re-enactor George Sampson portrays William Blackstone**

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Tom & Hazel Ryan

Ernest Balazf



General Rufus Putnam Hall
4 Uxbridge Road, Sutton, MA 01590

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