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A Newly Donated Civil War Letter

by Wilder S. Holbrook

Camp Opposite  
Fredricksburg, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> 1862

Dear Jennie,

I suppose you will be a little anxious to hear from the 36<sup>th</sup>. After going over the river and coming back. Thursday we were in line all day but did not move at night. Came back to camp for the night. Next morning (Friday) we formed our line again at 8 o'clock and started, marched over the river. Stayed in the city all day and night. Next morning (Saturday) moved about half a mile below the town into a deep ravine out of sight of the enemy although in range of their guns for they dropped a few shell very near us into the river so they didn't do much hurt.

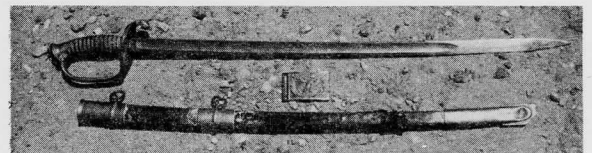


Wilder Holbrook 1862

We stayed there till most night when they moved us across a large plain to reinforce General Franklin. While we were in the flat we had a fine view of what was going on the enemy firing their artillery from their masked batteries. Ours were out in the field. We could see the smoke from the muskets but could not see the men the smoke was so thick. This was about the hardest of the fight. Everything looked as though we should have a brush. Before a great while they formed us in a line in an orchard behind a little hill to keep us out of sight. We stood all ready to march till after dark then we layed down, went to sleep but with idea we should have to go in the morning. At half past two Sunday A.M. we were called up. We marched out

towards the front and placed on the edge of a ravine down just enough to get out of sight, to support a battery.

Then we thought we were going to have a hack at them but at daylight we were marched where we were the day before in the valley. We cooked our breakfast but before we had eaten it we had to fall in. I took mine along what I had, not a great deal for I have had the Jaunois over a week and didn't feel like eating a great deal. That morning we went up to the city and stayed there all day in the mud behind some houses near the river. At night we went back to our old place again. Stayed there all night and next day (Monday) though we were in line twice but did not move. At night we went to bed but with the idea of being routed before morning as we had been every night before about nine we were called up and started towards the city.



Wilder Holbrook's Sword

After marching about there and hour or two we came over the river back to our old camp, when we got here I

looked to see what time it was and it was one \_\_\_\_\_. We were all pretty tired for it was very muddy and being without any shelter for four days and three nights and not very ..... little old ..... I did for I was most sick when we went over if the C?2 had ..... in camp all the time we were over then I should stayed in my tent but a little excitement brought me up and I have lived through it though a little though we should all get back to camp again living and well, when we crossed the bridge but we were kept on the reserve and didn't use us.

It is getting late and I am some what tired. I will close this letter and tell you the rest when I am home. I should like to write . . . ? . . . but I have just finished one long one to the folks. I guess I can tell it better some other time.

I had a letter from Mrs. Nason and Mrs. Howard beside one from you Monday night. Before I went over the river I burnt up all my letters that I had. My valise was most full and I did not care about their being pulled over by those that were left here to take care of the camp thinking nothing was . . . . ? . . . I didn't know what might happen and I suppose you wont get mad. If you do I shall have you write them over again.

From your friend,

Wilder S. Holbrook

## Wilder S. Holbrook

Residence Sutton MA; a 23 year old Farmer. Enlisted on 8/2/1862 as a 2nd Lieutenant. On 9/1/1862 he mustered into "K" Co. MA 36th Infantry. He Resigned on 7/31/1863 (As of Co. E). He also had service in: "G" Co. MA 15th Infantry.

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But their church was mortgaged, and being too much embarrassed to redeem it, it was sold at auction and bought by Stephen B. Holbrook, the present owner, who fitted it up for a dwelling house and store (now at the corner of Boston Road and Uxbridge Road and known to some as the beehive). It has a large fountain in the upper part, and hot and cold water is distributed all over the house. It is one of the most desirable residences in town, and is occupied by Mr Holbrook and his son, Lieutenant Wilder S. Holbrook, the present postmaster. The post office is kept in this building. S. B. Holbrook was born in Smithfield, Rhode Island; he has been engaged in several different places as a manufacturer of cotton goods. He married Hannah Sutton; they have had one son and two daughters. Lieutenant Wilder S. Holbrook was in the United States service during the war; he was badly wounded, and is a pensioner. He married Jennie M. Paine and has two daughters. Flora married D. M. Daniels and left one son, Walter H. Hattie A. graduated at Springfield high school, where she gave the valedictory. She is now an assistant and popular teacher in the Millbury High School.

Wilder Holbrook kept the old-fashioned store and post office in the basement until 1888 when he was appointed to a clerkship under civil service in the Boston Custom House. Mr. Holbrook went to Boston by train daily for sixteen years which meant an early morning drive to Millbury when often the snow drifts were waist high. In spite of snow and deep mud near the Millbury line, he was rarely absent from his desk. He watched the progress of the new road from Millbury to Sutton with great anticipation and used it only three weeks before his death, Dec. 27, 1902. After the opening of a Custom House in Worcester, he often served there as Deputy Collector.

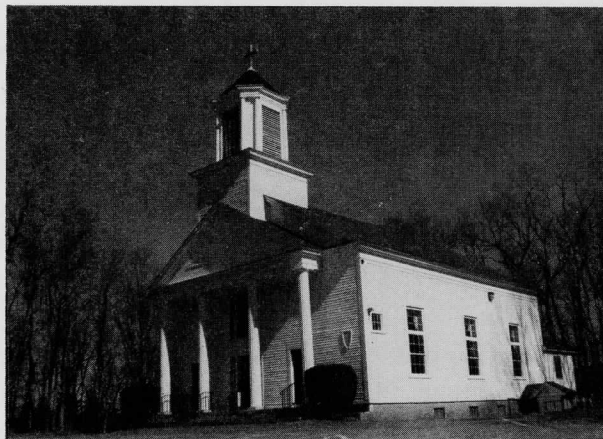
Wilder Holbrook was proud of his district school education. He was exceedingly clever in Mental Arithmetic; the kind that prevailed in a good district school. He was public spirited and active in Town affairs; serving as Town Clerk for many years. An ardent Democrat until the days of Bryan, he worked unceasingly for the cause. The Sutton store resounded with arguments around the old furnace. He was one of a group which began the observance of Memorial Day in Sutton and he gave most liberally of his time and strength year after year, that the honor of his dead comrades should be respected on May 30<sup>th</sup>. He walked with a military carriage one never forgot; he was stern and forceful. He was also a great lover of nature and the outdoors. An early Sunday morning ride around "Singletary Pond" to find the first violets and arbutus and to hear the first bluebird was a regular occurrence for Mr. and Mrs. Holbrook.

Townspople often spoke of Mrs. Holbrook as "perpetually young" when she tripped across the Common on the way to church or went about her duties. She loved her home and church and was an active worker in the choir. During the Civil War and in World War I she sewed and knit industriously for the boys in service. Her interest in Memorial Day never waned from the beginning; in her ninetieth year she went around with the group to watch the soldiers decorate the graves in five cemeteries and attended the evening exercises in the Town Hall. In the same year she registered her vote, showing her interest in civic affairs.

Wilder S. Holbrook was a Selectman in 1880 and Town Clerk from 1881-1889 and a Town Moderator in November 4, 1890.

## St. John's Episcopal Church Celebrates 175 Years

Excerpts from a historical report  
by Gayle Pierpont and Karen Taylor



St. John's Episcopal Church

### The Beginning

On what we picture as a shining, sunny, July 17th in the year of our Lord 1825, a small group of faithful men and women joined together for a morning of worship.

These fine Christian people, with their top-hats and morning coats, long dresses and bonnets, arrived by carriage, horse, or some, perhaps, on foot at the Rising Sun Hotel in the charming village of Wilkinsonville. They passed through the wide wooden doors into the lobby, proceeding at a genteel pace up the stairway and into the room where they would attend the first worship service of Saint John's church.

The Episcopal service was an entirely new experience for many of them as they were up until this

time Congregationalists. Misgivings, and, perhaps even anxiety could be read on their eager faces. These sensations passed quickly, however, as they met their sweet and enthusiastic minister, David LeBaron Goodwin. Mr. Goodwin was a young deacon, just 25 years old. He was born in Norton Massachusetts in 1800, the eldest of 12 children (five of whom became ministers- four Episcopalian and one Congregationalist). Deacon Goodwin was soon to put everyone at ease.

The service that day is believed to be the very first reading of an Episcopal service in Wilkinsonville (Sutton). Only three people on that day were permitted to give the responses: David Wilkinson (at whose bequest Deacon Goodwin has been sent to Wilkinsonville by Bishop Griswold), Albert Wilkinson, and Amasa Roberts. It can only be imagined how pleased everyone must have felt at being present at the birth of a new House for the Lord.

### Jumping forward 125 years

The early 1950's passed quietly for St. John's. It is noteworthy to mention, however, that in 1956 St.

John's took a giant step forward in recognizing equality for women. Evelyn Gustafson was appointed permanent Assistant Treasurer of the Church. She was the first woman permitted to serve on St. John's Vestry.

The following year, 1957, our Parish family welcomed Rev. Raymond H. Hoffman as our new Rector. Rev. Hoffman came to us from the U.S. Army where he served as Chaplain. When he left St. John's in 1959 it was to return to the military where he became Chaplain at Levinworth prison. His credentials were, perhaps, the most unusual for one of our Church's Rectors.

During the turbulent 1960's the nation was experiencing social and political upheavals. It was a time of protesting human rights, LSD, Rock and Roll music, and Flower Children. While St. John's remained a calm and peaceful house of prayer, we were blessed with our own version of a 'Flower Child' in the person of Rev. John H. Philbrick, our Rector, a man of God and a true lover of nature. Father John, as he liked to be called, was an avid gardener and naturalist. He spent much time with St. John's children teaching them about flowers, trees, and gardening and even letting them extract sap from the maple trees surrounding the Church grounds. With Father John's enthusiastic encouragement, his wife, Helen, penned a book about organic gardening.

Such was his love of things in nature-plants, flowers,

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**Rev. John Philbrick**

and astronomy- that these topics oftentimes found their way into his Sunday sermons.

Father John and his wife were both very active in the activities of St. John's women's group. Helen was a silversmith and taught jewelry-making to them. Along with the textile weaving done by Father John and Helen, these newly learned skills served as a very successful way of earning money for the various St. John's fairs. Having such an involved couple as our Rector and his wife it was no surprise that they are well-remembered by many of our older parishioners. When they left in 1973, they left many happy memories behind.

Following Father John as our Rector was Rev. Walter E. Reynolds. Father Reynolds clearly brings to the minds of many Eccl. 2:10 "My heart rejoiced in all my labor". For he was, indeed, a true laborer for St. John's. Seemingly tireless, he did much of the maintenance to the Church and it's Rectory own his own. His labors included the exhausting job of clearing the land that lay between the Church and Rectory which he accomplished with the help of his sons.

The softer side of this much beloved Rector could be seen in his endless devotion to visiting the sick, whether in their homes or in a hospital. His cheerful smile and understanding ways were always an uplifting experience for anyone he visited.

His wife, Roma, a charming lady, could always be found on a Sunday attending services in the church wearing one of her trademark pretty hats. She was very active as a member of St. John's Women's Guild and was an avid gardener. Her enjoyment of beautiful flowers was evident on many a Sunday when one would find the flowers from the gardens around the Church and Rectory cut and beautifully arranged around the altar.

During Father Reynold's 19 years with St. John's, Tracey Taylor and Kelley Boucher were instructed by

him and became the Church's first female acolytes.

In 1991, with his guidance, the Mission and Outreach/Stewardship Committee was formed. It was lead under the chairmanship of Carolyn Burke who still chairs. St. John's Vestry supplies a yearly sum which is used at the discretion of the committee. Over the 9 years of its existence, it has supported many worthwhile projects such as serving as Foster Parents, through the Childreach Program, for children in such countries as the Dominican Republic and Indonesia. Help supporting the important work of missionaries is also one of the Committees interests. Closer to home, Mission and Outreach has aided such organizations as the Worcester Food Bank, Abbey House, and Jeremiah's Inn.

One day while inspecting the condition of the Choir Loft, Father Reynolds uncovered a long-forgotten, but beautiful stained glass window which had at sometime in the past been covered by a plank of wallboard. Once again his 'gift' of labor benefitted the Church family. When he retired in 1992 he took with him his parishioner's love and respect. Is it any wonder why, to this day, the parishioners of St. John's look forward to his visits, whether it be to preach on a Sunday or simply come and pray with us with Roma.

After Father Reynolds retired, St. John's began its search for a new Rector. During this time Rev. George Warren joined the Parish family as an Interim Pastor. Though his stay with St. John's was of short duration, Father Warren proved to be a popular and respected Rector.

He immediately began a study group that met on Wednesday evenings. He led the group using such texts as 'The Road Less Traveled' and the Serendipity Bible as topics of discussion. These meetings were well-attended and his cheerful good-nature inspired many of us who found it difficult to share our thoughts verbally amongst others to be open to sharing our opinions about things spiritual.

He referred to his sermons always as 'homilies' and these homilies were looked for with eager anticipation each Sunday.

One could often find Father Warren riding through town on his beloved motorcycle or walking from the Rectory to the Church with his dog, Jake. Jake attended many services in fine weather when the Church doors remained open. While it's doubtful that Jake learned anything from the service, it was obvious to the parishioners that it was well worth spending an hour listening to his master's voice.

Father Warren's first love was Hospice work and

when he left us in 1993 he was able to devote his time primarily to Hospice work.

It is worth mentioning that during his time with us another of St. John's 'firsts' occurred. Margaret Quill was the first woman to preach before St. John's. She was a stand-in Pastor for Father Warren on a Sunday in 1992.

In 1993, St. John's welcomed its new Pastor, Rev. Richard Kilfoyle. Although illness caused him to leave us after a short time, Father Richard was a well respected and energetic Pastor. He was a man whose interest and knowledge of Church history seemed endless. His sermons at Sunday services were rich in historical references and clearly-defined spiritual messages. Upon his departure from St. John's, he generously gave the Church the beautiful picture of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ-child with a young St. John the Baptist looking on that can be found on the back wall across from the Baptismal Font.

With the departure of Father Richard in 1994 came the process of searching for a Pastor for St. John's again. The result of that search garnered for St. John's a treasure in the person of father Thomas E. Chase and his wife, Mary.

Father Tom had been a long-time pastor of the Church of the Reconciliation in Webster, Massachusetts. During his time as a Seminarian in the state of Maine, he traveled from town to town bringing the Lord's word to as many small country churches as could be fit on a Sunday. While it would, perhaps, be more picturesque to visualize him doing this in a horse and buggy, it was accomplished, we are told, by a none-too-recent automobile. It goes without saying, many of our parishioners ask him about his adventures and he is always delighted to talk about it.

Father Tom is a man of God who puts his whole heart and soul into his service to the Church. One of the first things on his agenda was to acquaint himself with the names of all his parishioners which he did quickly and accurately. This simple gesture warmed the hearts of all of us, especially, of course, the children.

Since Father Tom was welcomed into the St. John's family, the children in Church School have been brought upstairs to receive a blessing during the Eucharist then join their families for the remainder of the service.

It can truthfully be said that he has earned the name of 'the ubiquitous Father Tom' for he seems to be everywhere at once and always there when his presence is needed the most. His generous heart can only be matched by his endless enthusiasm for attending to the

needs of his Church and parishioners. His easy-going ways put everyone at ease and his sense of humor is thoroughly enjoyed by all. One of the gifts that Father Tom brought to the Parish was his wife, Mary, a warm-hearted lady who is an accomplished needlewoman, enthusiastically active in all the Church's activities, as well as singing in the Church choir. Her involvement with the women of the ECW is a blessing to St. John's. She introduced the wonderful idea of making (by hand) a Christmas ornament for every Church member to remove from the Church tree and bring home for their own trees. In fact, the first year she was with us she cross-stitched over 100 ornaments by herself. It is now a tradition for one or two members of the Church to make ornaments each year. Mary, herself, still makes up the tags with the date on them for each one. Each Christmas our Christmas trees at home are a little brighter for them.

Father Tom and Mary generously offer their home and their hospitality at the rectory for Christmas and other gatherings of the Women's group. Their warm hospitality is just one of the many reasons they are so beloved by the parishioners of St. John's.

During the years Father Tom has been with us St. John's has experienced many changes and events.

With Father Tom leading, a service was held on the Church grounds to celebrate the birth of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron Saint of small animals. Many parishioners brought their pets (cats, dogs, and ferrets were among the menagerie present) and Father Tom did the blessing with the assistance of some of the Church School children as well as Mother Mary Catherine, Mary Chase's aunt. It was a huge success.

In 1995, St. John's formed the Junior Altar Guild called "The Guild of St. Elizabeth". It was introduced as a way for the children to learn about preparing the altar for services, which altar linens to use, placement of the candles, and arranging the flowers that decorate the altar and so on. Membership was open to both girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 14. It was run under the leadership of Grace DeBoer and Karen Taylor. We are all pleased that it is still, to this day, a successful program.

In 1996 St. John's, at Father Tom's suggestion, began holding Ecumenical Services on Ash Wednesday with the Millbury Federated Church and the First Congregational Church participating.

Father Tom, at the Bishop's request, began special schooling courses which would qualify him to serve as teacher for Seminarians. It was with great pleasure that

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St. John's and Father Tom welcomed two Seminary students in 1997. John Lahey served with him on a summer internship in July and is now an ordained Deacon serving as assistant at St. Michael's on the Heights, a mission in Worcester. He was followed shortly by Adella "Tinka" Baker, another Seminarian who also aspired to the Priesthood of the Episcopal Church. When the two left they received the well wishes from St. John's family. Also in 1997, with encouragement from Father Tom and under the leadership of Joy Ackerman, St. John's joined with the First Congregational Church of Sutton and created 'Marketplace 49AD'. This marketplace was set up on the Sutton common using tents as homes and a marketplace area for the children to feel the experience of living in early Christian times. They ate food and wore clothing much like Jesus did. They learned pottery-making and listened avidly to story-tellers just as people did then. The project was a huge success and the children look forward to it each year.

As Father Tom and Mary are the loving parents of six children and grandparents, as well, it is no wonder that he encouraged St. John's to start up a youth group. A joint effort of St. John's and St. Andrew's Church in Grafton, this youth group meets bi-monthly to learn and discuss the Bible and its teachings. The group is led by Ms. Joy Ackerman from St. John's and Mr. Chris Graham from St. Andrew's. They are both to be congratulated for their devotion to the spiritual well-being of our youngsters.

It was Father Tom's pleasure, in 1998, to honor one of St. John's most faithful parishioners, Lou Janzow. Lou has served as a licensed Lay Reader and Eucharistic Minister since 1938, many of those years here at St. John's. For over 50 years his gentle voice has been heard by his fellow parishioners as he reads the lessons and offers the cup of wine at communion. St. John's is blessed to have a fine group of Lay Readers and Eucharistic Ministers including: Susan Morgan, Joy Ackerman, Arthur Bolivar, Tony Curruthers, Kerry Burke, Lois Karacius, and, of course, Lou. for 'A Little White Church on the Hill' as the townspeople call us. It has enjoyed a plentitude of dedicated Rectors from our first, the devoted Rev. Goodwin, to our present, the delightful and hardworking Father Tom.

St. John's has also been blessed by the continual devotion of its parishioners, many whose families have attended for generations. Families like the George's, Arola's, Royal's, Christie's, Bolivar's, White's, Hall's, Taylor's, Lewis's, and the Howlett's are multi-

generational families whose dedication to St. John's have made it the fine Church it is today. And as Father Tom baptizes new babies and welcomes newly-married couples into the Church, with God's help St. John's will continue to grow. St. John's, as we see, has had a long and eventful life.

**Please join St. John's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Service on Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup> with Bishop Gordon Scruton from the Episcopal Diocese of Webster, MA**

## THE HIKERS

Submitted by James Brigham

Standing around the watering trough in the center of town one afternoon was uneventful at the moment but what was decided there has made history.

Dora Berber jokingly said that if we would "Hike" to her home in the Eight Lots District on the Oxford line she would serve us a chicken dinner. We took her up on it. The second "Hike" was to the Brigham Farm at the Northbridge line. From those two Hikes taken over thirty-five years ago, the six "Hikers" have met once a month at a members home and made bed quilts. At the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Town of Sutton in 1954 this Hiker Group with much good help, served Breakfast in our State Reservation of Purgatory to 500 hungry people. This has been an annual event and the attendance has more than doubled. Through the years the efforts have brought in a substantial amount of money, given to the First Congregational Church of which we are all active members. Fire victims have been recipients of hand made quilts and money when disaster struck.

Worthy Captains who have served us well are: the Misses June Holbrooke and Doris Jones for the Hikers and Messrs. Alvin Swindell and Clarence Hutchinson for the church.

We have not forgotten our trysting place - the watering trough - and have kept it in bloom during the summer and green during the winter.

These are the Hikers:

Miss Alta MacLaren In memoriam  
Grace Brigham (Mrs. John D.)  
Ruth Holbrooke (Mrs. Milton L.)  
Eunice King (Mrs. Arthur E.)  
Maud MacLaren (Mrs. Harold L.)  
Mamie Thompson (Mrs. George)  
Dora Gerber (Mrs. Nelson, Sr.)



July 20th

**Breakfast at Purgatory, Labor Day 1954**

©

## IN MEMORIAM

Peter Nelson

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Sherman Bush Peter & Bertha Gvazdauskas Bob Anderson

**The Historical Society will have a Pot Luck Supper  
at  
Eight Lots School  
at  
6:00 pm  
on  
July 25<sup>th</sup>**

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

