

# Sutton Historical Society Bulletin



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Kate Hutchinson, Senior Editor  
Malcolm Pearson, Editor Emeritus

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## The Burbanks and Papermaking in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Sutton

(Excerpts from the Sutton History Vo. 1 1704-1876 and the  
Millbury History 1915 – Ed.)

...on a stream from Crooked Pond (Singletary)...in few towns in this State, as early as 1793, surpassed Sutton in manufacturing enterprise, is evidenced by the fact that at this time there were within the limits of the town,...one paper mill...fine water privileges along the outlet of Crooked Pond were at an early date utilized for manufacturing purposed. ... The next privilege (dam and water wheel power, -Ed.)...was occupied by the paper mil of Abijah Burbank. This was the first paper mill built in the county, and fourth of fifth in Massachusetts. Its erection appears to have been suggested by a resolution passed in a convention of the committees of several towns of the County of Worcester.

The convention held its first session, August 9, 1774, and ...holding its last meeting, May 31, 1775...the resolution...passed...as follows: 'Resolved, that the erection of a paper mill in the county would be of great public advantage;...' ...Mr. Burbank...set about building a paper mill in the early part...of...1776...and it was put in operation in June.

November 13, 1777 ...advertisement... in the MASSACHUSETTS SPY...'The Paper Mill...must immediately

stop...(until) people are more careful in preserving their Rags. The advanced price of Three Pence per pound, for clean Linen or Cotton and Linen Rags is now given...'

...in June (1778) Abijah Burbank, has lately procured...a Complete Master of the art of paper making... THE MASSACHUSETTS SPY...November 26, 1778...the following advertisement: 'It is that the Fair Daughters of Liberty,...would not neglect to serve their country, by saving for the Paper Mill in Sutton, all Linen and Cotton Rags for the purpose of making paper...will at least have the satisfaction of...doing an exceptional service,...with Eight Pence per pound...now given...will be a sufficient reward.'

This mill was, during most of the Revolutionary War...the sole dependence ...of the printing office of Isaiah Thomas in Worcester. ...its paper capacity was thirty reams per week, during eight months of the year. It was not kept in operation during the coldest weather.

Mr. Caleb Burbank, son of Abijah, was associated with his father and succeeded him...increasing somewhat the production,...and greatly improving the quality. Mr. Burbank, kept a team employed distributing he is paper in this State, Rhode Island and Connecticut. He was also a publisher of books, among which are a hymn book containing the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of Isacc Watts, and various school books.

After the mill became well established, five men and twelve women were employed. By operating the two engines to their full capacity for the accustomed fifteen hour day, about fifteen hundred pounds of paper was produced. It was hard labors that was chiefly instrumental in producing the writing paper in the mill. Each sheet of paper was treated separately five or six times before it was ready for market and three months were required in making ht paper from the time that the rags were received until the finished product was ready for the market.

Until about 1812 the Burbanks controlled the water on Singletary stream and, as they apparently decided to give special attention to the manufacture of paper, they took others into the partnership with them or

## Upcoming Meetings:

*Tuesday, 3/4: Clara Barton House, Oxford. Meet at Congregational Church and leave in carpools at 6:15 PM. (\$5 donation for guests)*

*Tuesday, 4/1: Guest Speaker Paul Rogers, Manchaug Church, 7:00 PM. (\$5 donation for guests)*

## PLEASE NOTE:

*Included in this issue is the form for membership renewal. Please cut out this form and mail it with your contribution to:*

*Sutton Historical Society  
4 Uxbridge Rd.  
Sutton, MA 01590*

*Thank you!*

sold the other privileges (water rights) or sold the rights entirely. In view of this retention of the paper mill, other water rights were sold in terms of water to run two machines in the Burbank paper mill, so that enough water was granted to the privilege, now occupied by the West End Thread Company, and to the privilege now occupied by the Mayo Mill #3, sufficient to keep two paper machines running within certain working hours.

Caleb Burbank continued to operate the mill until late June 1836 and as there was need of having a certain amount of water require to run the paper machines, a legal disposition was given him with allowed him a suitable water supply to run all the machines.

The two engines (water wheels)...were estimate to have capacity of six hundred horsepower each. In the summer of 1831 two larger ones were installed and in 1833 a third engine was put in. At this time an apron was put under the water wheel to save water which was wasted from the wheel buckets and with this apron in place the three engines could be carried as well as the two previously could.

In 1834 Caleb Burbank became financially involved with his brother, Elijah...and the business passed into the hand of Silas Goddard, who had been his superintendent. Later the industry carried on by Briely and Company who maintained a paper mill until 1857.

### **MAJOR-GENREAL CALEB BURBANK**

Maj.-Gen. Caleb Burbank was descended from John Burbank who settled in Rowley, Mass., about 1640. He was the eldest son of Capt. Abijah Burbank and was born in Sutton, July 18, 1761. As a youth he worked on the farm of his father and learned the art of papermaking in his fathers paper mills at Bramanville.

It was as a paper manufacturer that General Burbank was best known in the industrial world, although he also owned a part in most of the other mills on that stream. He greatly steadied the outflow of the water from the pond by raising its level several feet and he also built a storage basin for the paper mill. When it had passed into his possession he added both to the quantity and the quality of the output of paper from the paper mill.

General Burbank was in the prime of his manhood when Millbury was set off as a separate town from Sutton (in 1813) and at the time he was probably the richest and most prominent man in the new town. He selected the name "Millbury" for the town and, apparently by his sole influence, prevented the adoption of some other name.

In personal appearance General Burbank was of medium height, about one hundred and forty pounds in weight, erect, and moved with a martial step. "General Burbank was for many years a conspicuous character.

He always came to church at the 'Old Common' in a hack drawn by a span of white horses with a driver and surrounded by a bevy of young, beautiful girls whom he employed in his paper mill works. He was generous, public spirited and kindhearted." He was reputed to have been exceedingly generous. As an instance we may cite that, when the house of Stephen Blanchard was burned, General Burbank went the next day to view the ruins and at the time presented Mr. Blanchard with one thousand dollars as a help toward rebuilding. Although a man of a kind disposition General Burbank is reputed to have been strict in his military and business affairs. He loved the pomp attached to his military rank and undoubtedly exercised his command with uncompromising rigor.

For twenty-eight years he was an officer in the state militia. He was commissioned lieutenant, in 1790; captain, in 1794; major in 1797; lieutenant-colonel, in 1801; brigadier-general, in 1807; and major general, in 1813. Five years later he was dismissed from the service.

General Burbank built a residence, pretentious for those days, on Burbank Hill.

In his old age the General met with financial reverses, but it is to the credit of Millbury officials that, in consideration of what he had done for the town, a comfortable home was secured for him in the family of Deacon Tyrus March.

## A Message From the President

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Janice Swindell

Greetings! Officers have been elected, a Program Committee has been formed, and we hope to present a year of interesting and worthwhile activities. I encourage you to attend our meetings and join us on the "field trips." Invite your friends to come along, too.

I welcome Johanne Potter Walker as Recording Secretary, Wally Baker as Vice-Presidents, and Chris Sinacola as Corresponding Secretary. Chris will also be in charge of publicity. Dennis Coll has taken Chris' seat on our Board of Directors.

In future edition we will provide you with profiles of our officers and directors. In that way, we hope to become more than just "names" to you, but persons who truly love our town and are concerned about preserving Sutton's rich history

As always, your dues and gifts are welcome and appreciated, especially now as we plan for 2004, Sutton's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

Sincerely,

Janice Swindell, President



## Picturing History: Who's On First?



We'd like to know if you know who's on first from this circa 1915 Wilkinsonville baseball team. If you can identify anyone from this photo, we'd like to hear from you. Write to us at Sutton Historical Society, 4 Uxbridge Rd., Sutton, MA 01590.

### Welcome to New Members

Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Anderson

Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Kurnan

Suggestions and submissions for the *Bulletin* are accepted by mail and email:

Kate Hutchinson  
27 Vinton St. #3  
S. Boston, MA 02127  
[stkellen@dcne.net](mailto:stkellen@dcne.net)

In our next issue, we would like to feature stories about Springtime gone by in Sutton. If you have a story, you would like to share with us, please send it to the submissions address, and it may be run in the next issue of the *Sutton Historical Society Bulletin*.



# Sutton Historical Society

4 Uxbridge Road  
Sutton, MA 01590

## Membership Renewal Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

2003 Dues - \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Trust Fund \_\_\_\_\_

Donations \_\_\_\_\_

Total Donations: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tear out this form and return it to the address below:

Sutton Historical Society

4 Uxbridge Rd.

Sutton, MA 01590

As always, we thank you for your continued support!