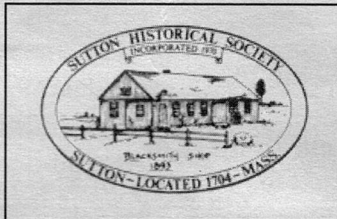


Sutton Historical Society Bulletin



November 15, 2006 – Volume 44, No. 3
Kate Hutchinson, Editor-in-Chief
Malcolm Pearson, Editor Emeritus

In This Issue:

*The Waters Family
and Gun Making*

Sutton Historical Society Officers:

President: Wally Baker

Vice President: Cheryl Bonin

*Recording Secretary: Darlene
Belisle*

*Corresponding Secretary:
Chris Sinacola*

Treasurer: Ellie Hutchinson

Historian: Johanne Walker

Curator: Paul Brosnihan

Upcoming

Sutton Historical Society Programs:

**December 5 – Annual
Holiday Party at the home
of Cheryl Bonin and
Darlene Belisle, 650
Central Turnpike, Sutton.**

**December 31 – Meet at
the Blacksmith Shop at
11:30 P.M. for the annual
“Last Night” Celebration
by the Sutton Artillery
Company and the
midnight firing of Old Ben
to ring in the New Year.**

A Message from the President

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The Society's M M Sherman Blacksmith Shop was host to approximately 150 of Sutton's fifth graders recently. They were able to see how the shop works and what kind of wares it produced as well as learn some of the history associated with their town. We are always open to having school children attend our buildings. There is a rich history and heritage in Sutton that can mean so much to person who learns it first hand. If anyone is interested in having a tour of any of our buildings, please let us know and we will make the proper arrangements. The Historical Society also has several reenactors as members who are willing to visit the local schools for presentations also.

I'd like to thank John Sinacola for all the hard work he put in to bring the electrical requirements of the Manchaug Baptist Church up to snuff. We are very lucky to have him volunteer his time and labor for some much needed repairs.

We are still trying to get together a list of volunteers to staff the Rufus Putnam museum on Tuesday nights. Regular staffing will enable us to apply for grants to help preserve our collections.

Hope to see you all soon,
Wally Baker, President

A Message from the Editorial Staff

We will be trying out the e-mail address listing later on in the fall. Please send any e-mails to be included to eu Hutchinson@yahoo.com and put "Sutton list" in the subject line.

Also, if anyone would like to see an article on a particular subject please let Wally Baker, Kate Hutchinson or Ellie Hutchinson know about it and we will try to do the research.

GUN MAKING By Col Asa H Waters

As written in the Sutton Town History, Vol I with some slight editing.

Richard Waters, emigrated from England about 1632, and was a contemporary of Governor Winthrop. Richard was by profession a gun manufacturer; married the daughter of a gun maker it is noteworthy that the business of gun making has been hereditary in some branch of the Waters families almost continually since. From the original Strip, Richard down to the present time, they trace their genealogy by official records in an unbroken line through nine generations.

Jonathan, son of Nathaniel and grandson of Richard, inherited the largest portion of his father's estate. He had ten children, of whom two sons, Asa and Andrus, inherited the mechanical talent of their progenitor Richard.

When the Revolutionary War broke out, there were at once called into requisition. There were no national armories, and few, if any, private ones of much account. Guns were scarce, gun makers more so, and neither could be imported legally. To supply the great demand, Asa and Andrus erected on the Singletary stream a gun factory or armory, which they fitted up with tools and machinery for making guns by water-power. Hitherto they had been made mostly by hand-power, and the process of making them by motive power was not discovered till the next generation of family, as will appear farther on. Water-power, however, was used in this armory to aid in the manufacture, and so far as we can learn, was here first introduced for that purpose – it being, long before it came into use in England.

These brothers early discovered, what had proved to be true to the present day, that the best iron for gun barrels lay in the mines of Salisbury, Connecticut. They obtained it there in pgs, had it carted through the forests t a forge in Douglas, where it was converted into refined iron, and carted thence to their armory in North Sutton, where it was wrought into the various parts of the gun. Andrus died in about two years, from exposures at Salisbury, and was buried at West Point. He possessed uncommon mechanical genius and his death, occurring when the country was in such urgent need of his services, was deplored as a public calamity.

Asa was thus left alone to pursue the business, which he did with vigor and success throughout the whole period of the war. It is a tradition, highly probably, that he received the support and patronage of the State. On a site next above his armory the State erected a large powder mill, which was the one referred to in the resolve passed by the Massachusetts Council, October 18, 1776.

“Resolved, that Mr. Nathan Putnam be appointed as the committee for building a powder mill at Sutton, in the room of Colonel Holman (who was called away to the field), and that the further sum of two hundred pounds be paid out of the public treasury of the State to the aforesaid committee to enable them to carry on the building of said mill.”

This mill had a long row of pestles and mortars on each of its four sides, and was run by water-power. Mr. Waters had the charge of it, and was often heard to say “there was hardly a barn in Worcester Count under which he had not bent his back to scrape up saltpeter.”

Asa Waters, second, born November 2, 1769, was quite as much distinguished as his father for his mechanical and inventive talents, and he was constantly engaged in the armory business most of his life. Congress having established two national armories, one at Springfield

and one at Harper's Ferry, passed a law in 1808, appropriating \$200,000 annually for furnishing arms and equipments to the different States. For this purpose they selected six well know mechanics, among who were Eli Whitney of New Haven and Asa Waters of Sutton; to who contracts were issue from time to time, for a term usually of five years. In that same year of 1808, Asa and brother Elijah erected on the Blackstone River, below the Singletary, the armory building, which still remains in the Armory village of now Millbury, and hence its names. Elijah died a few years after, leaving Asa to prosecute the business alone, which he did with energy and success and he was continued in the contract service of the United States until the day of his death which was December 24, 1841.

His armory was in active operation and of useful service in the war with England in 1812 and its business was largely increased by the manufacture of scythes, saw mill saws, smelting iron, cast steel, etc. Mr. Waters at the time of the separation of Millbury from Sutton, in 1813, was forty-four years of age. He was therefore essentially a product of Sutton and it may not be considered out of place if a few more incidents of his life and his armory are given in these pages.

While in the contract service of the Untied States he introduced various improvements, among which were two which completely revolutionized the English mode of making gun barrels, which was to weld them by hand, and then grind them by hand before a revolving stone. Mr. Waters invented a process of welding them by power under trip-hammers, by which the work was done much better, quicker and cheaper.

It was adopted at all the armories in the United States, b many in Europe, and is still in use. He took out a patent, October 25, 1817, and his claim to originality has never been disputed.

Grinding them down was found to leave the metal of unequal thickness, and the barrels liable to explode. In December 1818 he took out a patent for turning them in a lathe. In this he succeeded until he came to the irregular shape of the butt; there he was completely foiled, and so were the most ingenious mechanics in all the armories.

At last, in sheer desperation, he sent for a young man living in a border farming district of whom he had heard as having some genius for mechanics. When he came he seemed a stranger to all present, appeared uncouth and awkward, had a stammering tongue, and little was expected of him. But he had no sooner lanced his eye over the machine, and seen what was wanted, than he suggested an additional but very simple motion, which relieved the difficult at once, and proved a perfect success. It was adopted by all the armories in the United States and had been in constant use ever since; and as it saves more than half a dollar on each gun, some estimate may be formed of its' value to this country. This verdant youth, then called "Stammering Tom," was none other that the now famous Thomas Blanchard, whose inventive genius had rarely been surpassed in those or any of the age. It was then and there, as he afterwards said, that he first conceived the idea of his world renowned machine for turning irregular forms, such as gun stocks, shoe lasts, tackle blocks, spokes, busts and so on ad infinitum, and it was here he exhibited his first model.

(Taken from the History of the Town of Sutton Volume I, 1704-1876), Edited by E Hutchinson



The lock on an Asa Waters musket that was made while Millbury was still part of Sutton. Note the eagle above the word "Sutton" and the date of 1810. Owned by Joe Barbato Sutton, Photo by Joe Barbato



Lock from an Asa Waters Musket made after the split from Sutton. Note the words "Millbury 1824" vertically at the left end of the lock above the trigger and the addition of "A Waters" Owned by Ellie Hutchinson, Sutton. Photo by same.

The Sutton Artillery Company, on behalf of the Sutton Historical Society, Cordially Invites You to Attend the Third Annual "Last Night" at the M. M. Sherman Blacksmith Shop, Singletary Ave, Sutton on the 31st of December, 2006 at 10:00 PM to celebrate the incoming year of 2007 with a firing of the cannon known as "Old Ben" at midnight.

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 5, 2007 – Meet at the Congregational Church Parking Lot on the Common at 6:15 to carpool to the General Artemus Ward House Museum in Shrewsbury.

July 10th - Pot Luck Supper at the Blacksmith Shop, 6 PM

August 7th – Pot Luck Supper at the Eight Lots School House 6 PM

RECENT MEETINGS

On the 18th of October , a joint meeting of the Sutton Historical Society and the Millbury Historical Society, held at the Asa Waters Mansion in Millbury, was addressed by our old friends, Tom and Brenda Malloy of the Association for Gravestone Studies. Tom is the Vice-President of the Association and he and his wife are always a crowd pleaser. They will be back again next year in November with a different aspect of the gravestones that they have researched.

On November 7th, Sutton Town Planner Jen Hager gave the Society an update on the impact of the state plans on the the town of Sutton for the rebuilding of Route 146 in the Blackstone Valley. She answered many questions from the audience and explained how the town has worked with contractors, developers and industrial companies to benefit the town while still preserving the character of the community and the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor. Thanks, Jen!

Return to:

Sutton Historical Society

4 Uxbridge Road

Sutton, MA 01590

IN MEMORIAM

OUR GOOD FRIENDS AND SUTTONIANS

George DeBoer

Jessica Chase

Future Sutton Historical Society Events

December 5 – 6:00 PM - Pot Luck Christmas Party at the home of Cheryl Bonin and Darlene Belisle, 650 Central Turnpike, Sutton, MA. Each Attendee should bring a small wrapped present, \$5. max cost. Thanks, Cheryl and Darlene!

December 31, 2006 10:00 PM - Third Annual “Last Night” Celebration of the Sutton Artillery Company at the M M Sherman Blacksmith Shop featuring the firing of “Old Ben” at Midnight. Dress Warmly and bring plenty of cheer!

February 5, 2007 – Cliff Wilson, Owner of “Framed in Tatnuck”, will speak on the preservation and presentation of historical documents and memorabilia. 7:30 PM, Manchaug Baptist Church.