



The Sutton Historical Society Bulletin

D e d i c a t e d t o p r e s e r v i n g o u r h i s t o r i c a l
i n h e r i t a n c e f o r f u t u r e g e n e r a t i o n s .

F o u n d e d D e c e m b e r 8 , 1 9 6 9

In This Issue:

- **The Only Thing Constant is Change**
- **Historical Society's Repair Goal 2017**
- **Missing Mile Markers**
- **Sutton Trivia**
- **Membership Form and Special Orders**
- **2017 Calendar of Events**

-Society Officers- 2015-2017

President-Brian Stevenson

Vice President-Dave Pizzi

Secretary-Christine Watkins

Treasurer-Beverly Pizzi

Historian-Joyce Smith

-Board of Directors- 2014-2016

Wally Baker
Keith Downer
Marjorie Duff
Rochelle Forsythe
Alice Shaw
Linda Sinacola

Museum Curator-Joyce Smith
Blacksmith-Fran Donnelly
Bulletin Editor-Janice Swindell

THE ONLY THING CONSTANT IS CHANGE

By: Joyce Smith

Evolution is change over time. Young people assume things have always been as they are now, but the longer you live the more you know things change. We have been reminded of this in several ways lately at Historical Society's Board of Directors' meetings. One topic: has been are there other milestone markers between the distances of the ones we have? It would seem logical to measure by your car odometer, but the S curves in Boston Road have been straightened so distances are not the same as in 1771. Consider the many stonewalls in the woods. They were cleared fields in the mid 1800's. Pleasant Valley fairways were the bottom of Pleasantdale Pond before the floods of 1927 took out the dams. The only thing that you can count on is that things change constantly.

The Merrill Ponds, as they are known today, have changed over time. Since the first settlers came to town in 1715-16, there has been an evolution along Sucker or Singletary Brook and the impoundments that were created along its length. According to Phyllis MacLaren in her article in the June 1979 Historical Society Bulletin, the meadows along Sucker Brook Valley (Singletary Brook) had native cranberries, "nurtured by the Red Man in the Westerly part of Sutton, now called Eight Lots." Dried cranberries were an ingredient in Pemmican, a combination of dried meat, melted fat and berries that was formed into nutrient-rich cakes. Think about an energy bar that can be easily carried and eaten.

The first dams were built by Jonathan Putnam for his grist and saw mill in the early days of the town.

cont...

A deep pit for the water wheel was excavated. A small village with a store and houses called "Beanville" once existed in the vicinity of the Eight Lots School.

After the mill was abandoned, the ponds were used for raising meadow hay, the most nutrient rich type of hay. Long ditches were dug the length of the area so the hay could be harvested more easily. (These ditches were also important in the future cranberry cultivation and the breeding of warm water fish when it became a hatchery.)

The Putnam water privilege with 196 acres of land was bought in 1868 by Rev. Fred N. Knapp, James W. and Henry S. Stockwell. They had the idea of again raising cranberries on the 80 acres suited for cranberry culture, and began to prepare the ground for planting vines. Cranberries had been important to prevent scurvy in Civil War soldiers and this prime location for production was recognized. In November 1870 the "Sutton Cranberry Company" was incorporated with Rev. Thomas Hill, president of Harvard College, and Fred Knapp. Law Olmstead of New York City being equal partners and stockholders with Knapp and the Stockwells. In Volume I of the Sutton History, James Stockwell states that 20 acres of vines, with a good supply of water from four well-constructed dams, and a quantity of pure sand, produced 1,200 bushels of fruit in 1875. "The fruit is unrivaled for size, beauty and flavor (the writer has picked berries three and a quarter inches in circumference), and commands the highest price in market." The land was divided into three meadows with a reservoir. The ditches and existing dams made flooding the bogs relatively easy.

Sand and gravel were needed to "improve the soil" in the bogs. Benjamin F. Batcheller owned the gravel pits and was hired with his oxen to provide the gravel. A miniature box type train was used to help haul gravel. Phyllis MacLaren's article states that gravity propelled the full cars to the bog, at which time the oxen took over. Their hooves were padded with bunches of burlap to keep the beasts from sinking into the mire. More train tracks were laid and re-laid to various areas of the meadow, while men with shovels spread the gravel. It took more than one yoke of oxen to heave the empty cars back to the pits.

Phyllis didn't know where the train and tracks went, but there was a heavy iron train wheel on top of the well at Milestone Farm near the side door. (I wonder if it is still there.) Cranberries were harvested there into the 1900's. Local young people were hired to harvest berries and they were taken to Worcester by horse and wagon to the train station. Eventually, the demand declined and Sutton's Cranberry Co. went bankrupt.

The next phase made the area look much as it does today. The ponds became the Sutton Fish Hatchery, the first of its kind to raise warm-water fish, on the advice of Arthur C. Merrill. Mr. Merrill was a fish culturist and was the first-full time employee of the Mass. Division of Fisheries and Game. In 1898 he was appointed Superintendent of the Sutton Fish Hatchery in Wilkinsonville. At the time, it was experimental and the first cold-water fishery which eventually produced 10,000 rainbow, brook and brown trout yearly. It became a model for establishing other hatcheries.

Mass Wildlife leased the area in 1921 for the formation of the warm-water Fish Hatchery. Arnold Pond Dam, Town Farm Dam, Schoolhouse Pond Dam, and Putnam Pond Dam were in existence, but were altered for use in the Hatchery. In 1929 Mass Wildlife purchased the property and Thompson Pond Dam and Welsh Pond Dam were constructed. The pond-fish raised were perch, pout and sunfish; later, bluegills from Western Pennsylvania were added. Volume II of the Town History states that in the fall, ponds were lowered and a large culvert directed the fish to the old

wheel pit of the Putnam Grist Mill, where the fish were sorted for eventual distribution across the State. At the time Volume II was written, Merrill Pond System raised largemouth bass, pickerel, pout, and yellow perch. Approximately 250,000 fish a year were produced, with about 50,000 fingerlings returned to the ponds for breeders. The Merrill Pond fish hatchery operations ended in the 1970's, which led to the creation of the Merrill Pond Wildlife Management Area.

The present Merrill Pond WMA consists of 235 acres along West Sutton Road, with a series of manmade impoundments of varying sizes, a perennial stream, vegetated wetlands, and upland forested area. The area is now used by the public for hiking, wildlife viewing, and fishing. The ponds are too shallow for boating and the area too developed for hunting. The seven dams have been found to be in poor condition. All but Arnold Pond Dam and Thompson Pond Dam are Significant-hazard dams as defined by the Office of Dam Safety.

Once again changes may happen to the area. The State is in the process of drawing up plans to remedy the situation. Options are being discussed and studies are being conducted. In the preliminary planning, the Adams Pond dam would be rehabbed to maintain its recreational value and protect the State-Listed Endangered plant found there. The option favored for the area, taken from the Mass Wildlife Project Description is "a combination of dam removal and repair/rehabilitation based on the unique conditions at each dam and impoundment (Preferred Alternative.)"



SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S REPAIR GOAL 2017 *General Rufus Putnam Museum*

By: Brian Stevenson and Christine Watkins

The Sutton Historical Society is undertaking a new repair/renovation project for 2017. The success of the Eight Lots School renovation project, which culminated in 2015, has motivated our group to tackle the General Rufus Putnam Building/Sutton Historical Museum with the goal of reopening to the public with regular operating hours in early Spring 2018. The building is adjacent to the Sutton Town Hall at 4 Uxbridge Road and has served many purposes in its lifetime.

As part of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Sutton, with its rich history, will continue to grow in the coming years. An established, operational museum is vital to sharing our story with visitors to Sutton from near and far.

The building was constructed in 1823 by the Olive Branch Lodge of the Master Masons in connection with the Sutton School District. The School District carried the deed to the first floor school room; the Olive Branch Lodge retained the deed for the second floor space used as their Lodge.

The History of the Olive Branch Lodge of Master Masons, published in 1947, states that "a committee of brethren was directed to go forward and build a hall in company with the school district in the Sutton Centre, and have power to expend the funds of the Lodge for the same, said building not to be more than 45 feet long and 26 to 27 feet wide." It was an expeditious job, for by January 1, 1824, the Lodge was installed in its new quarters. The cost is placed at \$714.92. In 1844, the Lodge moved to new quarters in Wilkinsonville, where it remained for six years." On September 27, 1850, the Olive Branch Lodge transferred its deed for the second floor to the Sutton School District for \$175.

The opening of the High School on Singletary Avenue in 1908 caused the smaller Center school building to be vacated. From March 1910 until 1934, the building was used exclusively by the General Rufus Putnam Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). This Chapter was organized in 1909 by Sarah Brown, organizing regent, and was the 76th Chapter in Massachusetts. The DAR leased the building from the town for \$1 per year and had on display many interesting antiques donated by several local families. In 1934, growth in the town necessitated the use of the building as a school once again. At that time, most of the antiques were returned to the original owners or their descendants. The DAR Chapter continued to hold meetings in the building until they disbanded. Before officially disbanding, the ladies met in the homes of members. The building continued as a school until 1955 when the town opened its new elementary school on Boston Road. Lastly, it was the Town Library until 1984 when the Library was moved into the adjacent Town Hall.

The Town voted, in 1986, to allow the Historical Society to use the building. The Town retains the deed to the building, which now houses the General Rufus Putnam Museum and Office maintained by the Sutton Historical Society.

A broken furnace, in recent years, resulted in the Museum being closed to the public. A new propane-fired forced hot air furnace has been installed at an approximate cost of \$2,000. The Society wishes to thank Andy Mosher, Putnam Sheet Metal, who donated his crew's labor to install the furnace and duct work and David Gravison Plumbing, who installed the new gas line. In addition, we thank John Couture, Building Inspector, Matt Belsito, Fire Chief, and Jim Smith, Town Administrator, for working with our Society to keep the repairs moving ahead in a timely manner.

In addition, a new roof was installed in February by the Town, which retains ownership of the building. Plans for new gutters to be added to the exterior as well as repairs to the bulkhead are also moving ahead.

Society members have committed to cleaning, repainting, cataloguing and reopening the Museum to the public with regular operating hours by early Spring 2018.

We, the Sutton Historical Society, are able to accomplish a lot on our own. However, we are a small group and always operate on a shoestring budget. There are times when the task at hand is beyond our abilities, and we need to reach out for help. We are seeking financial contributions to offset the repairs and maintenance costs for this building as well as seeking volunteers to help with cleaning, painting, etc.

Financial contributions can be made to:

The Sutton Historical Society
General Rufus Putnam Building Repairs
4 Uxbridge Road
Sutton, MA 01590

Interested volunteers can contact:

Brian Stevenson - President, Sutton Historical Society
Joyce Smith - Museum Curator
Email: suttonbuzz@gmail.com
Phone: 508-865-2122

THE MISSING SUTTON HISTORICAL MILE MARKERS

By: Alice Shaw

We are inquiring if anyone might have information as to what may have happened to the two missing original stone mile markers placed on Boston Road in 1771. Currently there are four historic mile markers remaining in existence in Sutton marking 45, 46, 48 and 50 miles to Boston. A full article and related pictures of these historic mile markers were provided in our society news bulletin that was issued in Fall 2016. We believe that missing mile marker "49 miles to Boston" would have been in the vicinity of Rich Road and Boston Road and mile marker "47 miles to Boston" would have been in the vicinity of present day 334 Boston Road.

We know that through the years Boston Road was subject to some changes where certain portions of the road were slightly moved from its original 1771 layout. We would be sincerely grateful if anyone might have information regarding the two mile markers. Please call or email any information to suttonbuzz@gmail.com, or 508-865-2122. Thank you.

SUTTON TRIVIA

By: Joyce Smith

1. Where was "Beanville" and how did it get the name?
2. Almost everyone knows where the Silvermine was located, but what about a gold mine?
3. Where was the powder house and training field for the militia located?
4. What Sutton inventor made a machine to manufacture common pins?
5. Where is the "singing bridge"?
6. What was built as a combined school and Masonic Hall?
7. In 1965, what was the first PGA Tournament at Pleasant Valley CC?
8. What infamous teacher made us memorize "The Touch of the Master's Hand"?
9. Who was the last stagecoach driver between Millbury and West Sutton?
10. There is a plaque entering Purgatory in memory of which WWII soldier killed in WW II?

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Please note the annual membership fees are due by February 2017. The fees collected are important funds to help sustain payments of related insurances, utility bills and ancillary bills, the mailing of the news bulletin and various activities. Please help support our Historical Society and use the attached Membership Form in this bulletin. Thank you.

VOLUNTEER...

We welcome all volunteer help. If you have a special talent, skill or trade, please let us know how you would like to volunteer or what your area of interest is. Please contact suttonbuzz@gmail.com, or 508-865-2122.

Thank you.

**SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP FORM**
Annual Membership Fee is due February 2017

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone: _____

\$15.00 Individual Fee: _____

\$25.00 Family Fee (including children under 18): _____

Additional Donation _____

Mail to:

Sutton Historical Society Inc.

4 Uxbridge Road

Sutton, MA 01590

The Sutton Historical Society is a nonprofit corporation, all donations are tax deductible

SPECIAL ORDERS

___ Historical Society Stoneware Mug, \$20 plus \$5 S&H

___ 1715 Original Sutton Map (17" x 22"), \$10 plus \$7 mailing tube & postage

___ 1795 Sutton Map (18" x 22"), \$20 plus \$7 mailing tube & postage

___ 1850 Sutton Houses 1700 - 1850 Map (16" X 22"), \$10 plus \$7 mailing tube & postage

___ 1870 Sutton Map (17" x 22"), \$10 plus \$7 mailing tube & postage

___ Original 30 Sutton Lots superimposed on current town map (11" X 23"),
\$20 plus \$7 mailing tube & postage

___ Original Sutton Land Owners by Name and Location (13" X 22"),
\$10 plus \$7 mailing tube & postage

___ Volume I, Town History 1704 to 1876, \$90 plus \$7 S&H

___ Volume II, Town History 1876 to 1950, \$20 plus \$7 S&H

Mail payment to:

Sutton Historical Society Inc.

4 Uxbridge Road

Sutton, MA 01590

Note: Maps can be purchased at Sutton Public Library and history volumes at Town Clerk's Office

SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
4 UXBRIDGE ROAD
SUTTON, MA 01590

2017 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 7	7:00PM	General Meeting	First Congregational Church
April 4	7:00PM	General Meeting	First Congregational Church
May 2	7:00PM	General Meeting	First Congregational Church
June 30	6:30PM	Cookout/Pot Luck Manchaug Baptist Church Guest Speaker, Chuck Arning "Early Days of Baseball in the Blackstone Valley"	439 Putnam Hill Rd
August 1	6:30PM	Annual Pot Luck Supper	Eight Lots School House
Sept 12	7:00PM	General Meeting Guest Speaker, Keith Downer "Lecture and Display of Revolutionary War Artifacts"	Sutton Common
October 3	7:00PM	Annual Meeting	First Congregational Church
November 7	7:00PM	A review of 2017, and a look forward to 2018	First Congregational Church
December 5	6:30PM	Annual Christmas Pot Luck Supper	First Congregational Church

As always, anyone interested in any of these events is welcome to join us. Upcoming meetings are listed in The Millbury-Sutton Chronicle, Towns section of the Worcester Telegram, The Uxbridge Times and our Facebook page Sutton Historical Society Inc.