

GREETINGS! Here's this week's column from "OLD SAM SUTTON" - Enjoy! this one's a bit long, but i hope you find it interesting and informative, and that it sparks other memories. Please leave a comment! - (photo credits to April Eaton Brown)

THE BEEHIVE

It was once a grand building. It was once one of the most desirable locations and properties in town. It is now a crumbling, forgotten disgrace and shell of its former glory and history. The Methodist Church. The Holbrook house. The Sutton Center Apartments. The Beehive.

The crumbling building that currently stands on the corner of Boston Road and Singletary Avenue was not original to that site. The structure was originally built as a Methodist church on the west end of the Town Common in 1854. It stood on the site of the current Town Hall building (built in 1981) , which replaced the original town hall building that was built in 1884. A little history on Sutton's Methodists: The first preacher was Rev. John W. Lee, and following him in succession were John H. Gaylord, Rodney Gage, Newell S. Spaulding, a Mr. Brown, William A. Clapp, J.J. Woodbury, Charles S. McReading, Horace Moulton, and finally Dr. S.O. Brown. When the Civil War broke out, the church's first preacher Rev. John Lee enlisted and took a captain's commission and served three years in the Union Army before taking a position at the Custom House in Boston.

The Sutton Town History also tells us that Reverend Charles McReading entered the United States Navy during the Civil War, leaving the pulpit in Sutton to be commissioned an 'acting masters mate' on board a gunship called The Norwich. He sailed up the Savannah River for the attack on Savannah GA. After the war, he preached for several years on the island of Nantucket , where he saved several persons from drowning by the skillful management of his sail boat. But sad to say, he finally became discouraged and insane so as to commit suicide while stationed at Middleborough, Massachusetts.

Several members of the Congregational church across the common connected their conviction and conversion with the Methodist church's influence. Deacon John Marble was one such convert. But the Methodist church was to stand no more than a dozen years. The Sutton Town History tells us that all the preachers who were stationed here were good men. However their church was heavily mortgaged and being too embarrassed to redeem it, it was sold at auction to Stephen B. Holbrook. It is believed that Stephen Holbrook and his family dismantled the building circa 1869 and moved it to its present site by teams of oxen. He soon fitted it up as a dwelling house and store. Holbrook built a large foundation in the 'upper part'; presumably the east end. Hot and cold water was plumbed throughout the house. It was one of the most desirable residences in town at the time.

Stephen Buffin Holbrook was born in 1819 in Smithfield Rhode Island and was engaged in several different places as a manufacturer of cotton goods. He married Hannah Sutton of Douglas and together had one son and two daughters. The son, Lieutenant Wilder S. Holbrook, was born in August of 1840 and served during the Civil War. He was badly wounded, and was a pensioner. He served with the 15th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry regiment, his enlistment being credited to Sutton, along with nearly 220 other young men from town. He served in Company G along with his future brother in law, David Daniels. Wilder was wounded in the shoulder at the Battle of Ball's Bluff, Leesburg VA on October 21st

1861. He mustered out of the service in 1862 due to the disability. However, he re-enlisted in August of 1862 as a 2nd Lt. and served with the 36th Massachusetts when it was organized in Worcester, and ended his service at the end of July of 1863.

After the deaths of Stephen B. in 1878 and of Hannah, his wife, in 1886, their daughter Hattie continued to make this her home when school vacations made it possible. She was an ardent student and excellent teacher. While at Bridgewater Normal School, her specimen of the nervous system, dissected from a small animal, was the most nearly perfect, up to that time and was kept at the school for an exhibit. Hattie taught in high schools at Millbury, Upton, and Woburn Mass. And at the Hartford High School in Conn. She died in that city, March 20, 1890.

Wilder S. 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. James Stockwell then served as postmaster until Herbert Ray received the appointment. 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. After the opening of a Custom House in Worcester, he often served there as a Deputy Collector. He watched the progress of the new road from Millbury to Sutton with great anticipation and used it only three weeks before his death, December 27, 1902. He was 62.

The house was occupied by the descendants of Stephen B. Holbrook his son, Wilder S. Holbrook, until 1932, when Jennie M. (Paine) Holbrook, wife of Lieut. Wilder S. Holbrook, died in Sutton. The plot of land upon which the house is situated consisted originally of four and a quarter acres and in 1908 one and six tenths acres were sold to the Town of Sutton for a High School site. Upon this was erected a new High School building.

Soon after his appointment to the Customs House, Wilder S. Holbrook sold out his grocery business to Herbert L. Ray, who moved and conducted a general store in the Brick Block for about eleven years. During this time, Ray served as postmaster with the post office in the store. Mr. Ray sold out to Ernest P. Putnam in 1902 and he sold to Wallace F. King in 1904. William H. Davis bought in 1909, keeping the Brick Block store for a quarter of a century while living down the new Singletary Avenue a piece at the farm currently owned by John Hebert . In 1936, Frank H. Paine became the owner. As far as we know, neither 'commercial store enterprise' nor post office existed in the "Holbrook" home after the dawn of 20th century.

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 30th. 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 Wilder and Jane Holbrook.

Townpeople often spoke of Mrs. Jane M. Holbrook as “perpetually young” when she tripped across the Common on her 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 to vote, showing her interest in civil affairs.

Jennie Tyla, the Holbrook’s oldest daughter, studied music and art. She retained her skill in painting till her death in 1930. In 1887 she was married to Fred Southwick Smith. Together they had 10 children, 2 of whom died young. The others remained active in town politics, occupations, and church affairs, producing numerous Smith offspring that were equally as active in Sutton. Alice Marion, the next daughter, was graduated from Wellesley College in 1897, majoring in mathematics and science. She has taught in the high schools at Sutton, Moorestown NJ, and in the Philadelphia High for Girls where she was head of the department of mathematics. The youngest daughter, Flora Emily, born in 1881 was one of the three graduates from Sutton High School’s class of 1897. One of the other classmates was her future husband, John C. Dudley.

Flora was graduated in 1903 from Wellesley College and specialized in music and languages. She taught in West Broad Street School, Pawcatuck, Conn., and continued her study of music throughout the 1950’s. She was married to John Charles Dudley of Sutton in 1908, and they moved to Montreal where a daughter Alice Holbrook was born and died. In 1912, Mr. and Mrs. Dudley returned to Sutton to the John Dudley Farm and when Mr. Dudley enlisted in World War I, Mrs. Dudley returned to her mother’s home in Sutton Center, assisting in the Red Cross and Liberty Loan drives before going to Washington to serve as clerk during the War. In 1910-1911 Fred and Jennie Tyla lived with Mrs. Holbrook at the home place. The Dudley’s son John C. Dudley Jr was killed in action in World War II, having been shot down as a tail gunner over Sicily. The Dudley-Gendron American Legion post is named in his honor (along with Henry Gendron,) Flora Emily Dudley was an organist at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Wilkinsonville, and was very active in completing the The History of Sutton, Volume II. She died in 1983 at age 102.

Big changes came after the Second World War. Alfred Beaton and his wife Barbara Batchellor Beaton purchased the property in November of 1945. The lot extended North along Singletary Avenue to the 1908 High School property. The two upper floors were converted into four apartments and a four car garage added under the Beaton ownership. Amongst the first tenants were Garnette and Hazel Foor and their son James; George and Dorothy Graham and sons Richard and Stephen; Louis Cameron and Mary Hayward and children Louis and Susan; and John and Laura Delano and son Douglas. The Graham’s eventually moved less than a half mile West down Boston Road to a small single family home.

In 1946, the ground floor was converted into a grocery store, operated by George C. and Jesse Grandchamp, who later, with their children, Norma and Peter moved into one of the upstairs

apartments. In 1947, the store was replaced by two ground floor apartments that were occupied by Gunner and Betty Lou Bloomquist and son Wayne and Robert in one, and Marjorie Thyden and daughter Linda in the other.

The total six rental apartments soon became known as "The Beehive" . It was said that so many young couples and children were coming and going, going and coming - constantly moving in and out that the doorways resembled the openings to a beehive buzzing with life and activity. It was a busy place, but soon began to lose the 'grandeur' of a single family home.

Other tenants to occupy apartments at various times were: William and Irene Louis and children Barbara and Ronald; Homer O. and Barbara Mills Jr and son John; Edward and Betty Steele and daughter Karen; Norris and Nancy Corey and daughter Vicki Jo; Philip and Florence Parks and son Allan; Mrs. Evelyn Favreau and daughter Deborah. Many of these early residents eventually built or bought homes and stayed in Sutton.

From the early 1950's on, many people lived at 'the Beehive', more commonly known then as the Sutton Center Apartments. The apartments had been created by dividing the floors in half along the length of the building in orientation of the ridge line. On the first floor, John & Marge Michelson lived in the Southeast corner apartment; South being towards the fire station, and East being towards The Brick Block. The Michelson's were literally on the corner of Boston Road and Singletary Ave. John Michelson worked as bartender at The Blue Jay for years. Their daughter Janet married Wendell Whittier.

Kenneth and Marcia Gauvin lived in the 1st floor Southwest apartment, known as number (?). Ken and Marcia had several children and eventually built a house on Hutchinson Road. Sheila Adams moved into this apartment after the Gauvin's left.

There was a washroom/laundry room and boiler room on the first floor. This room was in the northwest corner, and connected to what was referred to as 'the stables'. Although it isn't clear if the building had accommodations for horses, it is known that Al Beaton built the attached four car garages shortly after purchasing the building for renovation into apartments. The garages were torn down shortly after the building was acquired by Getty Petroleum in the 1990's. There was a passageway from the 2nd floor apartments to the loft of these garages.

Norris and Nancy Corey were amongst the first young couples to live in the second floor apartments on the South side. Howard and Blanche Bottomly moved into this unit with little 4th grade Howie Jr in tow in 1956. The Bottomly's moved from a rental home on Lake Singletary. Blanche worked for years as a waitress at The Blue Jay. Howard ran a sporting goods shop for a time in the wing of the gas station. Young Howie was a star athlete at Sutton High, a member of SHS class of 1965. The Bottomly's - or at least Howie Jr were residents of the 2nd floor space for thirty nine years, leaving in 1995.

Joseph and Helena Gagne were early tenants of the North side of the second floor. Joseph, or "Chewey" as he was called, ran the grocery store in the Brick Block. Chewey was a WWII veteran of the Marines and served in the Pacific. They lived there with their three sons until moving in as caretakers of the Rectory of St. Mark's Catholic Church on Boston Road in the early 1960's, and eventually to a small

house on Marsh Road on Lake Singletary. Later tenants of this unit, in the 1960's included Robert & Penny Nunnemacher, Mark and Audrey Brigham, and Kenneth & Deborah Smith. Howie Bottomly remembers that 2nd floor North apartment as being the one with the most transition.

Howie also added this story:

< The road we know as Singletary Ave actually, at one time, ran through the front yard right across from Sherman's original barn and blacksmith shop. I had done the yard with my metal detector and pulled out dozens of horseshoes. Most of them were down 12 to 18 inches in the ground. I never found anything really great, an Indian Head penny or two. One really great story was when we replaced the floor of the stable/garage, which is now gone. Under the floor was a mound of dirt with a grave stone. It turned out to be a prank similar to a time capsule. The name on the stone was Dudley. We took it to Flora Dudley and she told us one of the relatives did it as a prank when they replaced the stone in the cemetery with a better one. Most of the relics came from the eaves. A few bottles and a candlestick holder which I have but it was common design for the time. If you look at the house from the gas station side there is one board of siding that goes up and down instead of side to side. Maybe to save cutting boards to size, no one every came up with an answer. The trees in the back are Black Walnut There was also a pull chain light fixture that would turn itself on in our apartment. We always said it was a ghost. It was the same ghost that would occasionally start our rocking chair to rocking in the kitchen for no reason. >

Benny and Dot Oles lived in the top floor with their daughters Kathy and Nancy. Kathy became a nurse. Nancy was a good Sutton High athlete of the 1960's. She also became a nurse, and eventually married Fred Jarvis Jr who lived across the hall in the other top floor apartment. Benny worked for Whitin Machine works and then in construction. Dot worked for years at Rossi's package store in Wilkinsonville. Both Benny & Dot were very good golfers.

Many different tenants also lived on the third floor. Andy Smith, son of Sutton Fire Chief Ellery "Bucky" Smith – and great grandson of Wilder S. Holbrook lived there for a short time after marrying Joan Karacius in April of 1966. They occupied the 'front' apartment, facing the Brick Block, while their side windows overlooked the gas station. It's interesting to note that Andy's grandmother, Tyla Holbrook Smith and aunt Flora Holbrook Dudley were born in the front room that was his and Joan's bedroom. It was Smith's family that had moved the building with teams of oxen from where it was originally located – the site of the Town Hall – to its present location. Andy would become active in the town and the church as his ancestors had.

One of the most interesting tenants of the 1950's and 1960's had to be Fred Jarvis Sr. Fred and his wife Regina – their daughters Helen and Ruth and their son Fred Jr - lived in the top floor north apartment overlooking the gas station. Fred and his wife were deaf and mostly mute, who communicated with each other by sign language. In his later life, Fred worked as a school crossing guard at the 'new' high school on Boston Road. He could say a garbled but understandable 'good morning' with a friendly wave. Fred, born in 1908, had been a successful Vaudeville escape artist and magician in the stylings of Harry Houdini. Legend has it that Jarvis was once chained and shackled and thrown into Lake Singletary. He quickly sank out of site. When he didn't appear at the surface after several minutes, the crowd became

worried. Meanwhile, he'd unshackled himself and swam quite a distance under water to the shoreline out of view. He then watched the panic and search unfold with amusement. He was a wonder at card tricks and sleight of hand, and often performed in minstrel and Vaudeville shows in the old Town Hall.

Regina was a good homemaker. There is a story that she used to hide her families extra cash in the apartment's oven. One day she decided to bake a cake for the family and accidentally burned up her stash of cash. It must have been the most expensive cake the family ever ate.

The Jarvais' daughter Helen married Barry Putnam, and Ruth married John Annis who became a Sutton Police chief.

Getty Petroleum eventually bought the property in the early 1990's. Their intent was to purchase the Sutton Center gas station and business. There is debate as to if Getty knew the Beehive was on the property as well, but the point is moot. Getty essentially abandoned and neglected that portion of their purchase. There was little or no maintenance provided by Getty. Howie Bottomly remembers a time when a foot of raw sewerage backed up into the basement and trying to phone Getty for help. There was little response; it was almost as if Getty didn't know the building – with six tenants – existed. The building quickly fell into disrepair and tenants left the building. I believe Getty may have had to evict the last tenants, who probably were happy to leave by that point. The property has since been sold to other larger petroleum conglomerates even further removed from little Sutton. The once proud building that had seen so much life and spawned such colorful characters has now sat vacant for nearly twenty years.