

# Walking Tour

**SUTTON, MA**



In Sutton center, wagon driven by Charles Harwood, who was the postman in the late 1800s, in front of Sherman blacksmith shop and livery stable.

**Follow country roads to a rural hamlet where fertile farms and family workshops gave industrialization its life.**

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# Sutton

The Blackstone Valley is the birthplace of the American industrial revolution, but it is the agriculture of towns like Sutton that gave that revolution life.

At first, Sutton—with its white church, country store, blacksmith shop, and cattle pound—may seem bypassed by the modern industrial world. Look again—towns like Sutton have always raised the food needed by the industrial workforce and the materials essential to industrial production.

Sutton began in 1718, when 30 families left the land shortages plaguing New England's coastal communities to settle on a huge grant owned by eastern investors. While other towns broke territory away from Sutton (Millbury, Upton, Grafton, Auburn, Uxbridge, Westborough, and Northbridge), much land remained. Because Sutton holds some of the region's most productive soil, family farms have dominated over time, producing dairy products, fruit, flax, grass crops, lumber, livestock, corn, grain, and vegetables for local consumption and commercial use.

You can still see some farms working today, as well as visit the historic Marble and Waters farmsteads.

Sutton's agriculture has gone hand in hand with manufacturing. Farmers often doubled as blacksmiths or carpenters, while women spun thread, wove cloth, and made butter in their homes. Widening markets created cottage industries in some trades, with such items as boots and shoes,

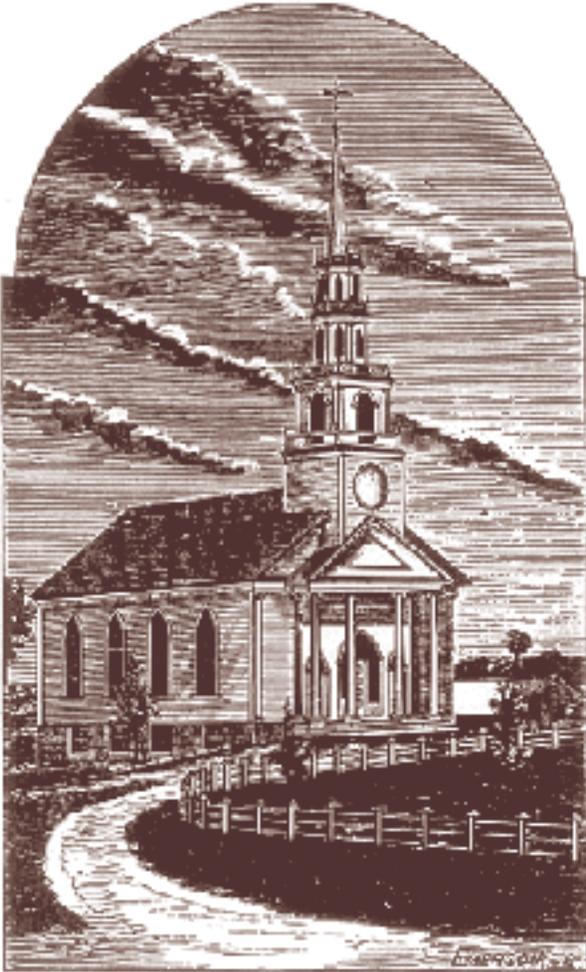
ploughs and scythes, and casks and coffins produced in farm-based workshops. Farm products also supported industry: hay fed horses used in factories, cattle hides were used for leather shoes, wool was used for cloth, and wood was used for potash, railroad ties, and charcoal to produce pig-iron. Moreover, lumber, grist, textile, and metal-working mills developed on local rivers distant from Sutton Center, creating the outlying villages of Manchaug, Wilkinsonville, and North Sutton (Millbury).

Sutton's contours altered somewhat over the 20th century, with the decline of cottage industries, collapse of mill production, specialization of agricultural production, and spread of suburban residences. Yet farms still dot the landscape, producing dairy products, fruits, and vegetables for urban markets. Many historic homesteads have been preserved, along with community buildings and much of the rural landscape. And Sutton's families (many of whom can trace their local lineage back for generations) have worked hard to reclaim their community's historic past, while harnessing it for the future. As a result, Sutton retains much of its picturesque 19th-century feel, along with a modern vitality.



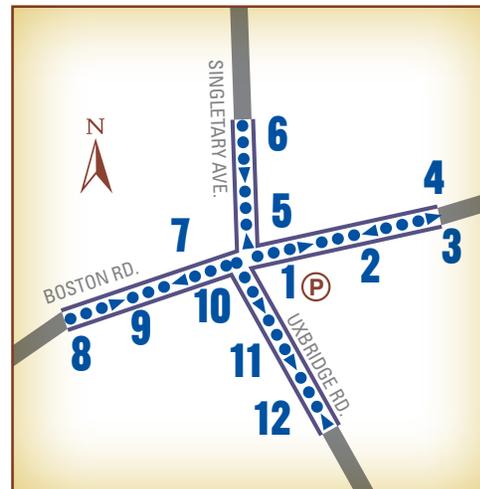
Benjamin Frank Batcheller, a Sutton resident, proudly stands with his oxen, "Buck" and "Boy," c.1890.

# Walking Tour



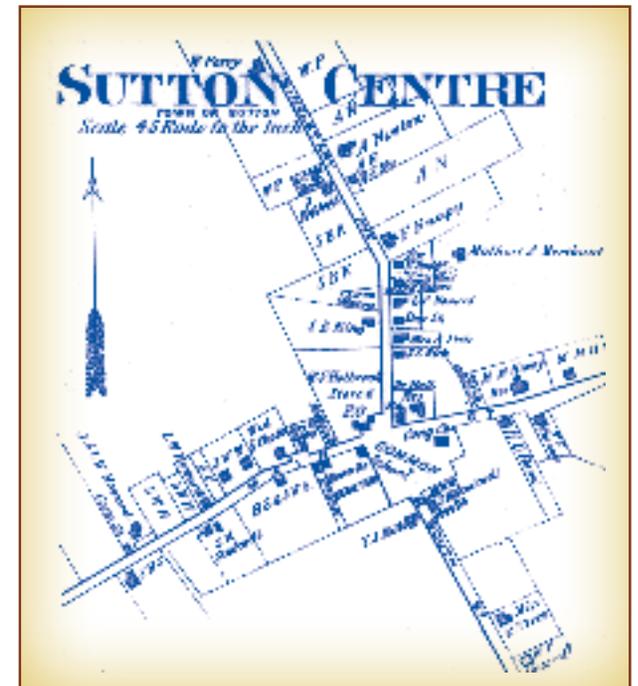
**1 First Congregational Church**  
In the 1630s, the Puritans came to America, driven by their opposition to the Church of England. They disliked the church hierarchy telling people what to believe as well as the King's interference in church matters. In New England, their own Congregational Church increased member participation in religious matters, while banning political involvement in the church. It did, however, urge church involvement in politics. To assure this

blend of community and church activism, many New England towns were built around a central building, doubling as a church and civic building. The modest edifice erected in Sutton in 1720 housed the First Congregational Church and the celebrated "New England town meeting." While Sutton later experienced a full "separation of church and state," both church and town meetings continue to occupy a central position in the Sutton community.



SUTTON, MA

When Sutton's original meetinghouse (on the Common's west side) was replaced in 1751, the new building (on the Common's south side) retained the secular style of its predecessor. In the 1790s, however, a church tower was added, marking the trend toward separate buildings for religious and political affairs. After a fire destroyed that building, the present "church-like" structure was erected (on the east side of the Common) in 1830.



# Walking Tour continued

## **2 Parsonage #301 Boston Road**

By the time Sutton was founded in the 1700s, New England Congregationalists continued to blend economic goals along with religious ones. Sutton Center bustled with activity, as farmers, artisans, and mill owners brought goods here for sale or exchange. Boston Road became a major east-west artery across New England, conveying products, information, and people through town. And civic leaders, living close to the Center, provided a range of commercial, religious, political, legal, and medical services. The building on this site, for instance, was occupied by an attorney and a judge in 1785, transformed into a tavern in the 1820s, and home to church ministers by the mid-1800s. Its Federal-style structure, added in 1790, was renovated in the 1880s and c. 1907.

## **3 La Baron Tavern 297 Boston Road**

The flow of traffic through 18th-century Sutton generated several inns and taverns. Hale's Tavern, once located here, was bought in 1777 by Lazarus La Baron, a merchant and French Huguenot from Boston. He built this Federal-style structure in 1794, hosting prominent visitors like John Hancock, John Paul Jones, and the Marquis de Lafayette. His fancy inn was among the more popular public houses between Boston and Hartford.

## **4 Fairview/Brigham Farm Boston Road**

Some of the Center's most successful residents artfully combined commercial and farming activity. Established in 1720, this farm became one of Sutton's most productive after it was bought by the Hovey family in 1811. Marius Hovey ran a saw mill and a dry goods store, harvested woodlands, and sold some of Sutton's finest stock. The farmhouse burned in 1898, the year Hovey died, and his wife moved across the road to her family home. The current buildings, built by the new owner c. 1902, have continued to support a working farm to the present day.

## **5 Red Brick Block 314 Boston Road**

Simon Tenney built the Center's only brick building in 1839, hoping to capitalize on a growing market by offering store goods for Sutton products and trading Sutton products to Boston. As in many rural locations throughout America, many exchanges were conducted on a store credit or barter basis. The store's first "sale" involved the trade of two eggs for chewing tobacco and "yaller" snuff. Among local items Tenney accepted were farm goods (including an apple,

the "Sutton Beauty"), boots and shoes (including cheap brogans, or work boots, for slave wear in the South), wood, jeans, cassimere, "family flour" from the Sutton Flour Mill, and broadcloths from the Sutton Woolen Mills. The brick block also housed manufactories (boot and shoe, tailoring, harnesses, flour bags), offices (Selectmen, lawyers, doctors), as well as tenements, the Sutton Library, the post office, and a private school. Washington Hall, upstairs, was used for exhibitions, lyceums, and Methodist meetings. Until recently, the building always held a general store, often a neighborhood gathering place.



The brick block also housed manufactories (boot and shoe, tailoring, harnesses, flour bags), offices (Selectmen, lawyers, doctors), as well as tenements, the Sutton Library, the post office, and a private school. Washington Hall, upstairs, was used for exhibitions, lyceums, and Methodist meetings. And, until recently, the building always held a general store, often a neighborhood gathering place. Pictured on the front porch in the 1890s were (left to right) Louis H. Sherman, John Patch Stockwell, Hollis N. Sherman (Louis's father and store owner) and Frank Hubbard (Louis's cousin).

# Walking Tour continued

## 6 Sherman Blacksmith Shop Singletary Avenue

When Hollis Sherman bought the brick store in 1893, its barn (now gone) housed a livery stable and shop, run by blacksmith Daniel Dudley. When Sherman's son, Milton, took over the shop, Dudley leased neighboring land from Marius Hovey and built this shop. Since the spread of specialized commercial agriculture was gradually eliminating resident smiths from local farms, both men were eager to meet a growing demand for wheels, tools, and utensils. Heavy traffic through town also increased the need for wagon wheels and the shodding of the draft animals used to pull plows and haul produce to Boston.

Despite the Center's bustling business, there

was not enough blacksmith work to support both Daniel Dudley's shop and that of his neighbor, Milton Sherman. Within a few years, Dudley sold out to Sherman, who built an addition and a building for lumber.

## 7 Methodist Church/Holbrook House/1 Singletary Avenue

Although the Puritans encouraged popular participation in church affairs, some groups felt they had not gone far enough in preventing hierarchy and politics from interfering with individual faith. They also opposed Congregationalism as the only "official church" in New England. Several denominations, such as Baptists and Methodists, struggled for recognition, initiated major revivals, and faced

major conflict in the 18th and 19th centuries. In Sutton Center, however, neither group presented much of a challenge. The Baptists met only in outlying areas. And, while the Methodists met for a year and built this structure across the Common in 1855, they were bankrupt by 1864. Stephen Holbrook bought the building, moved it to this site, and refit it into a post-office, store, and home. With hot and cold running water, it was among Sutton's most desirable residences. It was subdivided into apartments in the 1940s.

## 8 Hancock House 327 Boston Road

When Minister David Hall sold this farm to his son in 1753, the buildings had just been erected. In 1759 Hall, Jr., sold it to wealthy merchant Thomas Hancock, uncle to John Hancock, American revolutionary and future Massachusetts governor. Thomas made a fortune from war contracts and by smuggling goods to the West Indies in evasion of British regulations. John was adopted by his uncle as a child and inherited Thomas' fortune, including this farm which he owned from 1764 to 1785. In 1785, when Hancock sold the farm, he also stepped down—briefly—from the governor's seat. A fortuitous decision, he thus avoided blame for the armed insurrection that tore across Massachusetts the following year. Led by debt-ridden farmers seeking changes in state policies of taxation, debtor laws, currency, and representation, Shays' Rebellion garnered strong support among Suttonites, some of whom actively joined the uprising.



Despite the Center's bustling business, there was not enough blacksmith work to support both Daniel Dudley's shop and that of his neighbor, Milton Sherman. Within a few years, Dudley sold out to Sherman, who built an addition and a building for lumber. The Sherman blacksmith and wheelwright shop, shown here in 1893, is currently a working shop, run by the Sutton Historical Society.

# Walking Tour continued

## 9 Animal Pound/Hearse House Center Cemetery/Boston Road

This stone-walled pound was used since Sutton's early days to hold stray livestock. The small structure to its left, now a supply shed, was built in 1864. It held the town hearse and sleigh, used until 1900 to carry the dead to the Center Cemetery. The Cemetery, just beyond, is well worth exploring. As the oldest graveyard in Sutton (set aside in 1719, organized in 1732), it contains headstones of some of Sutton's most prominent families.

## 10 Masons Building School House

The Olive Branch Lodge of Masons built this hall in 1823. While they used the upstairs for meetings, the downstairs was used for a school. When the Masons moved, the entire building became a schoolhouse, operating into the mid-20th century. It was a public library until 1982, when it became home to the Sutton Historical Society Museum. It is named for Rufus Putnam, a Sutton farmer, surveyor, and builder. As a Brigadier General in the Revolutionary war, Putnam built the fortifications used to defend Boston harbor from the British.

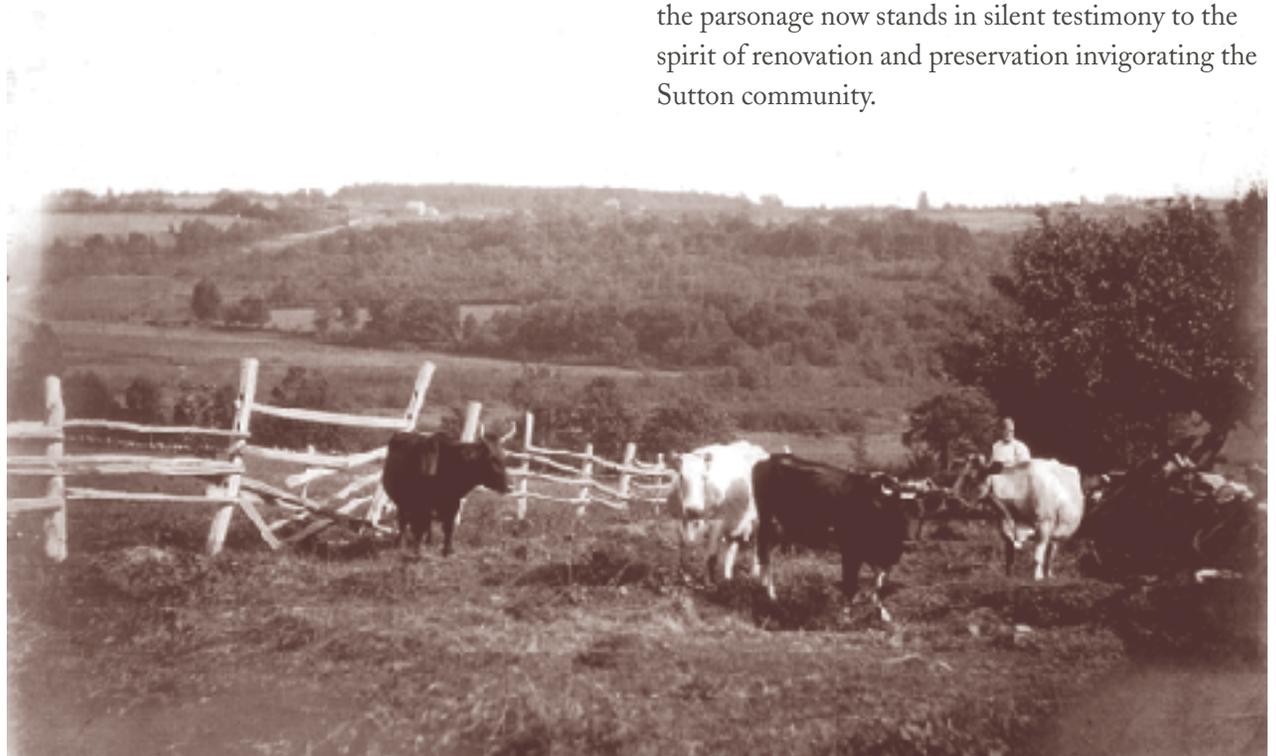
From the beginning, livestock production was a central part of rural life. Herbert L. Ray, for instance, was known to drive his cows from his home on Singletary Avenue through the center of town to his grazing lands in the fields of Bond Hollow off Uxbridge Road (pictured here in 1902). Not surprisingly, straying livestock was a common problem. As a result, one of the town's first official actions was to establish a pound to contain the runaways. Owners had to pay for the release of their wayward animals.

## 11 Town Hall/Uxbridge Road

Although the Sutton Town Hall is a recent structure, center meeting houses have always been home to that classic New England institution, the town meeting. It was at such meetings in the 1780s that Suttonites expressed dismay at state policies thought harmful to struggling farmers in a post-war depression. In 1783, they attacked tax collectors passing through town. In 1786, they voted in sympathy of Shay's Rebellion, signing petitions, calling meetings, and contributing participants to what proved to be six months of armed battles against the state's army. While some town meetings have proved livelier than others, they have always been a place for the citizens of Sutton to express the voices of their community.

## 12 Parsonage #10 Uxbridge Road

The center's oldest building, built in 1729 and first owned by the Rev. David Hall, began as a simple half-house with an interior end chimney. The rest of the structure was gradually built around that core, much like Sutton developed around its Center. In recent years, as the building fell into disrepair, Sutton residents gathered in town meetings, much as they had over the centuries, to debate what to do with the structure. Echoing a struggle taking place across America today, they weighed the importance of Sutton's unique historical character against the needs of a growing community. Finally, in a powerful mandate, the town bought the building with a preservation covenant: while the structure might be adapted to new uses, the town must also preserve its historical integrity. As a result, the parsonage now stands in silent testimony to the spirit of renovation and preservation invigorating the Sutton community.



# Directions

**From Rt. 146,** exit at Boston Road, traveling west to Sutton Center (about 2 miles). Park in Church parking lot at 307 Boston Road.



## Along the Way

- To visit the Sutton Historical Society Museum and other sites listed below, for a demonstration at the Sherman blacksmith shop, to contact the Sutton Historical Society, or to obtain more information on Sutton's history, please call the Sutton Town Clerk at 508-865-8725 to obtain the Society's phone number.
- Waters Farm in West Sutton is a 130-acre hilltop homestead established in 1757 and now a "living museum." October is "Farm Days" where hundreds of vintage tractors run. Early American crafters provide demonstrations, music, and the best apple crisp can be had. Other events include a hitch and harness school, an equestrian ride-a-thon, and a winter sleigh rally. For more information visit [www.watersfarm.com](http://www.watersfarm.com). Directions: Boston Road west to Central Turnpike. Turn right. First left up Douglas Road. Left at fork onto Waters Road until end.
- Manchaug Village, original home of "Fruit of the Loom," is on the Mumford River in southwest Sutton. It was used for cotton manufacturing, 1836 to 1926. It offers worker housing, stone mills, a store, Baptist Church, school, and mansion house. Boston Road west to Central Turnpike. Turn left. First right onto Manchaug Road to Parker Road. Turn left, to the intersection of Putnam Hill Road, Whitins Road, and Main Street. Explore in each direction.

- For information on other tours, riverboat excursions, special events, and more in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor contact the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce at 508-234-9090 or visit [www.blackstonerivervalley.com](http://www.blackstonerivervalley.com).
- Visit the River Bend Farm Visitor Center at 287 Oak Street in Uxbridge, MA. Free maps, trail guides, brochures, and interpretive exhibits with videos, and more. Free parking. Free admission. Open seven days. 508-278-7604.

**Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission in 1986, recognizing the national significance of the region between Providence, RI and Worcester, MA—the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is an affiliated area of the National Park Service.**



**This brochure was developed under the direction of The Rhode Island Historical Society in partnership with the Heritage Corridor Commission.**

Special thanks to Bud Gurney, Donna Rossio, and Ben MacClaren of the Sutton Historical Society. Graphics and photos have been used with permission of the Sutton Historical Society.