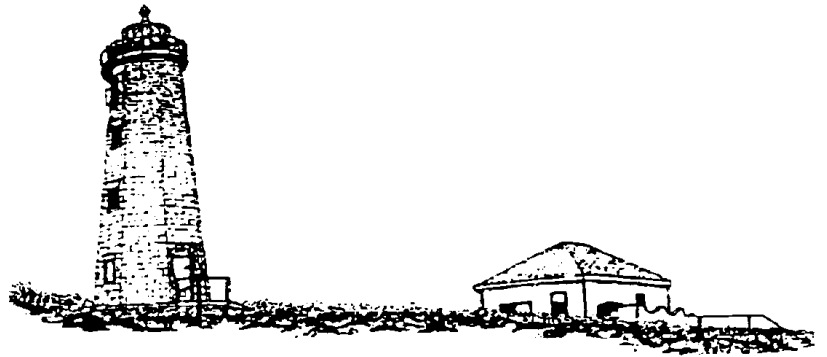


Benton Beach Beacon



May 2004

BBC Spring Work Weekend

by Ellen Fales

Our first beach event of the year will be the spring work weekend on Saturday, May 22nd and Sunday, May 23rd, starting on 9am both days. Come whatever day works best for you. In recent years Saturday has been the more attended day, although on a couple of occasions when it rained, most folks waited till Sunday. There will be a poster board of different jobs tacked up in the beach house. The usual projects will be tackled, including cleaning out the beach house, putting up the canopy, painting and bracing picnic tables, putting out the dock pieces, pulling up weeds and cutting brush and briars on the beach road. We hope to have the sand bulldozed down a bit also, as it has gotten pushed up so high on the beach. The eel grass and mud is also encroaching on the swimming area, so we will have some of that taken out at the same time when the bulldozer comes. We are hoping to be able to build a corner cupboard in the beach house, too, to be able to keep it a bit neater. There will be pizza, drinks and dessert provided on Saturday around 1pm. So come either day and help get the beach ready for another great summer!!

Benton Barn: A Symbol of Americana

by Joel Helander

Uncle Milton Benton's weather-beaten barn at 345 Vineyard Point Road, Sachem's Head, is truly a symbol of Americana. As the historian Eric Sloane has written, the "barn was born of

American soil and fitted to an American landscape for specific American needs."

There is an iron-like quality of the old wood of Benton Barn. There is a cleanness of the adze-cuts in its timber frame, hewn from oak and chestnut. Everywhere, the barn has the imprint of the builder's hand. It is built for soundness and endurance, for wind and weather. It is more than just an old barn, but the remnant of an old barnyard. It is a stark reminder of the families who shed blood, sweat, and tears to live off the land in the manner of their forefathers.

Benton Barn is tucked strategically in a little glen beside an old ice pond and stone well. Although the twin silos and open cowshed are gone, its beautiful proportions remain. Who was this barn builder who built with such architectural honesty? Where does this barn belong in the history of Guilford and New England?

Lest we believe for a minute that these sentiments (and appreciations) are over-stated, we can turn to the inclinations of Elton L. Helander, a city-bred boy, on his first visits to Sachem's Head. The years were 1946-1948, when he was dating Carolyn Benton. Elton documented Benton Barn and the seasonal functions of a farmer by using a Kodak camera with Kodachrome slide film. Of the barn, he later painted a February snow scene in oils, which still hangs in the Helander home. Clearly, Elton Helander was charmed by the barn's appearance. Perhaps he viewed it as a picture of Americana. Perhaps he knew that in order to find the spirit of early America, one first looks to the country. In the city, no one whistles yesterday's tunes.

And lest we believe for a minute that Benton Barn is not really celebrated, we can turn to the

venerable halls of Yale Peabody Museum in New Haven, CT. For 59 years, a color mural with Benton Barn as its focal point has been viewed by hundreds of thousands of visitors. The mural is the background painting for a diorama in the "Hall of Southern New England." It was painted by J. Perry Wilson (1889-1976), an artist widely known in museums of natural history. In recent weeks, when Edwin & Kasha Benton were admiring the diorama on the third floor of the museum, a staff member overheard their remarks about its location. Evidently, Peabody staff had never learned where this model barn stood and expressed great joy in knowing. The following Sunday, as I rode my bicycle past Uncle Milton's driveway, my attention was arrested by a gentleman down on his knees near the barn. At first, it appeared that somebody had fallen. But not so. It was Mr. Copeland MacClintock, invertebrate paleontologist at Peabody, who had received special permission from Milton Benton to examine the barn. For Copeland and his associate, this barn was an exciting, new discovery. Coincidentally, as Copeland and myself introduced ourselves, we both realized that we had corresponded on the subject of Eastern Box Turtles for some time -- never realizing our common bond with Benton Barn.

By Grandpa Benton's own account (Eliot H. Benton) in a taped interview (8/24/1968), Benton Barn was built as an outbuilding for the farmhouse at 370 Vineyard Point Road. In the tradition of the nineteenth century, it was built before the farmhouse, (to provide first for the livestock), but oddly enough, the barn was built on the opposite side of the road and at some distance from the house. There is a good reason for this, according to Grandpa Benton. He stated that John Benton (his grandfather's brother) planned to locate the house near the barn, perhaps on the flat ground near the beginning of Milton's driveway. The shallow ledge required blasting, which became so

difficult that the entire venture was abandoned and they relocated the house to the south (present) side of Vineyard Road. Grandpa Benton always spoke of the Benton brothers working together on the construction of their three houses in Sagem's Head, so it might be assumed that barn-raising involved the same cooperative venture. The brothers were Dan L. Benton, Jr., Richard Benton, and John Benton.

The two story portion of Benton Barn, which is the hay mow, originates to circa 1850 and the sons of Dan L. Benton, Sr. The John Benton farmhouse was built in 1851 at the time of John Benton's marriage. Many of us can remember the old cowshed (on the barn's east end) that collapsed during Hurricane Gloria. Along in the 1960s, first cousins had fun and frolic playing here, crawling along a catwalk of planks that had been laid at ceiling level. A set of oxcart wheels in the end bay of the cowshed was a source of curiosity. According to Grandpa Benton, the barn originally had a second cowshed on the same perpendicular as the first shed, but on the other (west) end of the barn. The 1852 Irvine wall map of Guilford confirms the original configuration of the barn with its two cowsheds. At some unknown date, both cowsheds were joined together as one long building.

Like older dwelling houses, barns have an evolution of

their own, telescoping up and out to accommodate the needs of their owners. The narrow one story extension on the west end of the barn, nearly even with Milton Benton's driveway, dates to circa 1860, when Horatio L. Scranton owned the John Benton Farm. It is properly called the cowbarn, as opposed to the larger haybarn. Scranton was the proprietor of the grand Sagem's Head Hotel, 1859-1865. He owned the farm for the purpose of supplying dairy products and other fresh provisions to grace the dining tables of his establishment.

The farm returned to Benton family ownership and was a wedding gift for Herbert Benton, the father of Eliot H. Benton. In 1888, the Grand



List of Guilford shows that Herbert was assessed for "10 neat cattle". Doubtlessly, they were housed in the cowsheds. Milton Benton states that his Grandfather Herbert told him personally of his harrowing experience during the Blizzard of 1888. The blizzard "dumped" snow for two days in March. By the second day, Herbert devised a scheme to make his way to the barn to care for the cattle. He took a large coil of manilla rope and fastened it to the shop outside the farmhouse. He played out the rope as he fought his way through blinding snow. Before reaching the barn, he reached the end of the rope and didn't dare continue for fear of being lost. He returned to the farmhouse with the security of the lifeline, yet distress of neglecting the livestock for that unforgettable day.

About 1900, Herbert Benton established the retail milk business that son Eliot later expanded. A small herd of dark red Devon cows supplied milk enough for the needs of the family and two winter customers: Ernest Barker and the Fiskes. In summertime, when the cottagers returned to Sachem's Head, milk sales soared.

Father and son, Herbert and Eliot Benton, opened up the cowbarn on the south side along in the 1920s for the installation of a manure carrier. This consisted of a bucket on little wheels, suspended on a cable that was extended to an outdoor pole.

Along in the 1930s, Eliot H. Benton built up an accredited Guernsey herd of cows and advertised for a milk route in Guilford. His fine reputation gave him the patronage of about fifty families. This retail business coincided with the arrival of electricity (1930), which allowed use of "surge" milking canisters, instead of the old hand-milking method. One-cylinder gasoline motors in the barn used for pumping water were retrofit with a vacuum pump to run the new milking machines. Concrete floors were poured in the Benton cowbarn and stanchions set into place. Eliot Benton arose every day at 5:00 a.m. and milked not less than a dozen cows. After breakfast, he cooled, bottled, and loaded up for milk delivery. Ice made the matter of refrigeration simple. Ice in the pond next to the barn was carefully marked in wintertime and cut into blocks. If packed in sawdust, the ice would last through summer.

At the time of the Hurricane of 1938, Eliot H. Benton extended the haybarn about twelve feet

on the east gable end, using lumber salvaged from William H. Norton's barn in Leete's Island. This created more room in the haymow. At haying time, it fell to the six children of Eliot and Mabel Benton to spread out the hay as it was pitched in through the top window. Tightly baled hay had not been introduced -- the mow was a large nest of loose hay.

Shortly after 1940, Eliot Benton and son Milton added a large sloping roof addition (eaves extension) onto the cowbarn. They laid up a cinder block foundation and used second hand timber salvaged from the old Newhall Cottage, which was virgin, white pine boards.

H. Milton Benton, the third of Mabel and Eliot's six children, fell to farming and stuck to it. He began milking cows at twelve years of age and at sixteen years took charge of milk deliveries for his father. At seventeen years of age, he plowed a two-acre field when his parents were on vacation. About 1945, Milton and his father formed a partnership in the retail milk business. Eliot H. Benton & Son became a well-known tradition in Guilford. Their cows yielded an average of 100 quarts daily. By 1959, when Eliot Benton retired, Milton had given up the retail route and was wholesaling 240 quarts daily to Maple Shade Dairy. The well-known oppressions of farming prompted him to retire from dairy farming a few years later.

Milton Benton continues to regale his children, grandchildren, and extended family with true-life adventures about Sachem's Farm. He is truly a bridge between modern farming and farming of yester-year, when horses -- not tractors, were used for heavy farm work and kerosene lanterns preceded modern electric lighting. Benton Barn is part of the legacy of the Benton Family as well as a symbol of Americana.

Changing of the Guard

Effective December 2, 2003, the Board of Directors elected new officers, as follows: Ellen Benton Fales, President; Donna Spalding Chemacki, Vice-President; Heather Benton Collinson, Secretary; and Joel E. Helander, Treasurer. This changing of the guard was required by the "Guidelines for Board Structure," as revised by shareholders at the 2001 annual meeting.

Eliot H. Benton's Humor

(as related by his son, Milton, to his daughter, Marjorie)

We were raking hay in the "Upper Lot" (now owned by Fishers). I was using the one horse dump rake, which has large spring steel teeth which lift above rocks. I saw a bunch of high grass and wondered why Dad hadn't cut it, so I went through it. Yellow jackets flew up in hordes, attacking me and Suzanne, the horse, which took off in fright. As I pulled the horse over to the stonewall where Dad was raking by hand and laughing, I said, "Dad, that wasn't funny!" He replied, "Well, it was funny from here where I'm standing!"

I was shingling the roof of the cowbarn, when all of a sudden, Dad (at 80 years of age) appeared on the roof with me. I was so surprised to see him that I asked, "Dad, how did you get here?" He said, "Well, I didn't jump, I came up the same way you did, up the ladder!"

The Wisdom of Daily Life

by Marjorie B. Spalding

- 1) Watch a sunrise at least once a year.
- 2) Plant flowers every spring.
- 3) Look people in the eye.
- 4) Compliment three people every day.
- 5) Live beneath your means.
- 6) Choose your life's mate carefully. From this one decision will come ninety percent of all your happiness or misery.
- 7) Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring, and integrity, they think of you.
- 8) Don't postpone joy.

Notes

Calendar of Events:

Saturday, May 22	Beach	clean-up/work day
Sunday, May 23	Beach	clean-up work day
Tuesday, June 15	Alpha Club	picnic (Lynne)

June 22-27	Fales/Schaefer	camp-out
Tuesday, June 22 12 noon+/-	Bridgeport school class	visit (Andrea Feig)
Sunday, July 4, 12 noon+	Edwin & Kasha's	picnic
Sunday, July 11, 1 p.m.+	TOPS group	picnic (Lynne)
Sunday, July 18	CURVES group	picnic (Lynne)
Saturday, July 24	Benton family	picnic
July 30-August 1	Tim & Sharon & friends,	camp-out
August 1-7	Whelan family	camp-out

Please remember to call Heather Benton Collinson, secretary, (860-663-3076) for scheduling a special event. A scheduled event does not create a reservation or exclusive use of the beach premises, but is designed to avoid conflicts and serve as a useful reference calendar.

Content Submission

Please submit any articles or family updates to Tim Chemacki for incorporation into the next issue (*preferably by email*).

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