



*Sam and Elsie Norton on their wedding day*

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### **TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting**

From the Century Farm Awards given this month to eligible applicants comes some very interesting farm land history of the families who pioneered this relatively young county. Over the next few weeks we will share with you some of their record of this history in hopes that over the next year more eligible farm land owners will apply for this award. The criteria is fairly simple in that you must have owned at least 25 contiguous acres within a family line for at least 100 consecutive years. And that some portion of that acreage be agriculturally maintained as fields or pasture but not necessarily be worked or used by the land owner themselves. Applications are available at the Sullivan County Conservation District office, the Sullivan County Historical Society or can be obtained on the web site [www.scpahistory.com](http://www.scpahistory.com). What follows is just one story.

Born on the Norton Ridge homestead farm in 1887, Samuel Norton grew to deeply care for his "adopted" grandparents, Joseph and Mary (Sabin Kelder) Pardoe. Joseph's first wife had been Eliza Ann (Molyneux) Pardoe whom he married in 1871 and she had died having been

an invalid for a number of years. Mary was Joseph's second wife who had been widowed with a son, T.A. Kelder. They were married 1883. Joseph then passed away in 1917 and Mary in 1937.

In the meanwhile, getting back to Sam Norton, the back fields of his family's homestead on Norton Ridge Road and the back fields of Mr. Pardoe were adjoined. When old enough to walk on his own, Sam would go through the field and down a pasture clearing that still exists today to then walk up the other side to visit the Pardoes. Them having no children of their own, Joseph and Mary lavished their attention on the boy. As Sam grew he would originally "help" Mr. Pardoe and that eventually evolved into real help as Sam became a young man and Mr. Pardoe grew older. Mr. Pardoe, having no children, continued to farm as well as he could but this became more and more difficult. As he came of age, Sam fell in love with and married Elsie Rinker from Hillsgrove and he moved down there for work. One day he got a message that Mr. Pardoe wanted to see him, so soon as he could – up he went. Mr. Pardoe started out with a question: "Sam, you'd said when you were younger that you'd like to live here one day. Does that still hold true?" To that Sam answered "It does still!" And from that exchange they made a gentlemen's agreement to do what could be called 'a rent to own' agreement. The year was 1904. In tracing the deed, the final deed transaction was completed in 1911, that's seven years! Sam had done every possible thing he could to make the extra money to accomplish this, all the while running the farm and starting a family. It was said that when Sam was outside working you could hear him singing from neighboring farms. Sam and Elsie's first son Ivan was born in 1908. A second son, Howard was born in 1910 and died in 1911, a third son, Paul was born in 1912 and then Elsie with child died in 1913. When Ivan's son Wylie got the family farm from Paul's widow in 1990, there were still people around who remembered Elsie's funeral wake that was held in the farm house with an oval windowed coffin where she and the infant lay like they were only sleeping. After Elsie's death, Sam never sang again.

At the Century Farm awards dinner of the Sullivan County Historical Society, Wylie Norton told about two old maple trees just out the back yard of the farm house. He'd been told that they were saplings when Sam was born in 1887. And in one of them is a bull ring on a heavy chain. Although not looking forward to the demise of either of these trees, Wylie would someday like (when they eventually come down) to know the number of links that remain embedded in the over 129 year old tree.