



Putney Historical Society

Fall 2018



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Zsolt Takacs Putney Story

(based on interview with Barbara Taylor)

THINK BACK TO AGE 17 — hot cars, college applications, dating and summer jobs, but it wasn't Zsolt Takacs's reality in 1956 at that age. He was alone and running for his life, leaving behind his family and country, Hungary, with only what he had taken with him at the time. He must have been really scared.

After a terrifying several days, being captured, interrogated, starving and held at gunpoint, he and others were put on a truck and told they were being returned to Budapest. Luckily, they were intercepted by a group of "Freedom Fighters" who helped them reach Mosendorf, Austria. It was now November, 1956 and they were safe.

Finally reaching Vienna, there was food, housing and help to relocate them to either Australia, Canada or the US. Zsolt was sent to the United States and Putney, Vermont. He arrived at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. Zsolt, along with 10 others, were met by Dr. Jack Wallace, who was working for the Experiment in International Living, based in Putney (the current Greenwood School

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FOR SALE!

Putney General Store Business is for Sale

THE PUTNEY GENERAL STORE — is the iconic cornerstone business in the heart of downtown Putney. Established circa 1796, it is the longest operating general store in Vermont. Rebuilt by the community after a devastating fire, the two-story post and beam structure is owned by the Putney Historical Society and has been leased to proprietor/tenants.

For the past fifteen months, the Putney Historical Society has been the proprietor with volunteer, non-profit management of the store in order to reflect on what the needs of the Putney Community are and what the role of the Putney General Store should be. With inventory currently around \$50,000 and using only the 2300 sf ground floor, the store grossed close to \$900,000 in the first year and is on a healthy and steady growth path to hit \$1 million the second

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Get Involved in the PHS!
Join and Participate
in Preserving
Putney's History!





Putney General Store Business, *continued from page 1*

year. Now it is time to find a professional with experience who will aggressively manage the store and possibly expand to use the beautiful 2500 sf 2nd floor space. There is currently seating for about 25 with the potential for expansion upstairs.

There are many directions in which the Putney General store could be taken. What is clear from the many conversations, panels, and meetings with Putney constituencies over the last year, is that the community wants the store to continue to be the community crossroad. The potential is high to use the elevator-served upstairs to increase sales with varied products and services that allow people a place to gather. Ideas range from an espresso bar upstairs with expanded general goods around the edges or a local art and craft showcase. There is nostalgia for a store that offers light hardware, children's toys, and more pharmacy products. People appreciate a place where they can use Wi-Fi to work with a coffee, chat with their neighbors, but also grab a mouse trap or a light bulb. Parents visiting students at the town's three residential educational institutions as well as the many summer & fall tourists come in looking for Vermont coffee, local info and products that reflect Vermont.



The thriving business is currently for sale. The Putney Historical Society is looking for a new proprietor/tenant and is happy to work with potential operators to ensure their success in serving the community and growing the business. Please stop by or call (802-387-4692) if you, or someone you know, are interested. ■

AVAILABLE

Items for Sale

PHS has copies of several publications for sale:

The History of Putney Vermont 1753–1953 — \$15

Putney: World's Best Known Small Town — \$25

People of Putney — \$20

Gravestone Inscriptions of Putney, by Ken Stevens — \$15

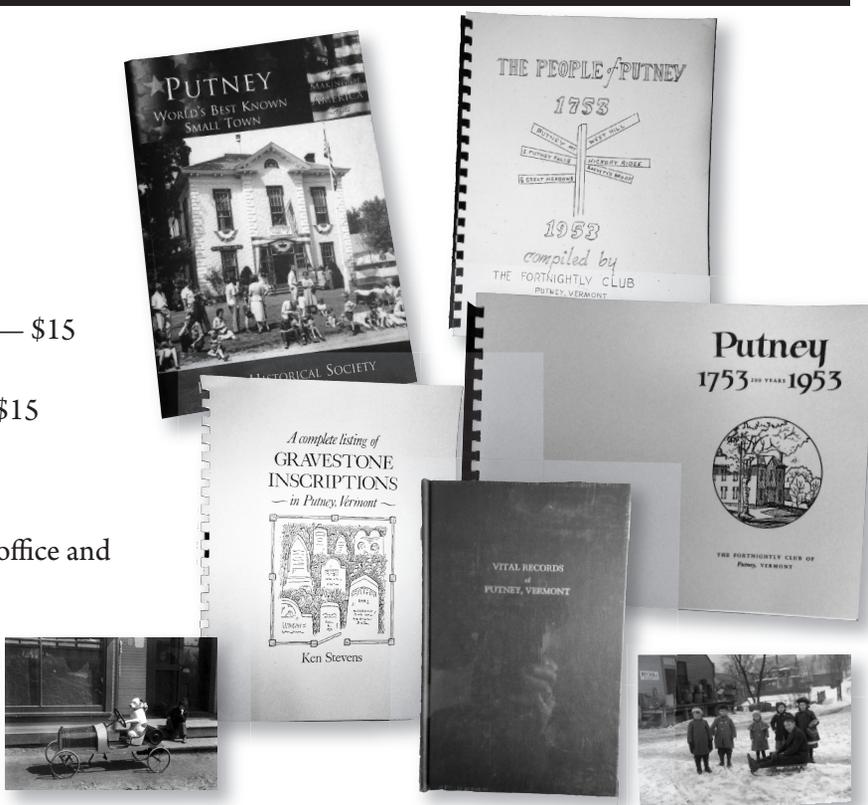
Putney Vital Records, by Ken Stevens — \$30

1800 Map of Putney by Cory and Carpender — \$15

Map of Putney Countryside by Dodd — \$15

Post cards of Putney — 80¢

These items are available at the historical society office and at the Putney General Store. ■



Book Blurbs

by Emily Zervas, Putney Public Library

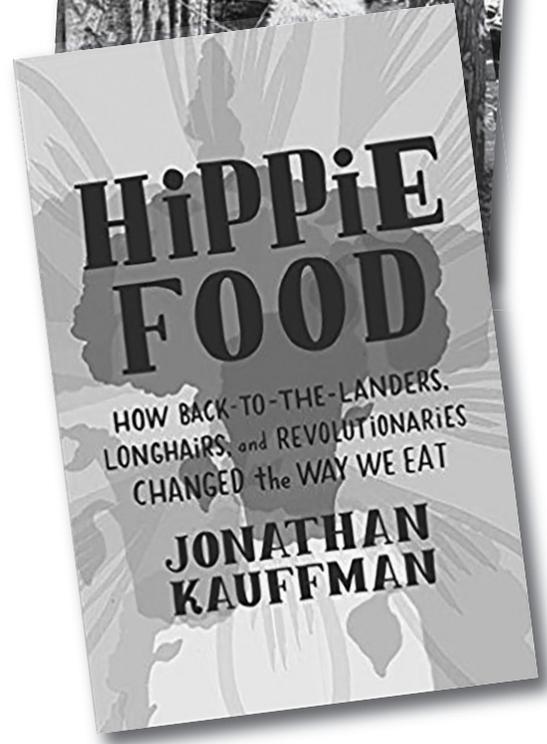
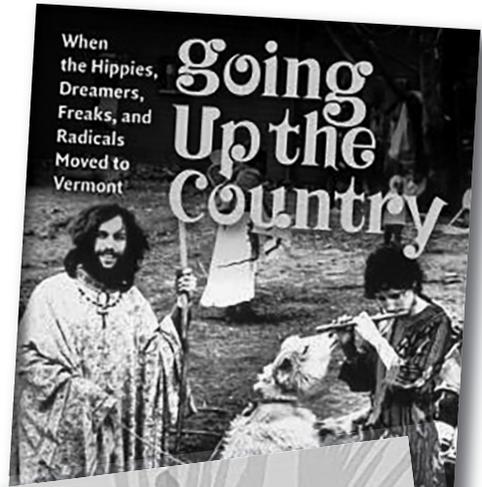
Going Up the Country: When the Hippies, Dreamers, Freaks, and Radicals Moved to Vermont by Yvonne Daley

Red Clover, Packers Corners, and other Vermont communities that boomed in the 1960s, take center stage in this look at Vermont's place in the back-to-the-land movement. Daley takes a look at the reasons for, and dramatic impact of, the migration of younger people to Vermont and how this has continued to influence the social and political fabric of our state.

Hippie Food: How Back-to-the-Landers, Longhairs, and Revolutionaries Changed the Way We Eat by Jonathan Kauffman

While less specifically about Vermont, Kauffman's book is still an entertaining look at how the counterculture of the 1960s has had a lasting impact on our culture, and specifically our food. From macrobiotic pioneers to the rise of the local food co-op, *Hippie Food* delves into the food and community trends that became popular during the same period that everyone was *Going Up the Country*.

Both of these books are available in the New Non-Fiction section of the Putney Library! Call or stop by to put them on hold today: 387-4407 ■



Annual Meeting Date Set

PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING will be held on September 16th at 2 pm at Next Stage.

After a short business meeting, there will be a presentation of plans for the Historic Walking Tour that the PHS is developing. Houses dating prior to 1850 will be featured in a pamphlet that will be provided to the public to learn about the history of the early houses and residents of the village. ■



Phineas White-John Kimball House, c 1815, drawing by Tim Ragle



PUTNEY NOSTALGIA

A Nostalgic Visit to Putney

by Gerald Elkin

Gerald Elkin visited Putney this Summer and offered this reminiscence of his time here.

In June, 2018, I returned to Putney. I am Gerald Elkan, a retired Professor of Microbiology at North Carolina State University, but 75 years ago, I was a middle school kid having just seen a story in a scholastic magazine about the "Victory Farm Volunteer Program." The Vermont Agricultural Extension service was one of the participants asking for summer help on area farms. Mrs. Martha Buttrick, the agent in charge, placed me on the farm owned by George Hamilton, of Putney. There, for several summers, as well as short periods in the Fall, prior to graduation, I was part of the Hamilton family with a grand salary of \$30 per month.

George Hamilton was a Vermonter with advanced degrees, who had taught vocational agriculture at Manumit School before returning with his wife Frances to his farm on Kimball Hill Road (Westminster Road) in Putney. Manumit school was organized as an "experimental Christian socialist boarding school for workers children" It was a successful experiment which unfortunately could not overcome the McCarthy era of the early 1950s. Among the notable graduates were: Ezra Stone (Henry Aldridge), Lee Marvin, Madeline Klein and a number of politicians.

Hamilton ran a general farm. He was also a local leader, serving in various town offices and later as a socialist member of the Vermont legislature. He had dairy cows, chickens, a few pigs, and of course horses. We used real, not mechanical horsepower for all needs. Occasionally, when extra power and help were needed, this was supplied by a neighbor, Raymond Pierce and his tractor. Another neighbor would loan his "doodlebug," a local term for a model A ford, converted to a pseudo-tractor. Hamilton, always ahead of his time, practiced sustainable agriculture. He grew all of his feed using no (or a minimum) chemicals using manure and compost. His income came from the sale of milk, cream, cheese, eggs and all kinds of fruit and vegetables. It was this produce that was central to my Putney experience.

On about a one acre garden, the farm yielded seasonable, perennial and annual fruit and vegetables for personal and local consumption. Local folks would come to pick their choices or we would deliver. Thus, I got to meet so many of the Putneyites. Up the hill from the farm lived Carol Brown, a most interesting lady who imported hand woven tweeds from Ireland and expanded this to a successful business. There were always interesting guests and customers at her home. I think she lived to be about 100 years old and must have been a local celebrity since I noticed a street named for her.

Another nearby neighbor was Dr. Daniel(?) Tolmach, a dentist and who was a Trotskyite Russian exile. I believe he had two sons. He would come by with his wife and harvest his own vegetables, while sharing political lessons.

Frances Hamilton worked part-time for Donald B. Watts, the founder of The Experiment in International Living, as the only employee. There were not many travel opportunities during the war but the program, still housed in the area, is active in at least 20 countries and has involved more than 250,000 young people to date. Things thrive in Putney!

A few miles out of Putney there lived Scott and Helen Nearing. Scott Nearing, an economist, underwent several political and economic incarnations, but he was always a pacifist. Always confrontational, he was dismissed from a Professorship at the University of Pennsylvania and prosecuted by the government for refusing military service. Scott and Helen owned a large tract of land and opted for the simple life, living off the land and trying to earn a living selling maple syrup. They



Gerald Elkin





PUTNEY NOSTALGIA

were “ultra” vegan vegetarians because “life is valid for all other species”. Thus they would not kill a living thing, even an insect. They were not able to sustain themselves and depended on locals donating food which is how I met them. They were the pioneers of the back to the land movement and wrote well received books, especially “Living the Simple Life” For years they wrote a column in *Mother Earth News*, called the Wisdom of Scott and Helen Nearing. The Nearings were important mentors to the Hippie generation. Scott died at 101.

Most of all, I remember U. S. Senator George Aiken who owned a wild flower nursery in Putney. Senator Aiken and George Hamilton were Grange leaders and the Grange meetings were held in the little white frame building with the sagging balcony across the street from the Next Stage building. Senator Aiken would attend regularly, without staff or airs. He was extremely popular in Vermont and, was reported to have spent a total of \$17.09 on a re-election campaign. He served as dean of the Senate, a position currently held by Senator Patrick Leahy!

I was on the farm when World War 2 ended, but as I recall, Putney did not celebrate until the next evening. I guess, always prudent Vermonters wanted to make sure the war really ended and would stay ended. Then the town started a huge bonfire across from the general store and there began a great celebration that ended abruptly when some boys threw 22 caliber bullets into the fire. There were loud pops and luckily no one was hurt and no damage was done but enthusiasm quickly waned.

Since Vermont had gotten under my skin, I decided to exchange my breakfast grits for maple syrup and attend the University of Vermont. The only problem was that with so many veterans returning, the University would not accept out of state applicants. Hoping for his assistance, I sought out Senator Aiken in his office in DC. I asked him if he could get me admitted to the University of Vermont. He said that he could but would not. Taken aback, I asked why not. He said that I would never feel right knowing I got my education through influence and not through my own ability. The Senator was right, of course, and that lesson has been most meaningful me. I doubt that there is a senator with such integrity around today.

Several times each week, I would walk to the diner around the corner from the general store (down from Mtn Paul’s store), across from the paper mill, to buy a malted milk shake (for one dime) and visit with the congregants there. We solved many world problems in that little diner. Unfortunately, I found the diner is gone but the problems are still here.

I figure that over the several years, I spent an accumulated 6 or 7 months in Putney. Recalling all of these things, after so many years, is not a memory feat but rather because the lessons I learned come to mind so often. ■



15 Kimball Hill Transferred to Next State Arts Project

ON APRIL 1, 2018 — the Putney Historical Society transferred ownership of the former United Church of Putney at 15 Kimball Hill to the Next Stage Arts Project. The PHS and Next Stage have collaborated over several years in fund raising, planning and operating the new arts venue in the center of Putney. The PHS will continue to maintain office hours at Next Stage as well as storage and display space. Next Stage will operate the facility and continue providing excellent performances in music, theater, spoken word and other forms Putney and the surrounding region have come to love. ■



Zsolt Takacs Putney Story, *continued from page 1*

Campus). Dr. Wallace had arranged for these young men to stay with area families. Some stayed with George Aiken, David Hamilton, and Dr. Steve Blickenstaf, a Columbia University professor who lived in the area. Dr. Wallace arranged for them to have English lessons each morning at his home and help with different jobs in the area (Does anyone remember the stonewall in front of the Catholic Church?). The English lessons were taught by Laura Heller and Mrs. Edward John.

Dr. Wallace wanted to know what they did as a group for fun. Soccer was the game they liked to play. They played the Windham College team. Dr. Wallace knew someone involved with the Tootingham Hot Spur team touring the US from Tootingham, England and so persuaded them to play the Hungarian refugee team in Putney. Having no experience in sewing, Zsolt sewed uniform pants for the team. They were given sneakers and white t-shirts numbered with a magic marker.

Zsolt recalls seeing the bus arrive with the Hot Spur's team, and with them women dressed in furs and diamonds. The Hungarian Refugees, in their make shift uniforms; beat the Spurs 3 to 2. The Spurs were not happy. Several weeks later, Dr. Wallace received a call from their manager asking for a rematch since he was sure it was a fluke. Ready now, they had gone to Boston for proper shoes but played in the same uniform. This time the Hungarians won 4 to 3. Years later, Zsolt visited the Spurs headquarters in London and asked to see the records of these games. He was told that they NEVER played on the East Coast only in California.

Thanks to Zsolt Takacs for providing this story. ■

THE PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY has been searching for any news article about the games that took place in August 1957 but as yet have not located any. Thanks to the Brattleboro Historical Society, we were able to search the bound copies of the *Brattleboro Reformer* dating back to 1957. The Brattleboro library also has the Reporter's card file that noted dates and subjects that the reporters wrote about. Sadly nothing has come to light. Dwight Smith, years ago, published a paper in Putney. The PHS has copies from 12/6/47 to 2/1/58; however, we are missing 1957. Reverend Cole published a paper but those were in the 1970s. Does anyone remember this group of young men? Does anyone have any 1957 papers published in Putney at the time? Please contact us if you have any further information.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
ANNUAL MEETING
SEPTEMBER 16TH AT 2 PM**

Office Hours

THE PHS is maintaining office hours at 15 Kimball Hill from 10am to 1pm every Saturday. Please stop by and visit, ask questions about Putney

History or search for photographs of your house. There is a lot of information available that we can try to direct you to.



Photographs: PHS has several historic photograph collections from the late 19th century to the middle 20th century. The Fairchild collection is the work of A. M. Corser, former owner of the general store, and Mary Corser Thwing, who both documented town events, places and people for many years. Several years ago the Brattleboro Historical Society donated a collection of negatives taken by the Brattleboro Reformer from 1949 to 1976, although most date to the 1950s. They include a wide range of community events over those years. In addition to these fairly coherent collections, we have a variety of additional photographs dating to the 19th and 20th centuries that have been donated and collected over the years.

Many of the photographs in the PHS collections are of known locations and people, often with associated names and dates. However, a large number are of unknown people and places. We would love to have help in identifying these photographs. Please stop by the PHS office to see if you can recognize any people or places in the photos or to look for views of your house! ■

PHS Calendar Coming Soon!

SEVERAL YEARS AGO the Brattleboro Historical Society donated to the Putney Historical Society a collection of photographic negatives of events in Putney taken by the *Brattleboro Reformer* from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s. These negatives depict a wide array of events in Putney during those years. Some people and events seen in the images are identified, but many are not. We would welcome help in identifying these people and events from anyone who would like to look through the images.

The PHS has decided to draw on this collection for the annual calendar this year. Look for the calendar at the Putney General Store, Putney Co-op and at the PHS offices in the coming months. Great gifts for friends and family members far and wide. ■



Eleanor Roosevelt at Putney School (Calendar image)

Volunteers Needed!

THE PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY is looking for volunteers interested in helping with two important tasks, maintaining the PHS website and curating our large collection. The website is on the Wordpress platform and we would like to keep it up to date with current PHS plans and programs, as well as providing detailed information on Putney history. At the same time, older posts need to be archived but accessible on the website. Our collection cataloging needs to be updated and the collection organized to make it more accessible to the public and for PHS programs and displays. Our accession and deaccession policies need to be reviewed, updated as appropriate, and implemented to reflect our mission of collecting and educating on the history of Putney.



We are looking for one or more volunteers who can organize each of these tasks and help develop procedures for maintaining the website and collections. Please contact the PHS at 802-387-4411 if you are interested in helping. Or stop by our office at Next Stage during our office hours on Saturdays between 10 am and 1 pm. ■

**The Putney Historical Society needs you onboard.
Please join us or renew your membership.**

Membership and donation are now available online at <http://putneyhistory.us>

Make checks payable to: Treasurer, Putney Historical Society
PO Box 260, Putney Vermont 05346

- \$5 Senior (basic) \$15 Individual (basic) \$25 Family
 \$50 Sustaining \$100 Benefactor \$250 Patron \$_____ Other

Thank you! PHS is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. All donations beyond basic membership are tax deductible.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL _____



Putney Historical Society

15 Kimball Hill
PO Box 260
Putney, VT 05346

OUR MISSION

is to bring together those persons interested in history, especially in the history of the Town of Putney; to discover and collect materials ... pertinent to the history of Putney; to acquire property or rights in interest in property in order to preserve historic resources.



Printed with assistance by
C&S Wholesale Grocers, in support of our community. ♻



Mystery Photo from the Fairchild Collection at PHS

L A B E L E D W. E. Pierce with cows in yard, dated 1904. Does anyone know where this scene was located?

