

Putney Historical Society

Fall 2019



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802-387-4411

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The Life of an East Putney Farmhouse

by Carol L. Hughson

IN 1977, my husband and I found an old farmhouse for sale at 150 Cemetery Road, in Putney, Vermont. It needed a lot of repairs, but we decided to go forward with the purchase for two reasons. First, with only one immediate neighbor on that nice gravel road, the location was perfect for raising children. Next, we cared about preserving such a beautiful structure.

Early on, my husband ventured across the road and into our barn. Up and into the cupola he climbed (three stories!) on a primitive ladder. There, he noticed the name Warren Parker carved into the wood. When he told me about his find, I wrote the name down and tucked it away for future reference.

Years passed quickly by with both of us working full time and raising our family. Warren Parker was long forgotten. However, after retirement I found family genealogy research to be a rewarding activity; and, finally, remembered Warren Parker. How fun and interesting it would be to find him! What could he tell us about our home and barn?

Since I was already a member of Ancestry.com I searched for him in hopes I might find some photos of our barn. My search yielded the name of a woman who listed Warren Parker in her family tree. I reached out to her through the site and asked if she had any photos. She didn't, but offered to share all of the information she had on Mr. Parker.

Within a few days, she messaged me with unbelievable news. She and I are related! Serendipity had brought our family to live in the home of my distant relative, Warren Parker. Who was this man?

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

The Life of an East Putney Farmhouse, *continued from page 1*



As evidenced by public records, Warren Parker was the son of Capt. Roswell Parker and grandson of one of the first settlers of Putney, Joshua Parker. Warren was a prominent businessman who for forty years manufactured the highly profitable horse hay rake in East Putney. He was also involved in the lumber trade; and, was a Director of the First National Bank of Brattleboro. Sadly, he lost a large portion of his property when the bank failed. However, he was highly respected by all who knew him; and, was buried in his family's plot within the East Putney cemetery. The Parker family made their home here from 1854–1890.

After discovering such intriguing information, I resolved to search for clues of our home's origin within a letter we had found underneath the floor boards of the second story while renovating. Dated Nov 4th, 1864, the letter was addressed to one of Mr. Parker's sons from his brother, Sterne O. Parker. It contained recollections of the grandeur of the ocean during a storm, and of puzzling over how his brother would get his horses into the barn. It also mentioned Lincoln and Johnson, and speculated that "Little Mac," (George B. McClellan) would be disappointed with the outcome of the Democratic presidential nomination/election the following week in which Sterne encouraged his brother to vote. On the whole, it was an informative letter. But, I was still no further in my search for our farmhouse and barn's origins.

Thankfully, a few Putney Historical Society members have guided me along this journey, and have been a tremendous help. I'm disappointed the records did show Parker was not the original builder as we have discovered several owners prior to Parker. We are, however, sure that Warren Parker had a great influence on this farmhouse throughout his years here, and what a beautiful farm it must have been!

Meanwhile, I've found a great deal of fascinating information about the subsequent owners, our farmhouse, and its barn and outbuildings.

For example, one of the former occupants was the founder of the Converse Rubber Shoe Company, Marquis M. Converse of Boston, who owned the farmhouse from 1893 to 1904. His half-brother, Charles H. Converse, a Putney farmer, owned the home from 1904 to 1905.

In addition, throughout the years, we have been told that our home was once a stagecoach stop, and an inn. In fact, we have a postcard of our home which has The Thistle Inn written on the back, date unknown. We can only imagine how many (and what kinds of) people have been within the walls of this farmhouse. Luckily, there are photos to help answer some of those questions.

As an example, a teacher, Elizabeth R. Turner, and her husband, Theron, owned our home from 1919 to 1933. Schoolhouse #7 (which ceased to exist as a school in 1945) is located next door.



We have seen photos of school children sitting happily on large metal milk cans, on our front porch, while celebrating their teacher's birthday.

Our versatile farmhouse, we have been told, was one time an orphanage. A few of the orphans returned to visit during the time Ella MacLaury owned the home (1946-1972).

Two photos of our property were included in the 2018 Putney Town Report, pages 45 and 79. One photo was of the barn and all its outbuildings. We were thrilled to see that photo because we had no idea what our barn, which now stands alone, looked like in its early days. Currently adjacent to the barn is a small area, bounded by granite posts, which looks like a small family cemetery plot. Over the years, I have planted flowers there. After seeing the photo, however, we have realized that the cemetery plot is actually an outbuilding's footings.

Throughout the years we have found and collected various artifacts on the property which included: a perfectly preserved small porcelain doll head which was found in our field; pieces of ancient soapstone water pipes; hand wrought nails; and, a primitive carpenter's tool with no apparent function, which was found in a partition of the house.

Once when replacing some clapboards on the oldest part of our house, we found an exterior wall wooden plank measuring 26 inches wide. We were so impressed by the extraordinarily wide plank that we took a photo; and, have since pondered its origins. Could it have been harvested from the Great Meadows which greeted the early settlers, where majestic and abundant yellow pine grew?

Fundamentally, our home appears the same as it was many years ago despite the gain and loss of some adjacent structures. Recently, the barn has undergone structural repair and reinforcement so that it may stand for at least another century.

Our dream is that, eventually, future owners will treat this farmhouse and land with the love and respect we have bestowed upon it over the course of our 42 years here.

Though the original owner and builder of 150 Cemetery Road remains a mystery, my quest to discover the origins of our farmhouse home continues.

Once again, my heartfelt thanks to the Putney Historical Society members for their invaluable insights.

If you or anyone you know may have information relevant to 150 Cemetery Road, please contact me at: Carol941@sover.net ■

Two Books Highlight Our Area's Fascinating History

(both available at Putney Public Library)

If: The Untold Story of Kipling's American Years

by Christopher Benfey

IN THIS NEW BIOGRAPHY, Mount Holyoke Professor of English, Christopher Benfey, shines light on Kipling's underexplored American years, four of which were spent living in Brattleboro, VT. During this time he wrote *The Jungle Book* and *Captains Courageous* and told many he was the working on "a great American novel". Kipling was forced to leave Brattleboro because of a family dispute and said at the time,

"There are only two places in the world where I want to live—Bombay and Brattleboro. And I can't live in either."

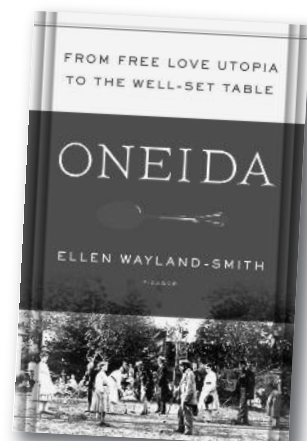
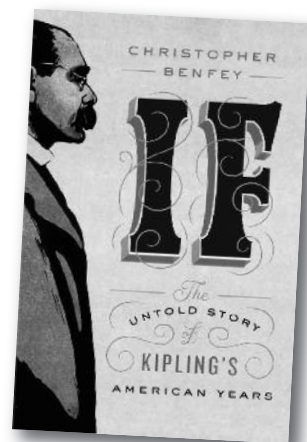
This history documents Kipling's happy years at Naulakha, his self-designed house overlooking the Connecticut River and his "guardian mountain", Wantastiquet. Benfey's description of Kipling's family life and their many prominent visitors and correspondents paints a beautiful picture of our area in the late 1800s.

Oneida: From Free Love Utopia to the Well-Set Table

by Ellen Wayland-Smith

WHILE NOT BRAND NEW, this exploration of the history of the Oneida colony is new to Putney Public Library and ready to be borrowed. The first chunk of this history covers the early life of John Humphrey Noyes, his childhood, awkward college years and the development of the perfectionist ideas and the Oneida community in Putney.

The book follows the group through their excommunication from Windham County and their resettling in New York state, with their eventual move to flatware manufacturing. ■



MYSTERY PHOTO



THIS YEAR'S MYSTERY PHOTO

is from the *Brattleboro Reformer* negatives and is labeled Opportunity Sale. We do not know the date or the names of the women in the photo. If anyone can provide any information, please let us know, 802-387-4411 or putneyhistory@gmail.com.

2018 Mystery Photo from the Fairchild Collection at PHS

Labeled W. E. Pierce with cows in yard, dated 1904. Betsy MacIsaac identified the mystery photo as the house and former barn at 219 East Putney Falls Road.



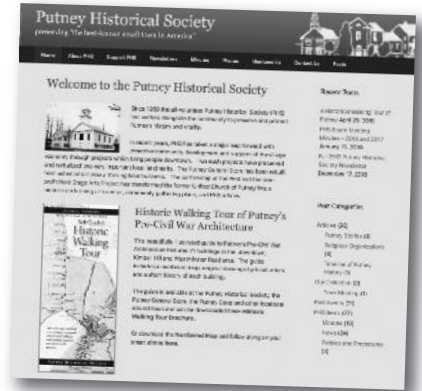
Annual Meeting Date Set

THE PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING will be held on Sunday September 8, 2019 from 2 to 4 PM at Next Stage (15 Kimball Hill). After a brief business meeting, Maryann Toffolon and Tim Ragle will lead the group on the walking tour of the village, based on the Historic Walking Tour pamphlet that the PHS recently published. Please join us. Rain date: September 15th from 2 to 4 PM. ■

Volunteers Needed!

THE PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY is looking for volunteers interested in helping with curating our large collection. 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. ■



Putney Grade Schools Reunion, Ltd.

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, the Putney Grade Schools Reunion Ltd. was formed to maintain a connection with all students, teachers and staff who attended the Putney grade schools, past and present. Everyone is invited to attend this year's reunion dinner. It will be held at the Carl M Dessaint VFW, 40 Black Mountain Road, Brattleboro, south of Exit 3 on I-91. (The VFW number is 802-257-0438.) on Saturday, Aug. 31. For more information, contact Anita Coomes (802-387-5715), email onlyhandy@gmail.com or see our Facebook page, "Putney Grade Schools Reunions." ■

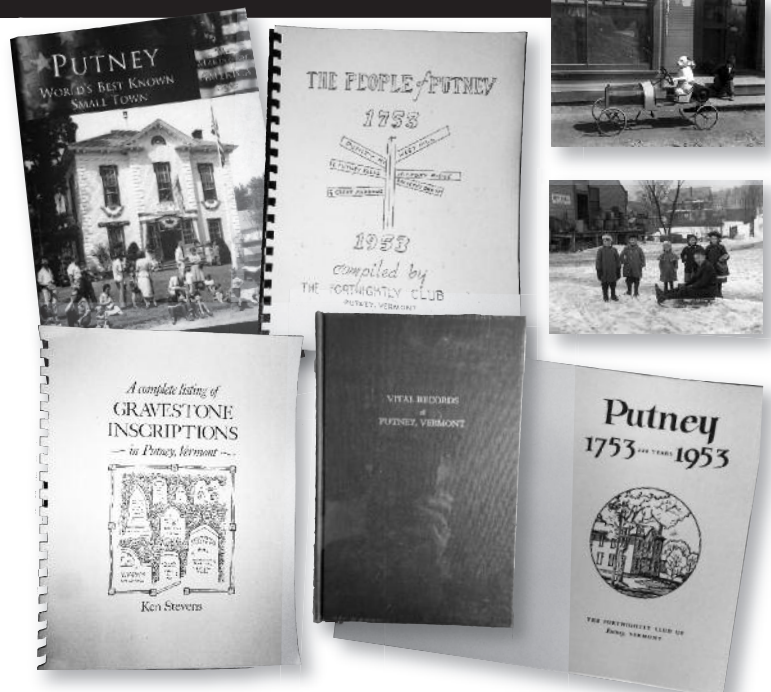
AVAILABLE

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. ■



PUTNEY SCHOOL SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY STUDIES CLASS

LYNNE WEINSTEIN AND KRISTIN DAWLEY of the Putney School created their Social Documentary Studies class with the express purpose of bridging the tools of photography and the discipline of history. The class is an opportunity for students to gain a deeper appreciation for the work of documentary work and also an exploration of what photos tell us about the societies that produced them.

With this fundamental question in mind “What can these photos tell us about Putney’s history?”, each year the class visits the Putney Historical Society. What do the PHS photos tell us about the Putney? First off, we learn that we are a town of people who love their cats and dogs. Some of the more humorous photos show cats on scales or dogs playing the piano or riding in cars. Putney folks clearly have a sense of humor and enjoyed play, with numerous photos of families laughing, children playing, families picnicking or swimming. We see examples of clothing styles in town and some of the formality and care. Students walk away with a sense that, in some ways, not too much has changed in town. We’re still a town with a farming and gardening orientation. There is a beautiful still life photo of a quart of Aiken’s strawberries. Not only was Aiken our state Governor and Senator, but also a horticulturalist. We learn that many of our town buildings remain central to the character of downtown, the tavern and general store most notably.

Many of the Putney School buildings are evident in the images. The river remains a vital landmark in many images, but our streets and roads have changed significantly. It’s always fun to hear the students’ exclamations as they explore the photos. By the end of our session, each student focuses on a particular photo and skills of photo document analysis, exploring content of the photos, inferences, and questions that photos lead us toward a richer sense of Putney town life. And, students gain an ability to transfer this skills of distinguishing object, inference, and questions as they approach a broader array of images throughout the class.

Here is the worksheet from the National Archives that students use:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet_former.pdf ■



Students from The Putney School doing historic photographic research, from right Bella Bonneau, Shyra Jainuddin, Ivy Fall, Steven Chen, Tom Fang

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
ANNUAL MEETING ■ SEPTEMBER 8TH AT 2-4 PM

Office Hours

THE PHS is maintaining office hours at 15 Kimball Hill from 10 AM to 1 PM 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 direct you to.

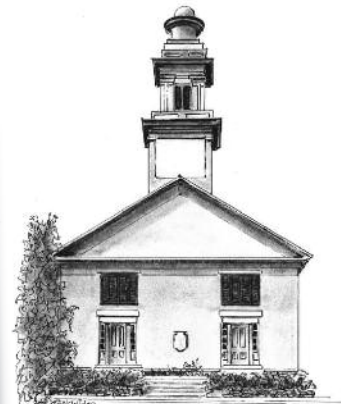
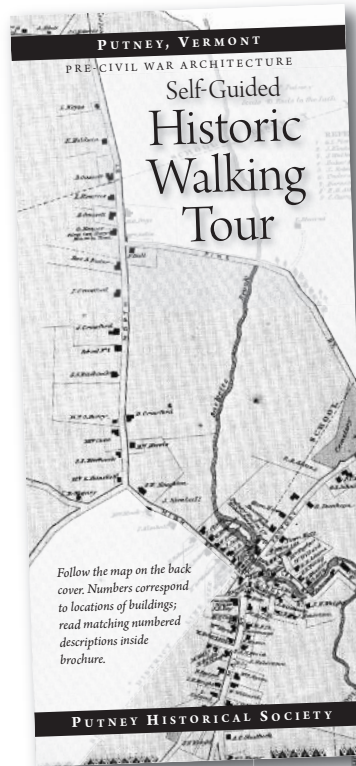
Photographs: PHS has several historic photograph collections from the late 19th century to the middle 20th century. The Fairchild collection is the work of A. M. Corser, former owner of the general store, and Mary Corser Thwing, who both documented town events, places and people for many

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 and Putney Walking Tour

INSPIRED BY THE PUTNEY WALKING TOUR that the PHS has developed, the 2020 calendar will feature historic photographs of houses in Putney. These photos come from our collections of historic photos from throughout Putney. 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. ■





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.



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The Putney Historical Society needs you onboard.

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Please support our effort by becoming a member.

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 _____