

History of the Thwing Grist Mill

By Laurel Ellis (Jan 2000)

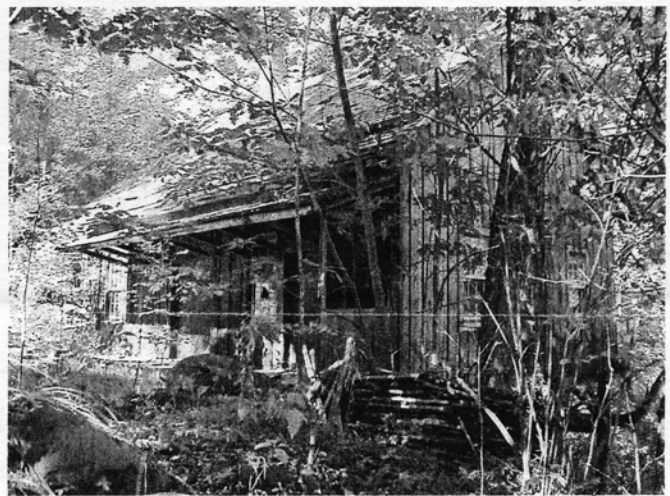
Edited by Lyssa Papazian (Aug 2001)

According to the *History of Putney 1753-1953*, the earliest Putney grist mills were a 1765 mill in East Putney built by Deacon Minott and a 1769 Sacketts Brook mill built by Jonathan Houghton. A new grist mill was built by Eliphalet Whitney on the site of the present Thwing Mill and was operating by 1799. In 1817 Whitney sold the mill to Luke Baker, who in turn sold to James Low. Lowe and Baker appear to have had a partnership from about 1819 until 1845 when the mill was deeded to Luke and James Baker. The Bakers, and probably Lowe, were part of the Perfectionist community and it appears that they ran the grist mill up until their flight to Oneida in the late 1840's.

In his book *Without Sin* about the Putney Perfectionists, Spencer Klaw reports that a group of Oneidans "...after satisfying themselves that Noyes's old enemies were no longer bent on harassing his followers, reopened, in 1851, the grist mill that the Putney Corporation had formerly operated there." In

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Wilson Donates Historic Grist Mill and Land to PHS



Thwing Grist Mill as it stands today

Photo: Tavalin

The Putney Historical Society will soon be the grateful recipient of a generous gift from Greg Wilson. The Society will be receiving the historic Thwing Grist Mill on the Sacketts Brook plus an additional .75 acre parcel of land on Mill Street known as the Gragen Property. This will be used for parking and to serve other needs associated with developing the mill into a museum. In addition to the gifts of property, deeds, and transfers, Greg has offered to assist the Historical Society to develop easy and permanent access to the site. The mill building, completely restored in 1990 by the Wilsons, can be best seen from Mill Street across the brook, where a bridge once connected the mill to Mill Street. ♦♦

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1860 "the old mill, known as the 'Baker,' 'Baker and Hall,' and the 'Community Grist Mill,' was purchased by Loren Holister, then William and John Robertson, who had the paper mills. Robertsons' 1865 deed to Horace Reynolds called it the "shoddy mill." It passed quickly from Reynolds to Elizah W. Brown to Lysander Holmes, and back to John Robertson in 1868. A "D. Wheeler" appeared to be running the mill on an 1869 map.

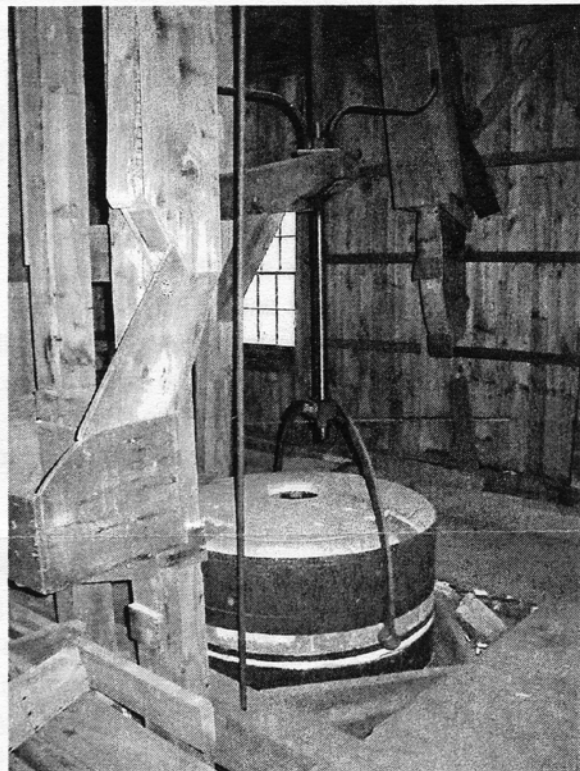
Following the "great freshet of 1869," John Robertson's deed of October 28, 1869 to Asa Shattuck and Isaac Puffer says: "land whereon was a grist mill...to build a new mill." On the same date, Shattuck and Puffer contracted the job "for building, furnishing and putting into operation a new grist mill" to Orren S. Thwing. According to *Putney 1753-1953*, the mill had two runs of stones made in Utica New York of Scotch granite carried overseas as ship ballast.

Five years later, Shattuck and Puffer deeded the mill back to John Robertson who signed an agreement to sell the mill to Thwing. Thwing had to pay six promissory notes all dated October 3, 1874 payable with interest of 7 3/10% and due as follows: 1 year \$100, 2 years - \$100, 3 years \$200, 4 years \$300, 5 years \$300 and 6 years \$400. On March 31, 1888, the mill was finally deeded to Thwing who deeded it to his son, Charles, the very next year.

Charles L. Thwing, born in Putney in 1863, married twenty year old Mary Corser of Putney in 1888. Charles and Mary, owned and operated the grist mill for 58 years. Charles, known as "the miller of Sackets Brook" made improvements such as adding an elevator and ground about 15,000 bushels a year. The mill ground and sold grain and carried specialty stock foods like cottonseed and gluten. Originally it stood on the side of a bridge over the Sacketts Brook, now demolished, and was a real center of community life. According to *Putney 1753 - 1953*, the dam was washed away in a flood the day before Charles died in 1946. After her husband's death Mary Thwing, an accomplished photographer, continued her public service to the town of Putney by running the Red Cross chapter, serving on the board of the Community Center, caring for the needs of children and others and

donating her time often to town causes. In 1962, after Mary's death, the grist mill was decreed to Archie and Synnove Whitney. The value listed at that time was \$100.

The old building fell into disrepair until it was purchased in 1986 by Greg and Steve Wilson who carefully restored it as closely as possible to the way it looked when it was last run as a grist mill. ♦♦



Mill equipment seen in its current location.

Photo: Tavalin

WHAT IS A FRESHET?

freshet \Fresh"et\, n. [OE. fresche flood + -et.]

A flood or overflowing of a stream caused by heavy rains or melted snow; a sudden inundation.

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998



Thwing's Grist Mill (front view). Charles Thwing on left and Garald Rhoades in center. Circa 1929.



Charles Thwing in the grist mill

Planning Begins for Thwing Mill Use

Receiving the gift of the Thwing Mill begins what will become a widespread planning effort to complete the restoration of the facility and make it available to the public. Initial research by Lyssa Papazian led to an intensive planning session for Putney Historical Society board members with non-profit advisor Steve Procter. The purpose of that meeting was to decide whether or not we should accept the donation, given that there are expenses involved with insuring the property and with bringing it to eventual public use. The animated discussion revealed the an overwhelming excitement for the mill's potential to enhance our mission of education, preservation, and fostering respect for the town's history. Now that the gift has been accepted, we enter a second phase of project development -- engaging prospective supporters in preparing a plan for use that can be phased in as funds allow. The meeting with Steve Procter generated a list of potential ways that the Thwing Mill could benefit the community. This list represents an early stage of thinking. If you are interested in participating with the further development of a plan or simply supporting the project, please contact Lyssa Papazian at 387-2878. ♦♦

Putney Historical Society Attends History Expo

By Barbara Taylor

The passion for Vermont history was ever present at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds for the Vermont Historical Expo, Saturday & Sunday, June 23 & 24. Although Saturday proved overcast and threatened rain, Vermonters and visitors to the state came away with smiles and a feeling of genuine excitement over each piece of history brought to life by the historical societies.

Two buildings and a large circus tent housed the 96 society exhibits. One very popular place was the Genealogy Resource Center. Computers were set up in Floral Hall, operated by staff members & volunteers from the Vermont Historical Society Library, the Church of Latter Day Saints, and the Genealogy Society of Vermont, to help visitors with their research.

For those folks needing a break from the history mode, a daily schedule of entertainment of all kinds was available: Edith Nichols as Hetty Green, Rusty DeWees in the Logger, Elisabeth von Trapp, folksinger, Moose Spirit Drummers. The list went on and on and included battle reenactments and live cannon fire. The kids had their own line up of events: Be a Butter Maker, Churn, wash and stamp; Marble Carving 101; Keep cool with Coolidge. They could also explore Heritage animals. Various groups and individuals in Vermont and New England have been preserving the genetics of these historic breeds.

After all that walking from place to place, the track area of the fairground provided a respite with your favorite food and drink. The historic kitchen was also showing just how it was done before the "Hot Dog Cart" with the open hearth. Once lunch was finished, a short walk through the Craft Tent was in order. These crafters were specially selected for their closeness to the historic manufacture of needed products. There was a rug hooker, baskets made from wood cut by a draw shave and pounded into filing for weaving, spinning wool, rosemaling on wood and tin, to name a few.

And if all this was not enough, some favorite local writers held book signings: Nancy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters*; Mark Breen, *The Kids Book of Weather Forecasting*; Tom Simon, *Green Mountain Boys of Summer: Vermonters in the Major Leagues 1882-1993*.

Coming back to the Putney Historical Society booth, we found many visitors interested in the story we had to tell. Our historical theme this year was about the Putney Perfectionists, John Humphrey Noyes and his community. We provided a chronological detail of the events of his life and that of the community. We quoted from Constance Noyes Robertson's books using three innovative areas:

Literacy - a community that encouraged learning & self-improvement, through books on science, religion, and history.

Industry - a community that supported international trade, importing silk thread from China and manufactured animal traps, chains & eventually Oneida silverware.

Women's Issues - a community that was a forerunner in the area of birth control, equality of the sexes & fashion with short-cropped hair and pants design.

We were pleased to have Jane Noyes join us on Sunday. The Mansion House in Oneida, New York provided us with brochures to include on our table.

The weekend was fantastic, so many stories to tell and each very different from the next. They will definitely repeat it next year. We heard that over 7,000 people visited the Expo on Saturday! Of course the Putney Historical Society could not have been an exhibitor with out the help of all its members.

Thanks to everyone who helped! Ruth Barton and Barbara Taylor put together the booth space. It took many members and friends of the PHS to fund the project, create the actual display, loan us the backdrops, set up and tear down the display, research and type the information, as well as donate time to talk with visitors about our story. Thank you to Steve Anderson, John & Merrill Barton, Anna Dewdney, Elaine Dixon, Laura Heller, Lyssa Papazian, Richard Taylor, Jacquie Walker, and Mary Jane Williams to name just a few.

Ruth and I have already come up with a list of possible themes for next year. Please let us know what's on your list and drop us a note if you'd like to help with the 2002 preparations. ♦♦

Only one newsletter per year goes to everyone. If you'd like to receive them all, join the Putney Historical Society.

Please take a moment to join or renew your membership.

PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please PRINT name and address:

Name _____ Date: _____

Address _____

() Individual \$5.00 () Sustaining \$25.00 () Family \$10.00 () Benefactor \$50.00 () Patron \$100.00

Additional donations beyond membership are appreciated. Any amount over the membership fee is tax deductible, as are gifts.

Yes, I will volunteer. Please phone me at: _____

Make checks payable to: *Treasurer, Putney Historical Society*. Mail to: Putney Historical Society, c/o Putney Town Hall, Box 233, Putney, VT 05346. Or leave at: Putney Town Hall.

Plans to Update Town History

By Fern Tavalin

In 2003, the Town of Putney will mark the 250th anniversary of its town charter. The Putney Historical Society would like to use this occasion to celebrate our past and document the present. To begin the celebration, we are inviting any interested members of the town, including our 5 schools, to participate in updating the town history. A lot has transpired since 1953 when the Fortnightly Club wrote the original version, and we would like to capture as much as possible from many viewpoints and recollections.

This updating will occur throughout the next two years. Our first step has been to request funds from the Vermont Council on the Humanities to support workshops, given by Putney residents, in videotaping, interviewing, and writing for history. By conducting these workshops, we hope to prepare people to write historical accounts of town events. We also hope that the materials we collect can be used in imaginative ways, just as in 1953, by generating art work, creating

plays, making music, and telling tall tales.

A survey conducted last March at Town Meeting has identified some volunteers. If you would like to add your name to a list of writers, interviewers, or videographers, contact Fern Tavalin by phone at 387-4277 or by e-mail tavalin@sover.net.

The Historical Society extends its thanks to Stuart Strothman of Landmark College for helping to write and submit the Humanities grant. ♦♦

T·i·d·b·i·t·s

- A tentative list for the veterans' memorial is posted in the museum. Please stop by to confirm that the proper names are included.
- A Kathan family reunion will be held in Putney during the summer of 2002.
- Does anyone remember how the old jail, also called the Tramp House, got behind the Town Hall? Does anyone remember seeing it moved to its current location?

Putney Historical Society
C/O Putney Town Hall
Box 233
Putney, VT 05346

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ANNUAL MEETING OCTOBER 14TH

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PHS Annual Meeting Planned for October 14th

Bring your appetites for history and good food to the Putney Historical Society annual meeting at the United Church of Putney (aka Putney Federated Church) on Sunday, October 14th from 4:00 - 6:30 pm. After a VERY BRIEF business session, the meeting will continue with an historical presentation. This year's topic will be the Thwing Mill and its role, along with many grist mills, in shaping Vermont town life for over 200 years from the 1750s until the 1960s. The presentation will begin with an introduction to the mill, move to a sharing of memories about the Thwings, and end with a discussion of next steps we should take as we plan to renovate.

A light fare of soup and corn bread will be provided. You can expect to savor these Historical Society favorites: beef barley, corn chowder, chicken, black bean, and vegetable. This year, we are also asking people to bring a potluck dessert. A donation to defray some of the food costs is welcomed.

