

PHS MAY TAKE ON HISTORIC THWING MILL

Greg and Frank Wilson, owners of Basketville and the Thwing Grist Mill, have generously offered to donate the historic mill to the Putney Historical Society. The c. 1867 grist mill, which perches at a dramatic falls on Sackett's Brook behind Putney Paper, was last operated by Charles and Mary Thwing until 1946. The building was extensively restored by the Wilsons soon after they acquired the property in 1987.

The next step to fully restoring the mill would be to locate and reinstall the mill equipment and power train. PHS is carefully evaluating whether we can take this ambitious project on and become a property-owning organization.

We have received a \$250 matching grant from the Robert Sincerbeaux Fund of the Preservation Trust of Vermont and National Trust for Historic Preservation Field Services to hire the necessary expertise to help us evaluate the project. The first step was a master planning board session on May 2 which was facilitated by fundraising consultant, Steve Procter. This in depth discussion will help us decide whether owning and managing an historic site should be part of the PHS mission and future. If this leads to the next step, we will assemble a site evaluation team for a one-day intensive walk-through and roundtable discussion. People invited to participate will include a restoration carpenter, civil engineers, historians, preservation specialists, museum collections specialists, mill museum managers, an insurance representative, and a lawyer.

We are very excited about this potential project and would welcome interest, advice, and expertise from the PHS membership and community. For more information, please contact Lyssa Papazian (387-2878).

If you like old photos please
join us on

Sunday, MAY 20, 2001
2 - 4 pm at the Noyes Barn
Kimball Hill, Putney

We need help identifying people, places, and dates for many of our old photographs. This will be a good chance to enjoy some memories, munch on some refreshments, and help ensure the accuracy and relevance of the wonderful collection that PHS has. It is also a reminder to label *at the very least* your most important photos - *including those in frames!* **FULL names, dates, locations, and special occasions** are so helpful to know.

Think about someone looking at the photo 100 years from now! "Mother and Dad," "Aunt Suzie," or "Gramps" isn't going to reveal much about who the person was.

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VERMONT HISTORY
EXPO 2001
JUNE 23 - 24
10 am - 5 pm
at TUNBRIDGE WORLD'S FAIR
GROUNDS

Ruth Barton and Barbara Taylor are working on plans for P.H.S.'s booth at this Expo with a focus on the Perfectionist community of the 1830's and 1840's. This event was a huge success in 2000 and is expecting the participation of nearly 60 percent of the local historical societies in Vermont. It should be a fascinating weekend!

THE "GREAT RIVER"

Our Original Highway

by Laurel Ellis

"Between great pines weighted with snow the Connecticut River wound its way, a blue ribbon of ice. Frozen or free it was the only artery of travel into the wilderness north of the Massachusetts border." (1)

In the 1740's and 1750's, before the settlements at Fort #4, Putney, Fullam (now Dummerston), and Fort Dummer were safe from the attacks of native Americans and the French who did not want British settlers to become secure here, those who wished to return to the safety of civilization might find room aboard a sloop which had brought supplies to the pioneers. "90 barrels of gunpowder to be sold to the settlers at cost and enough pork, molasses, and rum to stay the militia's appetite and courage through the winter." The return cargo was light - no corn and "no skins other than a few small bales of Injun scalps." There was plenty of room for all the women "who were not determined to stay with their men." (2) Otherwise, it was a long, perilous journey on foot or by horseback. From 1680 to 1763, waterways of Vermont were used primarily by the military. By the end of the 18th century, there was a lot of traffic on the Connecticut bringing supplies to the settlers and returning with potash, corn, wool, and manufactured goods from the mills that were springing up along many a brook large enough to supply water power. (3)

Logs were floated down river "on the crest of spring floods" accompanied by rafts carrying as many as 200 men, their equipment, teams of horses or oxen - even the cook's shanty. (4) As much as 2 million feet of logs were sent down river with the help of 30 to 40 horses. This method of transporting logs ended around 1916. (Putney Historical Society has photos taken about 1880 of logging runs on the Connecticut near Putney and Westmoreland.)

Early passengers and cargo were transported by small sail boats or sloops. In the History of Putney a notation is made of the arrival in Brattleboro of *The Packet* on

on July 18, 1803 which carried on that particular date: "West India Rum, molasses, chests of Souchong tea, shad salt fish, loaf sugar, tierces of Turks Island salt, cotton, 'segars' and pipe tobacco, hard biscuit, flour of sulphur, and ladies shoes." (6)

In 1788 the first U.S. charter of its kind was issued to build the canal to "route traffic around the great obstacle of Bellows Falls." (5) The canal was finished in the early 1800's.

For the *Annals of Brattleboro*, Mary Cabot interviewed Captain Nelson Richardson who began his career on the river as a boy in the early 1800's working on a ferry between Vermont and New Hampshire. He later worked as a "swift waterman" and retired as Captain of the *Mary Ann* (the last of the Brattleboro boats traveling between Hartford, Connecticut and Bellows Falls) in the fall of 1847. (7) His experiences provide a wonderful glimpse on the era that preceded the dawn of the railroad.

Of the ferry, Captain Richardson remembered that "in those days" there were no wires stretched from shore to shore to keep the ferry on course "so it was necessary to pull up stream and then pull like Sam Hill for t'uther shore." "Foot passengers" were rowed across in a skiff "for three cents a head." (8)

The swift watermen were a "crew of about fifteen men" living on both sides of the river in Vernon and Hinsdale. They were well organized and took turns staying on duty whenever a boat needed assistance to negotiate the swift water which began at the Hinsdale landing and ended about three miles above Brattleboro. They used long poles (16 to 23 feet in length) with a foot-long spike on one end which would be driven into the river bottom while the other end would be placed against the shoulder of the crewman as he took his turn walking about one third of the boat length - "from the bow to the mast board." Then another of the crew would do the same thing on the other side. Sometimes the "swift watermen" would use a pair or two of oxen to pull the boats past a particularly rough place and in one spot a windlass, and

described by Capt. Richardson as "a strong perpendicular post with four arms at the top"....."fastened to a large buttonwood tree" also operated by the sheer strength of the swift watermen. The men were not needed past the "Leavitts rock" rapids ("just above the suspension bridge, a mile and a half north of (Brattleboro) village" as from that point on "it was clear sailing to Bellows Falls." It seems that the men were well paid as the going rate was \$2.00 per trip from Hinsdale to Brattleboro and an extra 50 cents to "Leavitt's rock." Sometimes the men made 2 trips a day. Customers were charged an average of \$7.50 a ton from Brattleboro and "a trifle higher from Bellows Falls." Typical exports were wool and soapstone; imports were "general merchandise. Fall was the busiest time of the year during which an extra boat was added to the two normally run out of Brattleboro, two from Bellows Falls and two from Wells River. (9)

Using the assistance of these men, a boat carrying roughly eight tons could, "with favoring wind" make a round trip between Hartford and Bellows Falls in 10 to 12 days - traveling only in the daytime. After the canals and locks were built the capacity increased to 20 tons and boats were typically 68 feet long, "fourteen feet beam and drew about eight inches of water, the draft being increased three feet under load." The boats had a "33-foot mast and a sliding top mast, the two sails carrying about 200 square yards of canvas." (10)

Marguerite Allis in "Historic Connecticut" writes of the introduction of steamboats on the lower Connecticut in 1818: "There was as much high pressure along the shore as was generated in those navigating teakettles; accidents were frequent and thrilling." (11)

In 1829, the New Hampshire Legislature incorporated the Connecticut River Steamboat Co. changed the following year to the Connecticut River Valley Steamboat Co. Steamboats were used between the canals and locks that were built at Bellows Falls, Sumner's Falls (in Hartland),

Allcott's Falls (in Wilder). Passengers and freight were taken through the canals on flatboats and rafts to the steamers that took them to the next canal, enabling traffic all the way from Hartford to "the fifteen-mile fall at Dalton in Coos County" (between Littleton and Lancaster, New Hampshire). A Captain Nutt designed a small steamer to "run through the canals and locks" but it was a failure. Boats were open to the weather except for "tents to cover the dry goods. (12)

Plans for a \$1,000,000 canal (at \$9000 per mile) to be constructed near Hinsdale and partially in Vermont were begun in earnest in 1828 but never got beyond the planning stage. (13)

According to the History of Putney the *Barnet* was the first steamboat to navigate on the Connecticut in 1827. (14) However, Mr. Duffy, in his illustrated history, reports Samuel Morey to have built the boat that had that distinction in 1793 in Fairlee. (15) Mary Cabot stated in the Annals of Brattleboro 1681 - 1895 Vol. 1 that the *Barnet* was built by Thomas Blanchard who was aboard when it made it's first and only voyage up the Connecticut to Bellows Falls. Her colorful account defies paraphrasing: "*In 1827 when the little Barnet went, for the first time, screaming and puffing up the river, Captain Blanchard, the presiding genius, already known to fame for his achievements in mechanics, proudly walked the deck of his steamer, inspiring increased confidence that a new era was about to dawn upon this fertile valley. His advent here {in Brattleboro} was greeted with bonfires, bell-ringing, illumination and intoxication. But these demonstrations were made before our hero had gotten into port; he was struggling against the rapids below the bridge. When about halfway up the rapids, the boat came to a standstill. Notwithstanding the fire was so great that the blaze poured from the smokestack, and Captain Blanchard, with the energy of despair, was punching against the bed of the river with a spiked pole, no further progress could be made. While making vain efforts to successfully reinforce steam with this ancient*

method of navigation, Captain Blanchard fell from the boat into the rapids and came near being drawn under the boat, but was fortunately rescued by strong hands, which seized him by the collar at the right moment to save him from the threatened calamity." (16)

The river won the battle for a time until the *Barnet* was towed by oxen into port for the night. "Now safely moored in the desired haven, as the sun went down, the asthmatic breathing and noise of contending elements in the bosom of the *Barnet* ceased, but the public mind was under a high pressure all that night. The survivors of this brilliant engagement for the evening aroused the following day by the cannon, bell and hissing steam of the *Barnet*, bravely stepped on the hot, quivering deck, of the monster and away they went north, at the enormous speed of four miles an hour, and arrived finally at *Bellows Falls*." (17) According to The History of Putney, the boat was returned to Hartford and never used again! (18)

Two other steamboats were used on the River in this area: The *William Holmes* and The *John Ledyard*. The *William Holmes*, which was built at *Bellows Falls* and used mainly for towing other boats, was abandoned after three or four years because of the difficulty of negotiating the River's many turns. An accident may have led to its abandonment when one of *Brattleboro's* boats ran into "Cooper's rock" and was demolished. (20)

Mr. Richardson was captain of the *Peacock*, the *Dispatch*, the *Royal Tar*, and finally, the *Mary Ann* on which he made his last trip in 1847. He told Ms. Cabot that "he occasionally had a jolly party on board his boats from the different towns along the route, who simply went down the river for the fun of the thing. 'Gosh!' said the good-natured captain, 'I have often been up to *Bellows Falls* with eight hogsheads of rum.'" (21)

On local ferries, I'll be brief. There are some interesting facts and stories both tragic and comical in the History of Putney. One of the first ferries serving Putney was near what

later became the Putney Railroad Station and was known for years as the *Kathan Ferry* after it's first owner, Captain John *Kathan*. It operated for 172 years (from 1752 - 1924). The last time the ferry ran between East Putney and Westmoreland was in 1930. (22)

End-notes

1. Allis, Margarite. Not Without Peril, p. 3
2. *ibid.* pp. 98-99
3. Duffy, John. Vermont, An Illustrated History, p.24
4. *ibid.* p. 123
5. *ibid.* p. 67
6. The Fortnightly Club. The History of Putney, Vermont 1753 - 1953, p. 148
7. Cabot, Mary. Annals of Brattleboro 1681 - 1895 Volume 1, pp 302 -303
8. *ibid.* p. 303
9. *ibid.* p. 303 - 304
10. *ibid.* p. 303
11. Allis, Margarite. Historic Connecticut (copyrighted 1934 as Connecticut Trilogy), p. 93
12. The Fortnightly Club, p. 93
13. Cabot p. 304
14. *ibid.* p. 306
15. The Fortnightly Club, p. 93
16. Duffy p. 122
17. Cabot pp. 304 - 305
18. *ibid.*
19. The Fortnightly Club, p. 93
20. Cabot p. 305
21. *ibid.* p. 306
22. The Fortnightly Club, pp. 87, 89 - 90

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AVAILABLE FOR SALE AT P.H.S.

<u>HISTORY OF PUTNEY 1753 -1953</u>	\$10
<u>PEOPLE OF PUTNEY</u>	\$10
<u>VITAL RECORDS OF PUTNEY,VERMONT</u>	\$30
<u>GRAVESTONE INSCRIPTIONS IN PUTNEY, VERMONT</u>	\$20
<u>GIANTS OF THE GREEN MOUNTAIN EARTH</u> .by Edward Dodd.....	\$5
<u>18" x 26" MAP - PUTNEY'S EARLY HOUSES & CELLAR HOLES C1800</u> ...	\$5

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PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
INVITES YOU TO A

PHOTO PARTY

WHO IS IT?

WHERE IS IT?

WHAT IS IT?

IT'S A MYSTERY TO US!

WE NEED YOUR HELP -- COME TO THE PARTY!

HELP US IDENTIFY THE PHOTOS

JOIN US FOR TEA AND CRUMPETS

SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2001

2 - 4 pm Noyes Barn, Kimball Hill
(behind Putney Cares)

Please take a moment to join or renew your membership in the Putney Historical Society

Putney Historical Society Membership Form

Please PRINT name and address:

Name _____ Date: _____

Address _____
 Individual \$5.00 Sustaining \$25.00 Patron \$100.00
 Family \$10.00 Benefactor \$50.00

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, P. O. Box 233, Putney, VT 05346, or leave at the Town Hall

From The Vermont Record and Farmer - August 16, 1878:

"Putney: The temperance meeting on the 12th inst. was largely attended and the exercises were of unusual interest. Among the literary exercises were the recitation of the Temperance Alphabet. Twenty-two little girls appeared upon the stage and spoke finely. Short and sharp speeches were made by Currier, Cobb and the president, John Robertson."

"Last Thursday night and Friday a terrific thunder storm visited this section. The lightning struck in several places. Report says killed an ox for Mr. Newcomb and also one for Mr. Abbott. An unusually heavy shower Friday P.M. accompanied with hail, which did much damage to crops in some places. A few tobacco fields were nearly ruined. We pity the men who lose by it, but if they would cease to grow the poisonous weed we believe they would be better off."

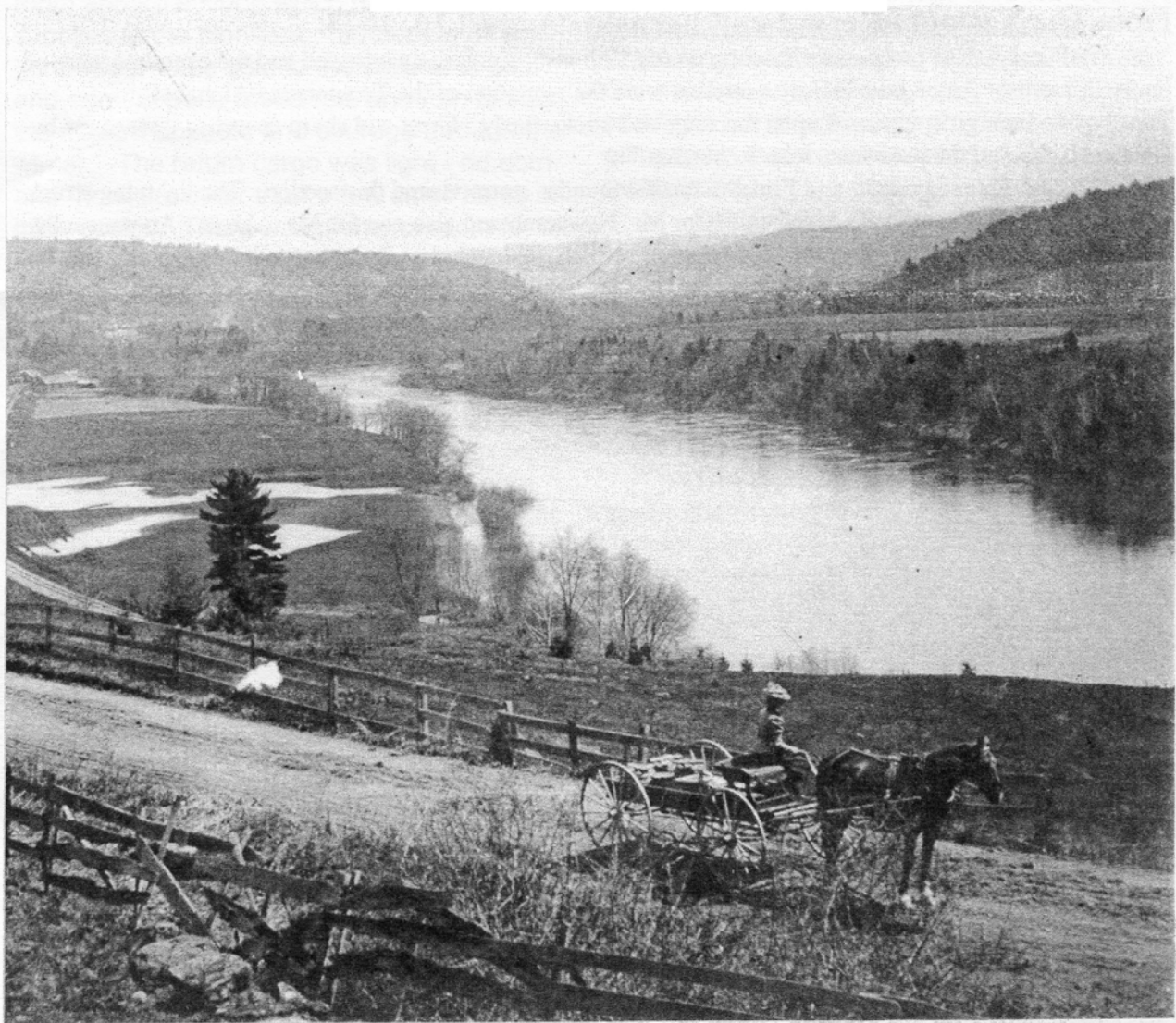
Editor's note: George W. Newcomb owned and occupied the current Nopper farm in 1878.

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A log drive on the Connecticut River c1900

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



Looking north across Kathan Meadows towards Putney