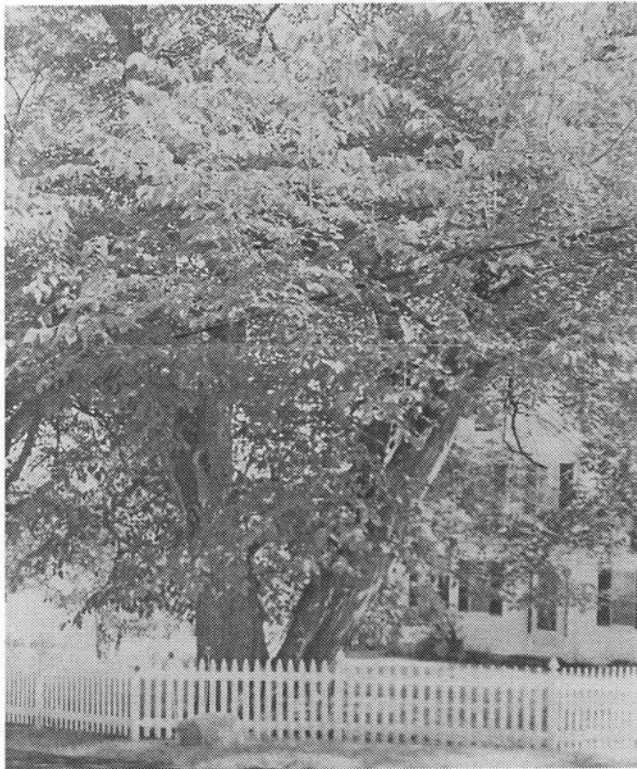


STATE'S LARGEST RED  
MULBERRY TREE

by Laurel Ellis



*State of VT's largest Mulberry tree*

In 1999 Lawrence J. and Louise Wood received a call from William Guenther, Windham County Forester, informing them that the tree in their front yard at 15 West Hill Road had been identified as the largest red mulberry in the State of Vermont. The estimated age of the tree is 100 to 150 years old. Larry has a photograph taken in 1935 which shows an already full grown tree indicating that it was probably there when his great-grandfather, Lyman B. Wood, purchased the property in 1905.

My curiosity about who may have planted the tree caused me to trace back through the deeds to see who else had owned the house and land over the years. The Wood family, closing in on 100 years, holds the record by far for longevity there having been home to 4 continuous generations: Lyman B., Henry L., Lawrence, and Lawrence J.

Lyman B. was the son of early settler, Brick Parkman Wood whose name was given to the present Parkman Wood Road off Holland Hill Road. (See the History of Putney 1753 - 1953 pages 212 - 214 for details on Wood family genealogy.)

Henry Kidder owned the property from 1872 to 1905 paying a whopping \$3200 for the house and 19 - 25 acres. Owners prior to that were: Albert W. and Mary J. Abbott (1871-2) who paid \$2900; Alvin J. and Lucie H. Johnson (occupied by Alvin's father, David B.) (1860 - 1871) who paid \$2000; Charles E. and Mary V. Davis (1859 - 1860); Denison and Catherine M. Davis (1856 - 1859) who paid \$1300; George W. Black (1845 - 1856) who paid \$800; Edward Seldon May (occupied by his father, Huntington May and owned jointly with his brother, Sylvester S. May for 10 years) (1832 - 45); Roger Leavitt (1827 - 32); David Leavitt (1821 - 27). The first mention of a dwelling house was in 1827 and was then occupied by Julia Deming. Comparing the price Leavitt paid for the property in 1821 (\$625) and when it was sold in 1832 (\$650) is a clue that the house was built before 1821. It is probably the property occupied in 1819 by Captain Stower who also owned and managed The Tavern about that time. (see PLR V 5p439)

I always read deeds carefully for any mention of structures or what the neighbors were up to. On the Wood property, there was once a Blacksmith shop probably built c 1807 by Leбина,  
*continued on page 2*

Elkana, or William Lincoln who lived across the road on the current Gill property. The last mention of the shop was in 1847.

Also on this piece there was once a Town House. The first mention I found was in 1814 when Timothy and William Reed/Read sold a piece of land 53 feet by 33 feet beginning at the "northwest corner of the Town House" to David Leavitt "near Joel Keyes" (current Gill property). Leavitt turned around and leased the same piece to the Selectmen for one cent.

Upon removal of the Town House, the property reverted to David Leavitt and his heirs quitclaimed it to George Smith in 1846 stating "also any other land in connection...on the south side of the road onto West Hill." The Town House and land was excepted from deeds to the Wood property from 1816 (the earliest deed I could find for that specific piece) until 1821. (I'd love to know if that same building was moved down to the site beside Basketville.)

Also in 1816, the "Lincoln nailing shop" was excepted. This was a structure which sat close to the road across from the house and barn that Elkanah Lincoln owned from 1807 to 1819. That property is now split by the Cross Road between the current Prentiss and Handy properties. Elkanah's widow and daughter, both named Lydia, lived in the Prentiss house until their respective deaths in 1858 and 1868. Previous to the Lincolns, John Nazro had built a store and "pearlash works", one on either side of the Cross Road between 1788 and 1796. A school house sat East of the Prentiss House on the northern corner of West Hill road, just south of the old Meeting House in 1788, or earlier, until about 1805.

This may be more than you wanted to know about the neighborhood of one large old tree but it's typical of how one discovery leads to many others when you take a tour back through time.

\* \* \*

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Welcome to our new members! We appreciate your support and encourage you to give us feedback on our newsletters and programs. Our mailing list currently has 189 addresses on it which is broken down as follows: Current members: 71 single (\$5) and family (\$10) memberships, 38 who paid dues for 2000, 29 for 2001, and 4 for 2002 and beyond. In addition 18 have sent "Sustaining" memberships of \$25 for 2000 or later, 3 have sent "Benefactor" dues of \$50, and 3 have sent "Patron" membership donations of \$100. *94 of those on our mailing list have not sent dues since 1999 or before.* We do not send bills for memberships as this is strictly a volunteer organization. Your mailing label should tell you if your membership is current. A "2001" means paid through the fiscal year July 31, 2001.

2000 - 2001 Board Members: Ruth Barton, Sharon Bice, Milly Ellis, Robert Goodell, Sue Mulcahy, Gloria Priest, Fern Tavalin, Mary Lou Treat. Officers: Laurel Ellis and Jacquie Walker, Co-Presidents; Lyssa Papazian, Vice President; Laura Heller, Secretary; Barbara Taylor, Treasurer; Museum Curators: Laura Heller and Elaine Dixon.

\* \* \*

## PROJECT 2000 A PUTNEY VETERANS' MEMORIAL

We may have to rename this "Project 2001" as things are moving along rather slowly. Perhaps because such a large part of the current population in Putney moved here from elsewhere and do not have parents or grandparents who would be remembered on such a marker, there has not been much response to accomplish this idea. As many towns in Vermont have constructed or are planning their memorials, it seems a shame that Putney's only "honor roll" from World War II appears to have rotted away. We need input for design and placement ideas and fund raising. We have lists of names that must be verified as Putney residents at the time of enlistment. Please call Doug or Laurel at 387-4489 for more information.

\* \* \*

## **ANNUAL MEETING 2000**

Annual meeting was attended by about 50 persons at 4 p.m. September 17 at the Noyes Barn. All enjoyed the showing of former minister Ed Tyler's documentary film of Putney people and places in 1953. The silent film was narrated by Ruth Barton. Video copies will be made in the near future. Another film taken of the Bicentennial parade and other celebrations is nowhere to be found. If you have any knowledge about that please let us know as we would like to put both films on the same video tape which we would offer for sale to the public.

\* \* \*

## **STATUS OF THE TREASURY**

In the last five years our total assets have increased by over \$5000, thanks to the frugal spending habits of the board of directors. Expenses are now higher due to an increased emphasis on newsletters but are generally offset by an increase in memberships and donations.

One large purchase we recently made was a new computer and scanner. This equipment will help bring us into the new millennium in ways never fathomed by those who organized our society. In time we will have our entire inventory cataloged so that we may quickly track down any item. We will be able to scan photographs and documents that can be later accessed and read without handling the aging paper itself. We will be able to share information via the Internet 24 hours a day. It will take time and lots of volunteer help to make all that a reality but we have taken the first steps. If you have given your name and number as a volunteer, you will be hearing from us as soon as we're set up and ready to go.

\* \* \*

## **PROGRESS REPORT HISTORY OF PUTNEY VOLUME II 1953 - 2003**

A committee has begun the ground work for this undertaking and has begun contacting many people for information about people, places, businesses, organizations and events of the 50 years since our bicentennial celebration. You will be hearing more and more about it as time rushes on. We hope to be hearing from more and more of you.

## **THE MIRACLE OF SCANNING!**

Geordie Heller, who makes prints for us from our old glass plate negatives, recently acquired a new scanner. At our last board meeting we were given a demonstration of what can be done with this amazing tool.

A very old and faded photograph and its digitally enhanced image were placed side by side for our inspection. With computerized adjustments made to the image after scanning, many details that were literally disappearing from view on the old print were brought back to crisp visibility! We were astonished and thrilled at the possibility of saving our one-of-a-kind photographs in this manner.

This technology will be very helpful to those who might wish to preserve or share an historic photograph without risking their original copy. If you have old photographs you are interested in having Geordie scan and work on, contact Laura Heller (387-4436).

\* \* \*

## **ANONYMOUS GIFT**

Sometime this past fall someone left a gift for PHS at the Town Hall. A brand new tape recorder, batteries, and blank tapes were found with no clues to the donor's identity! We hope our mysterious friend will see this paragraph and know that we appreciate your thoughtfulness and will put the gift to good use. Thank you!

\* \* \*

## **NEW OFFICE SPACE AT THE TOWN HALL**

During the December holidays, a major transformation took place at the Town Hall. A new entry to an expanded office for Town Clerk and Treasurer, Anita Coomes, will make her workspace more efficient and less open to the disruption of traffic. To accomplish this, the PHS office space was cut in half BUT we do have a new door (to better protect our new computer) and much improved wiring. We will still have room for the files that are most commonly used by researchers. Storage cabinets that are not needed as often will be moved to the stage area which has been cleaned and readied for our use.

More changes are expected in the future as funds are available.

## FROM THE PHS FILES

While perusing through the files in search of information for the new History, I chanced upon an album of old news clippings made by Edith Gassett. One particular headline caught my eye as being rather comical: **"101 SHE ABJURES WOMEN'S CLUBS"** sub headline: "Mrs. Ruth Smith Vermont Centenarian - Stayed at Home When Young and so is Living Now." This article datelined Putney, Vt. February 7, 1906 was in a "Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald" in honor of Mrs. Smith approaching her 102nd birthday in June of that year and being "easily the oldest woman in the Green Mountain State." "I lived my early life when women stayed at home and knew nothing of whist parties or club life. If the women today should follow my example they would live longer. But today there are so many things to take up a young woman's time that she runs herself to death." The interviewer further summarized: "Mrs. Smith is positive that her remarkable preservation is due to the care she exercised when a young woman."

Affixed to the same page in Mrs. Gassett's album was a copy of Mrs. Smith's obituary five years later following her death on March 12, 1911. Ruth Allen Smith came to Putney in 1827 with her siblings and parents, Benjamin and Esther (Willson) Allen. The family farmed "on West Hill" and her father was a deacon at the old Baptist Church. In 1841 she married George S. Smith of Putney and in 1846 the couple bought the farm on the site of the current Handy home on West Hill Road where they lived until George's death in 1867. Thereafter, Ruth made her home with her daughter Mary Jane and son-in-law, Albert W. Abbott who sold the Smith farm in 1869. They briefly owned the Wood House property (featured on page 1). She was said to be "the oldest woman in Vermont whose age could be verified and may have been the oldest in New England."

In her 1906 interview, Mrs. Smith had commented that she saw Putney grow "from a

2-family settlement ...to... become a thriving Vermont town." Apparently she really didn't leave the house much in her younger years!

*Coincidentally, after deciding to include this bit about Mrs. Smith, I noticed that her picture "c1900" (actually 1906) was printed in the 1999 Town Report on page 54. [Is that the special "oldest person's" cane she is holding?]. I was also surprised to realize that for 23 years she lived in the neighborhood I had just finished researching.*

L.E.

\* \* \*

**Obviously just to fill an empty space on the page devoted to Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Gassett also had glued the following undated clipping from an unknown newspaper:**

### Uncalled for Letters

\* Eph. Higgins, our accommodating P.M. informs us that the following letters remain at the P. O. uncalled for:

Marcus Rawlins, Shedrach Dobbs, Sarah Hawkins, Rufe Sprowl.

By looking over the Bugle files, we find that Shedrach Dobbs left Bingville 19 years ago on the run to escape arrest after his wife heard that she wasn't the only wife Shed had.

Mark Rollins has been dead only 4 years, but that's almost as bad as if he had been dead longer.

Sarah Hawkins, who everybuddy that was cut out for a old maid, married Felix St. Pierre, a Frenchman over to the Co. seat, 9 years ago, and has a large family and can talk french real well.

As for Rufe Sprowl, he moved to Sorrow Hollow a yeer ago last spring.

There is also several postage cards and some catalogs for farm tools and one thing and another that ain't much account, but Postmaster Higgins might as well open these old letters and see what's inside of them as to have them laying about in the way giving nobuddy satisfackshion."

## 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

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### From the 1950 report of the Superintendent of Schools, Ethel A. Eddy:

“Central School building, built in 1906 to accommodate not over 120 pupils, has at the present time 145. ...If present birth rates and new entrants continue it is reasonable to expect an enrollment of over 200 by 1960.”

The three possible choices facing voters at the time were the reopening of the Washburn School, building an addition to the old school, or the construction of a new school building. Obviously Ms. Eddy did not like the first two possibilities as she listed all the drawbacks to both quoting “Yale experts who made a thorough survey of the school needs of Putney (who answered ‘*Unequivacally (sic) no!*’ when asked if it would be wise to remodel the present building.”

Article 15 on the Warning for Town Meeting and Town School District Meeting for 1951: “Shall the following public improvement be made, viz: the construction, necessary equipment and furnishing of a new grammar school building on the Cooper Field property now owned by the Putney Community Center, Inc., at an estimated cost of \$140,000.00?”

Of course all budgetary amounts seem ridiculously low when looking back 50 years. The most pointed was the total of all teachers’ salaries for the year 1950: \$10,227! The highest paid of the five full time teachers (one for each group of two grades and one remedial teacher) received \$2056. All but one of the teachers had just elected, as of September that year, to receive their salaries “on a 12 months payment plan instead of 10 months.”

\* \* \*

**ONCE UPON A TIME** when someone was determined to be the oldest person living in the town, that person would be presented with a gold-handled cane as their “trophy” until the time came to pass the cane to a new oldest person.

Does anyone know whatever happened to this special community cane?

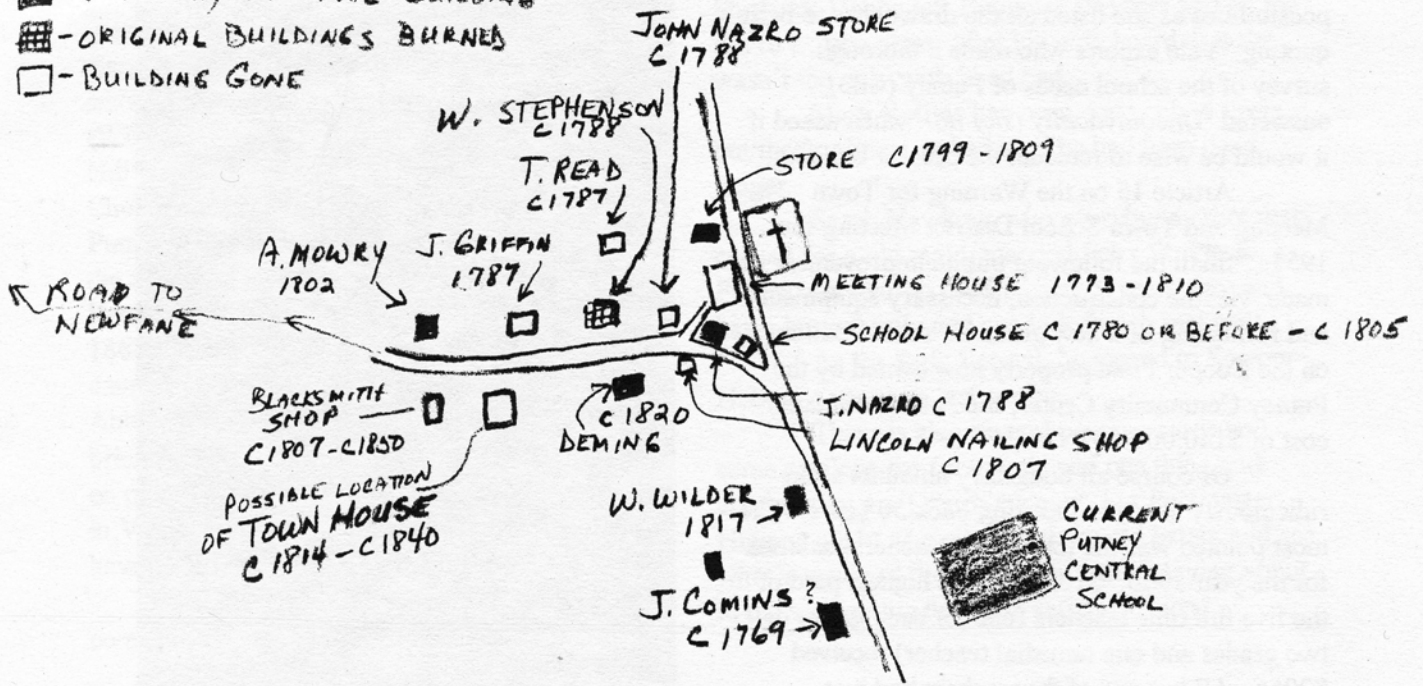
\* \* \*



Mrs. Ruth Smith at 102 in 1906

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

- - PROBABLY ORIGINAL BUILDING
- ▣ - ORIGINAL BUILDINGS BURNED
- - BUILDING GONE



AN EARLY PUTNEY VILLAGE CENTER

By L. ELLIS  
2001