

# PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Winter 2002

## DIVERS DISCOVER 1812 "ELEPHANT" BRIDGE

By Laurel Ellis

A casual conversation between old friends escalated into an exciting two days of discovery last fall for three dedicated underwater explorers and members of the Putney Historical Society.

Recently over a lunch with Don Harlow, the conversation turned to Annette Spaulding's diving career and some of the fascinating things she has discovered and helped to discover over the years (from lost airplanes to murder weapons). Don relayed the following story: "It is told that Sid Bailey, a colorful farmer, trapper, and a person who did custom work, was taking his 'one lunger' Abenaki engine on the ferry to go to the County Farm in Westmoreland to fill a silo. That morning, and again while on the ferry, Sid tried unsuccessfully to start it. Obstinate cuss that he was, he looked at the engine, looked at the river, and then unhitched the horses, kicked out the chock blocks, and let her go off the ferry into the river."

As this had to have happened prior to the closing of the ferry service in 1930, Don wondered if the engine

*continued on page 6*

## WORKSHOP SHAPES HISTORY

Under the guidance of Erik Wilkins-McKee, Ph.D. history teacher at the Putney School, six people gathered on Saturday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at Town Hall to develop a manageable approach to updating the town history. Eric encouraged the group to ask the question, "What counts as history?" He suggested that we would leave the future with a better idea of the past if we considered how to get into the minds and experiences of common people, taking a "What were they thinking" approach to history writing.

A lively discussion ensued about whether it's possible to get into the minds of people from another generation and whether, if we delved into the minds of the current generation, we would stir up too much controversy and not enough history. Eric noted that the people in Putney maintain strong feelings and that a good history would answer the question, "What does this town mean to people who live here?" He stressed that there is a difference between reporting about your sense of the town and telling stories about individuals and what you think of them. This distinguishes town history from personal life narratives or gossip.

Conversation continued with an exchange of ideas about how to balance a description of events with the accounts of why people did things - so the who, what, and why questions about the town's development combine with descriptions of particular institutions, clubs, etc. After four hours of discussion and debate, the group arrived at a feasible plan that can be implemented. (details on pages 2-4).

Thanks to all who attended: Doris Fredericks, Laura Heller, Tom Jamison, Stuart Strothman, Laurel Ellis, and Fern Tavalin. The writers' workshop was sponsored by a grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities. ♦♦

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# The Putney Diner 2002

By Fern Tavalin

The Putney Diner is a relatively new business in town. Begun in 1992 by Todd Darrah, it was originally named the Putney Royal Diner to show a relationship to Todd's other diner in West Brattleboro, the Chelsea Royal. Owing two diners proved to be more than Todd was willing to handle and so he put the diner up for sale within a year of purchase. An ad in the Brattleboro Town Crier attracted the attention of Deb Julian. Hailing from Greenfield, MA, Deb admits that at the time she "didn't know anything existed in Vermont after Brattleboro" and had never heard of Putney.

When Deb and Todd met, they "hit it off immediately." Deb fell in love with the diner and Todd selected her amongst a group of potential buyers because he thought that her enthusiasm would keep the diner going. According to Deb, once sold, "Todd didn't want to get the diner back."

Although owned by Deb Julian, she credits the workers with the success of the business. Cook Phyllis Deblois and waitress Ellie Lascore opened the original diner with Todd and remained after it changed hands and became the Putney Diner. Together, they taught Deb how to run a restaurant. Phyllis or Ellie has opened the diner every morning at 6 am, 6 days a week for the last 10 years, without fail. Debbie also attributes much of the restaurant success to manager Karen Zamojski.

The Putney Diner has an incredibly varied clientele with lots of "local regulars" and lots of "tourist regulars" who visit in all four seasons. Many return because of the supportive atmosphere they feel at the restaurant and within the town as a whole. According to Debbie, "People in town are so supportive of who you are and whatever you're doing." Sunday is the busiest day for the diner. The same local families tend to come in early in the morning. Later, the tourists arrive. Whether local or visiting, Ellie remembers the customers' orders. This adds to the feeling that in the town of Putney, people remember you. The town values that friendliness enough so that Ellie Lascore was named person-of-the-year in February 2002.

Business has steadily improved over the years. Word of mouth has created a reputation for the diner. The biggest jump in business occurred when the Tavern, located across the street from the diner, was renovated. The Tavern has given a visual beauty that makes residents and tourists stop in the center of town instead of passing through. The added interest and subsequent increase in traffic has drawn more customers to the diner, as well as to other local businesses.

National attention has helped as well. Two episodes stick out in the minds of the diner staff. First, unbeknownst to the people at the diner, authors Jane and Michael Stern of *Eat Your Way Across America* published a paragraph about the diner's wonderful pies in their eating guide. This led to an article in *USA Today*, proclaiming the Putney Diner as one of the ten best places in the United States to eat.

The second most memorable piece of national attention came when the diner opened at 5:00 one morning to find CNN trucks and television satellites all over the center of town, reporting on resident Jody Williams winning the Nobel Peace Prize. The press attention was extremely exciting for staff and made the diner incredibly busy all day long.

In creating the Putney Diner, its owner and staff have tried to develop a gathering place where people feel comfortable to sit and chat, hold meetings, or linger over a cup of coffee. Every month a different local artist's work is exhibited on the walls. The Diner sells a lot of art to both locals and tourists, without taking a commission. This is one way that they feel they can give back to the town and show their appreciation to the people who live here. ♦♦

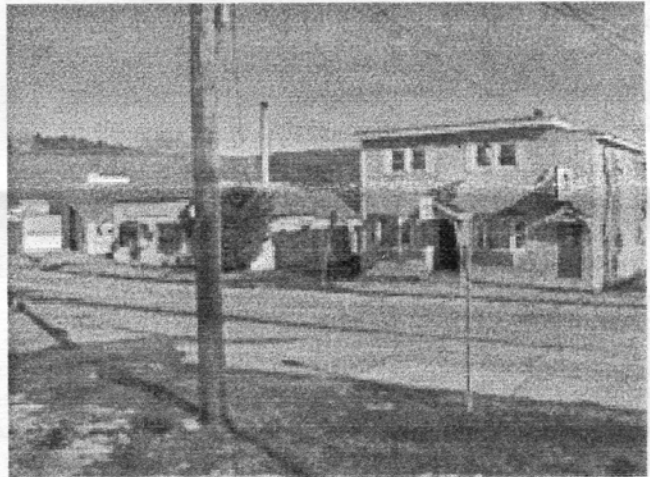
## RESOURCES

Interview with Deb Julian on January 22, 2002 at the Putney Diner.

Conducted by Fern Tavalin

*USA Today* "10 Great Places to..." by Veronica Gould Stoddart. August 27, 1999.

*Eat Your Way Across America* by Jane and Michael Stern, 1999.



**The Putney Diner article is an example of the interviewing and summary writing that will contribute background information about Putney today.**

**Writers of the history update will use these summaries and other primary resources to look for the patterns, trends, and community sentiment that tell us what Putney means to the people who live here.**

**The update of our history will be prepared by January 2003 so that we can rely on historical information to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the town charter.**

## How will this stay organized??

With so much activity going on at once, organization will be crucial. Thanks to the efforts of Julie Strothman, a technology student at the Marlboro College Graduate Center, we are creating an online system of communication.

**The Book:** an online database will show who will be interviewing whom and on what date. A password-protected area of the WEB Exchange will allow drafts to be discussed while they are in-progress. Finished versions of the written summaries will be provided online for community comment as well.

**Digital Collections:** while the exact text from interview summaries may not appear in the book, they will be available on the Internet. In this way, we can publish more information about the town than a book can accommodate.

**Notification:** there will also be an opportunity for people with e-mail to sign-up to receive notices and publications online. The web site is one way we will keep people informed about the progress we are making. Information will be disseminated by traditional means, too.

**Techno-speak:** does all of this talk about technology sound like a foreign language to you??? Read how technology is changing our lives in the communication and technology section of *The History of Putney, Vermont 1953-2003*.



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### Wish List for the Future

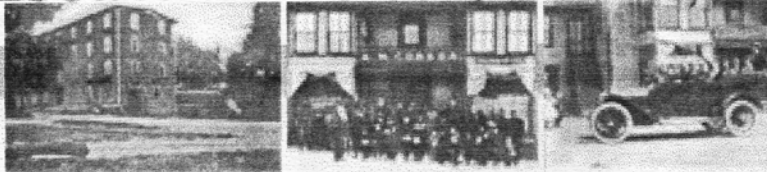
Putney Laundromat  
Hardware store  
Town Pharmacy

Click here to add  
more wishes!

In 2003 the Town of Putney reaches the 250th anniversary of its town charter. To mark this occasion, we invite our community to join us as we follow our mission to "discover and collect materials illustrative of life, conditions, events, and activities of the past and present pertinent to the history of Putney."

Click here to  
receive updates  
of our activities.

## 250th Anniversary Putney VT



Questions?  
Please contact  
Putney Historical  
Society  
387-5862

Building Preservation | Book | Digital Collection | Timeline | Honoring Veterans | Putney Home

Visit our web site at <http://www.putneyvt.org/history>.

## A Chance to Make History

By Fern Tavalin

The decision to collect descriptions of institutions, organizations, and businesses in Putney for writers to use as they analyze the patterns and trends of the town in the last 50 years requires mass participation. In addition to individual efforts and those of volunteer organizations, the five schools in our town serve as an important resource to accomplish this widescale gathering of information. Moreover, the opportunity to engage in community-based learning presents an exciting way for students to contribute to our town and to reach their learning goals at the same time. Through a generous grant from the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation to the WEB Project, educator Fern Tavalin is available to provide support to the participating schools. Thanks to the Vermont Council on the Humanities, the Putney Historical Society can also offer community and school-based workshops with Cynthia Payne (interviewing) and Christina Nova (videotaping).

**The Grammar School** -- upper grade language arts and social studies teacher Laurie Fichter will work with her students to incorporate writing and research. She explains that interviewing and looking for supporting documents in the Historical Society's collection will give her students the opportunity to integrate information from a variety of sources, creating an important foundation for critical thinking.

**The Greenwood School** -- writing program director Reed Duncan saw an immediate opportunity for his students to meet some of their goals in reading, writing, speaking, and note taking. This real life connection was important for Alan Owen to incorporate into his spring writing class as well. Specific involvement will be tailored to meet the needs of each Greenwood student who participates.

**The Putney School** -- ESL teacher Stephen Sadlier and his students from Japan, Korea, and Rwanda will join the Putney history writing project. The group is excited about getting to know some of the people from town through interviewing. In the words of their teacher, "This will be a chance to make history."

**Landmark College** -- Landmark will play a key role in preparing the update. Not only will students in various departments participate, but some of their instructors are offering needed expertise to the project at-large. Christina Nova will provide video workshops that prepare videographers to frame interview shots and record audio. Stuart Strothman will serve as editorial supervisor, overseeing the entire writing process. Tom Trenchard is organizing efforts throughout the Communications Department.

**Putney Central** -- while Putney Central will not be participating in the book update, the faculty is very excited about using the Town of Putney as an all-school theme for 2002-2003. Teachers will meet in the spring to organize next year's activities. Art teacher Gerry Gatz has begun discussions with Doris Fredericks to make a community, clay mural.

**Home Schoolers** -- we would like to invite home schoolers to participate. If you're interested, contact Fern Tavalin at 387-4277 or by e-mailing [tavalin@sover.net](mailto:tavalin@sover.net).

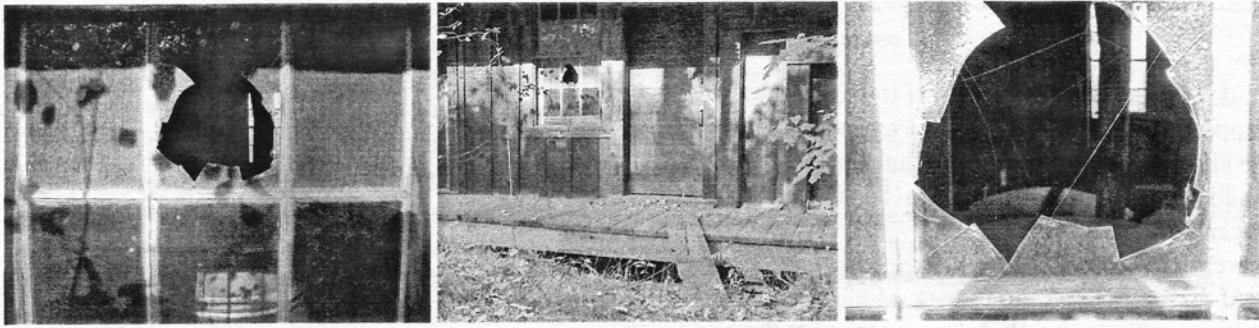


Photo: TGS Students

### What is a Bendo?

*A bendo, shown in the hands of a TGS student, is a popular toy for kids in 2002. A bendo is brightly colored and its arms and legs move and bend into many positions.*

*Eighth grade students in Laurie Fichter's social studies class at the Grammar School recently recorded conversations about their school and the town of Putney in preparation for working with the Putney Historical Society to update our town history.*



## **Putney Historical Society -- Long Term Plans**

**To help with anything on our list, contact us  
by phone at 387-5862 or via e-mail at [putneyhs@sover.net](mailto:putneyhs@sover.net)**

### **I. Generating and Gathering Primary Resources for 2003**

*Preparation of Oral Histories and Collection of Primary Resources that can be used in the updated town history and that become an archive unto themselves for future research.*

### **II. Preparing Materials for Book Update 1953-2003**

*Massive engagement of volunteers who will interview and write summaries about people, organizations, businesses, and places in Putney. Writers of the book update will rely on these materials and others to make statements about general themes and trends regarding town life in the last 50 years.*

### **III. Using Historical Information to Celebrate our Anniversary**

*Widespread celebration. Written history is only one way to occasion an event. In 1953, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated by preparing the original history. In addition, people of our town wrote and staged plays, had picnics, made parades, and used the entire year to highlight that landmark event. We will continue this tradition by asking the many talented people within the town of Putney to create engaging ways to celebrate, leaving an expression of our times for those in the future.*

### **IV. Preserving Buildings for Future Use**

*Continuation of ongoing historic building projects such as the Thwing Mill. In addition to building preservation, we need to generate an accurate record of all of the historic buildings in Putney, especially those beyond the main business district. Plans are in the making to hold photo memory sessions and to photograph buildings in their current state so that we can leave a record of what currently exists and is remembered.*

### **V. Honoring Veterans**

*Establishment of Veterans' Memorial at Town Hall with a target date for unveiling on Veteran's Day 2003. The fundraising effort for the memorial is not yet underway. If you would like to help, contact Laurel Ellis at the Historical Society for further details.*

### **VI. Cataloging Current Collection and Emerging Artifacts and Oral Histories**

*Use of computer software (Past Perfect) to catalog PHS's current collection and those items added as a result of Celebration 2003 activities is underway. A visit from Debbie Haines of the Hood Museum at the beginning of March will help us to proceed in a systematic way.*

was still down there somewhere or if it had deteriorated and disappeared. That was enough to entice Annette to go to the site to see what else might have been thrown from the ferry or if perhaps the boat itself might be down on the river bottom.

On November 4, 2001, Annette, daughter Christine, friend and diving companion Patrick Madden, and two other divers went into the 48 degree water near the site of the former Britton's Ferry in East Putney to look around. They didn't find any engines or ferry boats, but while exploring in the vicinity, Annette and Christine noticed a mysterious pile of rocks. Upon investigation, they found that the rocks had spilled out of a large structure made of huge timbers - timbers so large that Annette feels they must have been made from logs from the "virgin forest" of the surrounding area. On the opposite side of the river, Patrick and his dive buddies discovered a matching structure.

Annette excitedly described first the thrill of examining these immense underwater edifices and then sitting on top of them as they took a break in the action. The surface of the river was still another 20 feet over their heads. The bottom of the river in the center of the channel was about 20 feet below them.

At first thoughts were that these forms were connected to the old ferry, perhaps landings, as the river was much lower and narrower before the construction of the Vernon dam. But Annette's instincts "bridge."

When the historical society was contacted, the History of Putney was consulted and sure enough, there was a "Great Bridge" built in 1812 "just above the ferry." Excited at the possibility of taping these probably 190-year-old remains for further study and to share the experience of seeing them with interested people who will never have the opportunity to make such a dive, last-minute plans were successfully carried out. A second dive with a rented underwater video camera was made before winter set-in. Waiting until spring, the water would have been too swift and cloudy from dislodged sediment to allow good taping for yet several more months.

On the morning of November 12, Annette, Christine, and Patrick ignored the scattering flakes of snow in the chilly air as they suited up to take their second tour of the river bottom and to videotape the structural remains. In one week the water temperature had decreased to 44 degrees. Fern Tavalin, project director for Putney Historical Society's (History) "Celebration 2003" was on hand to tape the event from the river bank and to

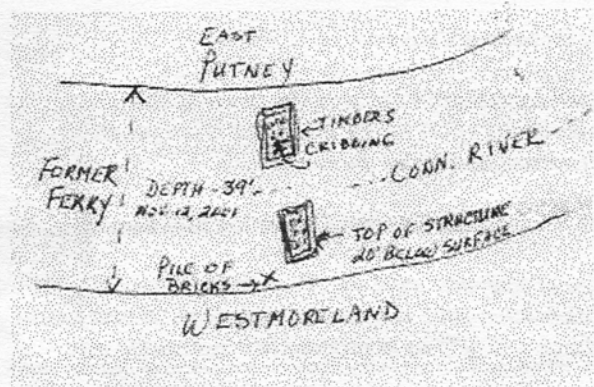
capture the divers' reactions to what they saw. These video records will be edited and made available to the public in the near future. John and Leigh Nopper graciously permitted access to the site across their sheep pasture and provided coffee and snacks for the chilled divers as they warmed up.

"It's hard to imagine after this length of time that the structures are still in unbelievably good condition. Ice jams, log drives, floods, and other happenings did not take their toll," commented Don after seeing the video.

Detailed measurements and further documentation will be done in the spring to help establish that these are indeed the remains of Putney's first bridge across the Connecticut.

*The History of Putney, Vermont 1753 - 1953* says that fund raising for the bridge began in 1810 and that Peleg Kingsley's bid of \$6000 won the contract. The actual cost was \$7,945.39 which included "the land and the franchise" and which translated into today's dollars amounted to somewhere between \$72,000 and \$105,000. The history states that "piers were set into the river but only to about the height of the low-water mark. On these rested the trestle of woodwork that supported the bridge. In the spring of 1813, however, the bridge collapsed when rising water lifted the ice which had frozen to the trestle and dislodged the bridge, causing its destruction. It was rebuilt in 1814." According to *The History of Westmoreland*, the bridge was washed away for the final time in February of 1824. It was replaced by another bridge about a mile upstream near the Aplin Farm in 1828.

Though some sources have referred to this bridge as a "covered" bridge, no solid evidence of that has been found to date. For the story that caused this bridge to be called "The Elephant Bridge" see *Putney, 1753 - 1953*, page 91. ♦♦



## MEMBERS SURVEY

With the acceptance of the Thwing Mill, our overhead to cover insurance costs has increased dramatically. We are reviewing ways to generate income. It has come up at many Board meetings that our dues may be too low. We would like to increase our dues, but do want that to prevent anyone from joining the Historical Society. So, we would like to have you help us answer that question. Should we raise membership dues to help cover extra costs?

- Yes, it's time to raise the Historical Society dues, keeping a special senior rate of \$5.
- \$15 is an acceptable fee
  - \$20 is an acceptable fee
  - \$25 is an acceptable fee
- No. All of the above rates are too expensive and would prevent me from joining the 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.

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

Yes, I will volunteer. Please phone me at: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## PUTNEY ROAD NAMES: Who was Fred Houghton?

Frederick Lowell Houghton (1859 - 1927) was a farmer, lawyer, author, state representative, Putney selectman and town moderator in addition to several other positions of trustee, director, and president of various companies and financial institutions. He may be best remembered for his involvement with the Holstein-Friesian Association of America of which he was secretary and editor of the register. He made his home on his ancestral farm where he "maintained a fine, highly-bred herd of Holstein-Friesian cattle." The former Houghton Farm is now the site of the Putney School Inn which is located off (you guessed it) Houghton Brook Road. (from "People of Putney 1753 - 1953" compiled by The Fortnightly Club of Putney, Vermont, second edition, October, 1953.)



Photos: Tavalin

Scenes of the old Houghton Farm in February 2002 from the Putney School lower farm driveway and from Houghton Brook Road.