
**ANNUAL MEETING AND
 SPECIAL SHOWING
 OF THE 1953
 BICENTENNIAL FILM**

Sunday, September 17 at 4 p.m.

Place: NOYES BARN

KIMBALL HILL

Please note: this will take place on Sept. 17 not Sept. 7 as noted in Putney Cares' newsletter.

Questions? Call Laurel 387-4489

Refreshments will be served.

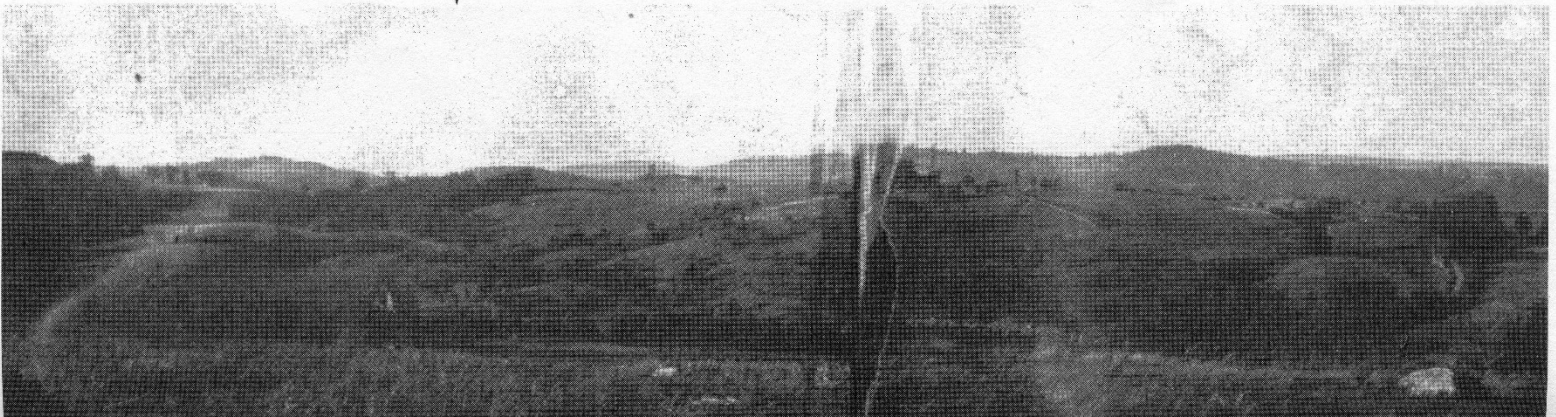
**The Cultural History of
 Putney's Ridgelines**

by Lyssa Papazian

(This article was developed out of a public presentation on the protection of the town's ridgelines made for the Putney Conservation Commission November 1999)

Putney's hills and ridgelines are some of the town's most striking features. Just as striking, however, is the dramatic change that has occurred on those landscape features in the past 200 years. There has been recent discussion of new, late 20th century development in Putney's ridgeline areas. Houses are being built in heavily wooded areas with vistas created by clearing on trails, in and around favorite hiking and recreation spots, and this seems like major change in the landscape. While important issues such as wildlife habitat protection, erosion, and scenic and recreational value need to be explored, the rich cultural history of the ridgelines may provide some perspective on development there.

Holway Farm/Aiken Road



It is important to realize that the population of Putney, organized as a town in 1770, soared to roughly 1848 as early as 1791 when it was the fourth largest town in the new state of Vermont. That was the peak from which the population declined sharply to 1574 in 1800 and then nearly steadily over the next 120 years to the low point of 761 in 1920, a time when the spectacle of abandoned Vermont hill farms was a state crisis.

There were slow increases in Putney's population until it reached about 1000 in 1950 where it remained until very recently. In the last 30 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the population of the town. In 1980, the census recorded a population of 1850 residents, passing the high point of 1848 set 200 years earlier. The town now has a population of over 2700. In terms of how that may "feel" to people, the very oldest residents will remember the 1920s and 1930s when the number of people was less than a quarter of what it is now. Most of the longtime residents, somewhat younger, will remember Putney of the 1950s and 1960s when the population was much less than half of the present size. Even those for whom the "old days" was the 1970s, are now looking at a town with a thousand more people in it. When you consider that family size has shrunk considerably since 1791, the number of single family homes required to shelter this new population is a level of development new to Putney. Nevertheless, the current settlement patterns are not too different from those of the 18th and early 19th centuries as many new homes are built on the hills among the cellar holes left from Putney's last population explosion.

As one of the first settled towns in Vermont, Putney experienced the full spectrum of Vermont's restless development history. Feeling too cramped in the growing settlements of Connecticut and eastern Massachusetts, many people headed north to the wild and dangerous frontier that was 18th century Vermont where they risked unsure land titles, natural adversity, and hostile confrontation with the native population to establish homesteads. The fort at Putney's famous Great Meadows was established in the 1740s - though it burned and was abandoned

(continued on page 2)

several times before the town was organized in 1770. In the decades after the French and Indian War, settlement began to spread out from the fort.

New settlers arrived from Massachusetts and Connecticut in droves. Many of them began to settle the ridgelines not just the valleys. In just a few decades, the town of Putney was well established with industries such as grist, saw, and paper mills along the Sacketts and East Putney brooks, several stores, two churches, taverns, and stage lines to Boston and Albany. Within the borders of Putney there were about 230 houses scattered throughout the town with small hamlets developing in the several school districts that were established in 1784. The 18th century village of Putney was north of the present center and was located on the hill stretching along the Westminster West Road. The early houses, stores and churches were closer to where the Central School is today. (It was not until the 1840s that the center of town was located nearer the industry on the brook, when new churches and houses joined the early store and tavern there.) The early settlement patterns were more scattered and on higher elevations. One of the first churches built in town, was the Baptist church constructed in 1790 "on the heights of West Hill."

By 1800, the ridgelines were well developed. There were 18 farms dotted along the present Banning Road on Putney Mountain (which was a major through-road extending south along the ridge), and another 23 further down the slope around the present Dusty Ridge, Holland Hill, Orchard Hill, and Putney Mountain Roads. There were six more farms along Hickory Ridge and 9 on East Putney Ridge. Around the lower slopes of Bare Hill were another 19 farms. Development avoided the tops of the ridges themselves, especially on Bare Hill near the center of Putney. Despite the fact that the 1753 "proprietor's map" chartering the Town laid out the dense, small lots of the village on Bare Hill, the lack of easily accessible water and rocky ledge below the soil changed the development pattern so that the village developed instead on the West Hill.

As the census records show, Putney's population high point for about two hundred years was reached in 1791, shortly after it was settled. By the next census in 1800, the long decline in the

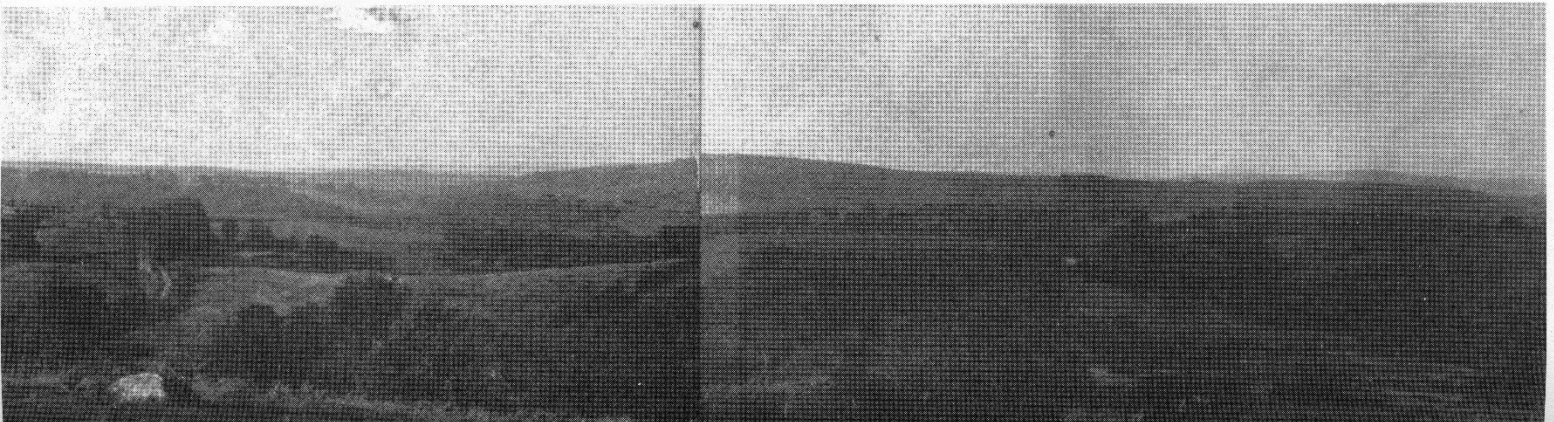
town's population had already begun with people leaving Southern Vermont for more northern, frontier towns and more often for the west. Many were seeking the land opportunities available only on the current frontiers of settlement. Others were looking for better, more easily worked farmland.

In the 1790s and early 19th century, Vermont was a major producer of wheat and other grains but these were more easily produced further west and Vermont's agricultural focus changed. The commodity wool production industry, started in 1811 with the importation of Spanish Merino sheep to Vermont by William Jarvis as well as by the protective tariffs imposed by the government, was perfect for Vermont's hills. The early subsistence hill farms, where much of the land had been cleared, became opportunities for a sheep-based market economy. Sheep could easily utilize unimproved ridge-top pastures and the wool was a valuable non-perishable commodity. However, the "sheep craze" as it has been called by historians of Vermont created an atmosphere of speculation in which farmers or investors with capital bought up several smaller farms to create bigger holdings. By the 1830s, Vermont was looking like it would become one vast sheepfold, its wooded hills almost entirely converted to open pasture. An 1834 writer called "the Green Mountaineer" warned in the Windsor Vermont Chronicle: "Beware of the 'western fever' and above all, sell not your farms to your rich neighbors for sheep pastures." This tendency left abandoned farmsteads, particularly in the hills. The westward migration became intensified with the advent of the railroads in the mid-19th century and the collapse of the wool market in 1846.

In 1856, with a population of about 1200, McClellan's map of Putney shows only two of the former 18 houses remaining on the ridgeline (now Banning) road. There were about 12 left on the lower slopes of Putney Mountain where there had been 23 in 1800 and only 6 near Bare Hill where 19 had existed half a century earlier. The total number of houses in town was about 170, 60 fewer than in 1800. Another map of Putney published by Beers in 1869, shows about 223 houses and these were clearly more concentrated in the new village centers of Putney and East Putney with very few left

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c. 1910 panoramic photos courtesy of Evan Darrow



on the upper hills. Most of the early roads in the ridge areas were still open but only sparsely occupied while the "Map of Putney in 1800," by Cory and Carpender, showed them dotted with farms.

By the end of the 19th century, farm abandonment was epidemic throughout New England. The state of Vermont tried to market the empty farms to immigrant farmers and non-farmer urbanites as vacation homes by publishing a "List of Desirable Vermont Farms" in 1893. The population in Putney even increased slightly between the 1880 and 1890 censuses. Agriculture in Putney (and Vermont in general) had shifted to a concentration in dairy and many of the valley farms flourished. However, the development trend away from the hills was strong and by 1947 when the Cory-Carpender map was made, only 74 of about 215 c. 1800 buildings were still standing – none in the Putney Mountain ridge areas. A further study of the development patterns and farm abandonment was a 1953 masters thesis by William H. Appel entitled "Putney, Vermont: A Study of the Changes in Property Relationships From 1930 to 1951, with Factors Leading up to 1930." Appel's interesting maps inventory the buildings left in town and note the complete abandonment of farms on the slopes of Putney Mountain with the only occupied structures being camps built after 1930. Other areas of concentrated abandonment are near Hickory Ridge and East Putney ridge and partly correlate to poorer (Class IV) agricultural soils. By the time of Appel's study, modern dairy industry standards and laws had further reduced the number of viable small farms on the hills and in other areas of town. The long-term effects of hill-abandonment were seen in the maturing woods which had replaced pasture. The stone walls that had once fenced sheep and fields, were quaint artifacts found by a walk in the forest. A hundred year comparison is often made that Vermont was 80% cleared and 20% wooded in 1850 (thanks to the "sheep craze") and only 20% cleared and 80% wooded by 1950. The woods of today are also very different from those found on the hills in 1753 when the town was first chartered. There are accounts of the "majestic white pine" on the uplands and yellow pine in the meadows. Now, the woods which grew up in the former sheep pastures of the 19th century are primarily mixed

hardwoods and present a very different picture in the fall.

The recent increase in Putney's population started in the 1960s and continuing through the present can be tracked in the development of housing in the ridgeline areas. By comparing older USGS maps and a series of aerial photographs to today's new 911 maps, it is possible to get a sense of the development chronology. Many of the newer houses in Putney have been built in the ridge areas especially since 1985, as technology improves to solve difficulties of designing water and septic systems in steeper areas. The early roads, long since turned to trail, are being used again as new houses are built in the areas popular in the 1790s. One difference in development patterns is that new houses tend to be placed back from the road, often down long driveways and sometimes at higher elevations than their 18th century predecessors. There are at least 26 houses now on Banning and Parkman Wood Roads (sections of the same old ridgeline road) where the 18 c. 1800 farms had vanished by 1869. Houses on the lower slopes of Putney Mountain now number about 60 compared to 23 in 1800 and 12 in 1869.

Development around Bare Hill is similar. The old roads are being used again for new development which is higher on the hill than formerly. The top of Bare Hill was always shown as a relatively wild height on maps through the 19th century and the recent development patterns show a first wave of houses in areas of former older development such as on Town Farm Road and Bear Hill Road, as well as a newer wave of development higher on the ridgeline.

The numbers of new homes and new residents is unprecedented in Putney and will no doubt have a dramatic impact on the town. However, it may never be as dramatic as the difference 7000 sheep made in 1840. It is hard now to imagine the classic wooded hill tops of the Putney landscape were once almost entirely cleared and dotted with sheep and fields of grain. Lower down, the slopes were dotted with houses in open fields. A little while later in the 19th century, a short walk in the young woods would have revealed the ghostly abandoned farmhouses of an earlier time. Now we have a few cellar holes, trails, and many miles of stone walls to remind us of the cultural history of our ridgelines.

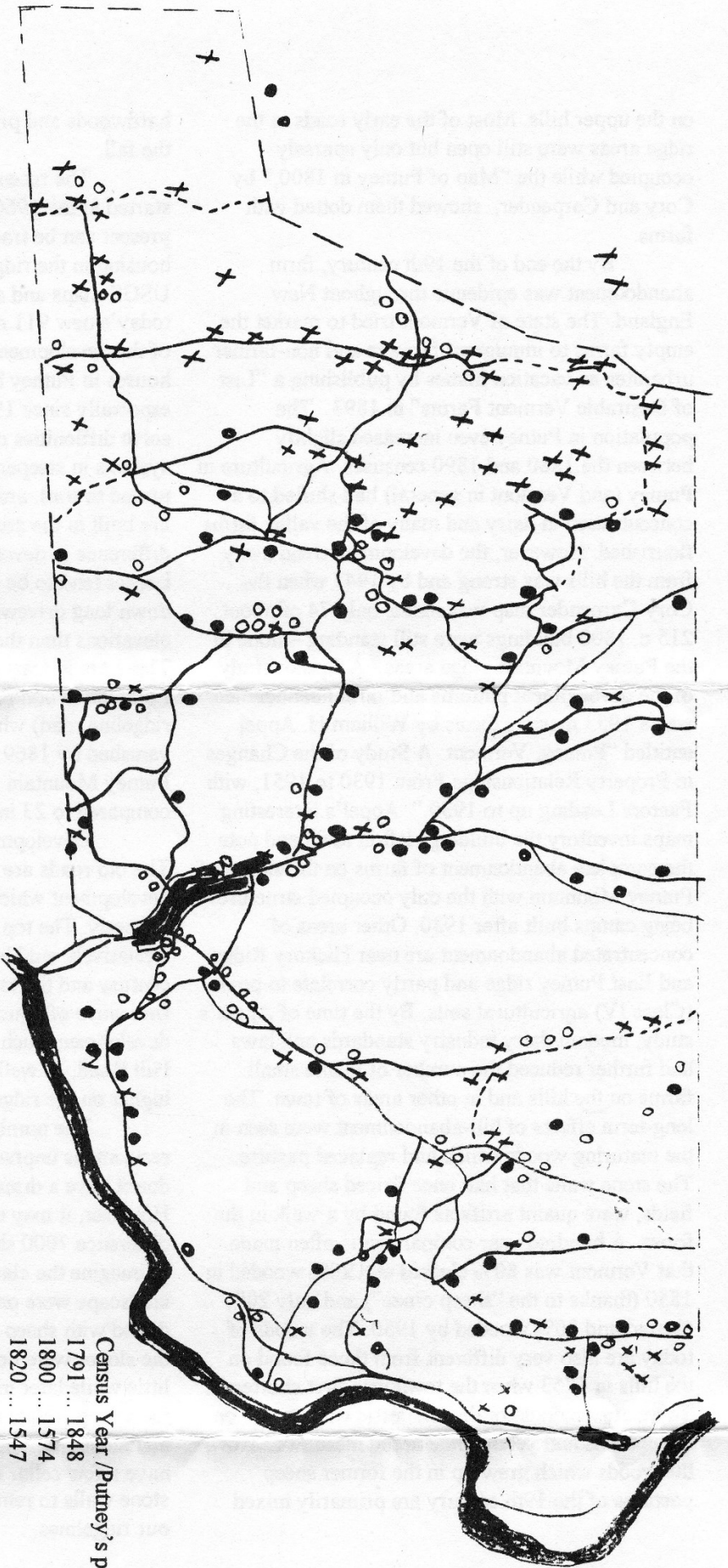
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(see map on page 4)

Putney School



X Abandoned buildings
 ● Buildings of 1800 still standing
 ○ Buildings built since 1800
 old roads



Census Year / Putney's population

1791 ...	1848
1800 ...	1574
1820 ...	1547
1850 ...	1423
1860 ...	1163
1880 ...	1075
1890 ...	1124
1900 ...	969
1910 ...	788
1920 ...	761
1930 ...	835
1940 ...	904
1950 ...	1019
1960 ...	1177
1970 ...	1727
1980 ...	1850
1990 ...	2352
2000 ...	2720 (est.)



CAN YOU HELP?

We have many old photos that need to be identified. There are old handwritten documents that need to be transcribed and many other ways we could use your help. Do you have an item or inquiry (new or old) for our newsletter? Would you be willing to share some memories of life in Putney for our history?

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

WANTED: WRITERS

As we begin the huge task of gathering and organizing information for The History of Putney Volume 2 (1953 - 2003) we are searching for writers willing to donate time and talent to help make this undertaking a success. Whether you can do 50 pages or just a paragraph, please let us hear from you. If you don't care to write but have memories to share, please contact us and we'll arrange for an interview.

Questions? Someone is usually at the Museum from 2 - 4 on Wednesdays (387-5862) or call Laurel Ellis (387-4489) or Laura Heller (387-4436)

Excerpts from "A Study of the Town of Putney, Vermont 1936" by Putney School Student and town resident, Monica Owen

"In all there were originally about 19,366 acres but in 1794, 3569 of them were cut off, as they were useless, and they now form part of Brookline."

"Farming is, of course, the main occupation in Putney. Dairy products are the main source of income. Milk is sold in Brattleboro or Bellows Falls "plants" (which then sell to Worcester and Springfield.) It used to be sold in Boston. It sells for 5 cents a quart wholesale and 7 - 8 cents retail. Other products are: Hay, selling for \$12 (per) ton in Brattleboro, \$15 in Putney; Apples, Other fruits, (few are raised), Corn, wheat \$ 3.50 a ton, Oats. Tobacco and Popcorn have been raised solely for profit."

"Voters, legally, are persons over 21 who have taken the "freeman's oath" - sworn allegiance to the constitution, etc., and have paid their poll, flood, old age assistance and other taxes for all past years. They must have lived here for one year."

From her discussion about Town Meeting where she lists the questions the voters were to take action on: "... what action should be taken for the establishment of a town forest (this would be planting trees - maple, pine etc., on some of the unused town pasture, thereby considerably increasing its value to the town)..."

and: "This year the question of making sidewalks arose, since the children play in the road because they have no other place. However, it was voted down on the ground that they wouldn't use them if they had them. It was suggested that the best thing to do would be to train the children to walk on the side of the road."

From Monica's list of Town Assets: "Tramp House: This is a lock-up for tramps, because there is a state law that says that tramps must be put up by the town free of charge. In 1935 this came to \$35 for meals ('Feeding 122 at 20 cents) and fuel, 1936 it was only \$12."

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

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**ANNUAL MEETING:
SEPTEMBER 17**

**BOXHOLDER
PUTNEY, VT 05346**

Postmaster, Mike Bedard presents Putney Historical Society with a Certificate of Appreciation and World War II commemorative stamps at the July 18 meeting of the board. The letter reads: "In recognition of the efforts of the men and women of Putney who faithfully and victoriously preserved our freedom, the U. S. Postal Service presents these stamps to the Putney Historical Society as an addition to the War Memorial. We gratefully acknowledge the price paid then for our liberty today."

We have begun the process of planning a permanent war memorial to honor all those who called Putney home when they served in any branch of the service during a time of war. There are about 500 names for all wars and we are checking lists for accuracy. The type of memorial (stone, bronze etc.) will be determined by the funds that we are able to raise. The location is yet to be determined. Names and suggestions are welcome.

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