

PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Winter 2002-2003



*Putney
turns
250 this
year!
Join our
celebration
read all about it
details inside...*

Russ and Milly Ellis

by Jan Thompson

Abridged Version

Community interviewing has played a large part in gathering information for the upcoming history book and in preserving a glimpse of today for tomorrow's residents. Friends and family have selected people they love and admire to include in our files. The Historical Society hopes that this list of Putney People continues to grow. The first version of Putney People was printed in the mid-fifties. We will publish a second volume within the next few years. Interviewing can be a fun family activity or a learning opportunity at school. For information about the format of our interviews, or to see other write-ups, visit <http://www.putneyvt.org/history>.

Although Russell and Milly Ellis have done so much for the community of Putney, it is a reflection of their graciousness that they asked why they had been chosen as subjects for the Historical Society's interviews. The Ellis' home on Watt Pond Road, which their architect son Peter designed, is beautiful, with its wide view of surrounding

fields and woods and its three lovingly and expertly tended gardens. But Russ and Milly's creative stewardship of nature has not been limited to their own back yard. It has extended to their neighborhood, the village of Putney, and beyond. Their great care for the land and natural beauty is combined with a strong belief in the need for people to understand and get along with one another.

Milly, formerly Milly Kapherr, is from Indianapolis, and Russ is from Winchester, MA. During WWII, Milly worked in the Office of Strategic Service, the predecessor of the CIA, in Washington DC, London, and Paris. She had majored in French in college. She and Russ met at the end of Russ's service overseas during World War II. An ROTC man, he was in the field artillery and had been commissioned in June 1942 for 18 months. Shortly before being shipped home, the young officer went to Paris for R & R at the Hotel du Monde. One night at dinner, he met Milly, who was the program director for the Red Cross. She was known as Mademoiselle Fleur because she bought fresh flowers at the market every week to place in the dining room.

Then in 1946, when Russ was studying in Cambridge at Harvard Business School, Milly—now Mrs. Ellis—saw a poster that posed the question, "Do you want to go abroad?" She and Russ did, so they went to hear Donald Watt—an "amazing person"—give a talk about the Experiment in International Living. They asked Watt, "Will



Milly (far right seated) and Russ (far right standing) with their neighbors in this Sun Hill community photo.

you take a couple?" To which Watt responded, "A couple of what?" Breaking new ground in the Experiment, Russ and Milly applied together to lead a group to Czechoslovakia, where Russ had finished his military service. But because of a coup there in the winter of 1948, the State Department would not allow the group to go. So they went to Holland instead, a difficult situation because this was the first Experiment group to go to the Netherlands, and the Dutch were not prepared for them. Ten American and ten Dutch students were in the program.

Donald Watt came to Amsterdam and asked Russ to be the business manager and treasurer of the Experiment, and Milly, the program director. Since Russ did not want to go into big business, the offer attracted him. He became the business manager and treasurer of the Experiment, and the Ellises came to Putney. The Watt home—a big chalet—was at the center of what is now the Greenwood School. The Ellises moved into the gray house on the grounds of the Experiment in the fall of 1948 when Milly was expecting their first child. She worked as a secretary at the Experiment and led several groups, to Norway, France, Yugoslavia, and Guadalupe. When working for the Experiment, Russ did most of his work in Putney, but he traveled to one or two meetings each year and visited 20 countries. The Ellises led a trip to Denmark in 1952. Milly took a group to France in 1962. The Ellises passed on their belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange to their children, two of whom went on Experiment trips. According to Milly, "Having been abroad during the war makes you more aware of what needs to be done. People-to-people, understanding each other."

After the Experiment moved to Brattleboro in 1963, the plan was to sell its Putney land and buildings. The Experiment sold the property west of Watt Pond Road to the Greenwood School, which had already been renting this land from Experiment. In addition, the Experiment decided to sell 60 acres, with four houses and a barn, east of Watt Pond Road. Realtors made an offer. At that time Russ and Milly still lived in what had been the Gassett place, where they had been since their second year at the Experiment. They were concerned that the neighborhood would be spoiled, that realtors would sell the houses where the other staff lived at the time (Paul and Ellen Gustafsen, Charlie McCormick, Jack Wallace, and others), and then develop and subdivide the land. So the Ellises offered the Experiment ten dollars more than the price that the realtors had offered, and won the contract. Then they offered fair prices—at no profit—to the other staff members in parcels of five or more acres, with a stipulation in the deed that the parcels could not be subdivided. Thus, they preserved the community, which Milly says was "very self supporting." The Ellises retained 20

acres out of the 70 for themselves. Their son Peter, an architect, designed a home for them to be built on their land, which is where they have lived since 1983. The Ellises explain that they loved the way of life here and wanted to preserve open land. Even though most of their Experiment colleague-neighbors no longer live here, the Ellises still feel fortunate to be a part of their neighborhood community. The Putney School still cuts their hay.

When asked what changes they have seen in Putney over their years here, Milly and Russ respond that the relative lack of change is what keeps them here. Upon further reflection, Milly notes that mud season used to be so bad that the milk man and post man could not get through. Russ adds that Experiment staff parked at the Putney School and had to be transported to the Experiment campus in a pre-World War II four-wheel drive Army command car. By contrast, today the roads are well maintained; they have to be because there are so many more people and houses now. Still, Putney has stayed relatively small, probably because it is hard to make a living here. ♦

PHS Updates

Arcadia Publishing to Release Putney History

Arcadia Publishing has recently announced that they will include the history of Putney in their Making of America series. The Making of America is an ambitious venture to produce a comprehensive history of every community across the United States, and Putney will be the first town in Vermont to appear in this series.

As part of its 250th charter celebration, the Putney Historical Society embarked on an ambitious effort in 2001 to write an update to its original town history, published in 1953. Rather than hire an historian, the Board decided to launch a grassroots effort to collect stories, do research, and write a new book. Sponsored in part through grants from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and the Paul Foundation, volunteers have interviewed 78 people on topics ranging from daily life to town government to the critical issues facing the town as it developed through the twentieth century. Another 20 people have completed lifestyle surveys to add a sense of personal experience to the factual information found in public documents.

Students and teachers from Landmark College, the Grammar School, Putney School, and Greenwood School have been instrumental in gathering information, making natural connections between the history project and their curriculum. To keep the grassroots effort organized, Julie Strothman of Landmark College designed a web site that provides instructions for conducting interviews and a place for completed write-ups. This work-in-progress can be seen by visiting <http://www.putneyvt.org/history>.

A team of three writers, Laurel Ellis, Stuart Strothman, and Fern Tavalin has pulled the community research and writing together into a draft version of the book. They have modified the original idea of a topic-based history of Putney from 1953 to 2003 to fit with Arcadia's requirement of a comprehensive narrative from early development to present day. In doing so, they have uncovered new information that was not included in the original history.

In keeping with the grassroots spirit of the book, the Putney Public Library will sponsor two critique sessions, the first was held on Tuesday, January 28th at 7pm at the Putney Cares Barn. This session was combined with a "picture party." Anyone with photos to share or an interest in reading the draft sections is invited to attend the next critique. The second critique session will be held on Tuesday, February 25th, 7:00 pm at the Putney Public Library.

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Celebration 2003 plans are underway - - help add to the schedule of events!

Forty people participated in a community planning session at the Historical Society's annual meeting to help shape the events of this summer's August celebration 2003. We have already acted on many of the suggestions that came from the meeting. But, there is still a lot of room to add more events. So, as you look at the schedule below, think about ways in which you would like to participate in existing events, or ways to include activities of your own. This is a great chance for organizations, individuals, and businesses to have some creative fun. With the energy of everyone in town, we can make a great street fair to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the town charter!

Some ideas from the annual meeting that you may like to consider include:

- Children's events
- Hula Hoopsters
- Croquet matches
- Exotic or silly sports competitions that are fun
- Horse and wagon rides
- Food concessions on Saturday
- Sugar on snow booth
- Lost Arts exhibit (crafts from yesteryear)

Thursday, August 14th (fully scheduled)

4-6 PM Release of *Putney, Vermont*. Reception at Heartstone Books.

7-10 PM Gala Evening Kick-off at the Putney Inn Featuring an evening of fun, food, music, and dance. After dinner swing dance lessons provided by Nancy Gagnon and Bob Burch. Costumed characters from Putney's past (optional).

Friday, August 15th (partially scheduled)

AM yet to be scheduled

PM yet to be scheduled

Evening yet to be scheduled

Ongoing Historic tours of houses and the Thwing Mill

Saturday, August 16th (partially scheduled)

AM Parade - Timeline parade of Putney past and present. Contact Sarah Baker if you would like to be a part of the parade.

Noon Pageant

PM yet to be scheduled

Late PM to Early Evening Putney Central School Reunion

Evening Tent Dance near Town Hall using the theme of "Dancing Across the Ages," Amy Cann and Fred Breunig will organize square and contra dances

Ongoing - yet to be scheduled

Sunday, August 17th (partially scheduled)

AM yet to be scheduled

Noon yet to be scheduled

PM yet to be scheduled

Evening yet to be scheduled

Ongoing

10-3 pm Crafts Fair in the Village Center

Time to be scheduled Music on the green

Time to be scheduled Barbecue sponsored by Putney Family Services

Time to be scheduled Blueberry Festival at Green Mountain Orchard

I (we) would like to help with:

- book reception
- gala kick-off
- historic tours
- parade
- pageant
- music on the green

I (we) would like to create a:

- fund raising activity
- special event
- sports activity

I (we) would like to organize or help with one of these activities

- Lost Arts Exhibit (crafts from yesteryear)
- Hula Hoopsters
- Croquet matches
- Exotic or Silly Sports Competitions
- Horse and Wagon Rides
- Food Concessions
- Sugar on Snow booth
- Evening tent dance

I (we) can help with clean-up _____

Name _____

Name of organization _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Time _____

Place _____

Other suggestions _____

Mail to: Putney Historical Society, c/o Putney Town Hall, Box 233, Putney, VT 05346. Or contact Fern Tavalin (tavalin@sover.net) or return to the Putney Historical Society at Town Hall. Museum hours are Wednesdays from 2-4 pm.

BRING YOUR PHOTOS TO THE NEXT PHOTO PARTY AT THE PUTNEY PUBLIC LIBRARY

FEBRUARY 25, 2003

7 - 8:30 pm

The Putney Public Library is sponsoring Photo Parties to gather images for the new Putney history book. The first was held in the Putney Cares Barn and it was a wonderful success! Over 40 people brought their pictures to share memories. The most wild story of the evening was about Carolyn Handy who travelled from NH to bring the old Putney photos she had purchased on E-Bay! We have scanned some pictures for potential use in the upcoming book. But we still need more! If you have any photos from 1945-2003, bring them to the next Photo Party at the Putney Public Library on Tuesday, February 25th from 7-8:30 pm. We'll scan your photos on the spot so that you can bring them home with you at the end of the evening.

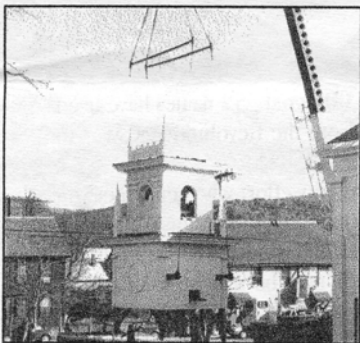
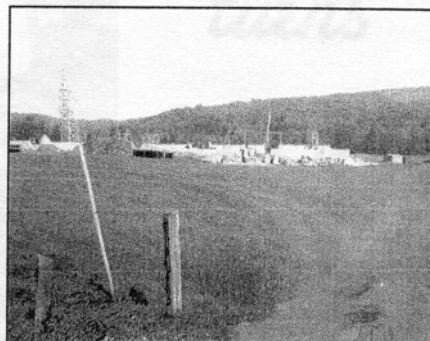
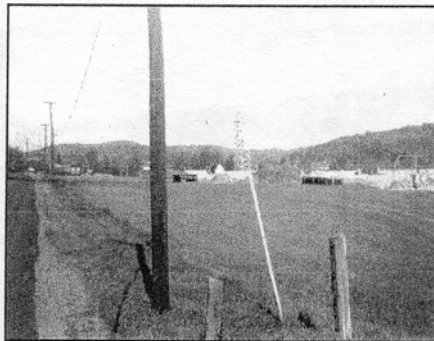
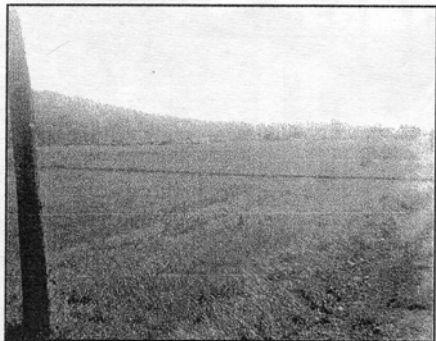
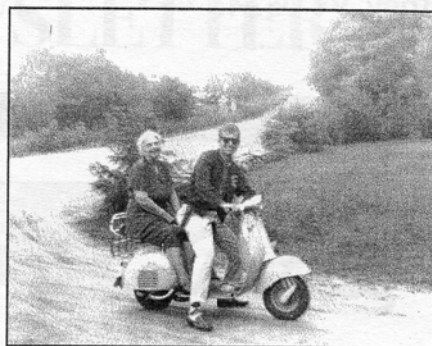


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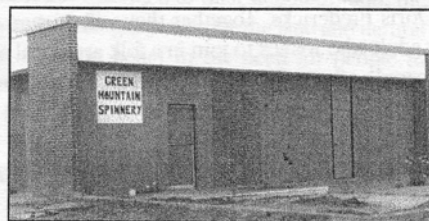
Top right: Mac Jones with his grandmother Beatrice Aiken on a motor cycle.

Next row: Mac Jones's collection showing the progress of the Putney Central School construction.

Next row: left, John Adams's picture of the steeple repair to the Federated Church, center, Bob Goodell's early photo of his family's homestead, right, Marion Daley's picture of Arla Bowen next to the Great Meadows monument.

Next row: left, Lindley Speers's copy of a Jill Noss photo of the Master Batters at work, right, Claire Wilson's shot of the vacated Mobil station just before it became the Green Mountain Spinnery.

Bottom right: Steven Haisley's picture of two large trout taken out of Sacketts Brook in 1999.



PHS updates

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The Town on Parade

Gerry Gatz's 6th graders have started on a community mural project. They are setting aside a time at the beginning of every art class to do some sketching. Come the first fair-weather Monday morning this spring they will be ready to tromp down to town and begin their studies of buildings for the mural. Gerry will be assisted by Putney clay artist Doris Fredericks. Together they will engage students and any Putney adult who wishes to join in a folk art mural of town, complete with a parade of people. Stayed tuned for details so that you can join the parade!

Foundations Give Grant Monies to Putney Historical Society

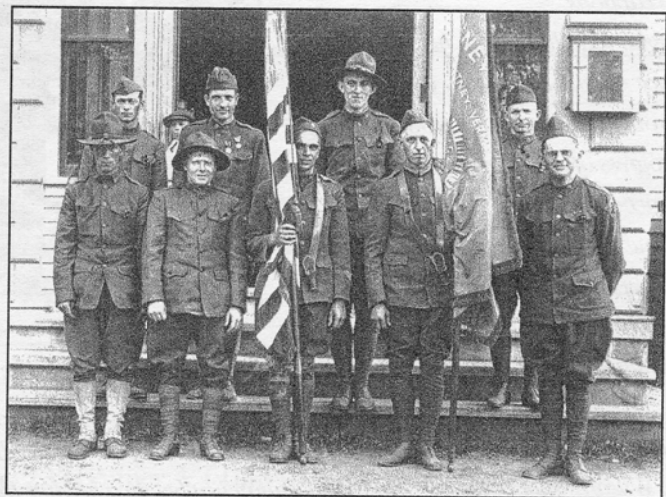
We have received three grants this year -- \$1,000 from the WEB Project to support the community mural project at Putney Central, \$2,000 from the Vermont Community Foundation to design museum displays and coordinate the parade, and over \$4,000 from the Strolling of Heifer Foundation to create educational opportunities relating to the agricultural history of Putney.

Veterans Memorial Fund Grows

Thanks to the generosity of 125 persons, contributions to the Putney Veterans Memorial are inching toward the \$10,000 mark as of mid-

February - not quite 30% of our \$35,000 goal. 52 names have been added to our master list of veterans from the Revolutionary War to present conflicts.

Let's make this a truly community effort whether or not you have a family member on the list. They are all part of our history. If you would like to help honor the Putney men and women who served in the armed forces, your tax deductible gift may be sent to: Honoring Putney Heroes, c/o Putney Historical Society, P. O. Box 233, Putney, Vermont 05346.



World War I veterans