

# Putney Historical Society News

Summer 2006

www.putneyhistory.org  
phone 802-387-5862  
email: info@putneyhistory.org

Putney Town Hall, Rte. 5  
Box 233  
Putney, Vermont 05346

Board of Directors:

Ruth Barton, President  
Lindley Speers, Vice President  
Stuart Strothman, Secretary  
Laurel Ellis, Treasurer  
Tom Jamison  
Barbara Taylor  
Jacquie Walker  
Jane Rawley  
Mary Jane MacGuire

**Inside this issue:**

Pierce's Hall and the  
East Putney  
Community Club 1

Annual Meeting  
Sept. 24—A Home  
for PHS in Pierce's  
Hall? 2

Message from the  
President 2

Putney Central  
middle school  
students research  
Civil War at PHS 2

Geneological  
research continues  
at PHS 3

A conversation  
with Olive Frost 4

## Pierce's Hall and the East Putney Community Club

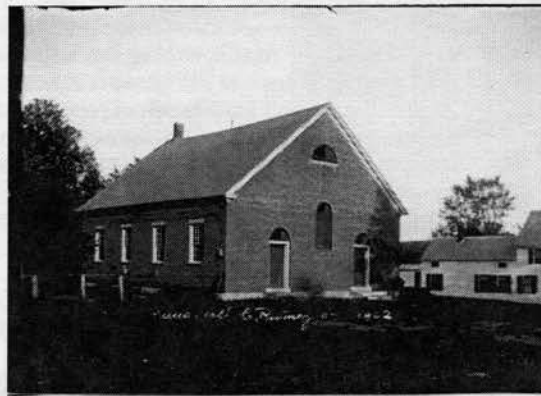
According to three documents written around 1953 for the first Putney town history, the beautiful brick building known as Pierce's Hall was erected in 1831, "for a Methodist meeting house." It has a foundation of long, beam-shaped granite slabs hauled from West Dummerston, and the brick came from Timothy Underwood's brickyard on River Road. When the second meeting house was built in 1842, the Hall was sold to Leroy Pierce, "who used it for storage of corn, and kept sheep underneath the building." There are some records of dances held in the building earlier than 1873, and in 1880 Norman and Mary (Carr) Cobb celebrated their wedding at the Hall. "It is stated that their six sons...drew their parents down in a sleigh from their home to the gala event."

Around 1881, the building was refurbished for use as a meeting house. Rev. N.D. Parsons

...drew the largest audiences in town gatherings every Sunday night to hear him preach. George Gassett's grandfather Elmer O. Gassett, a Deacon of the Baptist church, came over to conduct Sunday schools. A Ladies' Aid Society evidently was formed and earned money

to pay the minister...In those years [the late 1880s] there were Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist churches in Putney and the Society evidently helped each church by paying the minister when he preached at Pierce's Hall.

There was a fair at the Hall on Dec. 13, 1889. The Ladies' Aid Society continued to run the Hall through 1920; names



Pierce's Hall in East Putney, 1932

of presidents included Cobb, Upham, Marcy, Frost, Prince, and Smith in the 1890s, and enter into the 1900s with Fosburgh, Auston, Smith, Angier, Bugbee, Persons, Kingsbury, and Aplin. The fair had become an annual event, thanks in part to the efforts of Mrs. W.D. Bugbee in 1907, and a play was given in 1908. In 1911 a monolog was presented by Bessie Braley. During the 1<sup>st</sup> World War the women sewed and

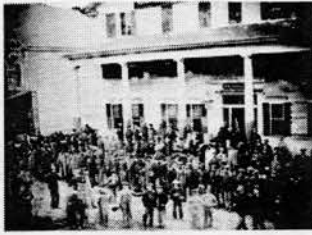
knitted for the Red Cross. Thereafter, "no formal meetings were held until disbandment in August 1924, when the table linen and silver were given to the Federated Church in Putney."

Following a Hallowe'en party at the No. 7 school in Oct. 1920, a Community Club was formed with Mrs. Esther J. Pratt as President. Negotiations were started for the Club to have the use of Pierce's Hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Allen Pierce of Portland, Maine, consented so that the first Club Christmas tree was held that year...the Club put in new windows, screens, draperies, fresh curtains, and in 1926 a very nice floor laid over the original one. When the Baptist Church was converted to Putney Community Centre [sic], Miss Bertha Estey gave the beautiful chandelier

to the Club. In 1937 when electricity became available the lamps were discarded and the chandelier electrified. (For a time Mr. Allen Pierce had his own power plant in the late twenties, and supplied the Hall as well as his own home.)

The object of the East Putney Community Club "shall be the united effort to promote the moral, intellectual, and social life of the members and for better citizenship in the community." The Club sponsored annual pre-Memorial day (continued on page 3)

## Annual Meeting Sunday, Sept. 24: Will PHS Move to Pierce's Hall?



The Vermont Fourth Regiment in Virginia

This past June, members of the East Putney Community Club generously voted to offer to share Pierce's Hall with the Putney Historical Society, which has really needed a home lately. Packed in boxes upstairs in the Town Hall, and continuing to work at times in the large room downstairs, PHS has actively sought some other solution, but as yet has no definite place to perform the extremely important work of preserving documents and artifacts relating to Putney history, and making them

available for research. Charters and bylaws from the two organizations have



The old two-holer out back, at Pierce's been sent to attorney Rich Bowen, to determine if we should be looking at a

merger, a shared space, or any property-related issues. Members of both organizations have worked this summer to take care of the building—we cleared and hauled the brush around the foundation, cleaned inside, and Scott Henry even patched the roof, which was badly in need of repair, and still wants replacement. (We seem to have had roof problems, all around!)

**Discussion of the building will be the focus of our annual meeting, which will be held at Pierce's Hall at 2 p.m on Sunday, Sept. 24.**



Campaign map depicting engagements of the Eleventh Regiment

### Message from the President

It's been a rather exciting year for Putney Historical Society. After a rather slow start we began to start organizing things at our "new digs" upstairs in Town Hall. Then, in early summer, we got an offer for us to move to Pierce's Hall. At this writing it is still being investigated to see if it will be workable. It is hoped that we will have much to report and discuss on this matter at the annual meeting. It is an exciting possibility, but it remains to be seen if it would be practical for all concerned.

We have had several workdays, usually the first Saturday of the month, some at Town Hall, and the last two at Pierce's Hall where we cleared brush and did some interior cleaning. Several pieces of larger farm equipment have been moved to Thwing Mill as they took up so much space at Town Hall, and they were in danger of being damaged as we moved things about. Hope to see you all at the annual meeting.

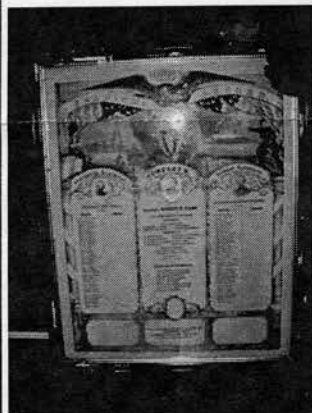
Ruth Barton, President

### Putney Central Middle School Students Research Putney Civil War Veterans at PHS

Over the course of two weeks in May, Putney Central School students in Connie Bresnahan's social studies class conducted research at the Town Hall, attempting to find information about individual Civil War veterans from Putney. In each case, the students had identified the location of the veteran's grave, and many had visited these sites already. With the help of Putney Historical Society members and town employees, the students looked at subject files, vital records, and Greenwood Post books of Civil War military records lent by Laurel

Ellis, and in many cases found interesting materials which inspired their class work. It helped that the Guilford Central students had recently donated to PHS numerous digital photos from Putney-born photographer George Houghton, as in many cases there were photos of regiments containing Putney veterans. Along with these visual pieces, we found original copies of programs from a reunion of the 16th regiment, which included a speech by their commander listing numerous details of their accomplishments; we found newspaper clippings

telling what various regiments had been up to, ranging from exciting battles to tedious encampments and marches; we found records of wounds received, and enlistment and discharge; we looked at some of the things that were happening in Putney at the time of the Civil War. The students were generally very interested and well-behaved. According to Ms. Bresnahan, the work at PHS "inspired the students, who shared their enthusiasm with other students in the classroom." We were certainly pleased to have Putney Central School students visiting our records!



Soldier's Record Sixteenth Regiment Company B Vermont Volunteers

(photo above taken at Guilford Historical Society)

## Pierce's Hall and the EPCC (cont'd from page 1)

events, swimming lessons on East Putney Brook in the 1930s, numerous square dances, and a Calico Ball, which began in 1929 and continued annually except during the 2nd World War. "On Oct. 29, 1950, the Club celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary when Miss Jennie Pierce and Herbert L. Bailey, heirs of Allen M. Pierce, presented the deed of the Hall and its large old fashioned key to the officers and directors for such time as the club is active." The terms are very specific; according to the handwritten 1950 deed,

This deed is upon the strict condition...that in the event that said premises shall at any time be not actively used for general public and social purposes corresponding to the present purposes for which the same is now used for a period of twelve consecutive months or if...not kept in repair and insurance...said premises shall immediately upon notice of Alan E. Pierce be returned to Allen Pierce's heirs, without first bringing in any proceedings.

The EPCC remained active throughout the next two decades, continuing to hold dances and events; there were numerous special occasions at the Hall, including funerals, weddings, "stork showers, bridal showers, wedding anniversaries, and old home day celebrations." There were hunters' suppers in

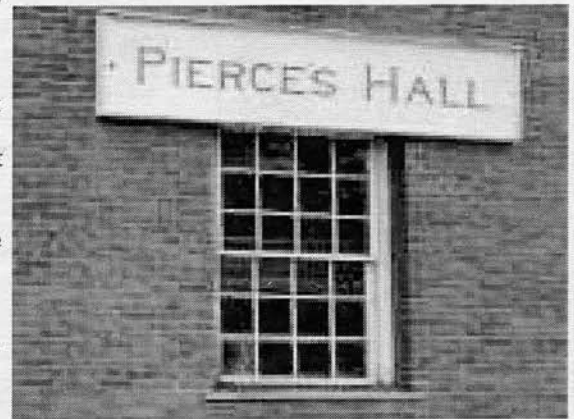
The 50s and 60s as well.

Following Esther Pratt, presidents' names have included Frost, Gilbert, Stockwell, Loomis, Williams, Phelps, Gilbert, Dort, and Watson, and there have been subsequent others, including Marilyn Loomis and Fred Breunig, whose efforts to revitalize Pierce's Hall and the EPCC around 1980 are a story of their own.

Over the years, activity at the hall has typically waxed and waned, and the mid-1970s was one of the waning periods. So when a group of dancers who lived next door to the hall approached Fred with the idea of starting a regular dance there, he was game to do it. An accomplished caller, he initiated a monthly contra and square dance that has continued to the present on the last Saturday of every month. (In August 2006, Paul Eric Smith was the caller. These dances are well-advertised in the Reformer, and on iPutney.)

In the mid-1980s a leak in the roof began to destroy the plaster ceiling. At that point Fred enlisted the aid of Marilyn Loomis and other former East Putney Community Club members and recent arrivals, and in 1986, they officially incorporated the EPCC in the State of Vermont as a non-profit organization dedicated to educational activities. During the next several years, a series of monthly potluck suppers, Halloween and Christmas

parties, penny auctions, rummage sales, pancake breakfasts, and spaghetti suppers raised funds sufficient not only to repair the roof but also the historic coved (arched) plaster ceiling, which is very similar to that of the the Catholic (formerly Methodist) Church in town, built about the same time. In addition to dances the Hall has continued to be used for family reunions, rehearsals, and weddings. While still involved, Fred has transferred his responsibility for coordinating dances to Abe Noe-Hayes, who has continued the tradition. Recently, and notably for our annual meeting, the EPCC voted to offer to share Pierce's Hall with the Putney Historical Society, to give us a much-needed home, to keep the Hall in active use, and to help revitalize East Putney.



## Geneological Research as Strong as Ever

Though our home base has shifted somewhat, geneological research has continued as strong as ever down at the Town Hall. It is common to come in and find some Putney relative with large books and folders out on the large table in the common area, and both town employees and Putney Historical Society members frequently have the opportunity to help with this research. Between the family files, the subject files, our vital records, the land records, and our photo collection, we have a lot to offer these researchers. In the past few months, Laura Heller, Stuart Strothman, Ruth Barton, and certainly Barbara Taylor and Anita Coomes have helped more than 25 people in their efforts to better understand their family history. They included families like the Sheas, who had a family story that one ancestor



Maud Annie Aiken?

was born in Putney in the mid-1800s, as the migrant family did railroad construction; they have included Velma Plouffe, daughter of Margaret Goodhue Miller, daughter of Maud Annie Aiken, whose photo (we believe it's her—taken June 12, 1930) is shown at left. Velma and her husband George, residents of Richmond, VT, took a drive up Holland Hill to see if she could identify the old farmhouse she remembered on the Aiken property purchased from George Parkman Wood in the late 1800s. Like these two, other families conducting research have varied considerably, but they all have some connection to our town. It will soon be an issue to determine, if the Putney Historical Society does move to Pierce's Hall, how the flow of geneological research will be affected; will the family files, for instance, stay at the Town Hall?

**PUTNEY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

Newsletter items assembled by:  
Stuart Strothman  
With contributions from:  
Laurel Ellis  
Ruth Barton

Phone: 802-387-5762  
email: [info@putneyhistory.org](mailto:info@putneyhistory.org)

We're on the web!  
[www.putneyhistory.org](http://www.putneyhistory.org)



## From a conversation with Olive Frost—by Laurel Ellis

In our busy here and now it's hard to imagine how different everything will be at some unknown time in the future. Today's minor hardships could even be remembered with a touch of nostalgia for the related memories of simpler and otherwise happy times. Sometimes it's someone else's memory that enriches our sense of everyday life at a time and place we could never experience first hand. Like a good novel but much more real. Such was the feeling enjoyed when talking with Olive Frost in August, 2006.

Olive was born in 1923 to Delphine and Bert Phelps in East Putney. The house where she grew up is now the home of the Kenzer/Canaris family which has been thoroughly modernized so that it bears little resemblance to the place Olive called home.

Like the many other children in the east part of town, Olive attended first through sixth grades at the #7 School which she still proudly states was a "Superior School." Her trek from home took her down the slope to the Gasset Road, across a bridge (now gone) over the East Putney Brook (below the falls) and up the former "Holler Road" to the school. [The old school building is now part of the Waterman home at the end of Cemetery Road where it is cut off by I91.] At lunch time she walked back home and frequently enjoyed a cream and brown sugar sandwich before returning to school.

Her childhood days were spent doing things that few children can enjoy today such as sliding the length of East Putney Falls Road without fear of meeting a car. George Aplin was the only one who had a car in those days so sliding was suspended when he was due to go speeding by. Another favorite pastime was watching the men cut ice from Loomis' pond. The ice would be packed in sawdust and stored in the barn all year for use in everyone's ice boxes.

Olive's father worked for the railroad and her mother took care of the house and family. For extra money Mrs. Phelps sometimes dug potatoes at the Palen farm and took in laundry. Groceries were delivered once a week by Sy Davis and clothing was either made at home or perhaps obtained at the clothing exchange (a precursor of today's consignment shops) run by Mrs. Pratt at her farm. [Mrs. Pratt was an extremely community-minded lady who lived at the large farm on the eastern section of the Cemetery Road which is now aptly called Pratt Road.] The family did not have a car and depended on family or friends who did for the occasional excursion to Bellows Falls.

The social center of this section of town was most definitely Pierce's Hall and Olive couldn't imagine life without it. From the school programs and plays, the weddings, dinners, and showers to the dances where she met her future husband, it was always part of home.

There was once a stove pipe that went the entire width of the building which helped keep the space warm in the winter. Children had to help with chores like bringing up wood from the cellar or climbing up a ladder to clean and fill the lamps of the chandelier.

At Christmas, a huge tree that reached the ceiling was decorated and there were pageants and gifts for all the children. Ornaments and supplies were stored under the stage.

Many suppers were held on Saturday nights and the women didn't seem to mind having to haul in the water to wash all the dishes. Mrs. Pratt was in charge of many of the suppers and Olive was one of the young people she taught to set a proper table and serve correctly. In the summer there were often clam bakes or corn roasts in the open field behind the Hall.

Special dances included those held on Valentine's Day and the "Calico Balls" where the women made their own cotton dresses and a necktie from the same material for their beaux. Harold Frost came from Brattleboro to attend the dances and Olive can still envision the certain way he stood against a post near the door when he first caught her eye. After their marriage, Harold decided to make his home in Putney and their daughter, Sharon, soon began attending the dances with her parents in her little basket.

As the years rolled on, the family moved to Putney Village and returned to Pierce's Hall for family reunions and increasingly fewer occasions until other, more modern places gradually replaced the old familiar building's usefulness and traditions.

While trying to think of who else would share her memories of those early years, Olive thinks it would be a great idea to have a reunion of sorts to share stories and pictures of long ago events at Pierce's Hall.