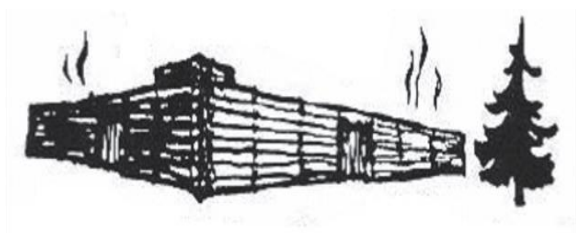


Putney Historical Society

Fall 2020 Newsletter



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Our Local Suffragists

By Meg Mott, *Professor of Politics Emerita, Emerson College*



Clarina Howard Nichols

In this issue:

Our Local Suffragists	1
Mystery Photo.....	6
Glass Negative Project.....	5
Space for PHS Collections.....	3
2021 Calendar	7
Items for Sale.....	6

Vermont has much to be proud of. We are the producers of world-class maple syrup and our local highway crews are skilled in the ancient art of keeping dirt roads passable in the Spring. The 1777 Vermont Constitution was the first to formally abolish slavery, a position that many Northeastern states took years to enact. New York did not formally emancipate enslaved persons until July 4, 1827.

In the 1830's, Vermont had a robust network of Anti-Slavery Societies matched by a general hostility to the very idea of legal equality for Black persons. When Samuel J. May of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society arrived for a lecture tour in 1835, he was often unable to finish his condemnations of the Slave Power (a 19th century term that exposed the tyranny of slave-interests over all Americans) before being run out of town. Once, when pontificating on the erosion of free speech under Slave Power, his point was illustrated by a steady volley of small stones and rotten eggs. He may have abandoned the podium but he certainly made his point. Still, when it came to protecting the Union, over 4000 Vermont soldiers gave their lives for the cause.

By comparison, the fight for women's suffrage was a quiet affair.

Clarina Howard Nichols, born in West Townshend, was an active member of the anti-Slavery movement. After a disastrous first marriage, she supported herself and her children as a journalist for Brattleboro's *Windham County Democrat*, eventually marrying the editor and publisher George Nichols. In 1852, Nichols spoke before the Vermont state legislature, making a case for women's suffrage and for equal pay. The legislators were unmoved by her remarks. Some counties in some states permitted women to vote on school matters. The idea that women should weigh in on the general matters of government was not up for debate. Two years later, the Nichols and their three children moved to Kansas, Territory. Her husband died the following year and Nichols raised herself and her children by publishing an abolitionist newspaper. She never returned to Vermont.

Lucy Daniels was born in Grafton in 1858. An unmarried woman of property, she took up the cause of women's suffrage early on, refusing to pay property taxes if she could not vote. While the Black and white foremothers had used elocution and constitutional principles to make their case to the public, Daniel's generation used more confrontational methods. Since male



legislators had not listened to reason, perhaps some highly publicized direct actions would change their minds. Daniels was arrested and imprisoned at least four times. Her property was seized by tax collectors and her house was subject to vandalism. At one point, she chained herself to the iron fence surrounding the White House.

Daniel's generation was also more racially-divided than the suffragists of the 19th century, most of whom were abolitionists. When the National American Women's Suffrage Association used a campaign of diluting "foreign and ignorant voters," Daniels insisted that the xenophobic strategy did not apply to Black women. According to Diana Lawrence, writing for the *Grafton News* (August 2020), Daniels "challenged Alice Paul to recruit more Black women, offering her \$50 if 100 Black women joined the march, and \$60 if they could have their own float."

Today, we might challenge the very notion that Black suffragists could be "bought," but NAWSA was doing its own political calculations. When Alice Paul canvassed for women's suffrage in Southern States, she

assured Southern oligarchs that their way of life would not change when women got the vote. As a matter of history, she was right; giving women the vote did not undermine Jim Crow laws. It was only when a coalition of civil rights organizers, Black and white, women and men, and the quietly queer, engaged in their own courageous form of direct action and constitutional litigation that the nation took its biggest step forward with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I feel certain that both Clarina Howard Nichols and Lucy Daniels would have celebrated that political triumph.

Office Hours

Although the PHS, like many offices, is not accepting visitors in this time of Covid-19, we are eager to help you with any Putney history topics you want to look into. Please contact the PHS by email or telephone and we'll get back to you. putneyhistory@gmail.com; 802-387-4411

Negotiating for a New Home for the PHS Collection

With a desire to secure a space for its collection so that the public would be able to access Putney's historic treasures, the Putney Historical Society (PHS) has entered conversation with the town to lease the second floor of the town hall.

About 60 years ago, the genesis of the historical society was on the first floor of the town hall. Former town clerk Inez Harlow was the society's first curator in about 1959. As the town grew, the society was asked to move its collection to the second floor. After the historical society bought the former Putney Federated Church, it stored some materials there and opened a small office space with Saturday hours. However, most of the collection at the current Next Stage Arts is not available for public viewing, and none of the materials at the town hall are accessible.

In 2019, the historical society asked the town for a 99-year lease for the second floor of the town hall and last October, the town responded with a draft lease that was for a much shorter term. In February 2020, the society replied to the town in a letter which read, in part, "We are seeking approval to use the second floor space for the next 99 years. Once we have a signed agreement for the longer term, it is our hope that the PHS could apply for grants to accomplish some town hall improvements, such as an elevator and heating, for example. We are looking forward to learning about all the desired building improvements so we can determine which ones might be facilitated by grants.

Because most of the PHS board are Putney residents and/or Putney landowners, and pay taxes, it is also our personal desire to reduce the cost to the town for town hall improvements. By obtaining grants, we want to work together with the town to upgrade the building for everyone who uses it."

According to the February 2020 letter from the PHS, "It would be advantageous for both the town and the historical society to have a safer building (for both the public and town employees), and is handicap accessible to the second floor via an elevator."

On March 11, 2020, the select board addressed the PHS letter and said they would forward it and the proposed lease to its attorney. Because of the pandemic, the matter had been on hold until the September 23, 2020 select board meeting. Board members of the historical society attended and suggested that both the PHS and the town take a step back and talk further about the mutual goals and advantages of the proposed arrangement. It was agreed that PHS board member, Lyssa Papazian would work with select board member Josh Laughlin and the town manager to come to a mutual agreement. The PHS's request got a vote of support from town resident, Howard Fairman who noted in a letter he wrote to the select board: "The Putney Historical Society have access to grants for cultural organizations, while the Town of Putney has access to grants for governmental

October 7, 2020

Members of the Selectboard

Town of Putney

Via e-mail before their regular public meeting

Putney Historical Society

Via e-mail before this meeting

Next Stage Arts and Putney General Store exist thanks to Putney Historical Society.

They could similarly renew Putney Town Hall.

As I said during public discussion at the September 23, 2020, regular selectboard meeting regarding their proposed leasing of the upper floor: Two organizations are talking about one building that everyone agrees needs work.

Putney Historical Society have access to grants for cultural organizations, while the Town of Putney has access to grants for governmental organizations. Both have access to energy-efficiency and historic-preservation grants.

And Putney Historical Society have demonstrated expertise and experience to make renewal of our Putney Town Hall happen.

Allowing them rent-free use of the upper floor is fair exchange.

Thank you for your consideration.

Howard Fairman

Putney

organizations. Both have access to energy-efficiency and historic-preservation grants." His full letter is found on the next page.

In addition to finding a secure home for its precious materials and genealogical resources, the PHS will be able to allocate more of its financial resources toward preservation and historic projects if it moves to the town hall. Currently, the society pays \$1,800 in rent annually to Next Stage to use half of an office space and a small storage area. Since annual membership dues to the historical society are \$15 for an individual, it takes 120 memberships just to pay the rent. Office hours at Next Stage are currently suspended because of the pandemic.

Even though the town hall is currently closed to the public, if the PHS and town agree on a long-term lease for the second floor, the PHS board members can start looking right away for grants and writing proposals for building improvements. PHS is looking forward to working with the town on this project.

The PHS Glass Negative Preservation Project – Complete!

By Geordie Heller

January 2020: 40 years, 2200 5"x7" contact prints, and 3400 digitally scanned glass plate negatives completes the PHS Glass Negative Preservation Project. Glass plates were the standard material for carrying the light sensitive emulsion for black and white negatives until gradually replaced by cellulose nitrate films. The film-based negatives were available by the early 1900s but many photographers continued with glass for several more decades. While individually fragile, undisturbed glass holds up pretty well so we were able to work to preserve the now one-hundred-year-old glass negatives (glass plates).

In the late seventies I was pretty involved and dedicated to large format photography. Laura Heller (my mother) saw that as compatible with some PHS needs and put me in charge of the glass negative collection. At the time that meant deciding how best to manage several dirty/dusty/decaying boxes containing a couple thousand black & white, 5"x7", glass plate negatives. Some negatives were in disintegrating sleeves with useful information like who, where, or when, but most were unprotected, unidentified, dirty, and in dire need of attention. We decided the best course of action was to start small by cleaning a batch of selected negatives as best we could, putting them in individual archival envelopes, transcribing any available information, and making prints for public view. A grant from The Vt Historical Society got us underway with the first four hundred negatives. Once that set of prints was available it turned out people wanted copies for their own use so we were custom printing both contact print and enlargement (up to 16"x20") orders directly from the original glass negatives. That created enough funding to continue the cleaning, storing, and proofing project for the remainder of the collection. I

think we eventually wound up with 2062 contact printed images from the Corser Collection in the display binders.

Printing/processing photographs the traditional way, in a darkroom with trays of liquid chemicals, is an intimate process. Working with so many images from one collection can lead to theories and suppositions about the photographer. What we do know is that the bulk of the images in the collection were by A. M. Corser and that they span a time period from the 1890s to the 1930s. During the printing project I would come across an occasional series of negatives that I felt strongly were the work of a photographer other than Corser. We know that Corser's sister, Mary Thwing, was also a photographer and my sense at the time was that she was likely responsible for many of those images. Looking at the pictures now, forty years later in a digital format, that clarity of differentiation has waned.

During his tenure as a photographer Corser owned and ran the General Store. (There are multiple images of his name displayed prominently across the front.) Evidently, when he sold the business, he didn't completely clear it out because when Robert and Ann Fairchild owned the store in the 1970s they found several more boxes of glass negatives in the attic. Eventually the 1200± negative Fairchild Collection made it to the Historical Society and was added to and included in the preservation project. All told there are around 3400 glass negatives, about 2/3 were printed and are available for view at the Historical Society office. The closer to the original source the better detail and tonal range a reproduction will have, but its no longer practical to print directly from the glass plates. Between the desire to handle the negatives less and changes in technology it became feasible and desirable to digitally scan the entire collection directly from the glass and use the high-resolution digital files for research and reproduction moving forward. The digital scans are also available for view at the PHS office.

It may have taken more than forty years, but with the completion of scanning I can finally say the PHS Glass Negative Preservation Project is complete. Most of the images are of people, some dressed in what might have been the height of fashion a hundred years ago. Then there are houses, cars, school children, kitchens and parlors, and an occasional landscape. There are picnics, town wide events, outings, and other records of daily life. Individually there are some remarkable images, as a whole it's a fascinating look at people and places in Putney a century ago.

[As Geordie mentions, the image collection can be viewed at the PHS on a computer with a large portion also printed and stored in binders. Prints may be purchased for personal or other uses. Please contact PHS to inquire about finding and obtaining prints of images.]

Mystery Photo!

This photo is from the Corser collection of glass plate negatives and is labeled "Will Laungo (?) House". Anyone have any idea where this was/is located?

Visit <http://putneyhistory.us/> to see a larger version of this photo



Items for Sale

These items are available at the historical society office or at the Putney General Store.

- The History of Putney Vermont 1753-1953 - \$15
- Putney: World's Best Known Small Town - \$25
- People of Putney - \$20
- Gravestone Inscriptions of Putney, by Ken Stevens - \$15
- Putney Vital Records, by Ken Stevens: \$30
- 1800 Map of Putney by Cory and Carpender - \$15
- Map of Putney Countryside by Dodd - \$15
- Post cards of Putney - 80 ¢



Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics

December 3, 2020 on Zoom

Next Stage Arts Project and the Putney Historical Society present "Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance," a Zoom presentation by scholar of traditional music and dance Phil Jamison on Thursday, December 3 at 7:30 pm. The southern Appalachian square dance is a hybrid dance form that developed in the American South during the nineteenth century, and like the Appalachian musical traditions, these dances reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the region.

In this Zoom event, Phil examines the multicultural roots and historical development of these dances and identifies the components of earlier European, African, and Native American dance forms that combined to make them uniquely American. He will also discuss African-American and native American musicians and callers who at one time were present in New England. These include African-American musician and barber John Putnam (1825-1895), who was active as a fiddler and

dance prompter in Greenfield, Massachusetts during the nineteenth century. Proceeds from this event will benefit the Putney Historical Society. For more information and to register for the Zoom, visit www.nextstagearts.org.



Phil Jamison



Putney General Store: Vermont Strong, Stay Safe

Bottom row, left to right: Jeff Desjardin, Nick Stratton, Hannah McCormick, James Dougan, Demi Schecter-Gross, Zachary Dunn, Nate Snell, Mike & Kim Cosco, Fiona Miller, Zoe Robb. **On the Balcony:** Katie Rice, Sage Olson, Susan Rizzo, Shay Limoges

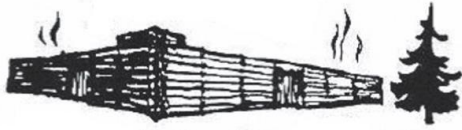
Other current employees not pictured: River Shanti, Keith Fletcher, August Mellowship, Jasmin Ricketts, Rikki Mears.

PHS 2021 Calendar: Animals!

The PHS 2021 calendar features photographs from the Corser Collection of turn of the 20th-century glass plate negatives. The images show animals of various kinds in and around Putney. Look for the calendar at the Putney General Store and Putney Coop. They can also be ordered from PHS for local delivery or by mail. Great gifts for friends and family members far and wide.

Price: \$15





Putney Historical Society

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OUR MISSION

is to bring together those persons interested in history, and especially in the history of the Town of Putney; to discover and collect materials pertinent to the history of Putney; to acquire property or rights in interest of property in order to preserve historic resources.

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PLEASE JOIN US OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP.

The Putney Historical Society needs you on board.

Our mission is to bring together those persons interested in history, and especially in the history of the Town of Putney; to discover and collect materials...pertinent to the history of Putney; to acquire property or rights in interest of property in order to preserve historic resources. Please support our effort with your membership.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Membership Type	Amount	Indicate amount paid
Senior (Basic)	\$5	_____
Individual (Basic)	15	_____
Family	25	_____
Sustaining	50	_____
Benefactor	100	_____
Patron	250	_____
Other	Write in	_____

Membership and donation are now available online at <http://putneyhistory.us>

Make checks payable to:

Treasurer, Putney Historical Society
 P.O. Box 260
 Putney, Vermont 05346

Thank You! PHS is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. All donations beyond basic membership are tax deductible.