

Sutton Historical Society Bulletin



June 25, 2004 – Volume 42, No. 2
Kate Hutchinson, Senior Editor
Malcolm Pearson, Editor Emeritus

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Rufus Putnam*

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250th Anniversary*

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Who Was Rufus Putnam?

A Profile of Sutton's Legendary Man

By Carl Hutchinson

If one visits the birthplace of Rufus Putnam, one would find a large bronze plaque mounted on a granite boulder. A drawing of Putnam's birthplace can be found on the Town Seal which adorns town vehicles, town stationery, town reports and ephemera connected to the 200th, 250th, and now the 300th anniversary of the incorporation of Sutton, Massachusetts. Though his is widely recognized, I wonder how many people are aware of the accomplishments of Rufus Putnam and why Sutton is so proud to claim him as a native son.

Rufus Putnam was born in Sutton on April 9, 1738, the youngest son of Elisha and Susanna (Fuller) Putnam who moved to here from Salem Village in 1725. Elisha died in 1745 and his mother sent him to live with his grandfather Fuller, presumably in Salem Village. Susanna married Capt. Sadler and in September 1747, Rufus came to live with his mother and stepfather in Upton, Massachusetts, where he did chores around Sadler's inn. His formal schooling ended at this time, much to the young Rufus's regret, and henceforth the only education he received was of his own devices.

Upon Sadler's death in 1754, Rufus was apprenticed to Daniel Mathews in Brookfield to learn the millwright trade. While he refused to allow Rufus to attend school, Mathews had no objection Rufus studying on his own time, and the apprentice turned his attention to arithmetic, geography and history. In later years he would regret that he hadn't spent as much time on spelling, grammar and writing.



*Painting of Rufus Putnam,
circa 17xx.*

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Upcoming Meetings:

Tuesday, July 6th:

Potluck Supper at Sherman Blacksmith Shop, 6:00. Cannon Demonstration with Sutton Militia.

Tuesday, August 3rd:

Potluck Supper at Eight Lots Schoolhouse, 6:00. Guest Speaker: Keith Downer, "Sutton's Original Settlers".

Monday, September 6th:

Annual Labor Day Flea Market and Bake Sale - Sherman Blacksmith Shop, Sutton Center 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Tuesday, October 5th:

Field Trip to Mark Twain House, Hartford, CT, date and time TBA.

Suggestions and submissions for the *Bulletin* are accepted by mail and email:

Kate Hutchinson
29 Princeton St. #1
East Boston, MA 02128
stkellen@dcne.net

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In 1757 the French and Indian War engulfed North America and Putnam elected to take the King's shilling and joined the Provincial Service on March 15, and was attached to Capt. Ebenezer Learned's company. He served through January 1758, mostly in the New York colony. The company had only a few days rations when they left and got lost in the snow. The three-day journey to the next post turned into an eight-day nightmare. By chance, the whole company survived and by February 15, Putnam was home in Brookfield.

On April 10, 1758, notwithstanding the privations of the previous tour of duty, Putnam enlisted for another campaign. This time he was assigned to a company of carpenters whose primary job was to build and improve fortifications. This experience provided the foundation for his successes in the Revolutionary War. His company was discharged on October 29th and arrived in his native town of Sutton on November 9th, to spend the winter.

Putnam served in the 1759 campaign in the stead of Moses Leland of Sutton, for the price of 14 pounds, 13 shillings. As a sergeant, he spent the campaign working on a number of projects around Lake Champlain and Lake George, including acting as the chief engineer on the construction of two sawmills.

In March 1760 the call went out again for soldiers and Rufus reluctantly engaged for another campaign and received an ensign's commission. He was chosen to engineer several projects at special rates of pay. The campaign was quite agreeable to him and he arrived home to New Braintree on December 1 in good health, high spirits and with a few pounds in his pocket.

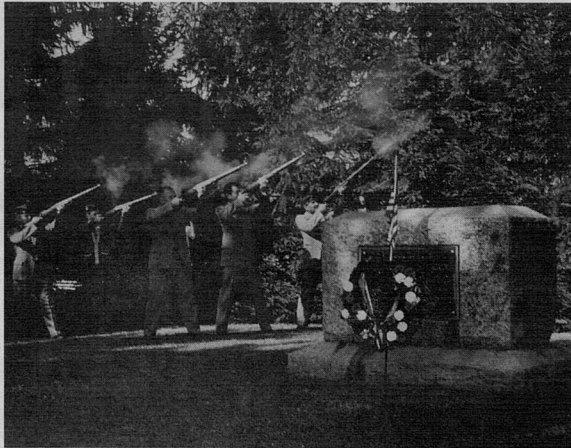
In March of 1761 he set himself in business as a millwright and soon married Elizabeth Ayres, daughter of William Ayres of Brookfield. The year that had started out so hopeful and promising soon turned nasty. In May, Rufus was taken sick with the "bilious fever" and was some three months in recovering his health. In November, Elizabeth died leaving him with an infant son, Ayres, to care for. Less than a year later, on September 29, 1762, the son died.

Putnam continued to work as a millwright until just before the start of the Revolution. On January 10, 1765, he married Persis Rice, daughter of Zebulon Rice of Westborough and began a partnership that was to last for 55 years and produce nine children. He left this comfortable life in December of 1772 to join a surveying expedition to find suitable land be-

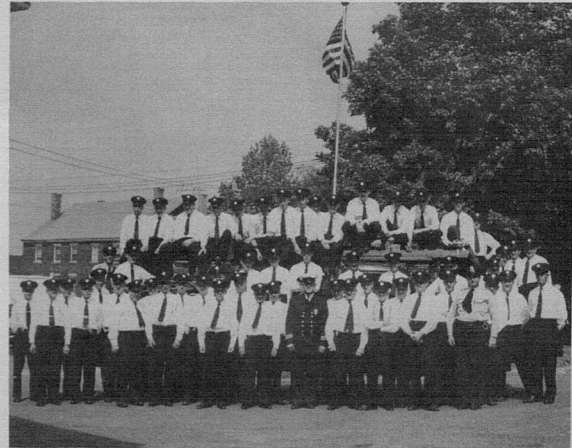
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SUTTON'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MALCOLM PEARSON



The Dudley Gendron Post fires a round honoring Rufus Putnam.



The Sutton Fire Department, led by Captain Daniel "Tighe" Smith, center.

BANQUET

1704  1754

250th Anniversary
of the town of
Sutton, Massachusetts

SATURDAY EVENING

September 6, 1954

COMMITTEE


ERWIN W. LINDSTROM, *Chairman*
James H. Colton
R. Gordon King
Barry B. Putnam
William T. Stockwell

INVITED GUESTS


Residents and former residents of Sutton over eighty years of age.

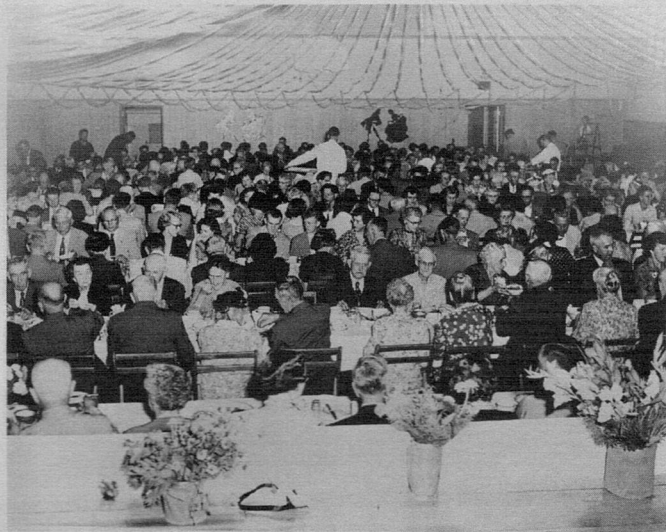
The Selectmen and their wives from neighboring towns and towns that were formerly part of Sutton.

PROGRAM

6:30 - 7:00 P. M. Frederick F. Fox
ORGAN MUSIC
7:00 P. M.
THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER
Miss Justice M. Swindell
INVOCATION The Reverend Norman L. Wray
Rector, St. John's Church, Wilkinsville
BANQUET 
8:00 P. M.
ENTERTAINMENT
WELCOME Mr. Walter B. Shaw, *Co-Chairman*
INTRODUCTION OF INVITED GUESTS
Mr. Edward W. McLaren, *Treasurer*
GREETINGS FROM ENGLAND by The Selectmen
A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUTTON Mrs. John C. Dudley
ADDRESS: The Reverend Harold Bentley
Director, Worcester Junior College
Interim Pastor
First Congregational Church of Sutton

MENU

FRUIT CUP
ROAST BEEF BROWN GRAVY
MASHED POTATOES GREEN PEAS
SWEET PICKLES
BANANA FRITTERS RASPBERRY SAUCE
TEA ROLLS BUTTER
ASSORTED COOKIES ICE CREAM
COFFEE

HALLAM, *Caterer*



Banquet at Sutton, Mass. Sept. 6, 1954

The 250th Anniversary Banquet, and the menu and program from the Banquet, at the left. (Thank you to Janice Swindell for the loan of the Banquet Program.)

PICTURES FROM SUTTON'S



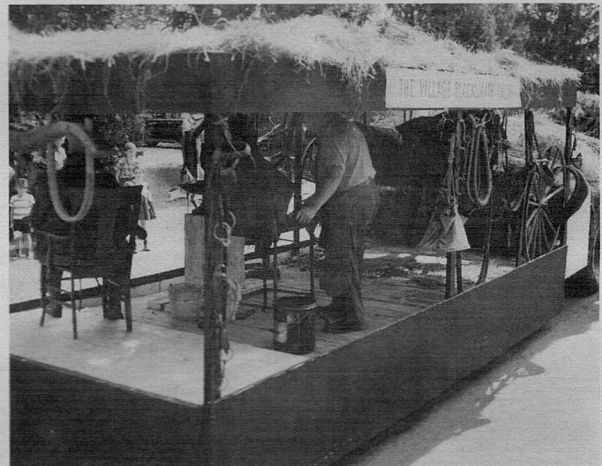
Queen of the Ball Barbara Lewis, and her escort, Linwood Eaton.



Prof. Nunnemacher's antique bicycle in the Parade.



An Open House at the Waters Farm Homestead.



The Sherman Blacksmith Shop Float in the Parade.



The crowds at Purgatory Breakfast.

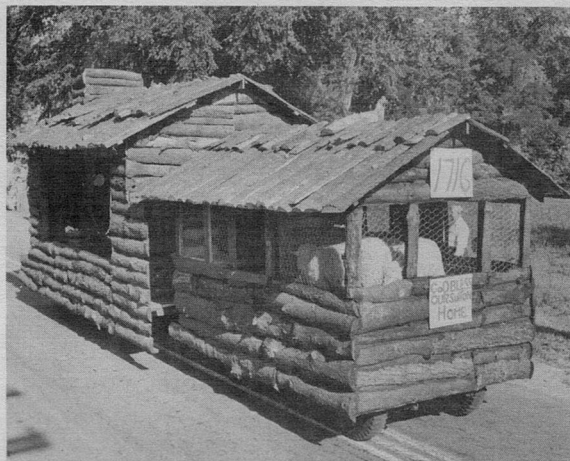


The Dedication of the Congregational Church, Revs. Bentley, Phelps, and Thornberg presiding.

250TH ANNIVERSARY, 1954



Progress of Education Float, featuring building plans for the school.



Log Cabin Float



Manchaug Baptist Church Float.



Milbury Kiwanis Club Float



Daughters of the American Revolution Float, Janice Swindell with parasol.



The crowds after the Parade.

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tween Florida and Texas to be given to former soldiers for settlement in lieu of back pay they were owed by the king for service in the French wars. Though the expedition produced some valuable maps of present day Louisiana and Mississippi, the scheme to give decent land for settlement to men who had done their duty came to naught as other events were unfolding in Boston which caused the plan to be abandoned.

Shortly after the battles at Lexington and Concord, Putnam entered the service again as a Lt. Colonel. He was stationed in Roxbury immediately after the Battle of Charlestown and as he was the only officer available with any experience laying out and constructing fortifications, he was assigned the task of defending the camp. As the fortifications began to take shape, they were inspected by General Washington and General Lee who were both impressed with the design and ordered him to build other defensive works in Roxbury, Dorchester and Brookline as well as survey the British positions in Boston and Charlestown. In December of 1775, Putnam accompanied Gen. Lee to Providence and then to Newport where he laid out an artillery battery to protect the harbor. His reputation as an engineer was clearly on the rise.

Back in Roxbury in January 1776, talk centered on how to remove the British forces from the Boston. Washington was faced with the choice of crossing the ice to attack the enemy in the city or luring the British out in the open where fighting would be easier. Washington knew that the British couldn't allow him to occupy and fortify Dorchester Heights because that was an ideal position from which to bombard the city with artillery. He asked Putnam to come up with a plan for fortifying Dorchester. Throwing up a standard earthworks couldn't be done because the ground was frozen several feet deep making digging impossible. After a

dinner meeting, Washington asked Putnam if there was any other way to construct the necessary protective wall. Putnam wanted time to think. After taking his leave from Washington, Putnam stopped at the tent of a friend to pay his respects. There on the table in his friends tent lay a copy of *Mullers Field Engineer*. In it he found a device called a chandelier. It consisted of a 10 foot long, 6 inch square sill with two vertical posts 5 feet long framed in the sill 5 feet apart. Braces are added from the middle of the posts to the end of the sill. The chandeliers are then placed side by side an appropriate distance apart. Rails and bundles of sticks, brush, etc. fill the space between the posts.

Putnam showed the idea to Col. Gridley, who had done the fortification of Cambridge, and Col. Knox of the Artillery who quickly endorsed the plan. The three officers presented the idea to Washington who approved and the gathering of materials began. Assembly of the wall was accomplished on the night of March 4. British commander General Gage was stunned with how quickly the rebels had thrown up such a strong wall and assumed that many reinforcements had arrived and so made plans to abandon Boston. Thus it was that Rufus Putnam was the architect of the bloodless victory that Bostonians celebrate as Evacuation Day on March 17th.

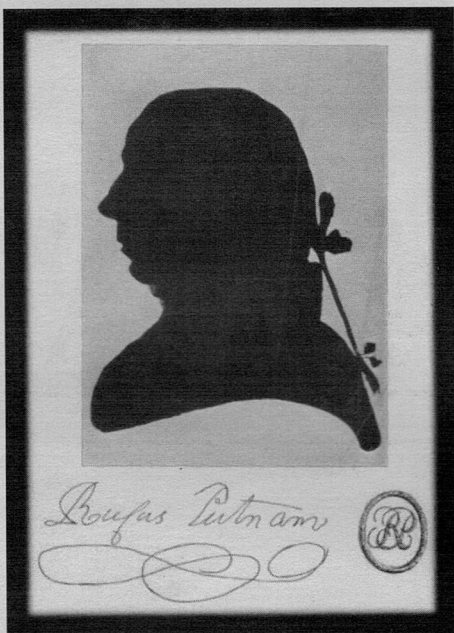
Putnam moved on with Washington to New York where he designed and constructed Fort Washington, Fort Lee and King Bridge. In August 1776, Congress appointed him Engineer and promoted him to full colonel. Putnam knew that the Continental Army had too few people capable of constructing defenses and he now drew up a plan to create a Corps of Engineers to meet the need. He sent it to Washington and Washington passed it on to the Continental Congress with his recommendation. Others military leaders were proposing plans for a Corps and Con-

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gress stalled working out the details for over year. A resolution to create three companies of engineers was passed in May of 1778.

Putnam continued designing and building forts, batteries and river barriers for the rest of the war. Among these projects were the first artillery battery at West Point to guard the Hudson and a chain of small forts to guard the artillery battery from land attack. He also played an important role in negotiating settlements with Congress and



Silhouette of Rufus Putnam, circa 17xx

much less when received than when earned. Putnam worked hard to keep the rank and file from revolting and to make their pay more timely.

Putnam wrote to Washington in December of 1782 that he intended to retire from the military as the war was over except for the signing of a peace treaty. Washington didn't want his friend to leave before the end and had Congress promote him to Brigadier General. Not wanting to appear ungrateful, Putnam remained in the service until June of 1783 when most of the army was mustered out after the official end of hostilities. At

the Massachusetts General Court regarding soldiers pay and food allowances. Inflation was a serious problem and soldiers' pay was so slow in coming that it was worth

Washington's request, he wrote a report to Congress listing the most important sites on the East Coast and how to best protect them from attack. Among other important comments in this report, he suggested that West Point was as well situated as any place in the country to become the "Grand Arsenal of America". He envisioned West Point as a place to manufacture weapons, instruct officers in the sciences of gunnery, engineering, etc. and a permanent guardian of the Hudson.

The war over, Putnam went back to work. He and a group of fellow officers had received a large grant of land in the Northwest Territory. In 1786 they formed the Ohio Company to settle that portion of the Territory. The first settlers headed west in December 1787, more in January 1788. Putnam joined them in Hartford and chose the site for the future city of Marietta in April. He sent for his family shortly thereafter.

Putnam remained in Ohio for the rest of his life. A religious man, he helped found the first church in Marietta. He was a firm believer in education and helped found Marietta College and served as a trustee of Ohio University. He served in a number of judge-ships in the Northwest Territory. In 1796 he was commissioned Surveyor General of the United States and in 1802 was elected to the First Ohio Constitutional Convention.

Rufus Putnam died May 4, 1824 age 86 years. In his Prefatory Note to *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam*, edited by Rowena Buell, 1903, Alfred Tyler Perry says, "General Rufus Putnam was a man to delight the soul of a historian. He not only made history, he also recorded it." Gen. Putnam preserved most of the correspondence he received and frequently made and saved copies of the letters he wrote. Much of this correspondence as well as his journals, manuscripts, maps, charts and layouts of fortifications have been bequeathed to Marietta College and can be found in the above mentioned memoirs. ■

Waters Farm Fiddle Contest
Saturday, October 2, 2004



Two Divisions:
Open and Youth (17 years old and under)

1 st Place Cash Prize	Open: \$300	Youth: \$75
2 nd Place Cash Prize	Open: \$100	Youth: \$25
3 rd Place Cash Prize	Open: \$50	Youth: \$15

Contest location:
Waters Farm Back Lawn
Waters Road, Sutton MA 01590

Registration begins at 10:00 AM
For more information, contact the
Waters Farm Preservation Association
4 Uxbridge Road. Sutton, MA 01590

Phone (508) 865-3010 - Fax (508) 865-2547
Email: euhutchinson@yahoo.com

Contest Rules will be available
at registration or sent on request



Sutton Historical Society
4 Uxbridge Road.
Sutton, MA 01590

Mailing label here