

# The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park



Bethel/Redding CT

## March 2007 NewsLetter



### Creation of Putnam Memorial Camp Ground

The various regiments of Putnam's Division quartered at Camp Reading and the two other camps to the west, left the campgrounds during March, April and May of 1779. The stories passed down through the years said that the soldiers burned their huts prior to leaving. But more recent documentation has been found by our historians which says the huts were left standing, so the property owner (Col. John Read) would have use of the lumber. Wood was a precious commodity in those days, and to purposely destroy it would have been a waste.

The stone chimneys eventually toppled over, leaving piles of stone which became the only visual means of determining the location of each hut. The site became covered with weeds, brush and trees. The stories of the army cantonments were passed down through the generations for the next 108 years. Stone piles and hand-me-down lore became the gospel for the late 1800's.

In 1886 a small group of individuals in Redding, including Charles Burr Todd, Redding's Historian, and Aaron Treadwell, who owned the remnants of Lonetown Manor, petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for the purpose of creating a memorial park on the site of the old army campground. Aaron Treadwell would donate the first tract of land containing the camp ground to the state. The CT Legislature appointed a committee in January 1887 to investigate the potential for a memorial park. Upon receipt of the report, the legislature gave the go ahead for the start of the project.

### Laying Out The Park



The first allocation of funds from the state was for \$1500 for the construction of the granite obelisk monument which was built in the summer of 1888. Meanwhile plans were being made for construction of walls, roads, bridges and walks inside the park.

Lead-man on the park scene was undoubtedly Charles B. Todd. He made it clear from the onset that the purpose of preserving the site of the encampment was to commemorate the winter quarters – **not** to create an area for recreation.



1889 – Constructing the block houses and Stone bridge at entrance of park.



Park entrance today. Over 100 years later. Note the plaques on the stone bases.

1888 Obelisk



1970 and 80's Park brochure

## Laying Out The Park

One of the first obstacles to arise at the start of construction was the realization that the army camp was larger than the initial land donation. Furthermore, the old Lonetown Manor which was owned by a single owner, was now subdivided into a myriad of lots with different owners. This is where the gentlemen of means from the region stepped in and purchased lots, and then donated them to the state. This took several years and explains why the firebacks closer to the monument seem larger and more orderly than those further down the line. They kept finding more firebacks, which today stretches for almost a quarter of a mile.

The state created two committees of men to oversee the new Putnam Camp Grounds. The first was a legislative committee which managed the funding requests and disbursements from Hartford. This committee changed every two years. Secondly, the governor appointed Commission members to the campground every two years (which was the term of governors in those days). The Commissioners were drawn from around the state. Some were obviously directly connected to the park project either through land donations, or being actual contractors on the project. Though it sounds like bureaucracy at its finest, the Commissioners and Committeemen actually moved rather quickly to accomplish projects.



Plaque on the left block house lists the major donators of land.

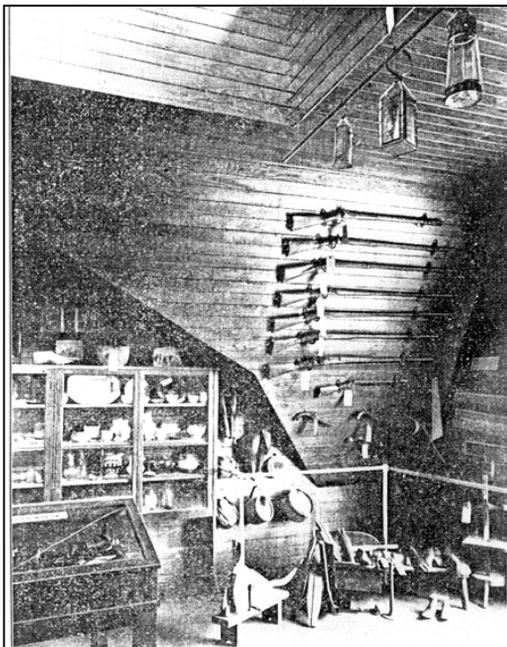


The block houses at the main entrance are 118 years old this year.



Plaque on the right block house lists the first Commissioners

1889 was a major year in construction of walls, bridges, roadway, blockhouses and paths. The expenses were \$20,650.00 for that year, approved and paid for out of the state treasury.



The pavilion was built in 1893. It provided shelter for visitors during rain showers. It was used for picnics and dances. The original park museum was on the second floor ( see window over center arch). The sky light provided light on the second floor. (You can see the opening in the upper left in the museum photo. No water, electric or heat in those days.

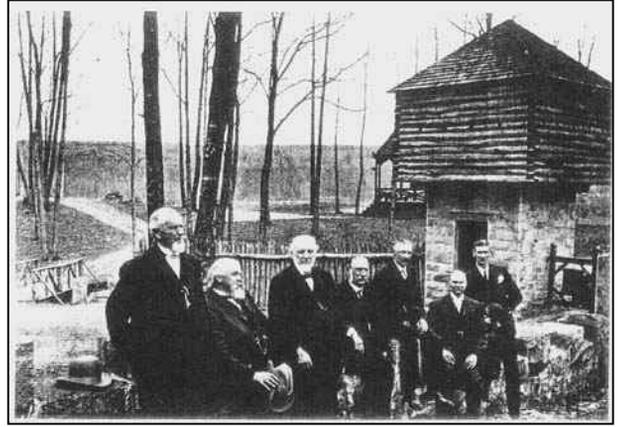
# Laying Out The Park



The Park Commissioners served for two years. Some served more than once. These men were the movers and shakers in their day; lawyers, bankers, legislators, builders and auditors. They made things happen and got things done. They hired contractors to move dirt and lay down roads. They hired stone masons who constructed an extraordinary amount of stone walls. Notice the numerous walls next time you pass the park.



# Friends of Putnam Park - 1900



Park Commissioners - *From left to right* John H. Jennings, George G. Parker, William Ward, William H. Hill, Clarence Hickok, Charles H. Peck, Thomas A. Evans



The man standing to the left of the cannon wheel is Thomas Delaney, who served as the park superintendent for the first 24 years. In this capacity he and his crews dug, graded, pulled stumps and made improvements to make the fireback areas "park-like". It is no surprise that Mr. Delaney "found" most of early relics dug up around the hut sites. Delaney used shovels and pry bars, and probably some horses to pull stumps. Today's modern day archaeologists, of which we have several in the Friends of Putnam Park – absolutely shudder when they hear of Mr. Delaney's excavation methods! You will find many of Mr. Delaney's artifacts on display in the park museum



The Park Commissioners did their best to keep recreational equipment out of the memorial campground itself. Note the swings and gazebo (long gone) were located outside the entrance.



The first couple of decades saw park visitors coming in horse and carriage. One of the first structures erected was the horse/carriage shed across the road from the entrance. You can still see some of the stone wall which was part of the sheds. Then came the autos!



**Future FANS! 21<sup>st</sup> Century**



Main Entrance, Putnam Park, Near Bethel, Conn.

## March FAN's Meeting

To contact us: [friendsofputnampark@comcast.net](mailto:friendsofputnampark@comcast.net)



1. Jeanine Herman opened meeting.
2. Nancy Cowles gave the **Treasurers Report** for Rosemary Payne.
3. Nancy Cowles gave **Living History School Days** update. We are now down to two or three days this year due to some cancellations. Nancy is still working to put some more schools onto the schedule. Week of May 14 - 19 is this year's school week.
4. Jeanine Herman gave update on this year's **Living History Event** (for public). Weekend is October 20 & 21<sup>st</sup>. Invitations being mailed.
5. **Membership status** was covered. We are going to ask all members who haven't paid their annual dues to do so. We will start paring down the newsletter lists accordingly at the end of March.



## Old Put Club

The Park Commissioners began in 1900 their recommendations to the General Assembly to purchase the 103 acre Old Put Club which was located across today's Rt.58. This, they pointed out, would solve the problem of keeping "recreation activities" out of the Historic memorial section. Finally, in 1923, the state purchased the lake, forest and club house of the Old Put Club. This doubled the property of the park.

The park remained under the auspices of the Committees & Commissioners reporting to the legislature. In 1955 the General Assembly voted to give control of the park to the Park and Forest Commission. Today the park is under the DEP Office of Parks and Recreation.



The Old Put Club was formed around the same time as the park (late 1880's). It was a gentlemen's club where the well-to-do boys could escape to for fishing, hunting, card games and camaraderie. After the turn of the century, the members suffered from attrition by members, old age, deaths, and lack of new members.

## Oldest Park and Oldest Park Building

The Putnam Memorial Campground was started in 1887 by vote of the Connecticut General Assembly. It was a park. It was owned managed and subsidized by the state. The **State Parks Commission** was started in 1913. The park division bought land that included Sherwood Island. This became park #1 in the parks department history. But for semantics, Putnam Park which was a state owned facility since 1887, preceded Sherwood by some 26 years. The 1893 Pavilion at Putnam Park is the oldest structure, built for park purposes, in the parks division. "It all depends on what the definition of is is!"



The 1893 Pavilion was dismantled beam by beam in 2004, and then reassembled onto a new foundation. The new visitor center with year round climate control is the result.

The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening, April 10th** at **7:00PM** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.