

# ASPINOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINTER 2023 NEWSLETTER



Jeanne Benoit and Elaine Turner unveil the sheep sculpture in Putnam's Rotary Park.



Aspinock Historical President John Miller speaks at the sheep sculpture dedication in Rotary Park.

## Aspinock Historical Society Honors the Humble Sheep

Putnam's newest art installation was unveiled on November 25 in Rotary Park. It is a sheep sculpture and has symbolic ties to Putnam's past as a textile manufacturing center. The statue began with Jeannie Benoit of the Aspinock Historical Society who had visited the Samuel Slater Experience museum in Webster, MA. She found out about fiberglass sheep statues that were being sold to organizations and businesses which had custom painted them to be placed around Webster, Dudley and Oxford.

Benoit thought, considering Putnam's textile history, that a sheep statue would make an excellent addition to the town's burgeoning art displays. Parks and Recreation Department Director Willie Bousquet was enthusiastically behind the idea.

The total cost was about \$4,000. The main sponsors are the Putnam Area Foundation and WIN Waste Innovations. Bousquet added that the town's Public Works Department did some in-kind work including removing the old bell stand in Rotary Park and pouring a concrete base for the sheep. The Putnam Recreation Department was also involved in the project.

Elaine Turner of the Art Guild Northeast was asked by former Aspinock society president Bill Pearsall if she would be interested in customizing Putnam's statue, and she agreed.

Credit to The Putnam Town Crier and Northeast Ledger



Members of the Aspinock Historical Society pose with the sheep sculpture in Rotary Park.

### About The Sheep

Merino sheep is a breed of domestic sheep, characterized by very fine soft wool. During the War of 1812 there was an embargo on wool and wool clothing exports to the United States. Merino sheep were introduced to Vermont in 1812. They were later brought to this area where they provided wonderful wool and food. When the supply of wool increased and the technology improved, the mill on Pomfret Street became Putnam Woolen. Much of the wool used for the blue Union Civil War uniforms was made there.

# Rededication of Aspinock Time Capsule Chest Is a Testament as to What History Means



**Bill Pearsall and John Miller lock the Aspinock time capsule chest for the next 25 years.**

If you were asked this question “What is history?” how would you answer. You might say that history is about old things or memories of times gone by. You might say that history is about memorizing dates of events long ago, or that history is old “stuff” gathering dust in someone’s attic or in a museum. All these answers are correct, but history is so much more.

Here are two definitions of history that I’ve come across which resonate with me. Dr. Tom Army, adjunct professor of history at QVCC, defines history as change over time. Bill Kenny, columnist for the “Norwich Bulletin” newspaper writes that history is the sum of our collective remembrances and memories which remain our best hope for the future.

Members and friends of the Putnam Aspinock Historical Society gathered in the Society’s research center and museum on January 28 for a dedication ceremony of the 2023 Aspinock time capsule chest to be reopened 25 years from now, in 2048. Aspinock Society president John Miller, along with committee chairperson Jeanne Benoit, opened the event with remarks thanking the many individuals who helped with the time chest project. Terri Pearsall organized the mementos. Linda Lemmon of the Putnam Town Crier & Northeast Ledger, was thanked for her help with gathering materials. Bill Pearsall recounted talking with fellow historical society member Robert Miller long ago when Miller asked Pearsall to take over his municipal historian duties. Miller stressed the importance preserving historical items for future generations to enjoy.

The first time capsule chest was dedicated in 1997 and opened in 2022. The new items have been placed on top of the original contents with a board separating the time periods. What went into the wooden chest on January 28? The contents include local restaurant menus, newspapers and Shopper’s Guides, Boxcar museum items, Cady Copp Cottage information, a list of all Putnam businesses to date, a miniature souvenir Coke bottle from the Coca-Cola mural restoration, a COVID 19 mask, a collection of essays and drawings from third grade students, ribbons from the ribbon cutting ceremonies of the refurbished Boxcar Museum and the Putnam Municipal Complex and much more. Bill Pearsall commented that one item from the 1997 chest which surprised him was a now extinct TV Guide. Something in the 2023 collection which may no longer be around in 2048, a phone book.

Keeping this day’s event in mind, I think that Bill Kenny’s commentary that history is the sum of our collective remembrances and memories, our best hope for the future definitely rings true.



**Third graders contributed drawings and essays about the future of Putnam.**



**Left: Kathy Zamagni, Terri Pearsall and Joy Lizotte examine items for the time capsule. Center: Jeanne Benoit and John Miller join Kathy and Terri. Right: Municipal Complex ribbon cutting tops off the chest for another 25 years.**

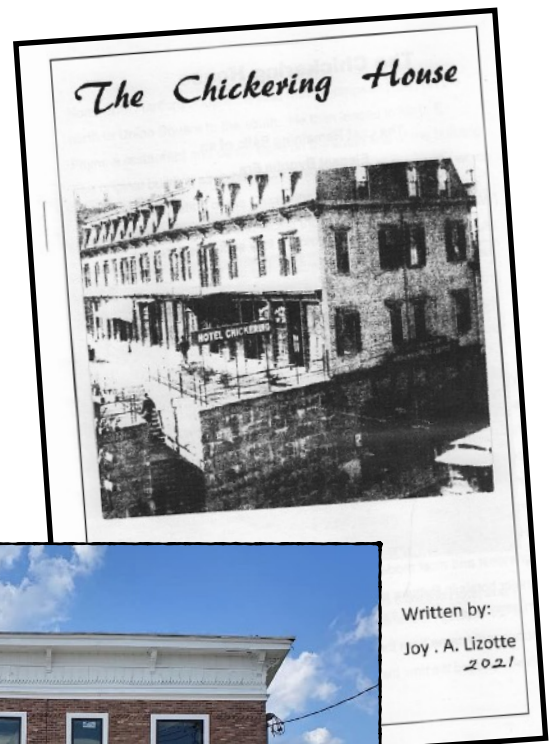
# The Story of a True Putnam Survivor

Aspinock Society member and treasurer Joy A Lizotte has written and recently published a booklet, "The Chickering House." Joy's work chronicles the long history of the much loved, often maligned Putnam icon, today usually referred to simply as "Chickerings."

Built around 1875, the Chickering House was a grand hotel catering to salesmen and out of town visitors coming to this once bustling railroad center. By the 1900's the railroads and the hotel business in Putnam were on the decline. The Chickering Hotel soldiered on under a series of different owners. The hotel aspect of the establishment pretty much dried up and in later years it became a very popular local "watering hole" frequented by a diverse clientele, including bikers and rail excursion enthusiasts and everyone in between. And yes, I have been there.

Of note are the many fires that destroyed surrounding properties over the years, but Chickerings somehow remained unscathed and still stands proudly today, completely renovated.

Recent plans to turn the facility into a nightclub style venue have fallen through and the property is back on the market. For an asking price of \$750,000 someone can own a true Putnam landmark.



## DURING THE OFF -SEASON

The Gertrude C. Warner Boxcar Museum is closed from October to May, but you can still purchase items from the museum gift shop, including her books, keychains, ornaments, etc. They are for sale at the Aspinock Museum and Research Center located in the Putnam Municipal Complex, 200 School Street.

The Aspinock Historical Society Museum and Research Center is located on the 2nd floor of the Putnam Municipal Complex at 200 School St., Putnam, CT It is open Tue, Wed, Thur, 10 AM to 2 PM; and the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month 10 AM To Noon. Visit us to learn about Putnam's history through our displays and archives.

### Submitting News - Ken A. Evans, Newsletter Editor

I encourage Aspinock Historical Society members to submit news and information to be included in our quarterly newsletter. You can email me at [kaevans1969@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kaevans1969@sbcglobal.net) or leave material for me at the Aspinock Historical Society facility at 200 Providence St., Putnam.





