

ASPINOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

A Nearly Forgotten Hero Remembered

Thomas Taylor Grave - Grove Street Cemetery, Putnam
A Site on the Connecticut Freedom Trail

A simple rectangular marble gravestone marks the resting place of Thomas L. Taylor, an African American sailor who served with the U. S. Navy on the Union's ironclad ship *U.S.S. Monitor* when it fought the Confederate ironclad *Virginia* during the Civil War. Taylor is recorded as being the last survivor of that famous battle. He died on March 7, 1932, at age 84.

At the Aspinock Historical Society's annual meeting on May 8 Putnam Town Historian Bill Pearsall presented the incredible story of Thomas Taylor, a young slave who escaped from a plantation by stealing his master's horse and riding into the night. When the horse could go no further, Taylor walked until he reached Fort Monroe, Virginia, then in Union hands. An officer approached Taylor and hired him to be his cabin mate on the innovative Union ironclad *U.S.S. Monitor*.

Taylor continued to serve on the *Monitor* when it fought against the Confederate ironclad *C.S.S. Virginia* in March 1862 at the Battle of Hampton Roads. Taylor served as a powder monkey, supplying the guns with powder. He survived the battle with the *Virginia* and ultimately enlisted in the US Navy, retiring many years later.



Taylor eventually settled in Putnam, CT and remained there until his untimely death as a result of a robbery and beating in 1932. His grave marker, above can be seen in the Grove Street cemetery, Putnam.

Bill Pearsall also participated in the Town of Putnam's first Juneteenth observance, presenting the story of African American Civil War veteran Thomas Taylor



Third graders from Putnam Elementary School show off their copies of local author Gertrude Warner's "Snowbound Mystery" presented by Mike Alberts and the team from Jewett City Savings Bank. Story on page 2.

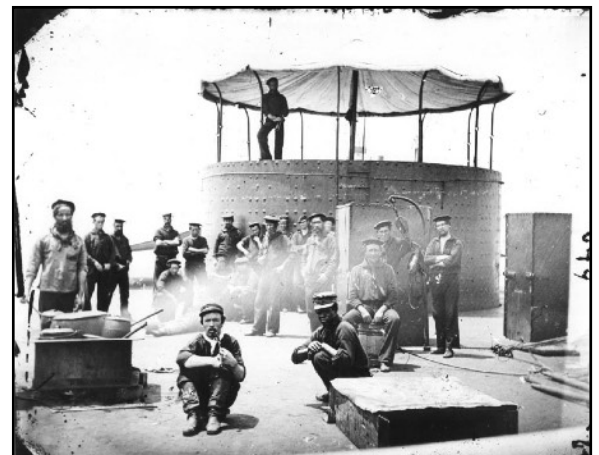


Photo taken onboard U.S.S. Monitor in 1862. The African American crewman right foreground is not identified, along with the others. Photo courtesy US Department of the Navy



Third graders from Putnam Elementary School listen as Jeanne Benoit reads a story by Gertrude Warner.



The students try out items possibly unfamiliar to them, including typewriters, rotary phones and antique flatirons.

Third Graders Step Back In Time

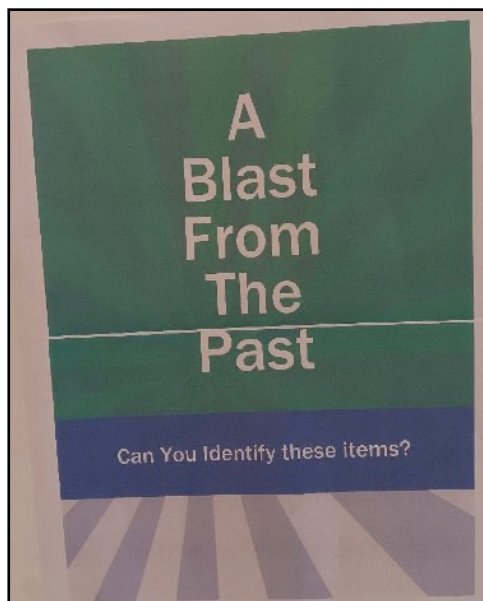
By Linda Lemmon, Putnam Town Crier Editor, with permission - Third-graders got a special treat last week — they were immersed in Putnam's history with a field trip to the Putnam Town Hall, the Aspinock Historical Society, the Putnam Public Library and the Gertrude Chandler Warner Boxcar Children Museum. This is the second year and there were 84 third graders, according to Boxcar Director Pat Hedenberg.

Their visit to the Aspinock Historical Society offered them a chance to see and use rotary phones, antique typewriters and cuddle in fur coats from the 1950s, along with learning about the history of the town. The students then had a chance tour the children's section of the Library along with a chance to let off steam on new playscape.

While at the Boxcar students learned about school life in Putnam at the turn of the century, created their own spool pet and bookmark, had a walking tour of Ms. Warner's Putnam and challenged each other to a game of corn hole. As one student said, it would be so much fun living in a Boxcar but I would want electricity — another chimed in that she plans on being a mystery writer and creating more adventures with Watch, the dog, Hedenberg said.

Hedenberg said at the conclusion of a fun-filled morning, Mike Alberts and the team, from Jewett City Savings Bank, provided each third grader with a copy of Gertrude Warner's book, "Snowbound Mystery." Roger Franklin, who was a student of Gertrude Warner's, said the author often put children in her books. Franklin's Market was included in "Snowbound Mystery." The students all said they can't wait to return.

Check Out Our Latest Museum Exhibition



Solar Disappearing Act



Do you remember this past April when a total solar eclipse's path of totality across the United States was projected to pass fairly close to Putnam? The event, which took place on April 9, received widespread coverage by mainstream and social media. Special glasses for viewing were available, eclipse parties organized, students participated, and it seemed everyone embraced science for a while.

What is not so well known is that one hundred years ago, in 1924, a total solar eclipse was viewed in this area which thrilled and awed local residents. The event made front page news of the Putnam Patriot newspaper issue of January 30, 1924.

The Patriot reported that "Putnam was on the edge of totality of the eclipse...It was believe that that the line of totality would be in the neighborhood of the junction of Mechanics and School Street...hundreds carried pieces of smoked glass, old negatives, or pieces of film to cover the eyes. Automobile parties went as far south as Wauregan. Many carried warm drinks, hot water bottles and other devices to battle the zero weather.

To summarize, "The sight was not a disappointing one, it was glorious."

What's In a Name?

In his play "Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare gave the world this memorable quote, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," indicating that things are what they are, no matter what name you give them. Over the years this area of Connecticut has been called a number of names, including the Ten Town Area, the Northeast Corner, the Forgotten Corner and the Quiet Corner.

The latter seems to have stuck. Indeed our area is referred to as the "Quiet Corner" by local TV stations, travel publications, state officials and politicians, and even by ourselves.

Did you ever wonder how the moniker "Quiet Corner" came about? On May 1, 1984 eight area towns joined together and formed the northeast regional tourism district to promote tourism in this area. A year later, on May 1, 1985, the district decided to celebrate its first birthday with a Name the Tourism District Contest. A few suggestions included: "Wyndham Hills," "Millstream Country," and "New England's Best Kept Secret."

Ultimately the winner of the contestant was Darrell Christopher May of East Woodstock for his entry, "Connecticut's Quiet Corner." May was awarded \$100 for his submission. Today 21 towns make up the "Quiet Corner" tourism district, and the rest, they say, is history.

A thank you to Terri Pearsall who provided material for this article.

Not To Be Seen Again For 100 Years

Time was when a total eclipse of the sun, such as you will see Saturday, January 24, would have filled the hearts of men with terror. But we today, living in an enlightened age, find it only an interesting scientific phenomenon, recurring every 100 years.

It is so on the financial field as well. People have become enlightened. Before the days of organized banks, men were forced to convert their wealth into costly merchandise or jewelry, for safe keeping. These men would have welcomed the security and efficient, personal service we offer in soliciting your account in this institution.

Citizens National Bank

Putnam Connecticut

Do not miss this impressive spectacle. If the weather is favorable for observation this Bank will open at 10 o'clock Saturday morning after the eclipse is over.

In Other News

The Boxcar Museum is temporarily closed pending replacement of the track section upon which it sits. As of now no date for completion of the project has been set. Please stay tune for any updates.

Our online presence continues to grow, according to Mike Bogdanski, Public Relations Chairperson and coordinator of social media. Mike reports that in the last year our Facebook account has bumped up from 100 followers to 794 and Instagram followers stands at 221. The Aspinock website has about 2,000 views per month. Past issues of this newsletter can be seen on our website. We also have a YouTube account which posts a number of videos for viewing, including Flood of 1955, Medal of Honor program, time capsule opening and more.

Officers for two year terms (May 2024 - May 2026) are:

President/Treasurer: John Miller

Vice President: Jeanne Benoit

Secretary; Kathleen Zamagni

Board of Directors-at-large: Elaine Turner, Paul Desautels, Nicole Flagg Nichols

The maple tables and chairs in the adult section are from the 1955 library. They have been refinished many times, most recently before moving to the Municipal Complex.



DID YOU KNOW?



The children's tables and chairs from 1979 were designed by Alvar Aalto, a midcentury Finnish architect and designer. His furniture designs are considered Scandinavian Modern.

New Members Joining the Aspinock Historical Society

Emily Barnes - North Grosvenordale, CT

Wilfred Bousquet - Putnam, CT

James Frost - Brooklyn, CT

Norman "Barney" Seney

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED FOR OUR 2024 SEASON

Can you spare 2 1/2 hours once a month from May to October? The Gertrude Warner Boxcar Museum is looking for people to volunteer one shift per month from 11 AM to 1:30 PM or 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM on Saturday or Sunday. It's easy and training will be provided. If you are interested in volunteering as a docent at the Boxcar Museum contact Barbara Scalise at 860-974-1832 or email her at quassett@gmail.com

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Come Visit Us

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 Saturdays by appointment. The **Gertrude Warner Boxcar Museum** is located on South Main St., Putnam, across the tracks from Union Square. It is open Saturdays and Sundays, May thru mid-October.

Both museums are handicap accessible.

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 or leave material for me at the Aspinock Historical Society facility at 200 School St., Putnam.