

Eben Putnam Papers, c.1890-1927  
Wellesley Historical Society

**Repository Identifier**

mawelhs

**Local Identifier**

2017.10

**Name and Location of Repository**

The Wellesley Historical Society  
229 Washington Street  
Wellesley, MA 02481  
(781) 235-6690  
[www.wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org)

**Title**

Eben Putnam Papers, c.1890-1927

**Date**

c.1890-1927, bulk 1920-1927

**Extent**

0.5 linear feet, 1 box

**Name of Creator**

Putnam, Eben (1868-1933)

**Biographical Note**

*Lt. Col. Eben Putnam, 1868-January 22, 1933*

Eben Putnam was a noted genealogist and historian of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He had a broad interest in family and genealogical history, anthropology, archaeology, as well as military history. He was a noted editor and publisher in these fields. He served in the U.S. Army in World War I as a captain in the Quartermaster Corps from 1917-1919. Putnam died in 1933, after a long illness.

Though he was weakened by the influenza he contracted in France during military service in 1919, the years of illness following World War I did not curtail Putnam's many professional activities and interests. He lived at 62 Glen Road in Wellesley Farms from 1904 until his death, apart from time spent overseas, and contributed much to the community by writing a series of articles on Wellesley area history for various local publications. Among the most notable is the "Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley," which appeared in *The Townsman* serially over four consecutive Friday issues in 1926. Originally the materials were delivered as a lecture at the first annual meeting of the Wellesley Historical Society on April 14, 1926.

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#### *Family Connections*

Putnam was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1868, and traced his lineage back to the 17th century Putnams of Salem and Danvers. He was the son of Frederick Ward Putnam, a noted anthropologist and curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, and Adelaide Martha Edmands Putnam. He was married to Florence M. (Tucker) Putnam in 1890, with whom he had three children; two sons, Eben F. and Frederic Lawrence, and a daughter, Margaret Adelaide. Adelaide occasionally undertook research on her father's behalf.

#### *Background and Publishing Career*

Putnam was educated in public schools in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and entered MIT in 1895. However, he did not take a degree, leaving the following year to work in a law firm. By 1890 he was working for the Salem Press, and in 1894 he bought the company, and founded *Putnam's Historical Magazine* and *Genealogical Quarterly Magazine*. In 1899 he also took on the role of business manager, and then managing editor, of *The International Monthly* a position he held for several years. He published widely in historical genealogy, with particular focus on the genealogy and history of early New England families and their emigration to the colonies; it was noted that his "knowledge of the genealogy of New England's leading families was regarded as authoritative" (*New York Herald Tribune*, January 23, 1933).

#### *Military Career*

Putnam joined the Salem Light Infantry corps in 1891. In 1917 he was commissioned a captain in the Quartermaster Corps; he was called to active duty that year, and served in the quartermaster supply branch in Boston. He was sent overseas in 1917, and served in the warehousing and storage branch in Nantes, France. Following the 1919 armistice, he contracted the flu and pneumonia, and was discharged from the Army that year. He continued his military service after the war, and was commissioned a major in the Quartermaster Corps Reserve in 1923; he was raised to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1927.

#### *American Legion and other organizations*

Putnam was involved with the American Legion from its inception in 1915. He was instrumental in the founding of Wellesley Post 72, which was organized in 1919 upon his return to the United States; he served as the post and then state historian for the Legion. His efforts won him recognition within the organization, and he was appointed national historian for the American Legion, the first to serve in the role, which he undertook from 1920 until his death in 1933.

In addition to his work as a historian and genealogist, Putnam also played a prominent role in the establishing of the National Archives, and was at the forefront of the movement for the establishment of the National Archives building. He served on the Committee on National Archives, was director of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, registrar of the Massachusetts Commandery (Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States), a member of the Military Order of Foreign Wars, and a member of the New England Genealogical Society, to name a few. He was also a member of controversial organizations such as the United States Eugenics Society and the American Genetic Association.

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#### **Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains research notes, correspondence, and other related materials pertaining to Putnam's work on a lecture titled "Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley." This paper, and accompanying presentation slides, was presented to the Wellesley Historical Society at their first annual meeting on April 14, 1926. After giving this talk, the textual contents of the paper were published on the front page in *The Townsman* in four parts on July 23, 30, August 6, and 13, 1926. This collection reflects the process of research and mapping Putnam engaged in during the writing of the articles. While *The Townsman* articles note that the talk had been accompanied by illustrative slides, these slides are no longer extant.

The collection also contains published pamphlets, a speech delivered on behalf of the American Legion, and newspaper clippings relating to Putnam's life in Wellesley.

In addition to the Eben Putnam materials, this collection contains one folder of materials pertaining to his daughter, Wellesley resident Margaret Adelaide Putnam (1902-1992). Included are a paper she wrote for a school class, dated 1915, and correspondence relating to the research of that paper.

#### **System of Arrangement**

The papers are arranged in six series, by type; within each series folders are arranged topically. These papers came into the repository collections at different times; Adelaide Putnam gifted much of the material, some of which she had roughly organized by subject. Much of the material in Series III reflects her original order and arrangement, and often a rough, handwritten list of contents can be found within the folders. Her original folder order and contents have been maintained where feasible, particularly in the family research files (Series III, Folders 8-14).

- Series I. Manuscripts
- Series II. Pamphlets (published), 1899 and 1903
- Series III. Papers: Research Notes, Maps, Map Tracings
- Series IV. Correspondence, 1923-1927
- Series V. Newspaper Clippings, 1910-1929
- Series VI. Papers: Margaret Adelaide Putnam, 1915

#### **Index Terms: Library of Congress Authorities**

American Legion—Officers  
Genealogists—New England  
Genealogy  
Genealogy—New England—Periodicals  
Genealogy—Periodicals  
Historians—United States—19th century  
Historians—United States—20th century  
Historians—United States—Periodicals  
Local history—Periodicals  
Military historians  
New England—History—Periodicals  
New England

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Putnam, Eben, 1868-1933  
Putnam family  
Salem Press (Salem, Mass.)  
Wellesley (Mass.)  
Wellesley (Mass.)—History  
Wellesley (Mass.)—Periodicals  
Wellesley Historical Society (Wellesley, Mass.)

**Conditions Governing Access**

The Collection is open for research purposes by appointment only. Please contact the Wellesley Historical Society for more information.  
info@wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org  
(781) 235-6690

**Physical Access**

Some of the materials are fragile.

**Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use**

Copyright restrictions may apply.

**Languages and Scripts of the Material**

English

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Accession M.7 (March 2, 1964), gift of Adelaide Putnam  
Some family history research notes carry "Putnam gift of 1985."

**Accruals**

The Historical Society may add materials to this collection in the future; however, no further accruals are currently expected.

**Existence and Location of Originals**

Wellesley Historical Society

**Related Materials**

Accession 1985.188, Shard of Pottery [collected by Eben Putnam]  
Accession 1985.189, Collection of Indian Artifacts [collected by Eben Putnam]  
American Legion Collection

**Description**

DACS-compliant Finding Aid created in April 2017 by Alden Ludlow. Processing of this collection was made possible through a grant from the Wellesley Community Preservation Committee.

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**Bibliography**

“Col. Eben Putnam, Historian, is dead.” *The Boston Globe*. January 23, 1933.

“Eben Putnam, Genealogist and historian, Dies.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 23, 1933.

“For Better Acquaintance.” *The Wellesley Times*. October 11, 1929. (Feature story on Eben Putnam.)

Putnam, Eben. “Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley. Part I.” *The Townsman*. July 23, 1926: p. 1 [Early Massachusetts history.] Note: There is a typographical error on the front page this edition; the date is printed incorrectly as July 16, 1926, but on the first page only; all other pages carry the January 23 date.

———. “Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley. Part II.” *The Townsman*. July 30, 1926: p. 1 [Early Wellesley area history]

———. “Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley. Part III.” *The Townsman*. August 6, 1926: p. 1 [Early Wellesley area Native American history]

———. “Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley. Part IV.” *The Townsman*. August 13, 1926: p. 1 [Early Wellesley area settlements, roads, agriculture, industry]

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**Container List**

**Box 1**

**I. Manuscripts**

This series contains manuscripts relating to Putnam's historical work and involvement with the American Legion. Much of this collection pertains to Putnam's article in *The Townsman* on Wellesley area history; Folder 1 contains a full version of all four articles in *The Townsman*, assembled by Putnam from newspaper clippings.

- Folder 1: "Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley." Book complete and assembled from newspaper clippings of the series.  
Folder 2: "John Wampus, Indian." Unbound typescript.  
Folder 3: Speech on behalf of the Wellesley post of the American Legion upon the consecration of a church. Undated, typed on 3x5 index cards and annotated.

**II. Pamphlets (published), 1899 and 1903**

This series contains two pamphlets published by Putnam.

- Folder 4: Putnam, Eben. "An Inquiry into the Authenticity of the so-called First Meeting House preserved by the Essex Institute at Salem, Massachusetts," August 1899.  
Folder 5: Putnam, Eben. "The Higginsons in England and America, Part I," 1903.

**III. Papers: Research Notes, Maps, Map Tracings used for "Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley."**

This series contains Putnam's historical research files, including notes, maps, and map tracings.

- Folder 6: Research notes [Early Wellesley history]  
Folder 7: Research notes [Early Wellesley history]  
Folder 8: Research notes: Fisher family  
Folder 9: Research notes: Gay family, miscellaneous transactions [notes on deeds]  
Folder 10: Research notes: Mills family  
Folder 11: Research notes: Pratt family  
Folder 12: Research notes: Daniels family  
Folder 13: Research notes: Notes on roads, properties  
Folder 14: Research notes: Notes on properties and deeds  
Folder 15: Research notes: Annotated maps  
Folder 16: Research notes: Annotated map tracings

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**IV. Correspondence, 1923-1927**

Folder 17: Correspondence relating to research and publication of "Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley."

**V. Newspaper Clippings, 1910-1929**

This series contains several different types of newspaper clippings, including clippings of Putnam's articles in *The Townsman* as well as clippings about Putnam's life and times.

Folder 18 Collection of clippings of the "Exploration and Early Settlements of the Territory now Wellesley," taken from articles in *The Townsman*, 1926.

Folder 19: *The Wellesley Times*. "For Better Acquaintance [Eben Putnam]." October 11, 1929. Article on Eben Putnam's life and experiences.

Folder 20: *Wellesley Review*; October 14, 1910.

**VI. Papers: Margaret Adelaide Putnam**

This small series contains materials pertaining to Margaret Adelaide Putnam, daughter of Eben Putnam. It includes a paper, "Wellesley," which she wrote for a class in 1915; the paper covers some of the early history of the Wellesley area, and is illustrated with several photographs and postcards.

Folder 21: School research typescripts on Wellesley history, correspondence