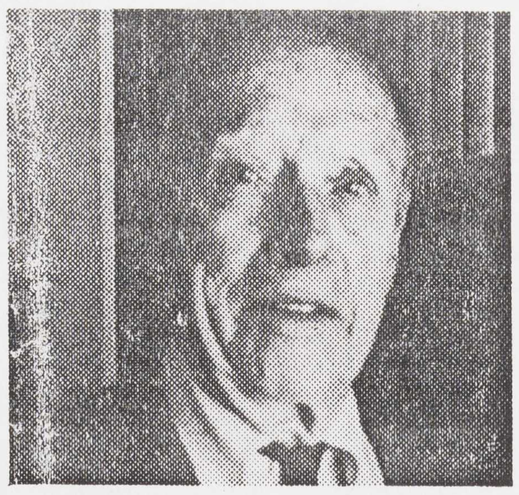
Mr. Moderator honored

By Dorris Hilberg
Staff Writer

ACTON — In his own words, John Putnam has been consistently working for the past three decades to "improve our Democracy by having better informed citizens." Why did he take that path in life? He acknowledges that "I am my mother's child." She was a woman he not only loved but admired and respected, and his life has been a testimonial to her. She had a great influence on his life, and, following in her footsteps — she was a very dedicated person and worked with the blind during the roaring '20s — he has spent the last 15 years reading, on tape, for the blind.



John Putnam

He is eminently suited for that role, for John Putnam has the most marvelous, resonant voice — Yankee, but with a British accent he cannot account for, as he was born and raised in Boston. And it is that voice people here will long remember as the voice of the town moderator for 10 years from 1965-1975, and as the voice of the moderator of the Acton Water District until his retirement last Wednesday night at the close of the annual meeting. If anything marks his tenure as moderator for both town and district, it is his sense of fairness, that everyone be recognized and allowed to speak.

John and his wife Susan built their home in Acton in 1948, when the population was only 3500. "In the fifties and sixties, Acton went haywire," he said in a recent interview. "We had strip zoning on 2A, Acton was the fastest growing town in the state. A bunch of us — Bill and Nancy Kingman, Paul Lesure, Bill Sawyer, Tom Rogers — asked ourselves what was wrong with the town, what could citizens do to help bring Acton into the new world, the modern era." One thing that disturbed these citizens was the fact that the then moderator, Jim Kinsley, was a "rigid conservative who violated the first principal of Democracy by letting his bias show in recognizing people, deciding who could talk" at Town Meeting. They decided to oust the incumbent.

After failing to find a candidate to challenge the incumbent, John Putnam ran for moderator and lost by about 180 votes. The second year, "my little gang decided to run me again," said John, and he won by about 200 votes. That was the same year Acton elected its first female selectman, Mary Hadley.

At about this time, a local clergyman, Justin Hartman, approached John and asked him to head a human rights group in the Nashoba Valley area. "But my highest priority was to make a change in Acton," said John, so he turned him down. But he was not to escape from this cause for long.

John's choice of career early on was preferably non-business, "not money for money's sake." He counts himself among the "worthy poor." His ventures have been varied. A Harvard graduate, he started teaching at the Middlesex School after the war, but wanted to get into politics, government. For a while he manufactured books for Houghton Mifflin's Riverside Press. There was a brief stint in the military. While working for the International Cooperative Association he was an advisor to the Philippine government on printing. And for two years he and his family lived in Austria while he was director of the Salzburg Seminar for American studies. "It was an effort to bring Central Europe a breath of fresh, democratic air."

At another point, He became "hooked on the issue of volunteer activities for retired men, when the mandatory age for retirement was 65." And so he formed the non-profit clearing house for volunteers which produced "Widening Horizons," a column listing volunteer opportunities. Although the company is defunct, the Boston Globe still publishes a volunteer column three times a week, its successor.

John became involved in the human rights movement in 1983, when he was impressed by a magazine article by Robert Holmes, a professor of philosophy at Rochester, who write, in essence, that we had reached a point in building nuclear weapons where the weapons we were acquiring were threatening our own security.

That put him "smack into the peace movement" and led to the formation of the Walden Peace and Justice Center with a grant from the Greeley Peace and Justice Foundation. It was a regional center where the exchange of ideas and equipment could be put together to enhance efforts to work for peace. It was housed in the basement of Trinity Church in Concord until it was closed a couple of years ago. "But we are still fighting the battle," said John.

Although he is retiring from public service, he is not going to rest on his laurels. He is still involved in many activities that pique his interest, establishing contacts and improving outreach.

The person who is to follow in John's footsteps must be "flexible mentally, be a catalyst, a facilitator. If I have any genius, it is my ability to talk, ceaselessly."

For his many contributions to the community and to the cause of peace and justice, *The Beacon* presents its "Bouquet" — a framed certificate — to John Putnam of Acton.

STAFF PHOTO BY ANN RINGWOOD

'DISCOVERING' THE MUSEUM — Chinese educators tour the Discovery Museums in Acton to get ideas for one they hope to build in Beijing. Here Playing basketball with blow dryers are Bi Li and Dr. Qin Xinhua with deputy director Debbie Gilpin.

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By Jennif
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ACTON — Museums colorf dinosaur are stan sights to Acton res many residents kn ums have garnere reputation.

Last Thursday Chinese educators check out these spo to build one of thei

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Officials exonerated in

Michael Valentino
Staff Writer

BOXBOROUGH — Nearly seven years after a tragic accident which claimed the life of an infant, a lawsuit against several Boxborough town officials has finally been resolved, and the town emerged completely exonerated of guilt.

Last week in Middlesex Superior Court in Lowell a judge dismissed most of the charges in a civil lawsuit filed by former Boxborough resident Lisa Beers, now of Acton. The remaining charges, against Boxborough Police Sergeant Stephen Trefry, were argued in open court, and on Friday a 14-member jury (12 women and 2 men) returned with a verdict in Trefry's favor after less than 3 hours of deliberations.

In addition to Trefry, the lawsuit named as defendants former selectmen David Birt and Richard Golden. It also named Jeanne Garrison, now chairman of the Board of Selectmen, and the town's Executive Administrator, Judith Jacobs. Among other things, the suit claimed that the officials conspired to smear Beers' name by insinuating she was at fault (through intoxication) for the accident which killed her two-month old daughter, Lauren. Charges were never filed against Beers for the accident.

The attorney for the town officials, Marshal Karol (appointed by the town's insurance company), explained that Judge Susan Garsh dismissed the majority of the charges on Wednesday in response to a defense motion for a directed verdict. "There simply wasn't an ounce of evidence to support those charges," he said.

As for the allegations against Trefry, who Beers claimed harrassed her and invaded her privacy, Karol said he was able to prove to the jury that "Sergeant Trefry had no ulterior motives, there was no malice, and there certainly wa Those are the es which need to be case, and they just

Beers' attorney refused to comme the trial.

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