

# Masters Trumpet When Over Sixty Years Old



MASTERS THE TRUMPET AT 64  
Miss Abby Cook Putnam of Provincetown, who learned to play the trumpet so well that she took part in a concert.

PROVINCETOWN, March 24 — Miss Abby Cook Putnam, descendant of one of Provincetown's oldest families, has just received a congratulatory letter from Walter ("Life Begins at 40") B. Pitkin, who writes that he refers to her "as one of my prize cases of the art of learning."

At the age of 64, Miss Putnam learned to play the trumpet in so proficient a manner as to be able to take part in an orchestra concert. It was the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition. And now, as she enters upon her 68th year, she declares with positive enthusiasm that "Life is just beginning for me."

Pitkin cited her case in a current magazine article having to do with Americans who have carved careers for themselves after the age of 40.

Miss Putnam showed a letter sent to her by the author: "Your achievement is so striking that I frequently hold you up (in complete anonymity, so far) as one of my prize cases of the art of learning! You have my heartiest congratulations. Next year I shall expect to hear that you are a member of a full-fledged band."

The purposeful Provincetown woman, who carries on with the spirit of her grandfather, an old-time whaling skipper of this port, laughingly told the story of her determination to master the patience-trying trumpet. She chose this instrument, she said, because of her deafness. Richard Parmenter, a musician by avocation, was "her inspiration"; she gives him much credit for her achievement.

"He took me to a concert of the Cape Cod Philharmonic Orchestra several years ago," she told her interviewer. "I shall never forget the thrill of that event. They played 'The Stars and

Stripes Forever.' It was beautiful. And it was then that the desire to play the trumpet—which has haunted me most of my life—became stronger than ever.

"Finally I went to Boston to shop for a trumpet. The young salesman wanted to know if I was buying it for my son or my daughter. Then I hunted about town for a teacher. George Ramos took me as his pupil—a splendid teacher, from whom I took lessons for two years.

"When I look back upon the many, tedious hours of practice, morning and night, I wonder how I ever did it. But today I'm very happy that I mastered the instrument, and I keep on learning."

She made her musical debut before a great gathering of hometown folk, in 1934, when she appeared with the Provincetown High School orchestra and rendered her first trumpet solo, "Miserere," from Il Trovatore. She received a great ovation.

Miss Putnam was librarian of the Provincetown Public Library for 34 years. She retired a few years ago.

## Stage Coach, Whaling Days Recalled In Paper By A. L. Putnam, Teacher

Tells Of Troubles With School Committee Members Who Termed Astronomy And Algebra "Dead Languages"—Business Of Town Described

One of the interesting and colorful, as well as highly respected figures of the Old Provincetown of nearly a century ago was A. L. Putnam who came here from the Bridgewater High School to teach in the Provincetown schools. He remained to become one of the town's leading citizens.

At the meeting of the Research Club held on Wednesday of last week his daughter, Abbie C. Putnam, read a fascinating paper which told with much good humor and sly wit the story of those old days in the schools and community of Provincetown at the turn of the last century before the days of trains but during the great era of the Grand Bankers and whaling expeditions.

Here are the reminiscences of Provincetown by Mr. Putnam:—

In the summer of 1856 I was to graduate from the Bridgewater Normal School. One day toward the end of the term, the president called three of the pupils and notified us that there was a gentleman in the recitation room who wished to meet us. Accordingly, we acted upon the order, and met there a man who told us that his business with us was to engage three teachers to act for three grammar schools during the winter at Provincetown, Massachusetts.

That town was then entirely unknown to any of us, but he very kindly explained as well as he could the condition of matters. We had a talk on salaries, and agreed to accept his proposition and be on the spot on time. He said the term would begin in the last week in November. We rather objected to that and asked why he had not fixed the date the week following Thanksgiving.

### Provincetown Spirit

"Well," he said, "we appoint any time for beginning when we are ready, and let the Governor appoint Thanksgiving to suit himself."

When the time came, one of our number was detained because of sickness in the family. Two of us started off on our journey. Had we imagined the long pull we had ahead of us, we would not have been so happy as we were. The railroad at that time terminated at Yarmouth. It seemed quite a long pull even there, for the road then was not in excellent condition, nor the running what it is in these days.

At Yarmouth, we took stage with a four-horse team for a ride (of fifteen miles) to the town of Orleans. It was a long tedious ride. We had dinner there; then took a fresh team for the town of Well-

fleet—another tiresome ride. But the ride following that was worse and more of it.

We started from Wellfleet with a full load of passengers, and, though we were not much behind the usual time of starting, the roads were worse and worse about all the way. When we came to the sand-hills of Truro, the road was unspeakably worse. As you sweep up the Cape now in the automobile, the roads seem very fine; it is a pleasure to ride. But then the sand hills were terrible. Every little while the driver would stop and say he would have to ask the men to get out and walk up the hill as the load was too much for the horses. It was eleven o'clock in the evening when we reached Provincetown. From seven in the morning to eleven in the evening was certainly a hard ride; we were pleased when it was over. We were at our journey's end.

### Two Public Houses

We took lodging at the Pilgrim House, the only public house in town, except the Union House, which a few years later was moved back from the street and called the Atlantic. The Pilgrim was run by James Gifford and was even then quite an old house. It was very finely kept and we had a pleasant winter there.

Mr. Gifford gave us a story of the previous year of schools in the town. It was not promising. They had had another committee then—

James Gifford and Thomas Lothrop—as good men as the town contained for the business. A crowd of men, many of whom were men of means, got an idea that the schools were costing more than they could afford. They worked, scolded and howled for retrenchment, which was their rallying cry. They finally gained their point and cut down the amount usually appropriated for schools. As a result, the High School, which had been established only a few years, was discontinued. The committee men resigned at once.

Finally another board of five men was appointed, not one of whom was fit for the office. Of all school boards, this was surely the limit. We were notified to present ourselves for examination, which we did. Such an examination, I am sure, never before was heard of in a committee room.

The man who officiated—not the chairman, by the way—took a book and proceeded to ask us questions in grammar. If we did not answer in the exact words of the book, he would correct us and read the answer as the book had it. The entire performance was a regular farce. One lady, who was examined for a primary school the summer before, told us the committee asked her to bound Massachusetts. She gave every boundary wrong. "Correct!" says the committee man.

The teachers in the four schools that winter were Virgil Thompson of Middleboro, Andrew Macy Folger of Nantucket, Edwin Bayard Harney of New Hampshire and myself from Danvers, Massachusetts. Harney later studied medicine and practiced in Massachusetts for a long time. For twenty years he was Medical Director of Massachusetts. Thompson also studied medicine, graduating in New York. He has practiced in that city for fifty or sixty years. Folger studied theology and the last time we saw him, he was preaching in Vermont. He is not now living.

### Long Point School

At that time there was a school on Long Point, where Thompson had about fifty pupils. (The school house in which he taught is now the upper story of Arnold's Radio Shop. All the houses of the Point people were moved across to town.) Thompson's pupils were from five to twenty-five years of age. Four or five advanced pupils wished to have classes in astronomy and algebra, if allowable.

When Thompson came to spend his Saturday and Sunday with us on this side, we went to the committee, and Thompson asked if he could be allowed classes in those advanced subjects. The leading