



The Jean Saunders History Contest

Presented by
The Putnam History Museum

With
Southeast Museum



Back by popular demand, this history contest lets youth 12-13 years of age try their hand at researching and making a new creative work based on a Revolutionary War topic of their choosing.

At a Glance:

Who can enter?	Students in 7th grade or kids who are 12–13 years old and live in Putnam County. You can enter alone or with a partner (just two people max).
What’s it about?	Your project must focus on the Revolutionary War in Putnam County . Pick a topic, ask a historical question, and then create something cool that answers it! (Don’t worry, we walk you through the process starting on page 5).
What do you make?	You need two parts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Written Part – 400–700 word artist’s statement (about 1–2 pages), typed, with at least 3 sources in a bibliography. Creative Part – This can be art, a poster, a model, a zine, a short video (10 min or less), or another creative idea.
Prizes?	Yes! 🏆 1st place: \$500 🥈 2nd place: \$300 🥉 3rd place: \$100 (If you work with a partner, you’ll share the prize money.)
Judging:	Judges are teachers, historians, and librarians who love history and helping kids learn. A rubric is included in this packet for reference.
Deadlines & Ceremony:	📅 Projects due: Friday, February 6, 2026, by 4:00 pm 📍 Drop off: Putnam History Museum (63 Chestnut St, Cold Spring, NY) or submit by email. 🎉 Awards Ceremony: Saturday, April 11, 2026, at 4:30 pm (location TBA).
How do you join?	Register at https://www.putnamhistorymuseum.org/saunders/
Need help?	The museum staff can help you research and plan your project. Just email education@putnamhistorymuseum.org or call 845-265-4010 to set up a time

In short: Pick a Revolutionary War topic, research it, create something fun and original, turn it in by February 6, 2026, and you could win cash prizes and be honored at a special ceremony!

Jean Saunders
Equestrian, Teacher, Historian, & Curator
b. November 27, 1908, Yonkers, NY — d. May 28, 1983, Garrison, NY



Born in 1908, Jean Saunders grew up as the fourth child of five siblings in Yonkers, New York. Jean and her family spent their summers on their farm in Garrison, New York. Eventually, Jean would make Garrison her full-time home and community.

Jean was a true Renaissance woman. She graduated from Halsted School in Yonkers in 1926 and then from Sweetbriar College in 1930 with a degree in chemistry and biology. Throughout these years, Jean ran various equestrian riding clubs, including one in Garrison from 1928 to 1937. Jean was also artistically gifted — she played the banjo and piano, learned to draw and model with clay, and studied sculpture and ceramics.

In addition to her academic and artistic talents, Jean was naturally athletic and regularly participated in basketball, hockey, swimming, skating, skiing, and tennis.

While Jean's interests and talents were varied and plentiful, one of her main passions was teaching children. She received her master's degree in education from Teachers College, Columbia University, in the 1940s. She served as a kindergarten teacher in Garrison for thirteen years and was beloved by the community for her dedication to her students. She also taught at the Reading Center in the Beacon public schools.

Each of these experiences and skills contributed to her other primary life passion, the preservation and sharing of history. Jean helped to develop the Foundry School Museum (now the Putnam History Museum) and wrote *A History of Garrison's Landing* (available in the PHM Gift Shop and Library). She prepared exhibitions, supervised the acquisition of thousands of items that now comprise the PHM's permanent collection, and ran weekly workshops to address local history questions. Jean served as Vice President of the organization in 1961 and then as the PHM's historian and curator from 1962 to 1978.

Each year, in honor of Saunders's love of history and her contributions to the preservation of Philipstown and the Highlands' local heritage, the PHM hosts the 7th-grade Jean Saunders Local History Contest.

Contest Rules & Checklist

1. Contestant Eligibility: The contest is open to Putnam County students in 7th grade, and/or youth 12 to 13 years of age.
2. Award and Recognition: First Place: \$500; Second Place: \$300; Third Place: \$100. If a winning project was completed by two Contestants working together, the award amount will be split between the two individuals. An awards ceremony will be held to recognize the participants and winners.
3. Judging: The History Contest is judged by volunteers who have a background in education, history, and/or youth activities. Prior year judges included certified teachers, librarians, college professors, and local historians.
4. Contest Focus: Topics must focus on Revolutionary War history within Putnam County. Refer to pages 6 and 7 for possible topics.
5. Historical Questions: Contestants must present a written historical question that is being addressed by their project. The question must be written and presented at the beginning of the first page of the written document or creative project, and it should be separate from the general content itself.
6. Format: All projects must include creative work and a written component. The written component should be between 400 and 700 words and include at least three citations. The written component copy may be integrated into the creative work. The creative component may consist of graphic design (such as a zine, infographic, or poster), illustrations or works of art, crafts and models (of a reasonable size for display), or audiovisual materials (not exceeding 10 minutes in duration). Creative components may be presented in physical form or electronically.
7. Electronic Media: Creative components that use electronic media must be submitted to the Putnam History Museum with the name of the Contestant in the file name via email to education@putnamhistorymuseum.org. If the file is too large to email, the Contestant should contact PHM at the above email to request a Google Drive folder for their submission by 4 pm.
8. Physical Projects: All physical projects must have an attached 3x5 index card listing the entrant's name (and partner's name), school if applicable, the Town the entrant lives in, and the title of your project. As judging is anonymous, **Contestants should not put their names on the project itself.**
9. The written component is to be typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font, with 1" margins, and submitted electronically in PDF format or hardcopy.
10. Entries: Entries may be submitted by individuals or a team of two entrants.
11. Original Work: The writing and creative work **must** be the original work of the entrant(s). Parents, relatives, and friends may be used as advisors, historical resources, and proofreaders.
12. Source References: Entries must be accompanied by an alphabetized bibliography page, including at least three sources. Please follow the example on the website <http://www.easybib.com/>, using MLA 8 format. Sources can include both primary and secondary source materials. If you are using a website, include the date on which you accessed the website.

13. Submission Deadline: Projects must be submitted by Friday, February 6, 2026, at 4 pm at the Putnam History Museum, or submitted to the Putnam History Museum with the contestant's name in the file name via email to education@putnamhistorymuseum.org. If the file is too large to email, the Contestant should contact PHM at the above email to request a Google Drive folder for their submission by 4 pm.
14. Retention and Use of Submissions: Contestants acknowledge by submitting a Project that they understand and agree that Putnam History Museum may retain all submitted materials, including the Submission, for archival, record-keeping, promotional purposes, and to use, reproduce, adapt, distribute, display, and create derivative works from the Submission for any purpose, regardless of whether the Submission is selected as a winner.
15. PHM Museum staff are available to assist with contest-related questions as well as project development and execution. To schedule your visit or ask questions, please email education@putnamhistorymuseum.org or call 845-265-4010. Please schedule research appointments before stopping by the Putnam History Museum. We will gather research materials related to your topic prior to your arrival, which will help ensure you maximize the benefits of your visit.

Contest Project Due Date and Time

Projects are due by **4:00 p.m. on Friday, February 6, 2026**, at the Putnam History Museum.

- *Drop-off:* 63 Chestnut Street, Cold Springs, NY
- *Electronic Submission:* electronic media must be submitted to the Putnam History Museum with the name of the applicant in the file name via email to education@putnamhistorymuseum.org. If your file is too large to email, contact PHM at the above email to request a Google Drive folder for your submission.

The contest award ceremony and reception:

- **Saturday, April 11, 2026, at 4:30 pm**
- **Location: TBA**

2025-2026 Suggested Steps to Complete a History Contest Project

Step 1: Generate a list of 3-8 questions that you have about local history. What do you want to know about the past? Are you interested in sports, family life, farming, the military, or hiking? Do you often wonder about a local historical site? Are you curious about a particular historical figure? Does your family have a unique history? Let your interests and curiosities guide you.

TOPIC: What are you curious about? What do you want to know about the past?	Why is this topic important to you and/or our local community?	What sources do you think may be available?
1)		
2)		
3)		

Step 2: Identify and evaluate possible sources. Some questions can be answered by readily available secondary sources. Some questions require archival and primary source research. Other questions cannot be answered with the available sources.

Good sources include, but are not limited to, footnoted history books, reputable online websites, digital archives, and individuals who can provide oral history. Projects with unique sources are encouraged (for example, you live in a historic home). Contestants are strongly encouraged to discuss possible sources with museum or library staff.

Step 3: Finalize your historical questions. Choose a question that is interesting to you and for which there is enough source material to conduct research. Refine your historical question to guide your research and writing.

Questions that go beyond asking “What happened when?” and rather ask “How?” and “Why?” generate stronger projects. Inquiry should focus on cause and effect, similarities and differences, and change over time. A good historical question is also an interesting one. Contestants should be able to explain why the question is important to them and why it should be important to others.

Step 4: Conduct research. Review material from at least three sources and take detailed notes. If your research includes primary sources and/or interviews, be sure to take detailed notes. Be sure to include sources that provide general historical context. Research visits to museums, Historical Societies, and libraries in Putnam County are strongly encouraged. Most highly rated projects were researched, in part, at a museum or library.

Step 5: Develop an outline with a thesis. Your thesis should address your historical question. Support your thesis using logic and evidence from research.

Step 6: Prepare a rough draft. Adjust your historical question, thesis, and evidence as needed to ensure the content effectively illustrates your research and/or thesis and makes it as interesting as possible. Ensure your written document is between 400 and 700 words, typed in the format described in the rules.

Step 7: Final draft. Make sure you have proofread your final draft.

Possible Contest Topics

Generate your own ideas here:

Topics must focus on the Revolutionary War period (1775-1783) within modern Putnam County or the Hudson Highlands (Anywhere between Peekskill and Newburgh).

Possible topics:

<p><u>People:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Philipse FamilyBeverley RobinsonNicholas FishMajor General Israel PutnamSybil Ludington/Ludington FamilyEnoch CrosbyRifle JackPrince CornwallAnthony ‘Tone’ WaringBenedict ArnoldMajor John AndréPeggy ShippenDaniel Nimham and his son <p><u>Places:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Pollepel Island and the chevaux-de-friseConstitution IslandBird and Bottle InnBoscobelBreakneck RidgeBull HillThe Mandeville houseContinental VillageFredericksburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hempstead HutsRedoubtsThe Great ChainThe Old Albany Post RoadArmy EncampmentsWest Point Fortifications <p><u>Themes and Groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Enslaved people and freedmen during the Revolutionary periodThe WappingerLoyalistsPatriotsSpies and espionageCommerce in the region during the Revolutionary War periodSmallpox Outbreak and Inoculation against SmallpoxContinental Army RegimentsPatriot MilitiaLoyalist MilitiaBritish Regiments
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WHAT QUESTIONS DO WE ASK OF THE PAST? THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN

 CAUSE AND EFFECT	 CHANGE AND CONTINUITY	 TURNING POINTS	 USING THE PAST	 THROUGH THEIR EYES
<p>What were the causes of past events?</p> <p>What were the effects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who or what made change happen? • Who supported change? • Who did not support change? • Which effects were intended? • Which effects were accidental? • How did events affect people's lives, community, and the world? 	<p>What has changed?</p> <p>What has remained the same?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has benefited from this change? And why? • Who has not benefited? And why? 	<p>How did past decisions or actions affect future choices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did decisions or actions narrow or eliminate choices for people? • How did decisions or actions significantly transform people's lives? 	<p>How does the past help us make sense of the present?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the past similar to the present? • How is the past different from the present? • What can we learn from the past? 	<p>How did people in the past view their world?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did their worldview affect their choices and actions? • What values, skills and forms of knowledge did people need to succeed?

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CESA 2, UWW, WHS - 2006

TOPIC: What are you curious about? What do you want to know about the past?	Why is this topic important to you and/or our local community?	What sources do you think may be available?
1)		
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3)		

Guidelines for Forming Historical Questions

Many students make the mistake of thinking that history is nothing more than memorizing names, dates, facts and events. Though knowing this material is helpful, the best historians are those that ask good historical questions, that uncover the central issues and motives that shaped events, ideas, and peoples' actions. An analytic approach looks at causes and effects rather than just narrative. *How* and *Why* become the focus rather than *Who*, *What*, *Where*, and *When*.

- Bad Questions: *Who were the Maya? When did the Maya collapse?*
- Better Question: *Why did the Maya civilization collapse?*

Good historical questions should do the following:

- Address causes or effects
- Be open-ended (not having a yes or no answer)
- Be argumentative (can be legitimately answered in multiple ways)
- Be specific

Here are a few examples of solid open-ended questions that have multiple possible answers:

- *What impacts did the Tokugawa Shogunate's policy of isolation have upon Japan during the 1600s and 1700s?*
- *How was Napoleon Bonaparte able to gain power in France?*
- *What impacts did westward expansion have upon the southern United States during the first half of the 1800s?*

Always remember that your entire paper is an elaborate answer to your question, so it is very important that you form a question you can live with!

2025-2026 Jean Saunders History Contest Judging Criteria

Total Possible Points: 80

Research

(25 points maximum)

1. Quality historical question (1-5 points) _____
2. Includes an alphabetized, properly formatted bibliography. (1-5 points) _____
3. The written document demonstrates an understanding of the general historical context. (1-5 points) _____
4. Accuracy of historical facts. (1-5 points) _____
5. Draws on three or more distinct, high-quality sources. (1-5 points) _____

Content

(25 points maximum)

1. Addresses the stated historical question. (1-5 points) _____
2. The introduction explains why the subject is interesting or relevant. (1-5 points) _____
3. Structure is organized and logical, with an overall point. (1-5 points) _____
4. The conclusion is based on the analysis of historical evidence. (1-5 points) _____
5. Proofread for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (1-5 points) _____

Creative Presentation

(25 points maximum)

1. The creative component demonstrates and/or expands a point or the points of the historical question being addressed. (1-5 points)
2. Creative quality of presentation method. (1-5 points) _____
3. Demonstrated effort. (1-5 points) _____
4. Accurate information, with no obvious errors. (1-5 points) _____
5. Neat, clearly labeled, and easy to interpret. (1-5 points) _____

Contest Rules

(5 points maximum)

1. Ability to follow contest direction. (1-5 points) _____

Possible Scores (general):

- 1 – Poor: Does not address the criteria.
- 2 – Fair: Weakly addresses the criteria.
- 3 – Average: Addresses the criteria in a moderately strong way.
- 4 – Good: Addresses the criteria very well.
- 5 – Excellent: Addresses the criteria in an excellent way; exemplary project.