

James O. **Putnam** in Fredonia
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2000

James Osborne **Putnam**, one of the founders of the Buffalo Historical Society, the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy and the University of Buffalo, had a brief but significant presence in Fredonia, NY. His first wife whom he married in January 1842, Harriet **Palmer**, died in 1853 leaving three small children. His second wife, whom he married in March 1855, Catharine (Kate) **Wright**, was the daughter of the Rev. Worthington **Wright**, and sister to the Rev. Dr. Edwin S. **Wright**.

Dr. Edwin **Wright** was called to the Presbyterian Church in Fredonia in July 1856 and, soon after, James **Putnam** and his family took up residence in the former Levi **Risley** mansion on Garden (now Risley) Street in Fredonia. The primary motivation for the move may have been to permit two of their daughters, Anna J. **Putnam** (then 12) and Harriet (Hattie) O. **Putnam** (then 14) to attend the Fredonia Academy. The children were there for five terms between 1859 and 1861. The elder **Wrights** lived with their daughter's family on Garden Street.

The relocation to Fredonia did not prevent James **Putnam** from continuing his involvement with national politics as one of the two Republican electors-at-large. On 8 September 1860 he wrote to President **Lincoln** reporting on a speech he had given at a Rochester rally and on 25 September another letter (twelve pages long!) analyzing the political climate in New York State, all as it related to **Lincoln's** campaign for the Presidency.

In April 1861 we find him subscribing to the local war fund for families of volunteers in Fredonia and, in that same year, he was appointed by President **Lincoln** to the position of American Consul at Le Havre, France. The **Putnams'** youngest child, Harvey W. **Putnam** was born there in 1864. The family must have returned to their Fredonia home for a brief time, since we find them recorded in the New York State Census of 1865. The household in Fredonia at the end of May 1865 consisted of **Putnam** "Consulate/France," Catharine F., George (In the 1860 Census he is a "time keeper," in 1865 a "clerk."), Harriet, Anna, Catharine, James, and Harvey W. **Putnam**, one year old, born in France. Soon after, the family returned to Buffalo permanently.