



CORNWALL CHRONICLE

VOLUME 19 : NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 2009



February, Wow! What a Month!

February, named after the Latin *Februalia*, a time during which sacrifices were made to atone for sins, conjures up thoughts of cold, dark nights, snow, and, on the plus side, some welcome holidays.

We all know it's Black History Month; that it has some notables' birthdays (does anyone under 50 remember which president's birthday falls on which day?); that on the second of the month the media scrutinize some poor groundhog whose shadow, or lack thereof, will never mean a shorter winter for us in northwest Connecticut; and that on the fourteenth romance beckons.

In 2009, Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) falls on February 24. Perhaps it's time for a Cornwall float down the center of West Cornwall?

But seriously, we've all maligned or underestimated February. It is a month rich beyond imagination. For instance, did you know it's Bake for Family Fun Month, not to mention National Bird Feeding Month? Or that on February 1, 1898, Travelers Insurance issued the first automobile policy against accidents with horses?

More importantly, in our corner of Connecticut it's the month when intimations of spring first tease our winter-bound imagination. Take Mike Root with his crew of frozen

arborists: they wait until the worst of the cold has spent itself and then prune fruit trees of local mini-orchards (those with three to twelve trees). "It helps you get good fruit," Mike said. "You want to thin out the branches so fruit gets sunlight." (The maple trees are done earlier in the winter, so the cuts don't damage the tree as the sap starts to run.)

By Presidents Day all the local sap-tappers are itchy. This year Dave Cadwell will make his first foray into maple syrup production. On Town Street, Gregor Oracz, who took over Bob Potter's equipment and made his first batch around three years ago, is preparing to tap the maples along his street and at some neighbors' homes. But before tapping he'll be looking for supplies like jars, favoring the big junkyard in Sheffield.

Karen Cramp gets her spring preview indoors. "It's Yankees spring training that I'm devoted to. Pitchers and catchers report mid-February, and exhibition games begin the 25th of the month. I guess I enjoy it so much because by that time of the winter I've about had it with the snow and it is so lovely to see fit young men...running around on green, green grass in the sun." Karen follows it online and through the YES network (channel 71 on Cablevision here in Cornwall).

Art Gingert finds signs of spring in the song of chickadees—"three pure, whistled

notes"—as early as December. By February things are moving along apace. Consider raptors: you might not think of them in the same vein as turtledoves, but Art says that in February the red-tailed hawks are "treeing," regularly perching together on the same branch as they strengthen their pair bond. Meanwhile, goldfinches—those olive drab, not-quite-identifiable little birds at your feeder—start to show a little yellow in their plumage.

"But for me," says Art, "one of the most evocative images of very early spring is the sight of a female great horned owl devotedly hunkered down in the nest, incubating her clutch of eggs with fresh snow lying across her back."

If, as Art says, spring advances 100 feet a day from the south, given that the days started lengthening back in December, spring is right around the corner, just a few thousand feet away. And you thought February was the pits!
—Honora Horan

A Time of Trial

Cornwall's budget season has opened without much fanfare, considering the pressure a shrinking national economy is putting on just about everyone.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway said in
(continued on page 2)

FEBRUARY 2009

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2 GROUNDHOG DAY Region One Bd. of Ed. 6 P.M. HVRHS Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	3 Census Testing 10 A.M.–5 P.M. Library † Park & Rec. 7 P.M. CCS Library Inland Wetlands 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	4	5	6 Story Hour 1:15 P.M. Library	7 Community Contra Dance 7–9:30 P.M. Town Hall †
8	9 Blood Pressure Screening Noon–1 P.M. UCC	10 Housatonic River Comm. 7:30 P.M. CCS Library P&Z 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	11	12 LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY Town Offices and Dump Closed in Honor of Lincoln's Birthday	13 CCS Closed: Professional Development Day	14 VALENTINE'S DAY Motherhouse Honey Bee Workshop 10:30 A.M.– 1:30 P.M. Town Hall † Film <i>Laura</i> and Desserts 7:30 P.M. Library † Sweethearts Waltzes 7:30–10 P.M. Town Hall †
15 Deadline: March <i>Chronicle</i> Copy	16 PRESIDENTS DAY CCS Closed for Presidents Day	17 CCS Closed Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	18	19 Bd. of Ed. 5 P.M. CCS Library Bd. of Finance 7:30 P.M. CCS Library	20 Bd. of Assessment Appeals Application Deadline Story Hour 1:15 P.M. Library <i>Arsenic & Old Lace</i> 8 P.M. Town Hall †	21 <i>Arsenic & Old Lace</i> 8 P.M. Town Hall †
22 WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY <i>Arsenic & Old Lace</i> 3 P.M. Town Hall †	23	24 ZBA 7:30 P.M. Town Hall* P&Z 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	25	26	27 Story Hour 1:15 P.M. Library	28
Every Week This Month: Mondays: Jam Session, 7:30 P.M. Call 672-0229 for Location; Men's Adult Basketball, 7 P.M. CCS Gym Tuesdays: Adult Volleyball, 7 P.M. CCS Gym Wednesdays: Stretch Class, 5 P.M. Town Hall; Women's Adult Basketball, 7:30 P.M. CCS; Tai Chi, 6 P.M. CCS Gathering Room Thursdays: Meditation for Mothers, 1:15 P.M. St. Peter's Saturdays: Ice Skating, 7–8 P.M. Schmidt Rink, Hotchkiss School Sundays: Meditation Group, 1–2 P.M. 672-0229 to confirm						

* Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

† Details in Events and Announcements

(continued from page 1)

mid-January that local governments are banding together through organizations like the Council of Small Towns (COST) to influence Governor Jodi Rell and the legislature, who will have much to say about how much state funding makes it back to Cornwall.

COST is seeking relief from state mandates that demand, but do not pay for, compliance with often-counter-productive regulations. Cases in point:

(1) "Prevailing wage" laws, which make Cornwall pay union wages to contractors for non-union jobs that cost the town over \$100,000 (for repairs). Since the Obama administration plans to pay for infrastructure renovations, it makes little sense to local officials to raise the cost artificially.

(2) Burdensome requirements for certification and study by our local ambulance squad members. Cornwall is now the most highly qualified unit in the area, on call 24 hours a day to give "intermediate-level" care. But the state wants more: that local squads meet national standards requiring time and money for additional training. (See the letter from Joyce Hart in this issue.)

There's always someone in state government who is marching to a different drummer. The Connecticut Department of Transportation is considering a program that will require towns to measure the reflectivity of signs near, and directing traffic to, state roads. If the signs don't sparkle sufficiently, the state wants Cornwall to buy and put up shiny new ones.

And one last word from Town Hall: The fame of the solar Christmas tree in Cornwall Bridge has reached the West Coast. A California trade paper for solar energy has contacted the town for more information. It's been learned, too, that the only other solar Christmas tree was the one that thrilled tourists from all over the world right over the ice rink at Rockefeller Center.

—Lisa Lansing Simont

Class Time on the Slopes

Many factors distinguish Cornwall from other towns, among them stellar voter turnout, an intense communal interest in stone walls, and stoicism in the face of gnat onslaughts. Perhaps less well known is our ski culture. While not known as a ski town like Stowe or Aspen, Cornwall lays claim to its own small ski mountain and, as a result, has reared many generations of skiers.

Since 1952, the Cornwall Consolidated School has offered weekly ski lessons to its lucky K-8 students. In grades seven and eight, the students even get to leave school early on Fridays in the winter to ski. Because skiing is part of the credentialed physical education program, the instructor-led classes and lift tickets are offered to CCS students at no charge by Mohawk Mountain Ski Area, and the students get credit for hitting the slopes.

For high schoolers, Mohawk a few years

ago extended its generational reach by offering reduced rates on season passes to students from all Region One towns. Students who paid before September 30 this year shelled out \$109 for the season pass, about \$300 less than the average.

"It's a unique thing our kids have here in Cornwall that no one else has," says Carol Lugar, president of Mohawk Mountain.

In addition, the Cornwall Park and Recreation Commission runs the SkiDaddle program for Cornwall students in grades one, two, and three. For six consecutive Thursday afternoons, students in the program receive six free ski lessons. The parents are responsible for the ski equipment, but discounts are available from Mohawk and Cornwall Park & Rec.

"I don't know of another town in which younger students are able to learn to ski for free," says Bethany Thompson, director of Park & Rec.

By the time Cornwall students get to high school, their only competition on the ski team is against private schools.

Housatonic Valley Regional High School Alpine ski coaches Billy Gold and Jim Terrell (Cornwallians themselves) oversee a team of 18 in the slalom and giant slalom, including the following in the 672 exchange: Ben Ackerman, Ethan Naylor, siblings Jessica and Taylor Leslie, and Marcel Stonehill.

"Looking at the way we're skiing and the times they're showing on the course, I think we'll do OK this year," Billy said. "And they seem to be all having fun."

And isn't that the intended result? Josie Whitney, who was involved in the CCS ski program's inception in the 1950s and is a member of the Mohawk Ski Patrol today, said not to call Cornwall a ski town. It's more of a place where people grow up skiing.

"For many, it's something they enjoy doing."
—Julie Beglin

Sad? You May Have SAD!

Do you get depressed when winter closes in? According to researchers, there are people who become depressed in winter not because the weather is cold and unpleasant, which is what depresses me about winter in Cornwall, but because of the darkness and gloom. The condition is called Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD.

Be glad you don't live in Alaska. A quarter of the population is afflicted with at least mild SAD. Winters have more light in New England, but SAD is also well known here. One hundred and fifty years ago Emily Dickinson wrote, "There's a certain slant of light/ On winter afternoons/ That oppresses, like the weight/ Of cathedral tunes."

Different doctors treat SAD with exposure to bright light, melatonin, cognitive be-

havioral therapy, and antidepressants. In a recent discussion on the Cornwall Community Network, members saw light, melatonin (though you have to get the dosage right), and veggies as possible remedies. Well, veggies are always good for you.

A number of people in Cornwall report that they experience SAD. Could you be one of them? Well, cheer up. Spring is coming and the days are getting longer

—Hendon Chubb

Land Transfer

Beth Smith, Trustee of the Wendy J. Weigel Supplemental Benefits Trust, to CVA Everest, LLC, two parcels of land consisting of 28 acres and 10 acres on Furnace Brook Road for \$187,500.

The Day the River Blew Up

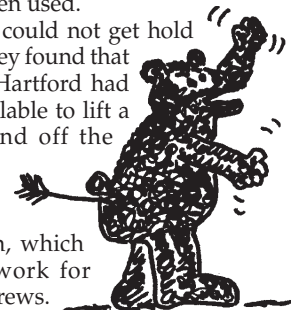
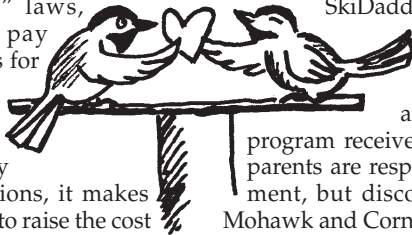
Forty-eight years ago this month, a massive ice jam threatened West Cornwall's covered bridge (built in 1864). At the time (1961) the bridge was owned jointly by the towns of Cornwall and Sharon. Two of the men involved were Second Selectman Ralph Scoville and Jack Preston, who shared their memories and photographs with this reporter.

The river was jammed with huge, jagged slabs of ice 18 inches thick, whose jostling and grinding against each other, as they pushed relentlessly downstream, made an ominous growl that could be heard for a good distance. The pressure had shouldered blocks up onto the shores and even onto Route 7 where it skirted the stream.

At first the ice began scraping against the bottom of the old bridge, which was a foot lower than it is now. Overnight, chunks started to pound against the north side, and by early morning they had built up several feet higher, while water poured across the road bed. Behind this barrier a torrent ran into West Cornwall, pouring over the nearest roads and demolishing the little bridge on Lower River Road. It gushed through cellars and even the lower floors of houses on the river bank.

The first selectman being out of town, Ralph took charge with Sharon's first selectman. They quickly concluded that if the bridge broke under the pressure, the ice-laden flood would wipe out everything downstream; and if it held, part of the village would be destroyed. Blasting appeared to be the only solution. There had been other times when ice pushed against a bridge, but dynamite had never been used.

The selectmen could not get hold of a supply, and they found that Civil Defense in Hartford had no helicopter available to lift a man safely on and off the icepack. At last they called in George Keith & Sons of Warren, which did demolition work for Cornwall's road crews.



The Keiths arrived with half a case of dynamite and a long rope.

Then young George, Jr., whom Jack calls "something of a daredevil," edged out over the heaving chunks of ice. The rope was tied around his waist for pulling him back to shore if necessary. After a struggle to force sticks of dynamite into the river bed through chinks between the slabs, he set off an explosion that sent a fountain of water high into the air. Cheers rose from the crowds gathered on the high ground.

"And then," Ralph remembers, "it was uncanny, just like stealth: the ice went down—the whole river emptied itself of ice."

"The water went down six feet like zip," Jack says, and it drained out of the flooded streets and houses until it was all over but the cleanup. Chunks of ice remained stranded on the banks for many days before a tractor could remove them.

The next selectmen's meeting received a bill for 75¢ from a homeowner for the phone call to Hartford.

There was no damage to the bridge, apart from a few loose boards. The state took it over a few years later, and in 1970 a slab of steel was laid under the deck from bank to bank to stabilize the structure. Dynamite has never since been used on an ice jam on the river.
—Ann Schillinger

Mus Musculus and Family

It is the habit of mice to seek warm winter quarters—there can't be anyone in Cornwall who is unaware of that. Traps, poisons, and sometimes cats help keep these uninvited guests under control; at times nothing seems to work.

Wikipedia claims that the "remarkable adaptability" of mice and their "ability to live...with humans, [makes them] the second most successful mammalian genus living on Earth today, after humans." And the humans are just holding on to the lead.

It was a year in which we were between cats when a small village of mice wintered over in our house. They turned up everywhere. A basket of clean laundry left upstairs for two days became a baby nursery; the backs of closets were storage for stolen goods.

The most brazen and ingenious heist the mice pulled that winter was in the cellar. I had stored rice in a monster coffee can—metal to repel the mice, of course—and covered it with a tight plastic snap-on cover.

It wasn't long before grains of rice began appearing upstairs—under the cushions on the couch, behind the books on a shelf, and, of course, in the laundry basket, probably to sustain the mothers in the maternity ward.

The mice had made a hole the size of a



Letters to the Chronicle

A PERSISTENT PILEATED

I have the blessing of having a pair of pileated woodpeckers at my place. Their beauty and funny calls are a joy to behold and listen to. However, this past week presented quite a predicament.

My pileated decided to practice his productivity on a standing dead hemlock tree next to my truck and power lines. At first I marveled at the pace of his prodigious performance. A professional practitioner of wood chipping he is. Two days later I realized the need to preclude the pileated from performing his production on my hemlock, as he rendered it unstable and precarious to the safety of my truck and power lines and dwelling. I was perplexed!

All is well that ends well. My friend and professional feller of trees, Skip, came to my rescue and with precision, placed the hemlock expertly out of the way. The pileated came back to the log and trunk pecking with pride. I can rest easy knowing I am safe and the pileated's purpose has been pacified.
—Zejke Hermann

CVFD UPDATE

As the new year begins, your volunteer fire department remains strong and generously supported. In the last year the Rescue Squad has added six new MRTs and three new EMTs. Members Jim Whiteside and Zachary Sawicki are going on to the Paramedic level. 2008 was one of the busiest years for the Rescue Squad responding to 197 calls which included medical and psychiatric emergencies, fallen skiers, and in conjunction with the firemen, motor vehicle accidents, trail and river rescues and fire call support. In addition to these, the firemen have responded to chimney and structure fires, CO alarms, and activated fire alarms.

The department has challenges to be met, including the recruitment of firemen and EMS personnel—ladies take note. Cornwall is fortunate in this regard. Our strong Junior Department feeds into our department membership as juniors grow up and become EMS personnel and fire fighters. Other challenges are the ever-changing and additional state mandates seeking

quarter in the plastic lid of the coffee can and removed every single grain. Since the can was at least ten inches high and slippery sided, how did the mice get the last bits of rice out? Standing on each other's shoulders, rappelling somehow?

We also discovered that the mice had used the lining of the oven walls as a lavatory. The smell by the time spring came made our eyes water. They got inside the top drawer of a kitchen cabinet and buried dried cat food under a pile of rubber bands in a bowl. But we didn't have a cat. Perhaps the current mice had found a stash stolen years before by an earlier genera-

our compliance. It seems the state is never satisfied and is oblivious to the costs of unfunded mandates. There is a limit to how many hours a volunteer can give as additional training and additional recertification hours are required. Rescue Captain Skip Kosciusko is working with legislators on these issues.

The fire department deeply appreciates the community support it has received. Thanks to the hard work of the department Truck Committee, we are looking forward to the delivery of a new fire truck this spring. Look for it next Memorial Day Parade.
—Joyce Hart, President
Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department

TIME TO ORGANIZE

Anyone who has spent any time in West Cornwall over the past few years has seen the fast cars hurtling through the bridge and roaring uphill out of the village despite the fact that they're traveling in a 20-mph zone. Finally, a move is afoot on the part of both elected officials and community groups to find a solution to this chronic problem.

In an effort to show solidarity with those efforts, we, the dogs of West Cornwall, have banded together to form a local chapter of CRASS: Canines Rallying Against Senseless Speeding. (This is not to be confused with the Massachusetts-based group DARK, Dogs Against Road Kill.) Our first event will be a 12-mile trot to the Canaan Barracks, where we will stage a bark-in until our concerns are addressed. Date and time to be announced.

Our Steering Committee consists of locals Emma Ackerman, Jet Whiteford, Ruby Heiny, Bill Chiles, Barney Bigelow, Chelsea Barrett, P. W. Kavanagh, Otis Trudeau, and Henry Xatzis. The Refreshments Committee is headed up by the Sawicki girls: Daisy, Lucy, and Ruby. Rocco Costello is our Sergeant-at-Arms.

Our work is dedicated to the memory of three veterans who survived the dangers of the local streets for years before succumbing to the infirmities of age: Rip Nickeson, Dusty Sawicki, and Pluto Dzenutis.

Please support us by tapping your brakes when you see one of us out and about!

—Kenny Bachman
West Cornwall



How To Be a *Chronicle* Editor

Each day brings another dire report of the death of book publishing or print journalism or indeed any written communication but text messaging. The *Chronicle*, however, soldiers on with a high heart, maintaining circulation and standards, hoping for new editors (and writers) to meet the demand.

How to be a *Chronicle* editor? Begin with a pleasantly snoopy interest in Cornwall and all its activities. Curiosity tops the list of qualities that make a good editor. What Cornwall phenomena have you been wanting to know more about? They'd probably make a good story. Common sense is another useful quality: you probably know where to find information. As for technology, familiarity with Word software and E-mail helps, but you can manage without it if you have a computer-competent co-editor.

How much time does it take? Some forethought and a few intense short spurts. Let's say you're co-editing the October issue. During the summer, you're keeping eyes and ears open; this is the editorial snooping that generates feature articles. In late August, you and your October co-editor have a planning session with the managing editor, Tom Bechtle, and a member of the *Chronicle* Board. This quartet brainstorms, weighs feature suggestions, and decides what story to assign to what writer. Diligent editorial telephoning follows; writers accept or regret; old stories become obsolete and new stories materialize. After copy comes in on September 15, the co-editors have about a week in which to prune it or ask writers to extend it before it all goes to Tom and then to the typesetter and finally to the printer.

Much of the space in each month's *Chronicle* is occupied by the calendar on page

Our Last Teenage Year

With this issue, the *Cornwall Chronicle* greets its 19th year of publication. It's not a big deal with a zero after its name, but still a nice birthday present from our readers wouldn't be amiss.

The paper is produced by volunteers, including the people who submit news for this back page you're reading now. We love to hear from anyone with an event or something to announce. Mail, E-mail, or call the editor for March named over to the right with your news. We're counting on you!

one, which is managed by Anne Baren, and the Events & Announcements on page four, which are submitted by various town organizations and formatted in *Chronicle* style by the co-editors. Each month's illustrations are commissioned by the board; co-editors can concentrate on text.

And then, on the first of the month, your *Chronicle* hits the stands.

O rapture! (Is this how Rupert Murdoch feels every day?)

To be a *Chronicle* editor, do you have to be an experienced journalist? No.

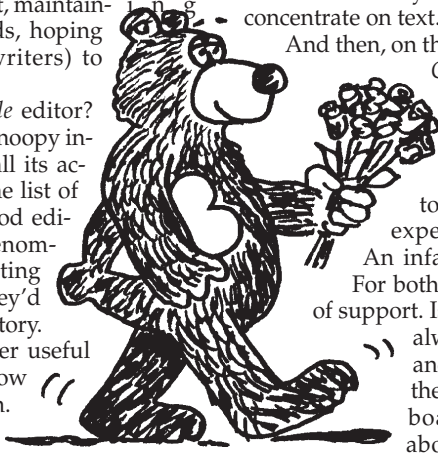
An infallible grammarian? No.

For both functions, there's plenty of support. Is it lonely work? No! You

always have your co-editor, and you can always turn to the managing editor and the board. If you're not sure about being an editor, can

you try it as a trainee? Yes. Is it fun? Is it instructive? Is it a way to get to know Cornwall better? Yes, yes, and yes. Call John Miller at 672-6493 if you'd like to give it a try.

—Franny Taliaferro



Events & Announcements

The U.S. Census Bureau will be testing prospects interested in becoming census takers on February 3 at the Library between 10 A.M. and 5 P.M. Keep an eye peeled for posters and more information in local newspapers.

Cornwall Community Contra Dance takes the floor at the Town Hall on Saturday, February 7, from 7 to 9:30 P.M. Bill Fischer will call, and Still the Homegrown Band will play. Suggested admission: \$5 for adults and \$3 for kids. For more information call Rachel Gall at 672-6328 or Jane Prentice at 672-6101.

On Saturday, February 14, the Homegrown Band will be back at the Town Hall for a Sweethearts Dance, a free evening of waltzing between 7:30 and 10 P.M. Rachel and Jane have information about this dance, too.

To see photos of past dances, visit www.motherhouse.us/contradances.htm.

Honey Bee Mine, an Old Style Life Skills Series Workshop, will examine life in the hive, learn about tools, and dip beeswax candles on Saturday, February 14, from 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. at the Town Hall. \$35 per family. Call 672-0229 to register or visit Debra@motherhouse.us.

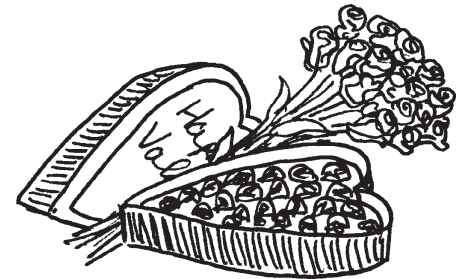
Movie Night returns to the Library for a Valentine's Day showing of *Laura*, with Gene Tierney and Dana Andrews. The evening starts at 7:30 P.M., February 14, with desserts followed by the film. Admission: \$10 per person and \$15 per couple.

Art in Cornwall: At the Cornwall Library, *Make Art Not War*, a group exhibition of anti-war works by area artists sponsored by the Cornwall Iraq Moratorium Network, will continue through February.

Photographers Choice will continue at Northern Exposure Gallery through February 15, and then the gallery will close for a winter break until April.

New IRS Rules for small non-profits may affect local organizations. Once protected from filing the information form 990 by small budgets, now all 501(c)3 organizations (churches excepted) must file the easy 990N form on the www.irs.gov site. It can be filled out online. A 39-page set of instructions will tell you all you need to know.

Arsenic and Old Lace will be presented as a staged radio play by the Town Hall Players on Friday and Saturday, February 20 and 21, at 8 P.M. and on Sunday, February 22, at 3 P.M. The performances will be staged at the Town Hall, whose cold metal chairs have been newly outfitted with warm, soft cushions. Admission is \$10. Call 672-6762 for more information.



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FEBRUARY ISSUE

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