



CORNWALL CHRONICLE

VOLUME 6 : NUMBER 2 MARCH 1996



911 Stays Home

If you have lived in a big city, you know one of the best things about a small town is living and dealing with people you know. There are cheerful greetings on all sides, and a real neighborly will to make things better for everyone.

Perhaps the most important manifestation of this is the response to a 911 ambulance call. In a city, a nameless, unknown person arrives with little interest in who you are or what your problem is. But here in Cornwall, when one calls 911, a good friend arrives in the shortest imaginable time, and immediately sets to work to make things right. How welcome is that familiar face and that obvious desire to help!

There was a movement afoot to change all this, to dissolve the local teams and substitute a national ambulance franchise. Gone would have been the familiar face and gone, too, the free trip to the hospital. In its place would be some uniformed paramedic working for American Medical Response whose charge would come to several hundred dollars.

But thanks to effective lobbying by our representatives in the state legislature and by both First Selectman Gordon Ridgway and Selectman Earl Brecher, this nightmarish idea was stopped dead in its tracks. The new bill will have no mention in it of substituting

outside paramedics for our own home-grown team. Our elected officials really watched out for our interests on this one.

—John Zinsser

Rumsey Sale—and Much More

Rumsey Hall, the imposing Greek Revival building that came within a dozen votes of becoming a \$2 million town hall, will be sold if voters approve a proposal to be presented at a March 30 town meeting (7:30 P.M. at CCS).

The selectmen have one firm offer (reportedly \$150,000 for Rumsey and the gym), have other expressions of interest, and have asked for all bids to be in by March 7. The board will release details on the bids by mid-March, choose the best one, and present it for approval at the March 30 meeting. The firm offer is from Bridgeport's Drew Hingson, who said in a letter to his realtor: "It would be my intent to renovate Rumsey as my personal residence...to celebrate Rumsey's existing exterior with the sole exception of eliminating the unsightly fire escape and possibly developing a rear porch that complements the neoclassical facade..."

The sale could run into some opposition. Most residents undoubtedly count Rumsey as a liability for the town, but some see the gym and land as valuable assets.

The second main item on the agenda is a

proposal to buy from Marcia Shaw half an acre of land for \$13,000. The selectmen want the land to allow for future expansion of the town office or library on their existing sites. Although this seems a small cost to keep the option open, the idea could also meet some resistance in view of the facts that: 1) in December, voters overwhelmingly rejected this purchase and an expansion of the present town office; and 2) the library's position was that a bump-out of its existing space was a poor choice.

When asked about expansion plans, First Selectman Gordon Ridgway said, "I don't think this board will offer any new plans for town office expansion in the next year or so." The selectmen have \$50,000 in the '96-97 budget for repairs to the current town office and feel that this will keep the office workable for the time being. Gordon said that his personal preference for a long-term solution was for the library to move to a Marvelwood building (with a substantial town buy-out to help finance it), thus freeing up the library building for town office use. This idea has been informally presented to the library, and in their early discussions some library trustees have been open to the possibility while others are reluctant to move from the building they have always occupied and are wary of tackling a major renovation at Marvelwood.

A related development is a new proposal

(continued on page 2)

MARCH 1996

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|---|
|  | <i>Note: Deadline for April Events & Announcements and Calendar listings is March 15.</i> |  |  | | 1 March Art Show Nat'l Iron Bank Cornwall Bridge, Don Bracken Stretch and Bend Exercise Class for Seniors UCC 11:15 A.M.-12:15 P.M. (p.4) | 2 |
| 3 | 4 Video on Learning Disabilities 7:30 P.M. CCS (p.4)  Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall | 5 Repub. Presidential Preference Primary 6 A.M.-8 P.M. Town Hall Agric. Adv. Comm. 7:30 P.M. W.C. Firehouse Park & Rec 7:30 P.M. Town Office Inland Wetlands 7:30 P.M. Town Hall | 6 W. Cornwall Merchants Assoc. 10 A.M. Cadwell's Dem. Town Comm. 7:30 P.M. Town Hall | 7 | 8 Stretch and Bend UCC 11:15 A.M.-12:15 P.M. | 9 Cornwall Assoc. 4 P.M. Town Hall |
| 10 Improvisation Workshop 4-6 P.M. Cornubia Hall (p.4) Poetry Reading 8 P.M. Cadwell's | 11 Open House Week CCS 3/11-3/15 (p.4) Art Show 3/11-4/13 Library Francis Cook P&Z 7:30 P.M. Town Hall | 12 Open House Week CCS Girl Scout Food Drive (p.4) Chess Club CCS 6:30 P.M. (p.4) Rep. Town Comm. 7:30 P.M. CCS Housatonic River Comm. 7:30 P.M. CCS Library | 13 Open House Week CCS CCS PTA 7 P.M. CCS Library | 14 Open House Week CCS Bd of Ed Presents Budget to Bd of Finance 7:30 P.M. CCS Library | 15 Open House Week CCS Stretch and Bend UCC 11:15 A.M.-12:15 P.M. | 16 |
| 17 Improvisation Workshop 4-6 P.M. Cornubia Hall | 18 HVRHS Board of Ed. 7 P.M. HVRHS  Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall | 19 | 20 | 21 Bd. of Education 5 P.M. CCS Library Bd. of Finance 7:30 P.M. CCS Library | 22 Stretch and Bend UCC 11:15 A.M.-12:15 P.M. | 23 |
| 24 Improvisation Workshop 4-6 P.M. Cornubia Hall | 25 ZBA 7:30 P.M. Town Hall* | 26 | 27 Positive Discipline Workshop HVRHS Auditorium 7-9 P.M. (For information and reservations call 824-4720) | 28 | 29 Referendum on HVRHS Capital Improvement Bond Issue 12-8 P.M. Town Hall | 30 Town Meeting 7:30 P.M. CCS (see above) |
| 31 Improvisation Workshop 4-6 P.M. Cornubia Hall | | | | | | |

*Check time and place at Town Office

(continued from page 1)

to the selectmen from the Cornwall Limited Liability Corporation which would like to see the town consider the Marvelwood classroom/library building for offices or for our library. (See letter from Rick Wolkowitz.) The space, 6,000 square feet, may be a better match for town's needs than the dining hall; and the price tag, \$195,000 plus \$225,000-\$250,000 for renovations (CLLC's estimate), is more affordable, with tennis and a basketball court included. This would presumably have support among voters who were for the dining hall purchase, but the selectmen, though they raised few specific objections to the plan at their February 20 meeting, all said that it was much too early to go back to the town with another Marvelwood purchase.

At the moment, Cornwall seems no closer to matching up buildings, space needs, and agendas than it was in 1987, when the town gratefully accepted the gift of Rumsey Hall from the Wise family. —Ed Ferman



Our Town

Anyone who lives or weekends in Cornwall has constructed a mental picture of who lives here, what our town profile looks like, and how it compares to other places.

Yet there are many questions we ask ourselves when paying taxes, voting on the town budgets, or debating needs for better roads or more civic spaces, and, in the absence of reliable information, our individual views have almost certainly been too optimistic or pessimistic.

Now along comes our Flat Rocks Road neighbor, David Grossman. Thanks to his energy and expertise, we have a wealth of factual answers to a bunch of knotty problems. We owe him a big debt of gratitude for bringing our over-all picture into sharper focus. Grossman, who is an advisor on the problems of cities, has written a 24-page report, *Cornwall in Context*. It is full of fascinating detail about all of us and where we fit in, particularly how we stack up among the nine towns in the Northwest Corner.

For starters, he tells us that in 1994 there were 1,455 permanent residents. It also seems that 400 or more weekend or summer people come here, so we are around 1850 to 1900 souls in all, four out of five being full-time residents.

For those who have always thought Cornwall a solidly middle-class place, how's this: "Cornwall is a town that exhibits extremes in wealth and poverty. On average,

per capita incomes and property values place Cornwall among the very wealthiest municipalities in the State of Connecticut, itself the wealthiest state in the nation, measured by per capita income. At the same time...most of Cornwall's households have incomes well below the town's high average, and a substantial number are poor or in economically difficult circumstances." We place third among the Northwest Corner towns in income and first in Grand List values (in part because the Marvelwood School property is now back on the tax rolls). The hard numbers in Grossman's tables and charts demonstrate the true facts of our situation.

- Taxes: In Connecticut, local property taxes account for more than all the sales and income taxes combined. Property taxes are, of course, flat taxes which hit all income levels at the same rate. Our Cornwall mill rate is the third lowest in the Northwest Corner, but with average annual tax payments of \$1,888 per person we pay the second highest taxes per capita in the Corner. (The total is close to \$2.9 million each year.) These statistics raise serious questions for the selectmen and Board of Finance, such as how to find ways to make property taxes less regressive and burdensome for the substantial number of low-income households in town.

- Costs of Government: Where do our taxes go? About 58 percent go to education, the single largest piece of the town budget. But note: we not only get good value based on statewide tests, but Cornwall's school costs per capita rank fourth in the Corner; and this despite some real disadvantages under state aid-to-education formulas for a "wealthy" town like Cornwall. The total budget, including the General Municipal Budget which covers most town expenses except debt service and transfers, has increased less than 14 percent in the last five years, a bit under the general rate of inflation. You can't say we don't control costs here.

- Debt and Reserves: The town has done a lot of borrowing—"by far the highest level of outstanding debt and debt service per capita of the nine towns in the Northwest Corner"—some \$1,970 per resident. But wait: at the end of 1995, offsetting a big part of the debt was almost \$880,500 in town reserves of all kinds, including a very adequate General Fund and school bond reserves of about \$481,200, including interest already earned.

So we ain't broke; in fact we have a substantial cushion to work with.

—Hector Prud'homme

Copies of Grossman's report are available for reading at the Town Office, or may be borrowed from the Library.

Turkeys, Turkeys Everywhere

If Benjamin Franklin had his way, our national symbol today would be the wild turkey instead of that bird of "bad moral character," the bald eagle. Symbol or not, how lucky for us that this "noble bird" was reintroduced to Connecticut in 1975 after 150 years. It comes as no surprise that our Northwest Corner has the highest turkey popula-

tion in Connecticut, and this year there is a three-week hunting season in May.

Turkeys usually range several square miles in a day searching for food. The flock eating the silage at the Scoville farm on Town Street passes by Madeleine Lape's feeders en route to the Cream Hill fields. We who live on the south side of Tarradiddle Mountain share another family with the Whitneys on River Road. Josie calls two mature gobblers that we have been feeding "the boys."

For much of the year gobblers travel separately but come spring they join their flock of hens and young males (called "jakes") and begin their courtship display. What a magnificent sight it is to see a mature gobbler with his large tail spread in a fan like a peacock, his breast outthrust, head drawn back, wingtips dragging, displaying for his hens. Breeding season begins in March and April. The hens make a shallow depression in the ground not far from an open field where insects will be plentiful. The gobbler announces his presence by calling to the hens from a tree (that mellow vibrato gobble!) and displaying and strutting on the ground. After mating, the hens lay an egg a day for eight to twenty days. The birds hatch in 28 days and after two weeks are able to fly for short distances. Not all chicks survive, of course. Those that do, remain with the mother through the following winter, foraging for food during the day and roosting in trees at night.

This winter, because of the scarcity of acorns, their preferred food, turkeys have become a more familiar sight around our bird feeders. These birds will acclimate readily to humans if fed throughout the year. Howard Kilpatrick, Department of Environmental Protection "turkey biologist," sees no harm in the casual feeding of turkeys. Still, it is in our interest and the turkeys' to see that these majestic birds remain "wild."

—Carla Bigelow



Welcome

Francesca Lilly Ott to Susan and David Ott

Jenna Marie Vanicky to
Debbie and Jim Vanicky

Good-bye to Friends

Viola D. Brown

Joseph S. Cahill

Robert J. Graham

Congratulations

Montgomery Hare to Alida White

Land Transfers

Robert P. and Joyce A. Hughey to Scott D. and Silvana Simko, house and 5.8 acres on Pritchard Road for \$165,000.

CCS Winners

The National Geography Bee began on January 5 with competitions in grades six, seven and eight. The winner of the Cornwall Geography Bee is Chris Barrett, with Winfield Wilson as runner-up. Chris will go on to compete in the Connecticut Geography Bee in March.

For the fourth year in a row, CCS has *Scholastic Art Awards* winners: Winfield Wilson, second place, and Jason Lynn, third place. Congratulations! —William M. Oros

Sizing Up The Budget

If Ebenezer Scrooge had attended the February meeting of the Board of Finance (BOF), he would probably have approved of a drop in the operating budget proposed by First Selectman Gordon Ridgway: \$12,784, or one percent. The shrinkage was accomplished despite a budgeted salary increase of 2.75 percent for the selectmen (whose compensation is moderate by comparison with others in the Northwest Corner). Also up were expenses for tax collection (new computers) and elections, with a Republican presidential preference primary scheduled for March 5.

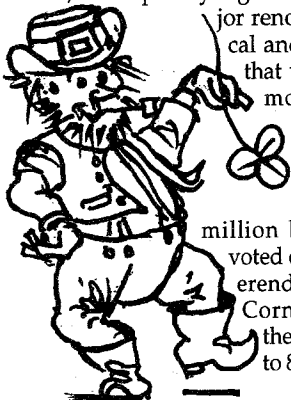
Most helpful, however, was a significant drop in Fire Department outlays, from \$75,000 in last year's budget to \$64,216. Another reduction, a cut of \$1,000 for Planning & Zoning "consultations," drew a question from BOF member Hendon Chubb. He pointed out that a revised town plan is due soon from P&Z. Wouldn't consideration of that matter require more rather than less expert consultation? Ridgway indicated that once the planning process got under way there would be enough money for consultants.

Scrooge, shifting his gaze from the operating budget, would have noted an increase in the capital budget of \$179,345 (54 percent). His reaction to that would have been predictable. Still, to the BOF, items accounting for most of the difference appeared to be needed: bridge construction on Cream Hill Road (\$75,000); a new highway truck (\$65,000), repairs and renovations of the town office (\$50,000).

The BOF must still look further at the budget, with the emphasis now on the Board of Education's planned outlays. Those numbers may be influenced by estimated regional high school budget increases of eight to nine percent. But those estimates could, in turn, be shaped by high school plans for major renovations of electrical and heating systems that would also accommodate more computer equipment.

These improvements would be financed by a \$1.4 million bond issue to be voted on in a regional referendum on March 29: Cornwall will vote at the Town Hall from 12 to 8 P.M.

—Charles Osborne



Letters to the Chronicle

A RESCUE AND THE FUTURE

On January 16, my husband Dan Gracey was seriously injured in a logging accident on White Memorial property in Morris. The Morris Volunteer Fire Department brought Dan out of the woods to a Lifestar helicopter. The Litchfield Fire Department helped the helicopter land at White Flower Farm.

My family and I would like to express our deep appreciation to the volunteers who gave unselfishly of their time and who provided an important and essential service to our communities. We would also like to thank our Cornwall friends and neighbors whose outpouring of support and prayers has been a tremendous source of comfort.

Dan was taken to Hartford Hospital where he is in stable condition in the Neurosurgical Intensive Care Unit. He is recovering slowly from his head injuries, but his back injury will almost certainly leave Dan without the use of his legs. We face a long period of recovery and rehabilitation, and the Dan Gracey Fund has been established at the National Iron Bank to help in that effort. Donations can be sent to: The Dan Gracey Fund, c/o The National Iron Bank, P.O. Box 87, Cornwall Bridge, CT 06754.

—Caitlin L. Gracey

HURRAH FOR THE CHRONICLE!

The February issue of the Chronicle is one of the best to my mind. Every article tells me things I did not know. Earl Brecher told us all things we should know about our town crew. I haven't ridden in a snowplow since the days of Bill Blake who was the only one able to clear our road before it was a hardtop. Of course I remember days before any roads were plowed, and I believe even state roads were not plowed until 1930.

I am proud again of our school. As an ex-Granger I am glad that the sale of the Grange Hall benefits Cornwall. I think that might be emphasized in the publicity for the Cornwall Fair next summer. I was glad to know how funds left by such good men as Sydney Kaye are being used.

Thanks to you all. How did we ever live without the Chronicle? I read it over and over and wonder who is who and where and what. The slide show of Okefenokee Swamp? Is that in Florida? Where Paul Chamberlain lives?

—Harriet L. Clark

WHAT ELSE?

On Sunday, January 28, the morning after the very heavy rainfall, I was driving down Lake Road to the junction with Route 43. As I turned the corner out of the woods I saw that the Hollenbeck had flooded and that the road was under water. Just then a large, tawny animal with a small head, long body, and a long tail cantered across the road and disappeared into the brush.

I saw it for only a few seconds, but it was no lynx, bobcat, coyote, wolf, or moose. It must have been a mountain lion—alias a cougar.

—Julia Scott

NEW TOWN OFFICE/LIBRARY PLAN

We want to thank the Chronicle for its informative coverage of the town office issue last fall. The people have spoken regarding the two plans presented by the selectmen.

Unfortunately, the outcome did not solve the space problem. Maybe we need a broader public discussion about the goals and future of town offices, community space, and the growth of the library in order to reach a consensus.



Having a town-wide discussion is all the more important because we will soon be facing a vote on the sale of the Rumsey property. Without an adequate plan in sight it will be hard to make intelligent decisions. But will one public meeting on the sale of Rumsey address the larger questions?

One possibility may be Marvelwood's classroom/library—a one-story masonry building which could be a far more economical answer either for town offices or for the library.

I have sent the selectmen a simple architectural plan for its re-use as offices and meeting hall. With a minimum of alterations it can provide all the required spaces for a little more than half the cost of December's dining hall option, and free up the existing offices for use by the library. The air-conditioned meeting hall would be large enough to function as a multipurpose space, and the town would gain tennis courts and a basketball court.

Alternatively, the library could use the building, giving up its existing space for town offices. The Marvelwood library wing is by itself three times the size of the existing Cornwall Library.

The sale of Rumsey could pay for a substantial part of the project either way. Ben Gray and I have been trying to do something positive for Cornwall and will continue to do so while the opportunity still exists. We hope the community can reach common ground in assessing its present and future needs. If the classroom/library building can be part of the solution, we will make it work.

—Rick Wolkowicz

HOW TO GREET A BEAR

If the Wilde Bestes are indeed amongst us (see January and February issues of the Chronicle) and wolves in the area are the real McCoy, not coyotes or coy dogs, if bears are shuffling about and the cougars are in the bush, this is indeed exciting news.

However, can your readers, especially those of us working in deserted hinterlands and in the woods, be assured about the friendliness (or non-friendliness) of these beautiful animals? What if you meet one nez-à-nez? What's the best greeting? Is it, perhaps, "Hi! Pardon me while I climb a tree"?

—Lydia H. Wolf

What's in a Name?

Is a delicatessen section with tables and chairs a "restaurant"? Or is it simply a "deli-with-tables-and-chairs"? That's the question P&Z asked itself and Yutzler Store co-owner Russ Sawicki at the commission's February 13 meeting. If it's the latter, the commission can act on Russ's entire permit application without public hearing; if the former, it can't. The commission decided to take the safe course and hold a hearing as soon as legally possible so as not to leave the applicant hanging.

A similar question of distinction came up with regard to the Berkshire Country Store—but with a twist: the Dethiers have already installed booths, tables, and chairs without benefit of permit authorization. A bit of heat was generated on this one when commission member Ken Keskinen expressed "concern" over the apparent disregard of carefully wrought P&Z regulations and the explicit prohibition of chairs and tables written into the Dethiers' original permit. Walter Dethier took exception to this implied reprimand. Chairman Bill Lyon wisely cut the discussion short when Walter agreed to file a second permit application which, if approved, would allow his customers to sit down legally. A public hearing on the matter, after the anticipated application is filed, will be the proper forum to air differences and allow townspeople to have their say as well. Uneasy rests the burden of upholding the town's authority to control land usage.

—Scoville Soulé

Events & Announcements

Open House Week at CCS: Our school is a source of great pride to the entire community. This year our annual Open House will take place March 11 through 15. Please come and see how our future leaders spend their time at CCS.

Classroom visits are scheduled on Tuesday and Thursday from 9 A.M. to 12 noon and on Wednesday from 1 to 3 P.M. School tours will be given during those times, as well as on Friday from 1 to 3 P.M. and during evening activities.

- Activities include:
- Monday, 1:20 P.M. Puppet show for grades three, four, and five, sponsored by the Cornwall Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council.
 - Monday, 6:45 P.M. Tai Chi demonstration.
 - Tuesday, 6:45 P.M. "Choices Sampler"—arts and crafts, chess club, and other after-school programs.
 - Wednesday, 7 P.M. PTA meeting. Open to all.
 - Thursday, 7 P.M. Video, *Learning Disabilities and Social Skills*, followed by a discussion.

Applications Available: Applications for the Woman's Society Scholarship for a Cornwall senior graduating from a public or private high school can be obtained from the HVRHS Guidance Office or from Thalia Scoville. The deadline for returning the applications is May 1.

Appealing Assessments: The Board of Assessment Appeals will be meeting in March. Taxpayers who have filed appeals will be receiving notices in early March of the day and time of their hearing. If you filed and by chance did not receive a notice, call Phyllis Wojan at 672-6141.

Chess Club: As one of the choices at the CCS Open House Week, the Chess Club will seek students and others interested in playing the game. The club will meet on Tuesday, March 12, at 6:30 P.M. at CCS for those who want to learn the game or improve their skills. The club hopes this will lead to an intergenerational chess club in Cornwall. All levels of play are welcome, including absolute beginners.

The club has some chess sets, but you can bring your own. For more information call Scott Cady at 672-0143.

Stretch and Bend: An exercise class for seniors will be held on the first four Friday mornings in March, 11:15 to 12:15, sponsored by Park & Rec. Please call Ruthellen Griffin to register (672-0109) or just attend.

A Video on Learning Disabilities will be shown on March 4 and March 14 at CCS. For more information see *Open House Week at CCS* at left.



Donations Wanted: National Iron Bank in Cornwall Bridge is collecting non-perishable food and household items for the Cornwall Food Closet, a walk-in style pantry located in the Cornwall Town Office. People are welcome to help themselves according to their family's need, at no charge, and no questions asked. Donations, which always taper off after the holidays, are especially important now.

Moving: Around March 15, West Cornwall's Wish House will be moving up the street to the yellow building across from the post office. A new feature of the shop will be a porch area which will serve as another sales room during the summer.

A Memorial Service for Arthur Getz will be held on Sunday, March 3, at 1 P.M. in Cornubia Hall. For more information call 364-0717.

The Cornwall Girl Scouts will sponsor a food drive on Tuesday, March 12, for Owl's Kitchen (which serves over 70 families in our area). The collection will take place at CCS. Please everyone (especially you former Girl Scouts) bring non-perishable items to the school on that day. Questions? Call Tricia Collins at 672-6437.

Movement Workshop: Ellen Berland will lead four intergenerational improvisational workshops at Cornubia Hall. The two-hour sessions will meet on Sundays, March 10, 17, 24, and 31 from 4 to 6 P.M. Dance experience not required. Co-ed. Minimum age 15. Free. For information call 868-0025.



C@AOL.COM

Yes! The *Chronicle* is now wired, so all you cyberjockeys make note of our E-Mail address in the headline and flash us something the next time you go on line. If you don't know what we're talking about, well, we're still partial to letters written by quill pen on vellum, especially when accompanied by a contribution. So stay in touch, anyway you choose.

Yes, I want the *Chronicle* to continue.
 Here is my tax-deductible contribution of: \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

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Mail the *Chronicle* to the out-of-town address above: \$10.

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