Back in the News: Rumsey Hall

Just when we had pretty much put unhappy thoughts of a rotting Rumsey Hall on our collective backburner, that sad, crumbling landmark is of a rotting Rumsey Hall on our collective

At the time of the purchase it was understood that Hingson would move into the gym building to the rear of the property while renovating Rumsey. He moved into the gym, but that was it, and Rumsey has continued to deteriorate.

When Hingson purchased the property he was a builder-developer with offices in Bridgeport, which, it was thought at the time, made him an ideal person to bring Rumsey back to its glory days. But nothing was done, and several years later Hingson went to work for a local real estate company.

When asked about the current situation, Hingson told the Chronicle that he had gone through a difficult financial period and that things had recently changed for the better. He said his lawyer had a sizable escrow account and was hoping to negotiate buying back the property from the mortgage holder. If successful, Hingson said, he would begin renovating Rumsey this summer.

The Chronicle also contacted Cindi Latourneau, a Litchfield realtor representing the bank, who said Mr. Hingson must be gone by April 1, when she said the locks would be changed. Latourneau said determining a price and then listing the property would have to wait until April when she can inspect the building. She also said she was going to look at Rumsey several weeks ago but thought better of it. “It didn’t look safe,” she said. The realtor also said she plans to “saturate the New York market” for prospective fixer-uppers.

Meanwhile, First Selectman Gordon Ridgway confirmed that he told Hingson some weeks ago that a party was interested in tearing down Rumsey to make way for an affordable house. Hingson, he said, rejected the idea. Ridgway also said there remain people interested in tearing down Rumsey and others in fixing it up.

Well, I hope you readers now have a somewhat better understanding of the current Rumsey situation. I think I do, but I’m not sure.

—John Miller

Feels Like Havens

There are about 100 or so people in town who take their car out every morning and drive to Baird’s or the Berkshire Country Store to get an item that they need just as much as milk and bread. They buy The New York Times because they “expect the world” from its pages, where the Duchess of Cornwall (the former Camilla Parker-Bowles) is mentioned more often than the town of Cornwall.

Most of them don’t care to be in the news. Or, for that matter, being the news. That’s why it hit members of the Cornwall Community Network Internet discussion group so vividly in early February when they saw a long, 1,500-word story in the Times under the headline “On the Housatonic, a Destination for Anglers and Skiers.” The article had been published in the “Escapes” section, where the paper trumpets its findings with headlines such as “Havens.” Cornwall had made the cut because it is “very rural and quaint,” shows a “charitable spirit,” and had scored high on another scale: “Cornwall is not so flashy. It’s definitely a lower-key spot.”

Praise like that has some people worried. The fear of being discovered and overrun by city folks, after millions of gazing eyes have detected the secret of their lives, can be daunting. So one member of the Internet chat group devised a strategy to produce the

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equivalent of a “Dangerous Dog on Duty” warning sign; a letter to the editor. Seven days later the paper published this note from a woman named Susan Rothchild of Miami Beach, a friend of Cornwall resident Victoria Montifiore, who only recently had discovered the attractiveness of Cornwall for herself: “I am perplexed by your positive portrayal of Cornwall, Conn. We visited friends there last summer; the bugs were ferocious, and shortly after we left our host came down with Lyme disease. They can’t plant very much because the deer eat everything, and they are overrun by beavers. They faced terrible problems with local boards over building their house and putting in a driveway, and they must drive miles to the nearest drugstore. What’s the upside?”

It was probably hard for a normal New York Times reader unfamiliar with the humorous undertones of Cornwall and its true aficionados to detect the irony. Which made Victoria Montifiore a bit remorseful when she confessed to her fellow Network members that she had been behind the prank: “I hope no one was offended, or considered it mean-spirited,” she wrote, “It was really meant as a salvo against the press and the real estate market, not lovely Cornwall.”

The press, i.e., “the gray lady,” has moved on—to other escapes, which she discovers constantly by the bucketful. New Preston (“where well-to-do New Yorkers go to hide”) had been given the same treatment in July. Roxbury (“best defined by an ethos of conservation”) had been undressed on the same page in October. A year ago, even New Milford had been given “Havens” status. Which should make concerned Cornwall residents sleep well again. Somebody who falls for New Milford will never even travel up this far. —Jürgen Kalsow

CVFD Juniors

This is a story to catch our readers up on a wonderful human asset to our town: the young boys and girls who make up the junior corps of the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department. Initially, some of the kids heard about several junior fire squads in nearby towns and lobbied First Selectman Gordon Ridgway to start one in Cornwall. It has now been functioning for two years, and last year the then-16-year-old Zach Sawicki completed his EMS training at the high school and became the youngest member in CVFD history. Zach became a regular on the ambulance, even though he was still too young to legally drive it.

That was last year. More recently, ten youngsters ages 12 to 18 completed a special first aid course under the direction of Dave Cadwell who, with several others, volunteered his time. The course included training in CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), the use of an AED (automated external defibrillator), the life-saving techniques of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, chest compression, and shocking the heart back to its normal rhythm. They practiced bandaging, splinting, and treatment for shock and stroke, as well as environmental emergencies such as snake and tick bites. All this was accomplished in four two-hour sessions.

The youngsters who successfully completed the course are Arnon Fischer, Mark St. John, Katelynn and Mike Guerra, Oliver Fox, John Hurlburt, Phillip Geyseleers, Elizabeth Ridgway, and Mary Kate and Lauren Kosciusko. They have been equipped with protective gear and pagers, and those over 14 can now respond to limited calls for search-and-rescue and forest fire duties. The kids also do some of the so-called “grunt” work at the firehouses, such as cleanup and equipment maintenance.

Eighteen-year-old Katelynn Guerra, the current junior captain, has applied for membership in the senior department, and Lauren Kosciusko, 17, is not far behind.

Forgive me for sounding off, but three cheers for these dedicated young volunteers!
—John Miller

Walkers Instead of Truckers

The Chronicle has learned that the Monuments Preservation Division of the Connecticut Department of Transportation is considering closing the last two covered bridges in Litchfield County because of repeated assaults by oversized trucks. In order to save the ancient structures that require expensive annual repair, DOT would close the West Cornwall bridge to vehicular traffic and limit the roadway to pedestrians. The other covered structure at Bulls Bridge may survive for a much-improved parking area thereon at 1 Runsey Circle for $478,000.

Land Transfers

Stephen J. Roberts and Anna M. Timel to Kirk Lowndes Van Tassel and Mary O’Sullivan-Van Tassel, land with all buildings and improvements thereon at 1 Runsey Circle for $478,000.

The Iceman Floweth

Bob Terrall once remarked that “things happen in Cornwall that do not occur in other places.” It is also now true of ice. I have just read Al Gore’s excellent book, An Inconvenient Truth, which chronicles global warming, complete with pictures of retreating glaciers around the world. Yet in Cornwall, a hillside stream has been working valiantly to create a mini menace of its own.

Susan Costello recently called the Town Office concerned that the Wandering Moose behind her house was freezing out of its banks. Upon inspection, I learned that she and her neighbors had a hundred-foot-long, twelve-foot-wide, and five-foot-high glacier in their backyards. I checked the files and found that the glacier had no town permits. It was growing daily, with flooded basements within easy reach.

The Civil Defense High Command was assembled, and we decided to mount a preemptive strike on the ice. Nobly led by the Highway Department and their famous WMD (winter melting device)”Magic Salt,” the force cut a trench down the middle to channel the water away from the banks.

Yet the glacier was neither to be tamed nor tricked by mere magic. Following some daytime meltdown, the mass re-froze, sending a new flow in the direction of those nearby endangered basements. Our local glacier was now threatening to undermine the former video store. Decisive action was needed to solve the crisis. Using chainsaws, picks, and a backhoe, we attacked the ice flow and seemingly got the upper hand. But with more rain in the forecast, we may have to send for Al Gore to help.

—Gordon Ridgway
Cornwall Workers

What kind of work do Cornwall’s residents do? How many jobs are there in town? How do people get to work? We each know what we do (or, for us retirees, what we did), and we may know what our friends do.

But to know what Cornwall as a whole works at, and where the jobs are, you need to look to the U.S. Census. It counts 800 people in Cornwall’s labor force— anybody over 16 who is ready, able, and willing to work. Just about half of the labor force— 387 people— consists of managers and professionals: doctors, lawyers, business owners, and the like. The next largest group is 154 people with sales or office jobs, 117 service workers, and 98 construction workers. Only 13 Cornwall residents work in farming, forestry, or fishing.

The census also classifies residents in terms of the industry they work in. The largest category consists of 184 people who work in education, health, or social services. Next come 112 in the professions and management. Only 39 residents work in manufacturing, and only 19 in agriculture or forestry. Cornwall has a substantial representation of 88 workers in a category that combines the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services.

It’s hard to know just how many of us actually work in Cornwall. Only 82 jobs were located here in 2005, according to the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development. But their data applies only to jobs covered by unemployment insurance, and many local workers aren’t covered. After all, one-fourth of our labor force— 202 people—are self-employed. That’s a far higher ratio than in Litchfield County as a whole, where fewer than one in ten is self-employed. Another 106 people work for government, but mostly not in Cornwall; according to DECID, there are only 9 full-time town employees. Our three federal employees presumably work in our three post offices.

Other categories of jobs located here include: 13 retail and 4 wholesale trade jobs, 12 construction jobs, 8 in administration or waste management, 5 in manufacturing, and 3 in agriculture or forestry. There are 21 Cornwall jobs described as “other services.” Probably many of these jobs are at Cornwall Consolidated School or Mohawk Ski Area.

Other dimensions of our economic base reflect Cornwall’s rural character. More than one in ten workers—that’s 93 people, or 12 percent of the labor force—work at home. Most of us drive to work, 529 alone and 93 by carpool. Another 32 actually use public transportation, and 5 more use “other means” to get to work.

Some insights into how Cornwall works can also be found in other places. For example, there are 211 separate listings on the assessor’s “personal property” file for people or firms that own equipment, machinery, or other such property. In most cases, the listings imply that either the owner or an employee is at work at the site of the equipment. Another source of information might be the zoning regulation that requires permits for “home occupations.” It’s hardly a secret that many Cornwall dwellings have computers, faxes, or other equipment in home offices that are sometimes used for commercial purposes but are unlisted either in the assessor’s files or with P&Z.

Also, let’s not forget that in addition to the 800 residents who make up Cornwall’s labor force, there are another 300 or more weekenders who work. Most live and work in Manhattan during the week, but some probably work from their homes here on the weekend or during the summer.

—David A. Grossman

Letters to the Chronicle

CHS SEeks A loan

The Cornwall Historical Society is now planning its spring exhibition entitled Cornwall Goes to War. We invite Cornwall residents, and those with Cornwall roots, to help us by lending us artifacts. We are looking for items such as uniforms, letters, ration booklets, photographs and prints, military orders and commissions, and other related items that would enrich the exhibit. We hope to show at least one artifact from every war or conflict, from the French and Indian War (1754–63) to the present. The “home front” will be included as well. If you would like to assist us, or have questions, please contact the Society at 672-0505.

The show will open on May 19, and we hope it will be an appropriate recognition of all those who have served.

—Jodi Polsgrove, CHS Curator

BRAZIL COMES TO CORNWALL

Marcello, a Brazilian Rotary exchange student, will be attending HVRHS this coming year and will be hosted by a Cornwall family from his arrival in August until the end of December or early January. He is a seventeen-year-old boy who excels in swimming and soccer and speaks English. Two more area families are needed for the rest of the school year. This is a wonderful opportunity for the whole family to get to know someone from a foreign country and to show what life in rural New England is like. If you are interested and/or would like more information, please call me at 672-6637.

—Paul Baren

Events & Announcements

Job Opportunities: Lisa Lansing Simont is retiring after 16 years of dedicated work in the Town’s Finance Office. A qualified successor is sought who should have experience in a complex and active office setting, knowledge of municipal finance, accounting, and benefits administration—or equivalent. The position is answerable to the Town Treasurer and works with the Boards of Finance and Selectmen. Resumes and references should be sent to P.O. Box 68, Cornwall, CT 06753 by April 30 (start July 1) so that the town will stay financially afloat.

The town is also seeking lifeguards to keep swimmers at the Town Beach afloat. The Cornwall Historical Society is now planning its spring exhibition entitled Cornwall Goes to War. We invite Cornwall residents, and those with Cornwall roots, to help us by lending us artifacts. We are looking for items such as uniforms, letters, ration booklets, photographs and prints, military orders and commissions, and other related items that would enrich the exhibit. We hope to show at least one artifact from every war or conflict, from the French and Indian War (1754–63) to the present. The “home front” will be included as well. If you would like to assist us, or have questions, please contact the Society at 672-0505.

The show will open on May 19, and we hope it will be an appropriate recognition of all those who have served.

—Jodi Polsgrove, CHS Curator
Smart Power: On Saturday, April 7, at 7 P.M. in the Gathering Room at CCS, Keri Enright will return to Cornwall to teach interested residents about Smart Power’s campaign to promote clean energy. The goal of her organization is to encourage communities to commit to obtaining 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by the year 2010. She will discuss how local homeowners can participate by purchasing a portion of their electricity from renewable sources. If 10 percent of residents sign up for the program, Cornwall will receive a photovoltaic system that could be installed at the Town Office or CCS to provide free power. If 20 percent sign up, Cornwall will receive two systems.

In addition, presentations will be made by local residents who have solar power installations.

Kindergarten Registration for the 2007–8 school year will be held on April 10, 12, and 13. Any child turning five on or before December 31, 2007, is eligible. Parents should call the CCS office at 672-6617 to schedule a time for their child to visit the kindergarten room and meet the teacher, Mrs. Wadbums. Parents need to bring their child’s official immunization record and birth certificate.

Motherhouse Event: Old Style Life Skills Workshop Series, “Get Your Goat,” on Saturday, April 14, from 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. in Cornwall Bridge. $35 per family. Visit Rachel Gall and her backyard goats. Discuss goat care, feeding, and fencing, and how to get started with your own goats. To register call 672-0229 or visit Debra@motherhouse.us.

Book Signing: The Wish House will host a book signing for authors Sally Cook and James Charlton for their new children’s book Hey Batter Bat Swing! The Wild Old Days of Baseball (illustrated by Russ MacDonald) on Saturday, April 7, from 4 to 6 P.M. There will be a baseball quiz for the audience and special prizes for the winners. Half the book sale profits will go to the Cornwall Free Library. For more information contact Sally Cook at (917) 913-2159.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

Just think how satisfied you’ll feel when next year’s line 15, Schedule A, Form 1040 benefits from a generous tax-deductible contribution to the Chronicle. And think of all the organizations we cover that will benefit as well. If you haven’t sent a check our way recently, please spread the satisfaction around by doing so now. Today.

Tax Relief: The Cornwall Assessor’s Office will be accepting applications for the Homeowner’s Tax Relief Program through May 15, 2007. Applicants are required by law to submit proof of their 2006 income (income tax return if filed) and their Social Security form 1099 for the year 2006. The income limits for this year are: married, $35,300; single, $28,800. This means all income including Social Security. Elderly homeowners must have reached the age of 65 by December 31, 2006, to qualify. Those homeowners on Social Security disability do not need to meet the age requirement but must show proof of their permanent disability status and meet the income limits for this program.

Cornwall residents who qualify may apply at the Assessor’s Office at the Town Hall on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9 A.M. to noon. Call 672-2703 with any questions.

The Eighth Annual Art at the Dump will take place at the Cornwall Transfer Station on Saturday, April 21, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. The show features artwork fashioned from recycled items. Artists, aspiring artists, and non-artists are encouraged to participate. All artwork, unless indicated, will be for sale; 30 percent of the profits will be donated to the art department of the Cornwall Consolidated School. See insert in this issue for complete details.

Town Hall Players Auditions: Continuing with Summer Shakespeare Outdoors, the Town Hall Players will hold auditions for As You Like It on Saturday, April 21, from 4 to 6 p.m., and Sunday, April 22, from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Callbacks will be on Tuesday, April 24, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Performance dates are June 28 through July 1 in the pavilion at Foote Field on Route 4. Needed are wrestlers, jugglers, dancers, singers, and actors of all ages. Contact Fred Thaler at fthaler@snet.net or 672-0052.

A Batting Cage has been set up in the CCS gym, resulting in the cancellation of the adult evening sports activities (basketball for men and women and co-ed volleyball) until further notice. Instead there will be several evenings set up for people to use the batting cages during the next month or more. Check the Park and Rec. website for details both on the evenings for the batting cages and dates for the resumption of the adult sports: cornwallparkandrecreation.org.

Cornwall Captured: The Planning and Zoning Commission would like photos of your favorite places in Cornwall. Professional and amateur photographers, young and old, are encouraged to participate. Photographs of scenic vistas, wildlife, buildings, people, events—if it’s a treasure in need of notice and preservation, snap a picture of it! Photos will be shown at the Library in November and will be on display at community Town Plan events. For more information call Gail Jacobson at 672-6639.

Family Contra Dance: Saturday, April 21, from 7 to 10 p.m. at the Town Hall, with Paul Rosenberg calling traditional dances to the music of the Homegrown Band. Fun for the whole family. Refreshments served; donations welcome. For information call Rachel at 672-6328 or Jane at 672-6101.

Library Reading: Laura Tyson Li (daughter of Bobbie and sister of Josh) grew up in Cornwall, graduated from CCS and the Marvelwood School, and after college set off for China. After years in China and Taiwan, she has written a biography entitled Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, China’s Eternal First Lady. She will talk about the book and read from it at the Cornwall Free Library on Saturday, April 21, from 3 to 5 p.m. Book signing and refreshments will follow the talk. Laura’s website is www.lauratysonli.com.