Has Cornwall Changed?

In what ways has Cornwall changed since Tom Bevans invented the Chronicle in 1991? Frankly, in lots of ways I don’t think Cornwall has changed much. Sure, there’s a new house here and there, but not many. And then there’s the terrific new library, the handsome school gym, Bonney Brook for limited income seniors, and West Cornwall’s Saturday morning farm market. And something called cable TV and, with it, the internet. Also, some local businesses have changed hands, and the folks who run Mohawk Mountain have made some major improvements.

But think about the constants: Hall’s Garage is still going strong with a third generation of the Hall family in charge. Also, 1991 was the very year that our organic farmer from Town Street began his reign as first selectman. And let us not forget everyone’s favorite cell tower off Bell Road, complete, unused, and—as far as I can tell—no longer the property of Verizon. Which explains why cell phone service is still lacking in many areas of town.

Our politics haven’t changed much in 25 years. Nationally we are more Democratic than Republican, but that’s a trend that began back in the 1970s and 80s. Local voting is less predictable, with frequent cross-party support by both parties and good turnouts compared to the rest of the state.

What about the population? No change in the number of full-time residents, which remains around 1,400. Significantly, however, the number of second-home families (largely weekenders) in town has more than doubled: from about 360 in 1990 to somewhere over 700 as of 2010.

We checked with local real estate agent Priscilla Pavel about housing prices and her answer was that, like the weekender population, average prices are about twice what they were 25 years ago, the average in 1998 being around $250,000. Since then, average housing prices have bounced up and down but are currently well over $400,000.

Priscilla said one interesting change in the housing market is that on the lower end, what she called “inexpensive fixer-uppers” have pretty much disappeared and that buyers nowadays—mostly weekenders—want houses that are “move-in ready.” And those buyers have recently been coming mostly from Brooklyn rather than Manhattan. (This is a young crowd, one that never saw Jackie Robinson steal home for the Dodgers.)

The 65-and-over geezer population is up by 20 percent, but the 45-to-64 gang has more than doubled. Because of these aging groups, our school population has gone south, forcing several grades to be combined. Jerry and Pat Blakey told us they used to get 60 to 80 visits in the village on Halloween—and not a one last year.

Since 1991 lots of activities and programs have come to town. There are the many classes offered by Local Farm, and multiple events at the library such as the winter film series, summer camp and reading programs for kids, and classes in yoga, meditation, karate, Pilates, stitching, and mah jongg. The only thing missing is how to convert kale into fuel for your Honda.

I’ve probably left out someone’s favorite (or least favorite) change. If so, write a letter and tell us what we missed—but please, no kale.

—John Miller

(continued on page 2)
marks for insertions or deletions. The pages were cobwebbed with lines and arrows and cryptic explanations.

The final copy went to Ross Cranann of Printing Services, Inc., in Canaan, who had "his girl" typeset the Chronicle copy into galleys. The galleys were then brought back to Cornwall and again combed through (more pencils, more erasers) for any lingering errors.

The editors had a first stab at a layout, using sheets devised by Tom Bevans that were numbered minutely down the margin so that every line could be counted. The volunteer artists who drew the illustrations made their work clear and as small as possible to fit the space available for art.

Jane Bevans Duber remembers the scent of the contact cement Tom used to position the drawings exactly in place on the layouts.

Tom and Margaret had the last word before Cranann printed the Chronicles. bundled them, and dispatched them to the circulation volunteers. From early years Anne Bevans, Dave Silva, and then John and Nan Bevans counted out the papers going to Cornwall's three post offices. The copies to be mailed were organized by Margaret and Audrey Ferman, who typed up mailing labels.

It is remarkable that every single issue over the past 25 years has gone from the first story meetings to final distribution with so few hitches. It is a tribute to Tom and Margaret Bevans—and later Bobby and Spencer Klaw—that it all went so smoothly.

Today, of course, everything is done on fast desktop or laptop computers. No printouts, no piles of paper, just electronic files attached to emails moving around the ether until the final paper is published.

—Lisa L. Simont

**You Heard What?**

The April 2005 issue of the Chronicle carried a remarkable story. Remarkable because it broke the news that Prince Charles and Camilla, Duke and Duchess of Cornwall, were planning to visit their namesake town on their forthcoming U.S. visit, with expat Julia Scott, and visit CCS and some farms. Remarkable because it was picked up by several larger newspapers and a wire service, and at least one person phoned Julia to request a royal visit. And remarkable because it was the first of editor John Miller's April Fool's stories.

The tradition endures. Further stories, some by other writers, reported among other things on the first black truffle grown here, and a Cornwall Association raffle for guessing the date when the Rumsey Hall building in the village would finally collapse.

The West Cornwall Covered Bridge was a popular target. One story revealed that the DOT would close the bridge to vehicular traffic, describing in mind-jamming detail its rerouting across the river just south of West Cornwall. This would free up the bridge to become a Ponte Vecchio-style market with stalls selling hot dogs and what not. Tom Bechtle remembers overhearing two couples at the Moose earnestly debating this proposal. Eight years later another DOT plan emerged: enlarging the bridge to admit tractor trailers and replacing the "unfortunate red siding" with the original boards. These would not be sufficient for the larger bridge, so composite siding would also be used, with an artist hired "to replicate the 50 shades of grey" in the originals.

Later on, pseudonyms were used as clues. A story about the H.J. Heinz purchase of the Trinity property for a pickle factory was signed by Peter Cherkin. One about the potential arrival of the Wooly Wool Self-Serve Dog Spa in dog-loving Cornwall came from Herman Shepard, and the recent report about a huge deposit of natural gas lying 12,000 feet below the town gravel bank was by Archie Leach.

*Caveat lector.* At least one year.

—April Fuller

**Dear Cornwall Chronicle**

If the Chronicle's articles tell us what's happening in town, its letters reveal how people feel about it all. Over the past 25 years, opinions on controversial topics have vied only with animal sightings as the most popular subjects. These letters' subjects read like a short history of Cornwall's concerns—night skiing at Mohawk, the sawmill, gravel mining, barking at the Little Guild, the 2 a.m. railroad whistle, the advent of cable and cell towers, speeding on country roads, what to do with Rumsey Hall, Sweet Peet, affordable housing—and always, always, town and school budgets.

Writers were sometimes impassioned: Monte Dunn wrote, "Those who oppose the sawmill seem to be more concerned about the resale value of their property than keeping Cornwall alive and breathing community where a Yankee yeoman farmer can make a living...May the Good Lord protect us from becoming Westchester or Fairfield County." And Sabina Leitzmann bemoaned the power company's amputation of a beautiful maple "spreading its branches like so many splendid arms...Having to pass that wounded stump...hurts me as if my own limbs had been cut off."

Early animal sightings focused primarily on mountain lions, despite the state's denial of their existence. They were so prolific that after one sighting the mountain lion (a.k.a. John Miller) was moved to respond: "We ARE here. It was me, Joe."

But that was just the tip of the iceberg. Over the years we learned about a bear curled up on a doorstep, a skunk that walked through a house, wolves, snapping turtles, bats, snowy owls, moose, a peacock, and coyotes who "howled, yipped and yodeled in response whenever the siren at the town garage let go" (Lisa Lansing). There was also a spurious letter from one I.C.A. Tusker (a.k.a. Spencer Klaw) reporting a mastodon in his back pasture who "raised his trunk and emitted a sound which...reminded me of the old Queen Elizabeth about to depart from Manhattan." Advice abounded as to what to do about this wildlife. My favorite was Jim Goodfriend's recipe for scaring bears away from his home by playing Bruckner's Seventh Symphony at full volume.

Here and there, there was beautiful writing: Spencer Klaw's wonderful recollection of riding the Friday afternoon train from New York to Cornwall on summer weekends in the 1940s, occasional postings about the old days from Harriet Clark, and Mary Schiefelin's hilarious tale of an endangered, "confused mass of skunks" in the middle of Route 128.

Kids had their issues as well. Sixth grader Luke Root complained about having only 20 minutes for recess, with the incontrovertible argument that "the more recess we get, the less energy we will have in the classroom and we wouldn't be so rowdy." And Pat Dinneen, claiming prejudice against skateboarders: "People usually stereotype us as 'trouble' because our pants are bigger than everyone else's. but in reality we are just out to have fun."

Cornwall's sense of humor shines brightly. There are Larry Pool's poems, one of them signed by Alfred Lord Tennyson, Ken Keskinen's epic anniversary poems, and Franny Taliaferro reporting on the Cornwall Minor Poets Award for the best sonnet celebrating real estate developers (who could she mean?)
As of the newsletter’s 10th anniversary, Bob Potter counted 546 published letters. I’d guess another another 600 since, as the letters started dwindling with the advent of the Cornwall chat site. And so we bid farewell to the letters of Chronicles past, but hope there will be many more to come.

Texting and internet griping just don’t have the same power and richness. —Carol Schneider

Headline Heyday

Twentieth-century American journalism saw the rise of attention-grabbing, often witty headlines, those great teasers that draw the reader into the story at hand. Some examples: Variety’s 1935 headline about rural America’s reaction to Hollywood, “Sticks Nix Hick Pix.” Or the New York Daily News’ 1975 gloss on a presidential advent of a Cornwall lunar probe, but rather in “The Pit and the Petulant” (June 1991) and “Ticket Toppers to Take Test” (September 1991); and “Princess at the Crow” (at the time north of Cornwall Bridge, and “Princess at the Brain” (December 1991), while the nasty set-to over a proposed new office, or “Tussle on Town Street,” a recap of a scrap over affordable housing (December 1991) and “Ticket Toppers to Take Test” (September 1991), a pre-Election Day polling of candidates for First Selectman and P&Z seats. Then there’s “Marvelwood Mulls Moves” (July 1992) and, maybe best of all, “Natators’ Numbers Not ‘Nuff,” about a narrow swim team loss (August 1992). Meanwhile, blaming in big type was “Beneficent Budget Breezes By” (June 1993), recounting easy passage of that year’s town budget. (The 1999 BOS budget was a bit more contentious, as suggested by the headline “Big Budget Boggles Board” [April 1999].)

Edible fungi were examined in “Mushrumors and Mush-facts” (December 1991), while the nasty set-to over a proposed gravel mine on James Taylor’s property in Cornwall Bridge was detailed in “The Pit and the Petulant” (June 1996), the latter bearing no relation to the March 1991 assessment of town thoroughfares, “Cornwall Roads: The Pits.”

Sometimes the humor could be found in the somewhat ambiguous (perhaps intentionally so?) headlines that began to appear later in the decade. Locals might justifiably have been confused by “Search for Space Continues” (January 1996), which turned out not to be about the launching of a Cornwall lunar probe, but rather detailed the town offices/library saga. Again, “Replacement of Route 4 Cribs” (August 1996) ignored nursery furniture and went right to the subject at hand—those “log-like retaining walls” along Route 4 just north of Cornwall Bridge. And “Princess at Home in Sharon” (June 1997) provided an update on Princess the crow (at the time newly settled at the nearby Audubon Center), not Lady Diana Spencer. Finally, one would be forgiven for misconstruing these headlines as harbingers of musical events: “Rockers on the Green” (November 1996), about a 12-foot Shaker rocking chair; not an Aerosmith concert; “Postal Rave” (May 1999), about workers at Cornwall’s three post offices (along the man) appearance; and “Rapping with Ridgway” (February 2000). Think of it: Gordon Ridgway, rapper...Who knew?

While it’s unclear who was responsible for these headlines—the authors of the stories themselves or the monthly editors—they reflect Cornwall’s keen sense of humor and unyielding professionalism. Keep ‘em coming, writers and editors! —Tom Bechtle

Looking Back

When I arrived in Cornwall in 2001 I saw many aspects of the town as fixed and certain: existing in a sort of alternate universe, perhaps out of time altogether. This summer, however, while thumbing through the Chronicles issues published during 1991, I realized just how much the town had changed in the decade before I arrived.

For example, in 1991 Cornwall residents had no access to cable television (the town was wired in 1995). Fallen trees and leftover debris from the September 1989 tornado still lay scattered about the local landscapes. The transition from town “dump” to “transfer station” was so recent that one writer waxed nostalgic about shooting rats at the landfill. Night skiing lights at Mohawk Mountain were still on for the first time. The burgeoning enrollment of CCS graduates at the high school so threatened to increase Cornwall’s share of the regional secondary school budget that programs and staff at CCS were cut only weeks after a major addition opened (enrollment continued to rise for another decade).

Cornwall Village was a different place altogether in 1991. Marvelwood, with its 150 high school-age students, was an everyday presence. In December the school reported the theft of computers, skis, a stereo, and $3,000 in cash. The Child Center was still housed in the UCC Parish House, the library was in today’s town hall, and the first selectman’s office moved from a closet in the town offices into a rented trailer in the parking lot, where before it sprung a leak. In November Gordon Ridgway was elected First Selectman for the first of what are so far 13 terms.

What struck me most, though, in reading through these issues, was the preoccupation of so many of Cornwall’s citizens in 1991 with the very idea of renewal and rebuilding. Was this in part a reaction to the trauma of the July 1989 tornado? Or simply the expression of longstanding town-wide needs? The library, squeezed into what is now the first selectman’s office, was bursting at the seams. The new first selectman, disdaining the leaky trailer, had moved onto the stage in the old stone building’s auditorium. The Cornwall Child Center was looking for a new home. The Cornwall Housing Corporation applied for funds to build Kugeman Village. And sitting vacant in the middle of the village were two large buildings once occupied by the Rumsey Hall School that had recently been opened. The main Greek Revival building dated back to 1848. Though severely damaged by the tornado, it had been added to the National Register of Historic Places only a year earlier.

A Municipal Building Committee formed. The group proposed a new town hall that would “not just be an office building but stand with dignity as a seat of Yankee democracy and frugality.” What better spot than the old Rumsey Hall? And while they were at it, the MBC came up with a wider “master plan”: the library could expand into the other half of the old stone building; the Child Center could move into the town office building behind it, and the Rumsey gym could become a civic center. As Sco- ville Soule once summed it up, using Rumsey Hall to solve space problems faced by the town’s institutions seemed nearly “a marriage made in heaven.”

Alas, no one was able to agree on the actual construction of the Rumsey building or the minimum office space required. The price tag for renovation or a new building climbed above $1.5 million. The library and the Child Center had other ideas. When the referendum on whether to proceed with the MBC’s vision came to a town vote two years later, the plan was rejected by a two-to-one margin. The sad saga of Rumsey Hall’s decline and later demolition had begun.

Nonetheless, the spirit of civic renewal that seemed to grip the town in 1991 eventually brought lasting changes. They were the outcome of a consensual process arrived at after all those discussions held during 1991 and after. The vision they embodied was at once bold and conservative, the natural product of the collection of skeptics, idealists, dreamers, and New England penny pinchers that make up our town. I like to think that the launch of the Chronicles in 1991 was an important element in building this consensus. —Paul De Angelis
Thank You

Thank you to all of you who have contributed your writing, editing, art, time, and money to make the Chronicle continue to prosper over the past 25 years. With your continued help, we look forward to a bright future in Cornwall. Please come to our anniversary exhibit at the library from September 13 through October 1 and celebrate its opening with us (and the Cornwall Association) on Saturday, September 17, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Cornwall Chronicle
cornwallchronicle.org

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(in parentheses: date of first contribution)

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Bailey, Robert ◆ (3/99)
Baird, K.C. • (8/92)
Balling, Fred ✦ (6/05)
Barberi, Patsy ✦ (9/92)
Bardot, Chelsea • (8/03)
Baren, Anne ✷ (5/94)
Baren, Paul ✦ (10/93)
Barkoff, Ira • (4/95)
Barrett, Tom ◆ (5/13)
Bate, Denise • (6/96)
Bate, Fred • (4/04)
Bean, David ✦ (10/91)
Bean, Jane ◆ (12/95)
Bechtle, Tom • (11/95)
Becker, Dave ◆ (7/93)
Beckwith, Lois • (7/15)
Beebe, Diane ◆ (1/12)
Beecher, Bill • (12/91)
Beers, Bob • (1/92)
Beglin, Julie • (2/09)
Bennett, Debby • (4/12)
Bevans, Anne ◆ (2/91)
Bevans, John • (3/09)
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Bevans, Nan • (5/91)
Bevans, Tom ◆ (2/91)
Bianchi, Cynthia • (8/94)
Bianchi, Laurie • (8/03)
Bigelow, Carla ◆ (7/94)
Blakey, Pat • (1/95)
Bouteiller, Jean • (1/14)
Boyne, Amy • (8/92)
Bracken, Don • (8/91)
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Bramley, Pat • (2/91)
Bramley, Richard • (1/09)
Brecher, Earl ◆ (1/92)
Brecher, Jeremy • (2/12)
Bredenberg, Alfred ◆ (4/93)
Brown, George ◆ (4/94)
Bruehl, Nick • (2/91)
Buck, Paper • (6/13)
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Burke, Raymonde ◆ (7/14)
Burke, Terry ◆ (5/13)
Bury, Teddy • (4/91)
Busby, Camilla ◆ (2/10)
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Cady, Amy • (7/97)
Cady, Scott ◆ (4/91)
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Canby, Peter • (6/06)
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Cheney, Lynn ◆ (1/92)
Chubb, Hendon ◆ (2/91)
Clark, Ellis ◆ (5/93)
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Classey, April • (2/06)
Clohessy, Robert • (4/09)
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Colbert, Dave ◆ (2/06)
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Cole, Erin • (1/99)
Collins, Annelle • (7/15)
Collins, Matt ◆ (5/02)
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Cook, Sally • (2/16)
Cooley, Maggie • (5/94)
Cowan, Aidan • (9/08)
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Dart, Nancy • (4/94)
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Dinneen, Vera • (9/08)
Dolan, Maisie • (8/03)
Donahue, Kenny ◆ • (2/14)
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Dorsen, Harriette ◆ ◆ (9/09)
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Fischer, Adam • • • • (5/95)
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Fisher, Valerie (Art Coordinator)
Fishman, Jim • (8/01)
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Fitzgibbons, Kathleen • (4/04)
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Hanh, Brigitte • • • (5/92)
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Hart, Ellen • (5/98)
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Heaney, Gary • (7/92)
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Hedden, Steve • (9/99)
Heiney, Dianne • (6/92)
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Heming, Michael • (2/16)
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Hurlburt, Bill • • • (8/92)
Hurlburt, Jacob • (3/14)
Ireland, Kelley • • (11/93)
Thanks to all of you for keeping the Chronicle alive and well!