The Cold Wave

Man, it was cold. Not chilly, but COLD! They told us it originated in the Arctic, and why not? Cornwall temperatures did a nosedive about a week before Christmas, spent some nights in the minus-zero range and never got above freezing during daylight hours. The late-December freeze continued into the first week of January, which included a surprise “bombo-genesis” snowstorm, then teased us with three days of balmy weather—would you believe 60 degrees one day—only to go back to single digits again.

How did Cornwall get through the brutal weather? Pretty much OK except for the households that ran out of heating fuels, and there were a lot of them, as furnaces worked overtime and oil companies, several of them, couldn’t keep up with demands. One major supplier, Bantam Wesson, had fuel but was apparently short of drivers for its delivery trucks. Bantam has been, and remains the provider of choice of the Cornwall Fuel Coop, with a roster of about 80 customers that takes in town and church buildings. The company couldn’t keep up with the demand and later apologized to its customers via email.

The firehouse in West Cornwall ran out of heating oil at one point and its members and the town crew had to deal with jellied diesel that needed special treatment before powering trucks.

Cornwall’s heroic town road crew*, led by foreman Jim Vanicky, stayed on top of the situation with its ability to make abundant amounts of sand at the gravel bank off Route 128. According to town hall, we managed to stay on our winter road budget while neighbor villages were already over theirs as they were forced to purchase greater supplies of road salt.

And speaking of Jim Vanicky, he had to use a five-foot chainsaw to break up an ice jam that was bogging a culvert on Lake Road.

The fire department helped out its Kent brothers and sisters with an unprecedented mile-long, 12-foot thick ice jam on the Housatonic River. The jam caused a flooding emergency that closed Route 7 south of the traffic light for days.

All this as another snowstorm swung up the East Coast and hit our hills and dales with eight more inches. —John Miller

What Kind of School?

About 55 Cornwall citizens came to the opening round on January 19 of a three-part examination of the future for Cornwall Consolidated School.

Jonathan Costa, assistant executive director of EdAdvance and a seasoned consultant, led what is being called “A Structured Community Conversation” about where CCS stands now and where it might be headed. He set the stage saying, “the decline in enrollment is our point of departure.”

Costa noted that this downward trend is statewide—even region wide across New England—driven by economic and demographic factors. Five years ago, when Costa came to CCS for an earlier consultancy, this trend never came up in discussion. In the five intervening years CCS lost 25 students, reducing the student population to about 75, where it stands today.

Since the school’s founding in 1939 enrollment has followed a roller coaster curve.

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*Town Crew roster: Jim Vanicky, foreman. Jack Malahan, Buddy Hurlburt, and Fred Scoville II.

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(continued on page 2)
At the peaks in 1964 and in 1998, the numbers were just over 200. The valleys were in 1984 (80 students) and in 1976 (72). Regional districts were established during a period of growth. The structure of the regions and their rules of operation were not designed to cope with a period of school population decline and demographic change.

A good example of this is the state’s minimum budget requirement, which forbids school districts from reducing education budgets more than 5 percent a year. This was intended to prevent cash-strapped districts from ransacking their schools—all well and good—but the requirement doesn’t recognize that many districts in the state have had whopping great declines in student numbers. It has meant that teaching and non-certified staffs have been retained with few (or no) students to serve. How can the state permit towns to design solutions to declining student numbers that fit their singular circumstances?

The meeting attendees were divided into small groups to talk and to identify the most important educational, fiscal, and general issues involved in delivering a quality education for Cornwall’s children given the current climate. The responses were legion but with Jonathan’s help, the issues and concerns with the greatest consensus were sorted and ranked.

The educational issue of greatest importance to the group was quality education: one that was state of the art with up-to-date practices, had a solid foundation in the basics, and encouraged personalized learning projects. More importantly, it should include wide exposure to a broad range of experiences, such as the arts, civics, outdoor education, and community involvement. The second tier of consensus included how small class size impacts the range of social experience.

The main fiscal concerns raised by the group were as follows: education had to be affordable for the taxpayers; the cost per student was a concern, yet there needed to be an understanding that there is a base cost to running a school; and the lack of affordable housing contributes to the decline in population. The second tier of fiscal concerns included the exploration of multiple building uses; maintaining the building as a community asset; and working with another district or creating a regional middle school.

Under the topic of “general” issues, the main points of consensus were community involvement and the roots a school can provide. Attendees overwhelmingly agreed that students should be involved in their community, and community members should care about students’ skills and talents with the school. It was equally felt that a local school provides a student roots in the community and that a school is where a community creates its future. The second tier of concerns were: questioning what would it be like if there was no school in the town; could spaces in the school be used for other educational purposes, and again, what about affordable housing.

The second session on February 8 will look at data to support the points of consensus, and consider them more carefully. A third meeting on March 9 will sum it all up and decide what the town wants to do.

—Lisa Lansing and Annie Kosciusko

Not Just Skiing Anymore

Cornwall students have always been fortunate to learn at Mohawk through the Skidaddle and upper grade ski programs. However, downhill skiing and snowboarding are only a couple of the winter sport options available to students. CCS students can choose to learn to cross-country ski, curl, snowshoe, and ice skate through the Alternative Winter Sports Program led by physical education teacher Aaron Boucher.

For years, CCS has had an alternative winter program for students who did not participate in the downhill ski and snowboarding program. Students would cross-country ski or hike, depending on the conditions, taking advantage of trails like Gold Road or the trail along the river by the Trinity Retreat Center. Before hitting the ski trails, kids would have a tutorial around the grounds of the school to become acquainted with the equipment and learn technique.

But in the last two years, Aaron Boucher has added curling and skating to provide kids with more outdoor activity skills. For curling and skating, the kids travel to the Norfolk Curling Club for one hour curling lessons and head to Hotchkiss for rink time. Principal Mike Croft has been known to come with the students to Hotchkiss and provide some skating lessons. Otherwise, students can enjoy their ice time as they please. According to Mr. Boucher, students and parents alike have been pleased with the additional offerings. When asked if the kids had a particular favorite sport, he said it depends on the kid.

Not only have the offerings changed, but scheduling has also been changed this year. In the past, students in first through third grades skied on Thursday with the Park and Recreation Skidaddle program and grades four to eight skied on Friday. Because class sizes are so small this year, the whole school will be heading to Mohawk or participating in the Alternative Winter Sports Program on Friday afternoons. All kindergartners will participate in the alternative program due to mutual concerns from Mohawk and the school regarding five- and six-year-olds participating in downhill ski lessons. With the addition of the kindergarten class, the total number of students in the alternative program is 14.

The first two Fridays of the program were canceled due to snow and rain, respectively. At this writing, the kids finally were able to head outside and practice the first skill of the season on fresh snow: snowshoeing. Students tried out the snowshoes by walking around the school property. Despite the cancellations of the first two weeks, Mr. Boucher hopes that the kids will get in all five planned sessions. —Mary Kate Kosciusko

Land Transfers

Robinson B. Lacy and Karen Doeblin to Lincoln E. Frank and Margaret O’Neil Frank, 5 acres of land with buildings and improvements thereon at 26 Dudleytown Road and .244 acres on Dudleytown Road, for $565,000.

Tabita Freimanis-Griffin and James Griffin to Andrew S. Peterson, 7.345 acres on Valley Road, for $175,000.

Kevin Whitney, Administrator of the Estate of Lorraine P. Whitney to Duncan J. Bowie, land with buildings thereon at 44 River Road, for $164,000.

Margaret D. Cooley, Alford W. Cooley and Susan Dalton Cooley to Cornwall Conservation Trust, 36.207 acres of land on Cherry Hill Road.

Leon E. Irish, Administrator of the Estate of Karla W. Simon to Karen Mullins, 50 percent interest in property at 6 Day Road and 4.17 acres of vacant land on Day Road, for $267,500.

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Marta Wick, Executrix of the Estate of Alison Foss to Jessica L. Grioli and Thomas J. Garafano, land with improvements thereon at 166 Bunker Hill Road.
GREENING NEWS

Cornwall is upping its game as the once “Greenest Town in CT” by participating in the new SustainableCT program. This program embraces all our past efforts and suggests a wider range of actions (beyond energy) to become sustainable, resilient, and a stronger community overall. There are eight categories: transportation, infrastructure, public services, planning, natural resources, economic development, housing, and cultural ecosystems. Resources are provided as well. It is administered by Eastern Connecticut State University’s Center for Sustainability and was developed for towns by municipal leaders throughout the state as an expansion of the Clean Communities Program, which has guided us from 2006 to November 2017.

Our Conservation Commission and the Conservation Trust are already developing actions. The selectmen are reviewing a town resolution and a plan to institute a local award. Other organizations and town committees will see relevance, can enhance their existing programs, and be inspired. Individuals can participate too! Please take a look at SustainableCT.org for full details.

For more info or to discuss ideas, contact me at 672-6010 or kfreygang@aol.com. I am active on the ESU planning team and the CT Sustainable Leadership Network.

—Katherine Freygang

LOOKING UP

While reading the estimable Cornwall Chronicle online this morning, I caught a strong whiff of optimism on its pages. This optimism knew me, because I had reluctantly begun to talk informally with people about selling my Yelling Hill property, where I have spent at least a part of every summer since 1948 when I was four. I should have realized that the collective intelligence of the Cornwall community would not take our recent business decline lying down.

—Katherine Freygang

HANDS OFF THE RIVERBANK!

We have lived opposite the meadow on Lower River Road in West Cornwall for 21 years. We are very lucky to live in one of the beauty spots of Cornwall, where residents and visitors come to play, picnic, and relax on the riverbank, and where fishermen, boaters, and tubers park for water activities. Every few years the area is threatened by the town with plans for improvement: first there was a ramp for disabled fishermen, followed by information kiosks, then self-composting toilets and recently a venue for the fractured farmers’ market. Now we are told that a sewage plant needs to go there to improve local business. We are assured that it will look like a Shaker building and not smell or make a noise and that the filtered water that is dumped into the river will actually improve it (let’s not forget the wisdom of GE please). The proposal is strongly supported by a group of people who do not live on the river and not supported by those that do. Why is this land regarded as something that needs to be fixed or improved, despite the fact that it’s not even owned by the town? Eversource has chosen to leave it alone; we urge the town to do the same.

—Ron Chester

Events & Announcements

Also: check our Facebook page for event reminders and Cornwall updates.

Cornwall Woman’s Society: Program and Meeting, Thursday, February 1, 10 A.M., at the Cornwall Library. Speaker Carol Lugar will talk about the history of Mohawk Mountain Ski Area from its founding by her parents in 1947 to today. Yes, artificial snow was invented at Mohawk, but there is much more to learn about Cornwall’s skiing history. Refreshments to follow the presentation.

(continued on page 4)
Thanks!
by a nice check, works for the
"Where is the Love?" which, accompanied
there was "Fax me." Our candy heart says
Necco in Cambridge Mass. Over the years
Remember the candy hearts? Made by
ing will begin at 7
dance at the Community Contra Dance
groundhog, come out of your burrow and
Community Contra Dance:
Five. Please see insert for details.
Ambition in Early New England.
William Dyer: Quaker Light and Puritan
conflict between the Puritans and Quakers,
1
reunion on Saturday, February 10, 4 p.m.
BYOB and snacks to share. Witness the
of action and adventure. Let's gather to the
Jerry, Don, and Dick will regale us with tales
ing the glorious sunrise over Appalachia.
pig," pacing in freezing boxcars and watch­
carriers, wedged under the tires of a "fast
the rails on sooty coal trains, new car
shadowy pasts. Join them for tales of ridin'
Ambassador in the East. Although the
Cornwall Hobos’ Reunion: What syn­
person.
inal choice for the e-mail.
the Cornwall Library
The Winter Film Series continues Sat­
aday, February 3, with Z and Saturday, Febru­
ary 24, with All the King’s Men. Films start at 4 p.m. Suggested donation of $5 per person.
Cornwall Hobos’ Reunion: What syn­
chronous marvel brought three former hobo
ences to settle in our little town? Under the
disguise of respectability, Jerry Doolittle,
Dorothy, and Dick Sears discovered that
each had hopped freight trains in their
shadowy pasts. Join them for tales of ridin’
the rails on sooty coal trains, new car
warners, wedged under the tires of a “fast
pig,” pacing in freezing boxcars and watch­ing
the glorious sunrise over Appalachia.
Jerry, Don, and Dick will regale us with tales of
action and adventure. Let’s gather to the
sound of classic train songs while enjoying
BYOB and snacks to share. Witness the
reunion on Saturday, February 10, 4 p.m.
Author talk: On Sunday, February 11, at
1 p.m., Johan Winsser will speak about the
conflict between the Puritans and Quakers,
and sign copies of his new book, Mary and
William Dyer: Quaker Light and Puritan
Ambition in Early New England.
Annual Jazz Dinner Dance: “Dancing
Under the Stars” Saturday, February 17,
6 to 9 p.m. with Bob Parker’s Jive by
Five. Please see insert for details.
Community Contra Dance: Don’t be a
groundhog, come out of your burrow and
dance at the Community Contra Dance
Saturday, February 3, at town hall. Danc­ing
will begin at 7 p.m. with the lively music
You’re our Main Squeeze
Remember the candy hearts? Made by
Necco in Cambridge Mass. Over the years
they tried to update their messages. Once
there was “Fax me.” Our candy heart says
“Where is the Love?” which, accompanied
by a nice check, works for the Chronicle. Thanks!
CORNWALL CHRONICLE
FEBRUARY 2018

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