Library-Selectmen Deal

Striking a long-awaited bargain, the Selectmen and the Cornwall Library Association (CLA) have taken a historic step toward ending their 90-year mutual occupancy of the gray stone building on the Cornwall green. CLA has elected to leave the stone building and seek a Cornwall site on which to build a new library.

In an agreement with CLA made public in mid-February, the selectmen undertook four actions:

- To urge the Board of Finance and the Town Meeting to authorize payment to the Library of $250,000. This sum would compensate CLA for the building—granted under the trust that established the funds.
- To recommend that the Town Meeting authorize payment to CLA of $17,000 a year for 15 years. These payments are designed to bring the agreement before a Town Meeting to recognize CLA’s status as a civic organization that can, in the future, ask the selectmen for additional financial assistance.
- To have town lawyers draft revisions to Ridgway and CLA Board President Lars are already in the proposed capital budget.
- To urge the Board of Finance and the Board of Education (BOE) budget to have town lawyers draft revisions to Ridgway and CLA Board President Lars are already in the proposed capital budget.

CLA accepted a challenge to match the town’s principal compensation payment by raising “at least $250,000 in charitable gifts, donations, and pledges.” CLA also committed itself to raise money to acquire a site and build a new library—seeking private donations and a grant from the State Library, among other possibilities. CLA has already raised or received pledges for about $100,000.

On the question of funds, First Selectman Gordon Ridgway emphasized in an interview that the town’s financial contribution should be seen as a matching grant—payable in full only when CLA has put up its share of the funds. “We just want to spark the project,” said Ridgway. “The primary financing should be private.”

CLA promised to assist the selectmen in bringing the agreement before a Town Meeting—demonstrating the benefits to the community of a “greatly enhanced library and an improved Town Hall.”

Ridgway and CLA Board President Audrey Ferman emphasized the significance of the agreement. The agreement, said Ridgway, “commits the town to the proposal in a big way.” “The Trustees,” said Ferman, “are joining Gordon in getting behind the agreement.”

—Charles Osborne

Hefty Budget Hike Seen

The Board of Selectmen has completed its proposed operating and capital budgets for the fiscal year 1999 beginning July 1. At $1,420,000, the combined budgets represent a 15.4 percent increase over the current year budgets.

The $1,025,000 proposed for town operations is an increase of only 1.6 percent over the current year, but capital projects, budgeted at $395,000, are up 78 percent, because this year’s capital budget was deliberately kept low to lessen the impact of a major increase in the Board of Education (BOE) budget.

These budgets represent the dropping of only one shoe. The other—policies of the BOE budget—has yet to drop. That will happen by March 12 when the BOE presents its budget to the Board of Finance (BOF).

And the education budget is the biggest. In fiscal year 1998 it was $2,550,000, a figure including debt service on school bonds. School capital projects are set at $40,000 and these dollars are already in the proposed capital budget.

What’s of interest in these budgets? Well, operations are expected to continue much as in the past, with some modest increases in salaries and other costs partially offset by various economies and lowered insurance costs. Additional part-time assistance in the Treasurer’s Office and at Park and Rec is anticipated.

(continued on page 2)
Amistad in Cornwall

The story of the ship Amistad and its cargo of mutinous black slaves has become an icon of American freedom, a tale told nationally by Steven Spielberg and here in Cornwall by Jeremy Brecher in his film "The Amistad Revolt: All We Want Is Make Us Free."

Brecher will present his film at a Friends of the Cornwall Library screening on Saturday, March 7, at 5 P.M. at the Library. His film tells the "real story of the Amistad," Brecher said, and the role the incident played in 1839 and later in framing the nation's struggle for human rights and racial justice. In a case argued by former President John Quincy Adams, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Africans should be set free.

At the Library screening, Brecher will read a previously unknown letter written by a Cornwall resident who witnessed the Amistad captives' experiences in New Haven. Another local connection is Jill Bryant's great-grandfather, Leonard Bacon, minister of the Center Congregational Church in New Haven, who led efforts to free the African captives.

Brecher is Humanities Scholar-in-Residence at Connecticut Public Television, where his Amistad film appeared in February.

The Brecher film will pair with "Celebrating our Amistad History," the focus Peter Hammond has chosen for the March 8 morning service at 10 and the adult education session at 11:30 A.M. at the United Church of Christ.

The Amistad affair was widely reported at the Library screening Brecher will read a previously unknown letter written by a Cornwall resident who witnessed the Amistad captives' experiences in New Haven. Another local connection is Jill Bryant's great-grandfather, Leonard Bacon, minister of the Center Congregational Church in New Haven, who led efforts to free the African captives.

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The Amistad affair was widely reported in 1839 and the issues it raised fed the Abolition movement and later missionary activities of the Congregational Church.

—Lisa Lansing Simont

CCTS Mastery Tested

Is Cornwall Consolidated School academically competitive with other state schools? Surely, the yearly statewide Mastery Tests which evaluate fourth, sixth and eighth graders in math, writing, and reading should tell the story.

Not entirely, says Principal Bill Oros. Newspaper listings of percentages of students meeting state goals don't indicate the number approaching those goals, missing by one or two points. Nor, among other variables, do they factor in the number of students exempted from taking the tests, a number which certainly affects the percentages of students at goal level or above. (CCTS tested 98.2 percent of its students this year as contrasted to the state average of 91.6 percent.)

Bill's take on the Mastery Tests is that they are an excellent tool to alert teachers and parents to which students need extra help and in what areas. In some instances they alert the entire school to a need for more emphasis in a given discipline. Such an instance occurred at CCS in 1994 when only five percent of the fourth graders tested up to state goals. Two years later, now sixth graders, 60 percent of basically the same students achieved the goals.

One revealing in-school comparison is that of the percentages of goal achievers in a given year in each grade tested. From 1994 through 1997 the eighth grades almost always had more students reaching the goal in every subject tested.
Letters to the Chronicle

EL NIÑO NUDGES NEW ENGLAND
I'm glad that John Miller shouldered the research on the Cornwall-El Niño connection even if his respondents were breezy. Dr. Mel trustee El Niño data, but he does the waffle on global warming. He once told his audience at the Audubon Festival that if you predict tomorrow's weather to be just like today you will be right about 65 percent of the time. But he didn't talk about the oceanographic connection between Cornwall and the distant South American warm current that lurks in the ocean before its fugitive embrace of North America. This happens every four to twelve years and what it does is mess up my sap season. Usually normal sap season for Cornwall is the end of February through March. During the malaise of December, January, and early February the sugar-maker's mind is free of buckets, tubs, evaporators, sugar content, spiles, and the myriad steps of prep work. Then El Niño. The sap is running in January and early February. The maple buds are swelling, the ground frost is gone. What do you do? Tap or hold? In El Niño years you tap because winter is an unkept promise. The buckets go up early even if the weather woodchuck saw his shadow on February 2. Why else would Irv Robbins and Gordon tap so early in February? Why would I tap earlier than ever before? EL NIÑO.

If we judged wrong, what we get is not the transformation of drops of sap ringing in the pale but the clank of empty buckets banging against the trees in the cold north wind and the sugar microbes of heating doing their little dance in the sap hole. Everything shuts down, and the relatives who came to help go back home. Ah, normal sap season! Has there ever been one? —Phil Hart

INVENTION CONVENTION
The event is happening at CCS in March. Upper-grade students must find a problem and design an invention to solve it. They must verify originality. The invention must have a catchy title and an attractive poster advertising the product. The presentation is an important part of the score. It should include how you solved the problem, and is it safe and easy to use.

The convention is where presentations are brought together and judged. The students with the best inventions will be recognized.

—Ellen V. Hart, fifth grade

BRING BACK THE GRAND TOOTS
Ann Peterson is so right in her letter in the February issue, in which she states that closing Everest Hill Road by blocking it with a chair provided by Clarence Blake "provided excellent sledding for the Cornwall youngsters."

We arrived a little later in Cornwall than Ann, in 1966, and by then Clarence Blake's chair was not in use because the road was kept open year 'round. Keeping it open is the right thing to do. I remember when a tree blocked Great Hollow Road, and the school bus came around Everest Hill to service the 15 families. We were all pleased that our town repaved the road.

But I, too, miss the grand toots on the best of all sledding runs. Solution: legally do what we used to do: namely, after a good snow, put a new Clarence Blake Memorial Chair to block traffic, and have a scheduled sledding time after school, while the snow plow holds off for a couple of hours. We used to park a station wagon at the bottom and lift the kids back to the top. I'll supply the chair and the hot chocolate.

Long live Cornwall, the nicest town east of San Francisco; long live a paved and plowed Everest Hill Road that can still be used, when the sun comes out after the storm, for sledding.

—Al Waller

Events & Announcements

Cornwall Homeowners who were 65 or older by December 31, 1997, or who are receiving Social Security disability payments, may be eligible for a credit on their property tax. The property must be their principal residence and their total income, including Social Security, must be less than $23,100 if single or $28,300 if married.

Applications may be filed at the Assessor’s Office until May 15 and, if approved, will apply to the July tax billing. Once enrolled in the program, a new application is required every two years. Forms have been mailed to homeowners who must reapply this year.

Persons receiving a veteran’s exemption may be eligible for an additional exemption if they meet the above income requirements. There is no age requirement for the veteran’s exemption. Applications must be filed by October 1 to qualify for the October 1998 Grand List. Application forms are available from the Assessor’s Office, which is open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 A.M. to noon, and Wednesdays 1 to 4 P.M.
Region 1 Chorus to Perform: Selected music students from CCS will be singing with the Region 1 Chorus on Wednesday, March 4, in three concerts: at 10 A.M. at the North Canaan Elementary School, at 1:15 P.M. at the Kellogg School in Falls Village, and at 7 P.M. at HVRHS. All are welcome.

Alternatives to Violence Project Workshop: An AVP Community Workshop will be held on the weekend of May 1-3 at the UCC Parish House. It will focus on primary conflict resolution skills. Call the church office, 672-6840, or Peg Keskinen, 672-6486, for more information about AVP or about the workshop.

CCS PTA Fruit Sale: Boxes of mixed fruit and nuts, as well as oranges and grapefruit by the case or half case, are on sale now. Orders are due March 13 for delivery March 19. For information call David Samson, 672-0616.

Food Drive: During March the Youth Group sponsored by UCC will be collecting food and supplies for OWL’s Kitchen and the Torrington Community Kitchen. Please place your contributions of non-perishable foods and paper goods in the collection boxes in local stores and businesses. Thank you!

Paper Making with Nita Colgate will be offered on Thursday, March 5, 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. at CCS. Using 1000-year-old techniques to make handmade paper of natural fibers such as corn husks and onion skins, participants will learn to process leaves from their own garden plants into paper. Open to adults or children accompanied by an adult. Fee: $10 (no charge for children).

Cornwall Trivia: 1
There are only three persons now acting as town officials who were also serving as far back as 1968. Guess who. (Look below for answer.) We hope The Chronicle can match that kind of continuity, but we need your constant support to endure, so please don’t forget to keep those checks coming.

Park & Rec. will be sponsoring a number of activities in March:
- Tibetan Film: Home to Tibet, an award-winning film produced and directed by Alan Dater and Lisa Merton, will be shown at Corneria Hall on Saturday, March 28, at 7 P.M. The film follows the journey of an exiled Tibetan stone mason, Sonam Lama, from his home in Massachusetts to his occupied homeland for the first time since his escape 12 years earlier. Sonam Lama and the film makers will be in attendance and a discussion and refreshments will follow. Admission by advance reservation is $5. Admission at the door is $6. For reservations or information call Skip Hunt at 672-3171 or Anne Chamberlain at 672-6133.
- Spring Baseball: Registration for T-ball, instructional, minor, and major leagues will be at the Cornwall Library on Saturday, March 14, from 10 A.M. to noon. There is a $20 fee. Call Sharon Sawicki at 672-2975 for further information.
- Baskets: There will be a basket-making class on Saturday, March 7, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. in the CCS art room, where students will make a swing-handle market basket. The skill level is for adult beginners, and there will be a $20 materials fee. Call Jill Gibbons at 672-0033 for pre-registration and a list of items to bring to the class. There is a limit of 15 students.
- Game Night Canceled: There will be no game night in March.

Political Parties: The Democratic Town Committee met on February 10 to elect officers. Reelected were Stephen Senzer, Chair, and Isabel Osborne, Treasurer. New officers are Ann Schilling, Vice-Chair, and Hanna Grossman, Secretary. The Republican Town Committee will elect officers at its March 10 meeting.

Community Input Invited: The United Church of Christ has formed a Capital Projects Committee to explore the needs of the church and its buildings over the next ten years. The two meetinghouses and the parish house are used by many community groups, and the committee would welcome community input. Contact Paul Baren at 672-6637.

Cornwall Senior Survey responses have been pouring in. If you haven’t returned yours, please do so by March 30. If you’ve misplaced your questionnaire, pick up a replacement at the Town Office or the Library.

Art in Cornwall: At the National Iron Bank during March, Peter Barrett will be exhibiting pastels and drawings. At the Cornwall Library, Danielle Mailer’s show continues until March 14. From March 16 until April 18 there will be a show of designs by Cornwall artists for the “tails” side of the proposed “Connecticut Quarter.”

Bus Service Reduced: Bonanza Bus Lines’ southbound morning bus will no longer stop anywhere between Canaan and New York City. Travelers wishing to go to New York can get the bus in Canaan, in front of the Canaan Pharmacy, at 9:30 A.M. It is not known if this will change when the summer schedule is released. Complete schedules (effective January 5) are available at Baird’s in Cornwall Bridge.

The CCS Computer Lab will be open for community use under PTA sponsorship on Monday evenings from 6:30 to 8:30 except on school holidays. Word processing, Internet access, games, business applications, and other uses are all available for a $3 fee. Individual tutoring, by appointment only, is available at $15 per hour. More tutors are needed, and will be paid the $15 fee. For more information contact Cheryl Thibault at 672-0606.

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ILLUSTRATIONS Will Calhoun
MARCH EDITORS Lisa and Doc Smoot
APRIL EDITORS Peg and Ken Keskinen
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Edward Forman SECRETARY • Robert Bees TREASURER
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CORNWALL CHRONICLE, INC.
143 CREAM HILL ROAD, WEST CORNWALL, CT 06796
E-MAIL: spencerbar@b1.com
FAX: (860) 672-2643

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