Town Top Spender on Schools, Public Works

Why does Cornwall spend more per year-round resident than the eight Northwest Corner towns that surround it? That’s the question raised by a recent article in The Lakeville Journal that cited figures gathered by the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, a nonprofit business group based in Hartford.

Cornwall does spend more: over the three years from 1993 to 1995, Cornwall’s budget averaged $2,461 per resident, more than any of the eight adjoining towns and well above the average of $1,087 per person in the nine-town Northwest Corner.

CPEC’s figures reveal that three functions account for most of our high spending pattern. Education accounts for more of our budget than any other item, averaging $1,194 per person from 1993 to 1995, or just under half the total. As shown on the accompanying chart, we spend about ten percent more than the nine-town average of $1,087 per resident on our students. But Debt Service, a budget item like Planning & Zoning and General Government.

Some factors that might influence Cornwall’s high rate of spending on Public Works include:

- Cornwall spends about 40 percent more per mile of local road than the average in the nine towns in the Northwest Corner. First Selectman Gordon Ridgway believes that Cornwall’s many bridges and steep roads probably account for much of that. Further, he says, we’ve been addressing some of our accumulated road needs, something that other towns aren’t doing.
- Cornwall also has more local roads to maintain. It has 41 miles of road per 1,000 residents, more by far than any of the adjoining towns, which average only about 25 miles per 1,000. Gordon sees that as largely the result of the town’s very low population density: Cornwall has only 31 residents per square mile, lowest of the nine Northwest Corner towns and less than half the area’s average.

—David A. Grossman

School Population Surges

Not since the early seventies has school enrollment at Cornwall Consolidated School been so high. This fall begins with 186 students as opposed to the 168 of last year.

“New students will be well mixed throughout the grades,” said CCS principal William Oros. “There is no need to worry that this influx will overload the system,” he continued and explained that a part-time teacher would come in mornings to help the first and second grades in reading, language arts and math; aides would help primary teachers in the afternoon; and there would be four aides to help with Special Ed in grades K to 8 (there were two last year).

Paulette Soja, the music teacher, has resigned. As of mid-August, candidates for the job were being interviewed.

School will open September 3.

—Anne Zinsser
Annals of Crime I

Dean Hammond, a former state trooper now retired from the Canaan Barracks, has been digging into old crime records in the Northwest Corner. And he's come up with some delicious dirt in Cornwall.

There is, for instance, the story of the Rev. William H. Green, a Methodist minister who moved from New York to Connecticut in 1867, along with a new young widow of a wife, reputed to be worth some money. Here he lectured on temperance and gained recognition as a spellbinding evangelist. He opened a store in West Cornwall with his brother-in-law. Mrs. Green, already weakened by tuberculosis, suffered an “attack of spasms” on the evening of May 6 and died soon after midnight. But certain people were suspicious. The body was exhumed, and a Professor Barker of Yale found firm evidence of strychnine poisoning. Green, hearing of this analysis before the law latched onto him, cut his throat with a pocket knife. Thwarted in his suicide attempt, he was brought back to health, tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged on December 4, 1868. A new trial was granted, which resulted in a hung jury, a third trial, and finally a life sentence.

Hammond also tells the old story of London Dana, accused of breaking into the general store in Cornwall Bridge. The only clue in this case was the broken-off point of a knife blade, found in a window frame from which a pane had been removed. The knife point exactly matched a broken knife found in Dana’s possession. On this evidence, he was sent to Newgate Prison in Simsbury, on the site of an abandoned pre-Revolutionary mine, where he proved the most intractable of inmates. In those days the convicts made not license plates but nails. Before long Dana rebelled. He laid his right hand on the nail anvil and smashed the fingers with a hammer. Then, put to a meaningless one-handed task, he remained defiant and uncooperative. At last he was placed in a damp, dark cell deep in the old copper mine, chained to a rock, fed on bread, his only furniture a straw pallet. He endured this solitary torture for a long time, but finally begged to see the light of day, repeated, and went back to making nails with his manacled hand till the end of his term.

According to Hammond, records were scanty in the old days, and many of these are lost to time. What we find today are tantalizing tidbits. Consider a tombstone recorded in Starr’s History of Cornwall: “In Memory of Benjamin son to Peter and Elisabeth Mawwehew, he died Sept. 2, 1790, AE 4.” Starr adds, “Near the old Harrison place in Johnson Hollow an Indian wigwam was burned while the parents were absent, and Judge Harrison always insisted that two children perished. This was probably the one, and the occasion.”

Furthermore, says Hammond, it was probably relatively easy to pull off a murder before 1900, and some crimes went undetected. The State Police Department had not yet been formed. Local matters were handled by part-time town constables, and in possible homicides, the town coroner. Only if the coroner demanded an investigation was one made. What records there are indicate that between 1730 and 1900, more than 100 people suffered so-called accidental deaths—many by drowning or “killed by the cars,” or railroad. How many victims were simply thrown in the water? How many were bashed in the head, roughed up, and dumped by the tracks? No one will ever know.

But the 19th-century constables did have one advantage. “Ninety-nine point nine percent of crime in Cornwall was committed by Cornwall people,” Hammond believes. The local constables knew the town well, and knew who the troublemakers were. All this changed with the coming of the automobile after 1910. “Auto bandits” from the cities burglarized Cornwall homes, sometimes pursued by the police as they sped for the New York State line. Fortunately for justice, that line was often ignored and extradition niceties forgotten. But that gets us into other stories...

—Bob Potter
Letters to the Chronicle

PIGEON ON THE GRASS, ALAS

Generally I have not been too worried about the northward urban pressure along Route 7. However, one day early in August, an hour after I had enjoyed a Great Blue Heron stalking around on my lawn, I looked out and saw a Rock Dove, a.k.a. pigeon, in the same place. Now I am starting to worry. Was he a spy? An advance man? I hope he doesn’t report back on the scattering of sunflower seeds.

—Hanna Grossman

CHORAL MUSIC FAN

Because I can’t carry a tune, I have great admiration for anyone who can. So it was wonderful to listen to the Northwest Passage and Coltsfoot Chorus sing on July 21. But I was sad there were empty seats in the North Cornwall Church. The music was wonderful and we are so lucky to have so much musical talent here...they deserve an SRO attendance.

—Judy Bronner

THE PEQUIGNOT KISS

In July, my daughter Alexandra, the activist and Baywatch babe, flew to England to promote several British charities. During the visit, she appeared on a “silly” (her word) talk show called The Big Breakfast. The guests all perform in some way and her task was to be blindfolded and asked to identify three men who kissed her. She correctly guessed the first two but was stumped by the third. It turned out to be Bob Pequignot, the Don Juan of the fifth grade, who had given Alexandra her first kiss somewhere at CCS.

Alexandra had let this information about her and Bob slip on another show. The Big Breakfast found out and decided to give her a surprise; Bob and his girlfriend got a free trip to England.

So, CCS girls, be careful who you kiss; it might catch up with you years later and become public knowledge.

—Sarah Paul

AUNT SARAH’S DIARY

These items are from my Aunt Sarah’s diary which I recently found in the attic. I thought Chronicle readers might be interested in what was going on in 1868.

My Aunt Sarah was daughter of Sheldon and Melissa Cook Clark who lived in East Cornwall. Sarah was teaching at the District 16 School, East Cornwall.

‘Friday, April 24. Mary Keith, Mother and I have been quilting today. We put a quilt on this morning and finished quilting and took it off before dark.

—Jill Gibbons

BLACK VERSES FOR THE TOWN LIBRARY COMPUTER

Blank verses—Ah, what joy they bring!
To me they mean just blank lines,
Completely white, completely blank.
No theme to sing
No muse to thank
No words at all—one’s thoughts to sway,
A joy to folks of all the ages.
Blank verses.
Yet what might they say?

They’d say “Etsoon, afoe ye swoon
Undr your too-tight corset laces,
Cast off your spats by light of moon,
Then smile with cheerful happy faces
And sign that slip that’s white and blank
Save for the title of your bank.

—Larry Pool

found to rent the ground floor of Calhoun: Lifelike Birds, owned by Madeline Dahl, currently located in Railroad Square, West Cornwall and Mary Sams, who plans to open a Cornwall branch of her NY antiques consulting business. No manufacturing or retail is involved in either activity. Further offices on the second floor are possible. The third floor will remain residential.

Of the six homes, only one remains unsold. On another, sale is pending, and four have been sold, one to the Cornwall Housing Corp. for affordable housing.

—Hanna Grossman

Record Rosie Show

The 37th Annual Friends of Rose Algrant Art Show, held last month, had record-breaking sales of $10,800. Of the 45 artists exhibiting, 23 had sales. Commissions, plus fees and contributions, less expenses and set-asides, resulted in a $1,800 gift by the committee to the Dan Gracey Fund.

Mott Exhibits Oriental Artwork

The Cornwall Free Library is hosting an exhibition of paintings and scratchboards by Jacolyn Mott, on display through September 14. Mott shows fine mastery of Chinese watercolor, especially in Emperor’s Peonies and Oriental Lily. Her scratchboards are quite a contrast to the Oriental pieces—evidence of great versatility. Fantasy Fountain is an excellent example, in which fantastical mythical beings pour water upon an ocean below.

Best of all are Mott’s black-and-white sumi-e ink paintings, including In the High Country (a landscape) and Maine Coast (a seascape).

—Alfred Bredenberg

It’s the Law

Again this month, a Cornwall ambulance crew, responding to a “911” medical emergency, was delayed in locating its patient by the absence of a house number. In some cases—fortunately, not this one—those minutes could mean the difference between life and death.

Each home and business is required to prominently display its number, in numerals at least three inches high, in a conspicuous location. This can be near the entrance to a driveway or along the front of the property where it is readily visible from the road.

The Cornwall Volunteer

(continued on page 4)
(continued from page 3)

Fire Department again asks homeowners to be certain their house numbers are prominently displayed. Residents who need assistance should contact the Selectmen’s Office at 672-4959.

—William B. Winters

Events & Announcements

Cornwall Association Conclave: The Cornwall Association will hold its 11th annual meeting at the West Cornwall Firehouse at 4 p.m., Saturday, September 21. Everyone is welcome. Following custom, a short business meeting will be followed by refreshments. The Cornwall Association award will be given jointly this year—to Dave Becker of the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department and Ken Keskinen of the Cornwall Housing Corporation. The Association will also donate $200 to each of the organizations the award recipients represent.

The Association board will hold a regular monthly meeting at 4 p.m. on Saturday, September 14, at the Town Hall. All are welcome.

Cornwall Free Library Preschool Story Hour: Jane Prentice will be the reader, song leader and general organizer of fun for the popular Friday morning program for our youngest library users. The sessions are at 10 A.M.; check Chronicle calendar for schedule or call the Library, 672-6874.

• Computer: Our new computer will be up and running by the first week in September and all are welcome to browse the CD-ROM collection; Internet link-up is coming soon.

• Book Sale: Sponsored by the Friends of the Library, this year’s sale will be held the weekend of October 12 at the Library Building. Please contact Ella Clark, 672-4817 or call the Library if you have books to donate.

Many Thanks

To all who responded to last month’s appeal with donations and words of support (including a poem!). If you’ve been meaning to send a check and haven’t quite gotten around to it, why not do it today?

Board of Assessment Appeals will meet on Saturday, September 21 from 10 a.m. to noon in the Town Office. Persons who wish to appeal a motor vehicle assessment should come at this time. No appointment is needed and an application can be filled out at the time of the appeal. Persons with very recent vehicle ownership changes may also come at this time to assure that these are properly recorded.

The UCC Women’s Society awarded scholarships this year to four students, all from H.V.R.H.S.: Caroline Calhoun, Colby College; Sandra Gyselaers, Wheaton College; Zachary Tyler, the University of Maine; Matthew Wolf, St. Johns College.

CCC Registration: The Cornwall Child Center will open Tuesday, September 3. Children for whom registration is complete may attend on opening morning. The staff will be available after 1 p.m. for registration or information. Visitors are welcome. The phone number is 672-6989.

Cornwall Play Group begins September 4, 10 a.m.—11:30 a.m. St. Peter’s Lutheran Church Fellowship Room. Group meets Wednesday mornings except school holidays. Pre-schoolers, infants, nannies, grandparents and dads welcome, as well as moms. For more information, call 672-6101.

A Children’s Clothing Swap will take place at UCC Parish House Saturday, September 28, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Bring no more than one trash bag full of children’s winter clothing, shoes, boots and outerwear to swap. No drop-offs, please. For information, call Jane Prentice, 672-6101.

The CVFD Community Birthday Calendar, 1997 edition, can be ordered for $5.00 from CVFD, P.O. Box 131, Cornwall Bridge, CT 06754, or at Baird’s General Store, Berkshire Country Store, Cadwell’s Corner or Hedgerows Market. You may include names and dates for up to six birthday listings. Deadline for ordering is September 20; calendars will be available in early December. Please include $1.00 for postage if you want your calendar mailed. Advertising space is also offered; call Caren Nelson (672-6865) for information.

St. Peter’s Lutheran Church will hold its first annual tag sale and silent auction on Saturday, September 21 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Items available at the sale range from furniture, curtains, kitchen gear, clothes and jewelry to rugs, exercise equipment, stereos and books. The silent auction offers such enticements as the reupholstering of a chair, a year’s worth of desserts-of-the-month, gift certificates and vacation getaways.

The Northwest Corner Quilter’s Guild will hold its third annual quilt show on Saturday, September 21 from noon to 5 p.m. in the sanctuary of the United Church of Christ. The show will include all types of quilts, old and new.

For information, call Jill Gibbons (672-0033) or Corinne Levy (672-6377). If you have a quilt to show, please call or drop it off between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on the 21st.

Cornwall Biographers: The Taconic Learning Center’s fall term, beginning September 10, will offer a program billed as Lives and More Lives: The Biographer’s Art. Classes will feature three Cornwall writers: Spencer Klaw, leading discussion of his book Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Onesta Colony on October 8 and 15; Ken Keskinen on Doris Kearns’s Lyndon B. Johnson and the American Dream, November 12 and 29; and Charles Osborne on November 26 and December 3 about his Jabal: The Life and Times of General Jabal A. Early, CSA, Defender of the Lost Cause. For information about the series, call 435-2922.

Annual Ball: The Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department will hold its ball at Mohawk on September 7. Hors d’oeuvres and drinks (BYOB) from 7-8 p.m.; music—by Rock n Roll Heaven—and dancing from 8 to midnight. A door prize will be awarded for the best costume in the ball’s theme, the ambiance of the ’50s and ’60s. Tickets are $20 per couple, on sale at the door.

CORNWALL CHRONICLE

SEPTEMBER 1996

ILLUSTRATIONS Don Bracken

SEPTEMBER EDITORS

Hanna & David Grossman • Philla & Charles Osborne

OCTOBER EDITORS

Philla & Charles Osborne • Ella Clark

DIRECTORS

Tom Bevens \* PRESIDENT

Spencer Klaw \* VICE PRESIDENT • Barbara Klaw \* PUBLISHER

Edward Ferman \* SECRETARY • Robert Beers \* TREASURER

Helen Chubb • Cheryl Evans

Audrey Ferman • Charles Osborne

CORNWALL CHRONICLE

143 CREAM HILL ROAD, WEST CORNWALL, CT 06796

E-MAIL: CORNWALL@AOL.COM

CORNWALL RESIDENT