



CORNWALL CHRONICLE

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Memories of Christmas Past

Looking at the picturesque rolling hills and farmscapes of Cornwall, long a favorite subject for local photographers and artists, one might imagine a Christmas in the old days right out of old-fashioned Christmas carols and cards.

Were there one-horse open sleighs? Figgy puddings? Myrrh? (Confession: I have always wanted to use that word in a sentence.) Well, there were sleighs—when it snowed heavily in the 1920s, Marion Blake's father took the neighborhood kids to their one-room schoolhouse in a horse-drawn sled. Phil Hart's family's favorite tradition was cutting down the hemlock Christmas tree in the Valley on his birthday a week beforehand, using a sleigh when there was snow. But Christmas celebrations here were more Norman Rockwell than elaborate, at least among the farmers who started the dairy farms, had big families, and grew or raised their own food.

Phil represents the 11th generation of his family in Connecticut, descended from the lone survivor of an Indian raid. He was one of eight children on the Hart farm, and Christmas was a big deal. They decorated their tree with inherited ornaments, chains of paper circles made by the kids in school, and tinsel that their mother let them throw at the tree (and, Phil suspects, secretly

tidied up when the kids went to bed). Phil remembers piles of Christmas cards received and sent, "even to the people next door!"

They were allowed to open one present on Christmas Eve, and their stockings—laid out on the floor by the woodstove—in the morning after the milking was done. These were real cotton or wool stockings, mind you, not the gussied-up red ones you could order from the catalogs they used for shopping. Relatives swelled the crowd for Christmas dinner, which was hearty but not fancy. Because most mothers baked constantly, Marion Blake says "it seemed like Christmas every day," though they did make fudge and penuche for the holidays.

Marion grew up on a dairy farm in East Cornwall with three siblings and a cousin who came to live with them during the Depression. She remembers real candles on their homegrown tree that were lit, for safety's sake, only on Christmas day. At school they had a "Secret Santa," drawing names for gifts that were not to cost more than \$2 or \$3.

So what was in those stockings and the presents tied up in string? (That was before Scotch tape, remember?) "Kids didn't get the presents they get now," said Thalia Scoville, who came as a bride to her husband's family's farm in 1947 and had six

children. Most gifts out of necessity were practical—stockings were likely to contain socks and underwear, with some nuts or candy and an orange at the bottom, though Grandpa Blake carved little hand-held games. Presents were what children needed for the coming year: clothing made by Marion's mother; hats, coats, and mittens at the Hart farm with some mechanical toys, books, and games as time went on.

There were no special church services in those years, though at the Second Church a Christmas party replaced Sunday school before the holiday, with Carl Yutzler playing Santa. ("That combination of Jesus Christ and Santa Claus always perplexed me," said Phil.) The UCC Christmas Eve pageant we know today started during Dick Beebe's ministry in the 1940s and Phil smiles recalling the one where Monty Hare brought real sheep into the church. Some other old traditions have endured as well: two of Phil's brothers still insist on cutting down their trees on his birthday.

—Carol Schneider

Cornwall Country Market

The Cornwall Country Market in Cornwall Bridge opened its doors on November 1. Clearly, things have changed in the old

(continued on page 2)

DECEMBER 2013

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | 2 NEW ♦ Region 1 Board of Ed 6 pm HVRHS Library ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ Park & Rec 7:30 pm Town Hall | 3 ♦ Inland Wetlands 7:30 pm Town Hall | 4 | 5 CCS Eighth-Grade Pasta Dinner 5 pm and 7 pm Cornwall Inn | 6 CCS Eighth-Grade Pasta Dinner 5 pm and 7 pm Cornwall Inn | 7 ♦ Christmas Fair 9:30 am–3 pm UCC Parish House ♦ Access Health CT Workshop 1 pm Library ♦ Charles Van Doren <i>The Lion of Cortona</i> Discussion 4 pm ♦ Community Contra Dance 7 pm Town Hall |
| 8 ♦ Advent Vespers 7:15 pm North Cornwall Meeting House | 9 1 st Q | 10 ♦ Economic Dev. 8:30 am Town Hall ♦ Seniors' Luncheon 11:30 am–1 pm Wandering Moose ♦ P & Z 7 pm Library | 11 ♦ Dance Films: <i>Maple Leaf Rag and Acts of Light</i> 7 pm Library | 12 | 13 | 14 ♦ Christmas Pageant 7:30 pm UCC Parish House |
| 15 ♦ Deadline: January Chronicle Copy | 16 ♦ ZBA* 7:30 pm Library | 17 FULL ♦ Cornwall Committee for Seniors 7 pm Library ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall | 18 ♦ Board of Education 3:30 pm CCS Library | 19 ♦ Cornwall Conservation Commission 7 pm Town Hall ♦ Board of Finance 7:30 pm CCS Library | 20 ♦ Family Movies <i>A Charlie Brown Christmas</i> and <i>The Polar Express</i> 6:30 pm Library | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 4 th Q  | 26 ♦ Boxing Day Reading 4 pm North Cornwall Meeting House | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | Every Week This Month: Mondays: Yoga, 8:30–10 am Library; Yoga, 5:45–7 pm CCS; Karate, 6:30–7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ Tuesdays: Adult Volleyball, 7:30 pm CCS gym ♦ Wednesdays: Tai Chi, 6–9 pm Town Hall; Women's Basketball , 7:30 pm CCS gym ♦ Thursdays: Pilates, 8:30–9:30 am Library; Toddler Play Group , 10:30–11:30 am Library; Yoga , 5:30–6:30 pm Library ♦ Fridays: Yoga, 8:30–10 am Library ♦ Saturdays: West Cornwall Walks, 12:30 pm Wish House ♦ Sundays: Yoga 9–10:30 am Library; Meditation , 1–2 pm, call Debra for location, 672–0229; West Cornwall Walks , 12:30 pm Wish House | | | |

*Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

(continued from page 1)

Baird's building. Owners James and Idella Shepard have transformed the place, spending the last few months making extensive improvements. There are new windows, flooring, seating areas, shelving, heating and cooling system, front deck, handicap ramp, septic system, bathrooms, and even an underground grease trap. The result is a bright, open, welcoming store—exactly the vision James and Idella had for the building.

The Shepards say that the last few weeks have been a whirlwind learning experience, and they have been busy and putting in long hours—which they expected. They are “overwhelmed” with the amount of support that they have gotten from the Cornwall community. Their goal is to provide a friendly gathering place, and to partner with other Cornwall businesses to provide local goods for sale.

For now, the store offers the usual deli fare, with a selection of ready-to-go, store-made meals. There's Hurlburt beef in the freezer, and Suzie's Sweets and other baked goods on the counter. The shelves contain household staples, from bread and pasta to diapers and pain relievers. There are also several areas to sit and eat, or relax and have some coffee. Plans for the future? This spring they are going to improve the picnic area between the store and Bonney Brook.

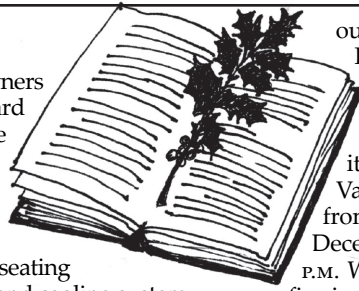
—Annie Kosciusko

Mountain Greenery

It takes eight to ten years to grow a solid Christmas tree. Our early settlers would find it hard even to grasp the concept of a tree farm, but nowadays, tree farms are thriving. The *Chronicle* did an informal survey recently on where Cornwall's Christmas buyers are getting their trees these days. It found that some people no longer have them; some have artificial trees to pull out of the cupboard; some find trees on their own land; and one even digs up a small tree with root ball and returns it to the field after the holiday.

Others have their favorite sources. In town, Jack Kling (83 Todd Hill Road at Route 128) has his own stand of firs from 5 feet to 12 feet tall. Call ahead; you can cut your own, or Jack will cut and clip it for you. At Benjamin Farms (115 Furnace Brook Road), DeForest Benjamin will be open on the first three weekends in December with spruces and firs. Precut trees from eastern Connecticut, and some “cut your own” are on hand, a few over 20 feet tall. (The three-foot trees in their field will be ready in another four or five years.) They supply seedlings for starting your own trees.

But beware of risks! Rick Lynn will not be selling this year because deer have wiped



out the operation, devouring the Frazier firs “like candy.” The Lynns plan to transition to spruce trees in the future.

Most of Cornwall buys its trees from the FFA at Housatonic Valley Regional High School, open from November 23 through December 23, from 9:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. White pines, spruce, balsam, and firs in all sizes are trucked in, mostly from Vermont and Maine. Wreath and garland making, pricing, selling, and lashing your tree atop your car are all student-run operations. —Ann Schillinger

Daffodils in Memory

On a warm Saturday in October, about 25 men, women, and children came together to plant 1,000 assorted daffodil bulbs all along the roadside near Cream Hill Farm. Donated by Julia Scott, the bulbs were planted in memory of Ralph Gold, who died earlier this year. Julia commented that she would like this to be an annual event. Ann Gold expressed her delight and appreciation to all those who came out to plant: “This has been wonderful; I hope everyone comes by in the spring to see the results of their hard work.” —Jane Bean

Ridgway Wins Another Term

Voters in Cornwall gave First Selectman Gordon Ridgway a 12th two-year term as he defeated his Republican opponent K.C. Baird 346 to 169 in the November election. He will be joined on the Board of Selectmen by incumbent Democrat Richard Bramley, who received 299 votes, and Republican newcomer Heidi Kearns, who took the third spot on the board with a vote total of 212.

Other winners in head-to-head contests were Bill Hurlburt and Janet Carlson Sanders on the Board of Finance; Irene Hurlburt, newcomer Dave Cadwell, and Rachel Matsudaira to the Board of Education; and Dave Colbert and Steve Saccardi to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

In other contests where those running had no opponents, returned to office were Town Clerk Vera Dinneen, Treasurer John Green, Tax Collector Jean Bouteiller, Charles Gold to the Board of Assessment Appeals, Ginny Potter and Ann Schillinger to the Zoning Board of Appeals, and Jack Preston and Maureen Donahue as Board of Finance alternates.

Also elected were Steve Saccardi, Anna Hubbard, and Pat Elias to the Park and Recreation Commission. It was a rather light turnout for Cornwall, with just a little more than half the town's registered voters going to the polls. —John Miller

Welcome

Jack Root to Michael Root and Laurie Bianchi

Goodbye to a Friend

Frances B. Wood

Land Transfers

Estate of Neil Taylor to Vladimir Parizhsky and Anna Kremer, 25.212 acres with improvements thereon and 1/3 interest in 10.908 acres, at 22 Whitcomb Way for \$510,000.

William Lee Berry and Nancy G. Berry to Richard G. Griggs, 3.91 acres with all buildings and improvements thereon, at 55 Lake Road, for \$160,000.

John A. Lorch and David Lorch to Brian F. Lorch, 2/3 interest in 5.358 acres, with all improvements thereon, at 34 Hickory Lane, for \$203,334.

William Paley and Elaine Beun to Gregory Goldberg and Katya Kazakina, 5.3473 acres with dwelling and improvements thereon, at 15 Poughkeepsie Road, for \$712,000.

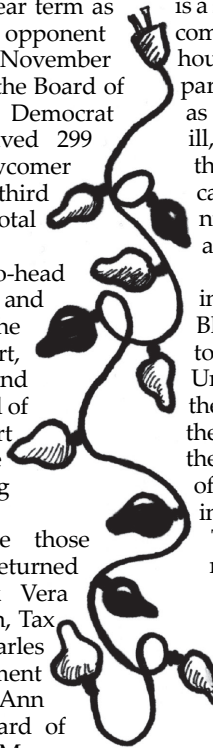
Life Savers

“You saved my life” is a comment that Cornwall's Pat and Jerry Blakey have heard more than once during the 37 years that they have been loaning and donating medical equipment to area residents. Theirs is a story of happenstance, compassion, and commitment. Pat's aunt had inherited the house at 1 Pine Street after Pat's grandparents had passed. With the aunt, as well as Pat's mother and father then becoming ill, the three relatives moved together into the Pine Street house for convenience of care and support...a family-run, mini nursing home close by the caregivers, Pat and Jerry.

When Pat's mother, Jean Benedict, died in 1975 the house was vacant and the Blakeys arranged for Jean's hospital bed to be transferred to a storage closet at the United Church of Christ. The bed was then loaned to whomever needed it. As the word of the traveling bed got around, the Blakeys began receiving donation offers of all types of medical devices that individuals no longer needed.

The inventory of equipment and the need of it so expanded that during the UCC's addition in 2000, a basement storage area was devoted exclusively to what has now become known as the Medical Equipment Loan Program or “the lending locker.” The basement inventory is extensive and the program's scope is astonishing.

In 2013 alone over 150 borrowers had used the program through early November, many borrowing multiple items. Requests arrive from individuals, visiting nurse associations, and convalescent homes throughout the Northwest Corner and sometimes beyond. Calls to the Blakeys



begin early mornings with the activity being 24/7. On a recent Friday eight requests were received and Jerry had been able to deliver six of the items by the end of the day. Current items on loan include: 58 wheelchairs, 25 electric assist lift chairs, 67 walkers, 26 hospital beds, 55 commodes, two aluminum access ramps, and 17 electric scooters.

Nearly all of the equipment has been donated. The remainder has been purchased via monetary gifts by grateful borrowers that are deposited in a special UCC account and via a UCC budget.

Although items can be obtained at the UCC or from the Blakeys directly, Jerry and Pat have driven nearly 2,000 miles in 2013 delivering items to individuals. For moving the bulky and heavy items, assistance is received mainly from the Blakeys' son and son-in-law David Blakey and David Welles, John Calhoun, and Roger Kane.

Other than this heavy lifting help, the program is handled exclusively by the Blakeys. Have they any concerns? Yes, one major worry. Who will keep this program running when they are no longer able to manage it? Now who else will step forward?
—Jeff Jacobsen

"Soup's On!"

A long-standing tradition in Cornwall on Election Day, begun in the early 1960s, is to stop by the United Church of Christ (UCC) Parish House after casting your vote at the town hall to enjoy a hot bowl of soup. Awaiting you are more than two or three choices, and the best part is that you can vote more than once.

The candidates, six large steaming crock pots, wait on white tablecloth-covered tables for the voting to begin. Once inside the Parish House doors, their appealing aromas reach out and pull you in by the nose as you stumble over your feet to cast your vote. Hey, wait a minute! I thought voting was a free-will gesture. Behind the candidates are the ladle-wielding, non-partisan attendants ready to fill a bowl with the soup of your choice.

Voting is not easy as these are extraordinary candidates. Their creaminess, chunkiness and full-of-flavor lip-smacking goodness have garnered distinction as favorite family soups, favorite Election Day soups, and soups back by popular demand. The recipe for Jill Bryant's mulligatawny soup, a soup that had its origins in India, was given to Jill in 1990 by her cousin Sue Calhoun Heminway who found it in a VNA cookbook. Pat Blakey's corn chowder is definitely back by popular demand. "It's my favorite," said Tracy Gray. "I always have it." Pat also made a flavorful bean stew; Lori Wells, a pureed ginger squash soup; Margaret Kane, a roasted

tomato soup; and Micki Nunn-Miller, a heavenly chili. It was hard to narrow the choice down to just one candidate. Some voters had to cast their ballot two or three times.

Following this extravaganza of voting was a real arm twister in the dessert category. Audrey Ferman made scrumptious chocolate loaf cake and zucchini bread, and Norma Lake made delectable lemon squares, all of which garnered enough votes to earn their own place on the Senate floor.

In an ecstasy of appreciation as he went back to cast his vote again, John Miller said, "We should have mock elections four times a year so we can have soup again."

I'll second that!
Donations raised \$435 for the Cornwall Food & Fuel Fund. —Brenda Underwood

Cornwall Briefs

•**Calling Again:** The cell tower thing just won't go away. Now comes AT&T scouting properties in Cornwall Bridge, the town's gravel bank on Route 128, and elsewhere. P&Z, for its part, is considering changing the conversation about the towers from confrontation to reasonable cooperation. A forum is planned for mid-January; keep your eyes peeled for the date.

•**Other Than a Tennis Court:** Ivan Lendl, the town's heftiest taxpayer, caught a break when a Superior Court settlement reduced his property taxes by \$11,000 to a more doable \$112,000. Lendl's 14,000 square-foot house and 25 acres are assessed at \$11 million. The effort to defend cost the town \$26,000, which was drawn from the budget's contingency fund.

•**Chugging Ahead:** The briefer would never have placed a bet on this, but the future of passenger service on the Housatonic line is getting rosier. The CT DOT, whose job it will be to repair the roadbed, has expressed cautious interest under some pressure from north of the border. A project to repair the line between Ashley Falls and Pittsfield has actually gotten funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Handicappers should note that Gov. Deval Patrick has a summer place in Alford. First Selectman Gordon Ridgway said it was nice to hear the CT DOT talking about bicycles and trains for once instead of asphalt and highways. —Lisa L. Simont

Mabel's Trip

Many people in Cornwall have fond memories of Mabel Engisch. She taught at CCS for 20 years, from the school's opening day to her retirement in 1960, then continued as a frequent substitute for more than 20 years. I first met Mrs. Engisch, then in her early

forties, as a fifth-grader in 1940. She had a unique combination of gentleness and firmness, the latter somehow arising from the former. She was so nice that you wanted to be nice too. She gave us no homework. She let us listen to the World Series. Sometimes she would forget the lessons and read to us all afternoon.

Little did I know that in the fall of 1940, Mabel—it's still awkward to call her that—had just returned from a circuit of the USA with a friend, Clara Sandmeyer. Mabel's daily journal of that trip has recently been transcribed by her niece, Marcia McGowan of Watertown. The diary contains many snapshots—the ladies always in just-below-the-knee dresses and wearing hats—and a menu from Moore's Café in Jackson Hole, Wyo., with a hamburger at 15 cents and coffee for a dime.

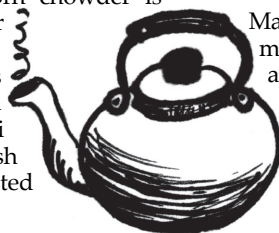
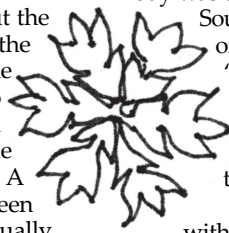
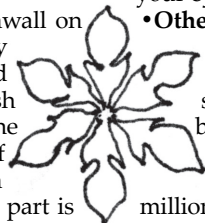
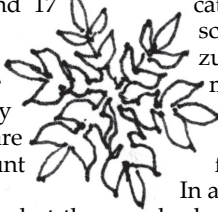
The travelers took 75-mile turns driving Mabel's 1940 Plymouth, with a 25-mile penalty for not getting out of bed in time to leave on the prepared schedule. They left Cornwall on July 1, reaching Rochester that first day. They spent their nights in "tourist homes" or cabins, where the going rate was usually \$1. Mabel frequently commented on the cabins, especially those that were "perfectly bad." "cobwebs on the ceiling;" "the toilet flushed OK once—then needed a plumber;" "Clara saw a frog in her shower—later a grasshopper in her bed;" "too much shouting and hollering and laughing, I was awake most of the night."

Parts of Mabel's journal are just what one might expect: routine descriptions of national parks and other tourist spots. Her writing gets more interesting when it gets more personal. She relished what she called "choc sodas," seemingly determined to have at least one in every state. Near Denison, Iowa, she had one, then ordered another. The next day was a different story. In the Badlands of South Dakota, water was scarce and often had to be hauled for miles.

"Stopped at a drugstore—got a choc soda and while drinking it—noticed how the girls cleaned the glasses (pouring water from one to the other) so I left my choc soda."

Westward the two continued, without the benefit of air conditioning, through heat that reached 106°. "Awfully hot. Couldn't sleep all night—no air." She amusingly described the pleasure/pain experience of a swim in Utah's Great Salt Lake. Getting out of the heavy water, she discovered that the top of her "bathing suit" had slipped down. Her comment: "Another of life's most embarrassing moments."

The drive back from California was easier: "Rented an air cooler for the car crossing the desert. A queer affair to put on the window of the door—contains water, etc." This "helped a lot going across the desert—about 300 miles—terribly hot." After passing many oil rigs in Oklahoma, the ladies were surprised to find that gas got cheaper as they continued east. In Missouri they "saw signs of regular for 9 cents and special for 10



cents, tax paid. Although it was mostly 12 and 14 cents per gallon."

The Great Depression was not quite over: many Indian women selling items on hot and barren roadsides, many small towns dilapidated and distressed. "Never saw so many hitchhikers—especially so many girls and so many times a fellow and a girl. They stand by the roadside and sometimes have boxes and a couple of suitcases. Some of the men looked so dirty and are dressed so badly." "Still traveled on Route 66—saw some awful old cars and families cooking their breakfast along the highway—mattresses laying on the ground—very much like book *Grapes of Wrath*."

There's no room for more in this space. Mabel's *Road Trip Journal: 1940* has been donated to the Cornwall Historical Society and may be read there upon request. Highly recommended. —Bob Potter

Events & Announcements

CCS Eighth-Grade Pasta Dinner: Thursday December 5, and Friday December 6, at the Cornwall Inn. Seatings at 5 and 7 P.M. each night. Cost is \$15 for adults, \$10 for children. Reservations required. Take-out available. Email ccs8thgradepastadinner@gmail.com for more information.

Get Help with Healthcare: Access Health CT will be holding workshops to help people get information and get enrolled in health insurance programs. One workshop will be held on Thursday, December 5, at the Salisbury Bank and Trust Co. in Lakeville from 5:30 to 7:30 P.M., and another on Saturday, December 7, from 1 to 3 P.M. at the Cornwall Library. Please bring Social Security numbers for you and your family, employer and income information for every member of your family who needs coverage (pay stubs or W2 forms), and policy numbers for any current health insurance plans covering members of your household. Contact Janet

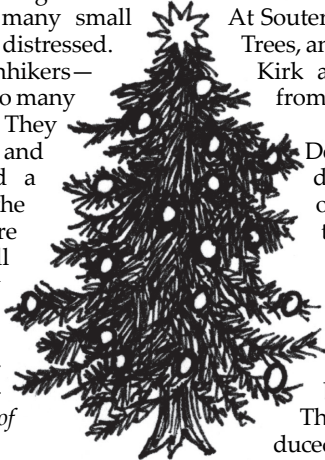
Closing out 2013

The current year drops into the past now leaving us with memories of a hot summer and a mild fall. The *Chronicle*, your source of local news and occasional amusement, has thrived, thanks to you. Watch for lots of new editors, writers, and artists in 2014. And keep the checks coming!

Sanders at cornwallsanders@gmail.com or call 672-0038 for more information.

Art in Cornwall

At Souterrain Gallery: Visions of Earth, Trees, and Skies featuring artists Cindy Kirk and Zejke Herman. Showing from November 30 to February 9.



Mexican Flowers, Day of the Dead; jewelry by artist and designer Ann Spence of She Bee opened October 29, and will run through December 14.

Words and Pictures: Ink, Inc. Prints by Robert Andrew Parker opens December 17 and runs through February 1. Parker and the Salisbury-based typographer and printer Thomas Whitridge have produced some 20 books together over the last six years that will be on exhibition. All the work is a combination of typesetting, printing, and drawing, with the distinction often blurred. The artists' talk and reception is on January 4.

The UCC Christmas Fair will be Saturday, December 7, 9:30 A.M. to 3 P.M. in the Parish House in Cornwall Village. Featured items include local crafts and foods, wreaths, bake sale, children's shopping room, basket raffle, and luncheon. For more information call 672-6840.

Contra Dance: Swing into the holidays at the Cornwall Community Contra Dance on Saturday, December 7, at 7 P.M. at the town hall. Live music by Still, the Homegrown Band, with instruction and calling by Patricia Campbell. All ages welcome, no partner necessary. Donations requested to pay the caller. For information call Jane at 672-6101.

Senior Luncheon on Tuesday, December 10, from 11:30 A.M. to 1 P.M. at the Wandering Moose Cafe. No reservation necessary. For information call Jane at 672-6101.

UCC Pageant: Calling all angels, shepherds, and wise men for the annual Christmas Pageant Saturday, December 14, at 7:30 P.M. (snow date: Sunday, December 15, at 4 P.M.) at the UCC. Traditional readings and carols will culminate in the giving of "white gifts" for children in need. Please bring a toy wrapped in plain white paper. Refreshments will follow in the Parish House. Those interested in being in the pageant: rehearsal is at the church on Friday, December 13, at 5:30 P.M. sharp. Questions? Call Jane at 672-6101.

At the Library

The family movie will be held December 20 at 6:30 P.M. The library will show two Christmas classics, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* followed by *The Polar Express*.

The dance movie is scheduled for Wednesday, December 11, at 7 P.M., when the films on Martha Graham's ballets, *Maple Leaf Rag* and *Acts of Light* will be shown.

On December 7 at 4 P.M. Charlie Van Doren will discuss his most recent work, a trilogy titled *The Lion of Cortona*. Books will be available for sale and signing.

Annual Boxing Day Reading: On December 26, Tom Walker will read from two unorthodox Christmas-themed works: *The Blue Carbuncle* by Arthur Conan Doyle and Damon Runyon's *Dancing Dan's Christmas*. This will be held at 4 P.M. at the North Cornwall Meeting House.

Food Drive: The National Iron Bank is running a food drive to support the Cornwall Food Pantry. Anything you give is appreciated. Popular items range from pasta sauce to cold cereal to any personal or nonperishable items. Donations will be accepted at the Cornwall Bridge branch.

Help Wanted, Civil War: The Cornwall Historical Society is seeking material for its 2014 exhibit about the Civil War from Cornwall's perspective. Included among the featured Cornwall soldiers will be Maj. Gen. John Sedgwick; 2014 marks the 150th year since the death of this beloved officer from a sniper's bullet at Spotsylvania. We welcome the loan/donation of any letters, photographs, and other memorabilia related to Cornwall and the Civil War. Call 672-0505 or email cornhistsoc@optonline.net.

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CORNWALL CHRONICLE

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THIS MONTH

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