



CORNWALL CHRONICLE

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Struggling In Cornwall

Laura (not her real name) is 55 and has lived in town with her family for 14 years, renting a house on Popple Swamp Road. In 2010 her husband's home improvement business failed, and in 2012 she was laid off from her job at Housatonic Valley Regional High School. Her husband and youngest son have serious health issues and are essentially disabled. And so Laura is not only a caregiver but has to figure out how to feed the family, pay the rent, and find the money for heating fuel and gas.

She seems cheerful and organized but admits to being under a lot of stress. "My two Labs and anxiety meds help," she said.

"I had to sell most of our possessions and our family treasures just to get gas money. Dealing with the state is a nightmare. I have paperwork a foot thick trying to get assistance from them.

"I think we would have starved or frozen without Cornwall Social Services. It's the most important office in town. And there are many families like us. Every time I go to see Jill (Social Services Director Jill Gibbons), there are lines out the door, the phone is ringing, and files are piled high.

Somehow Jill manages; she's really a dedicated professional and she's kept me, my family, and my pets alive."

Stories like Laura's are all too common in town, which may surprise some who view Cornwall as a wealthy community. And yes, we are relatively wealthy, census data assure us, with a median income of \$80,000, far above state and U.S. medians.

But if you look further, you'll find some troubling additional data. While almost a quarter of Cornwall households have income of over \$150,000, a substantial minority, over 12 percent, now has income below the poverty level. About the same percentage of Cornwallians are enrolled in Medicaid, and almost 5 percent are enrolled in SNAP (food stamps).

The low-income figures in Cornwall are no surprise to Jill Gibbons. "I've always had a steady flow of clients needing assist-

ance," she said, "but things started to change drastically with the recession in 2007. People in Cornwall are proud and want to work. When the recession hit I had couples coming in who had never needed help but who had lost their jobs and were devastated.

"The recession may have ended for some," Jill said, "but it hasn't ended for my clients, it's only gotten worse."

Jill's tenure as social services director began at the time when First Selectman Patsy Van Doren brought new energy and ideas to town government. Jill told us, "One day in 1985 Patsy called me into her office and said: 'I want all social services off my desk. I need you to do this job, and I know you'll be good at it.' And that's how it all started." What began as a part-time job has become increasingly busy and essential.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway echoed Jill about the growing need in town. "There's little building in the area and construction jobs have dried up. Many younger people have simply given up and left Cornwall," Gordon said. "But it's a regional and state problem. Connecticut is losing more 20-to 40-year olds than any other state."

Although the 2012 census shows only 4.1 percent unemployed in Cornwall, it also

(continued on page 2)



SEPTEMBER 2014

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 ◆ Inland Wetlands 7:30 pm Town Hall ◆ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall ◆ Park & Rec 7:30 pm Town Hall ◆ CCS Opening Day	3 ◆ Creative Writing Workshop begins 6:30-8:30 pm Library	4 ◆ Woman's Society 10 am UCC Parish House ◆ Red Cross Blood Drive 1-5:45 pm UCC	5	6 ◆ Cornwall Agricultural Fair 10 am-4 pm Village Green ◆ Newcomers' Tea 4-6 pm Library ◆ Community Contra Dance 7 pm Town Hall
7 ◆ Maj. Gen. John Sedgwick Walking Tour 2-3:30 pm	8 ◆ Free Blood Pressure Clinic Noon-1 pm UCC ◆ Region 1 Board of Ed 6 pm Rm 133 HVRHS	9 ◆ Economic Development 8:30 am Town Hall ◆ Seniors' Luncheon 11:30 am-1 pm Wandering Moose ◆ P&Z 7 pm Library ◆ Housatonic River Commission 7:30 pm CCS	10	11	12	13 ◆ HH Hazardous Waste Collection 9 am-2 pm Torrington ◆ Board of Assessment Appeals 10-11 am Town Offices
14 ◆ CCT Picnic Noon-2 pm Hart Farm Preserve ◆ Art Opening 4 pm Souterrain Gallery ◆ Covered Bridge Closed 4-9 pm	15 ◆ Deadline: October Chronicle Copy	16 ◆ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall	17 ◆ Board of Ed 4 pm CCS Library ◆ Board of Finance 7:30 pm CCS Library	18 ◆ Cornwall Conservation Comm. 6:30 pm Town Hall	19	20
21	22 ◆ ZBA* 7:30 pm Library	23	24 ● NEW	25	26	27
28	29	30 ◆ Committee for Seniors 7 pm Library	Every Week This Month: Mondays: Yoga, 8:30-10 am Library; Karate, 6:30-7:30 pm Town Hall ◆ Wednesdays: Tai Chi, 6-9 pm Town Hall; ◆ Thursdays: Pilates, 8:30-9:30 am Library; Toddler Play Group, 10:30-11:30 am Library; Meditation, 4-5 pm call Debra 672-0229; Mah Jongg 7-9 pm Library; Adult Volleyball , 7:30 pm CCS gym ◆ Fridays: Yoga, 8:30-10 am Library ◆ Saturdays: Farm Market, 9 am-1 pm West Cornwall except 9/6 at AgFair ◆ Sundays: Yoga 9-10:30 am Library; Meditation, 1-2 pm call Debra 672-0229			

*Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

For additions and updating, visit www.cornwallchronicle.org

shows that 32 percent are “not in labor force.” One can infer that many of these have given up or dropped out, part of the “disappearing work force.” It hurts even more that Connecticut has the worst job creation record in the nation.

As jobs fled the state, Connecticut’s Department of Social Services foundered. Jill observed: “When the economy took the downturn, caseload in my office went up dramatically. State assistance was reduced as their offices were also overwhelmed. They didn’t have the staff or even a phone system that could handle the caseload. Clients could not reach their caseworkers and now have a 3.5 hour wait to speak with any DSS worker.”

That’s when Cornwall steps in with its town programs. The most important of these is the Cornwall Food & Fuel Fund. “It’s been an absolute godsend,” Jill said, “and townspeople have been generous in donating to it.”

In the 10 months from July 2013 through April 2014, this fund granted \$22,627 to 99 people; many were disabled or had chronic health problems. The largest percentage is in the age group 51 to 60.

The food & fuel fund is far from the only activity of Cornwall Social Services. Other local programs include the food pantry, a rental assistance program, and holiday gift and food assistance. During the last fiscal year, social services took in 325 applications for assistance.

These programs are entirely funded by private donations. Aside from a \$500 budget item for General Assistance (and the salary of the social services director), there are no town revenues dedicated to social service programs.

Jill can also refer applicants to regional programs such as the Berkshire Taconic’s Jane Lloyd Fund, which aids those with a cancer diagnosis. (Social services seem just as complicated as health care.)

Jill does what she can, “but sometimes I feel it’s just a drop in the bucket.” Struggling families may be better off here. But this country and this state do very little for the poor, and it’s clear that Cornwall shares the enormous problem of income inequality, about which much has been written but almost nothing done. —Ed Ferman

A Snake-Lover’s House

My grandfather Samuel Scoville, Jr. loved snakes. He loved finding them and collecting them and writing about them. He often caught them on his nature walks, brought them home and put them into suitcases, from which they escaped.

Snakes always showed up around my grandfather. The house he built, Treetop, has massive dry stone chimneys, which provide them a welcoming portal. The first

fall after we arrived there, I was reading in the living room when I noticed a movement on the big stone hearth. I looked up but saw just the uneven granite surface with its dark crevices. I looked down and again saw a flicker, then nothing. This time I waited.

It was a tiny, beautiful ringneck snake, shimmery black all along his length, with a crisp elegant white collar like a minister’s. After a long still moment he began a slow secretive slither across the hearth, with that strange motionless motion.

I got a hand towel, dropped it gently over him, scooped it carefully closed from the edges, then held it shut like a bag. I carried it out and set it down among the rocks and opened it.

Now he was a glowing set of black curves. He whiplashed suddenly, his gleaming body slashing and twisting, and then he was gone into the ferns.

Ringnecks are mild fangless creatures who wait, motionless, until an unwary invertebrate or insect wanders by. They do good work in the garden, but not in the house, where they drift haplessly across our floors. That first year there were five babies, though each year there are fewer. Two years ago I was in the upstairs bathroom with a plumber who was fixing the shower. A tiny snake slithered along the wall.

“Don’t hurt him,” I said, “he’s just a baby ringneck.”

I got a towel, but the snake whiplashed inside the plumber’s cloth. “Let’s just gather up your drop cloth and take him out to the garden,” I said.

The plumber looked at me, “You want to save him?”

“Of course, save him,” I said.

The plumber shook his head. “My wife wouldn’t feel that way,” he said. “I can tell you, this snake was born in the right zip code.” We carried him out together.

I haven’t seen any this year, so maybe the chimney plugging is working. But on the lawn yesterday I found a discarded skin, a long ghostly slither, light and airy. Near the head it’s crumpled into accordion pleats, as though he’d shuffled impatiently to get out. Every detail of the snake is there in perfect negative: wide underbelly scales, flat nose, gaping eyes. It’s not a snake but the pale memory of a snake, the after image, the reminder that I live in a snake-lover’s house. —Roxana Robinson

STEAP for the Steeple

The town has received its sixth Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant: \$100,000 for restoration of the steeple and other areas of the historic North Cornwall Meeting House (NCMH). A town meeting will be called in October to vote to accept the grant, for which the

town will have financial oversight.

STEAP grants are available for towns of 30,000 or fewer residents that do not have an urban center; they must be used for economic development, conservation, or quality of life. According to First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, state Representative Roberta Willis and former state Senator Andrew Roraback spearheaded the legislation.

Since 2004 the town has received \$1,180,000 in grants. The others were for Foote Field, Cornwall Historical Society renovations, business facades (two), and the Hughes Library.

The Friends of the North Cornwall Meeting House’s goal is to raise at least \$400,000 for restoration and an endowment to maintain the building. In addition to the STEAP grant, they have received a \$20,000 matching Survey and Planning Grant from the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). This will be used to hire a state-approved historical architect to do cost estimates and oversee planning; they are in the process of interviewing three candidates for the job.

Once costs are determined, they plan to apply for a DECD Building Grant in October and anticipate that the restoration work will be underway by spring 2015.

—Audrey Ferman

Congratulations

Sophie Horsley to Michael Mager

Emily Kilroy to Stefan Wolf

Katherine Houk to Frederick Scoville III

Shoshana Pinedo to Sam Bruehl

Goodbye to Friends

Mary Burnham MacCracken

Joyce Daley St. Pierre

Diana Trowbridge

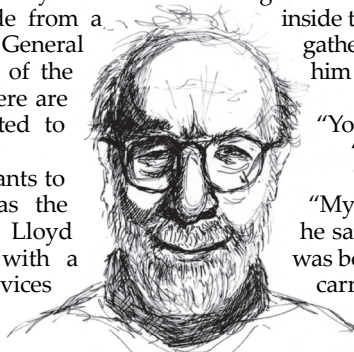
James Trowbridge

Bonney Brook Up and Running

After months of envisioning, incorporating, building, and clearing hurdles, Cornwall’s low-income elderly housing community—Bonney Brook—is fully occupied and thriving. Resident Nick Jacobs says he “is very thankful to the people who spent six years putting this place together.”

A line of maturing trees set against a stone wall buffers the attractive, ten-unit complex from the traffic on Route 7. In the backyard, lawn chairs, small tables, a gas grill, and newly planted flowers hint at the camaraderie of the residents.

Al Stokes, property administrator for Elderly Housing Management (the non-profit agency hired by Cornwall Elderly Housing Corporation to maintain the facility and to deal with HUD compliance, fair housing issues, and rentals), said there



Marc Simant

is a sense of community among the tenants and it is growing stronger. Will Calhoun, vice president of the Cornwall Housing Corporation, said, "By and large, everyone seems really happy there...the spaces are not enormous, but you can't beat the price or the quality." Stokes also explained that life at Bonney Brook can be a bit of a transition for people coming from private homes.

In addition to their apartments, which are about 530 square feet, tenants have access to a shared yard, community room, laundry room, and TV room. All utilities are included in the rent. Rents are calculated using HUD formulas, and grants and subsidies enable tenants to pay no more than 30 percent of their adjusted gross income for rent. Applicants must meet income guidelines, and individuals must make no more than approximately \$31,400 to qualify (for couples the ceiling is about \$35,850). Because federal funding is involved, the units are available to non-Cornwall residents, though most who apply have some connection to the area, whether it be prior residence, family, or job. Currently, there is a waiting list of five for the apartments.

Like any new building project there is a settling-in period. Some issues need fine tuning, said Calhoun. For example, the rooms situated above the boiler run warmer than others. The engineer and architect are also addressing the slope to the rear of the property that sloughed this spring with the wet weather.

Those curious to see the facility for themselves will have that opportunity when CHC has an open house at Bonney Brook. *—Pam Longwell*



Audrey Hepburn

- a. \$4.55 million
- b. \$4 million
- c. \$3.55 million
- d. \$3.25 million

3. In 1992, two residents sued the town, claiming that an affordable house site on Town Street would:
- a. Allow ordinary people to move in.
 - b. Lower real estate values.
 - c. Deprive them of their constitutional rights.
 - d. Pretty much all of the above.

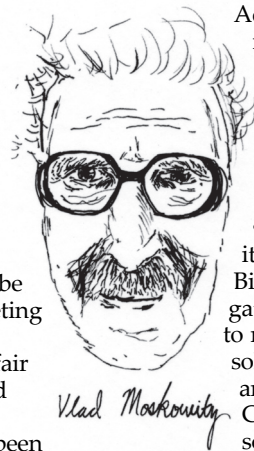
4. Cornwall voted to become a "Nuclear Free Zone" for the purpose of:
- a. Preventing the storage of nuclear waste in Coltsfoot Valley.
 - b. Protesting a plan to locate a cruise missile launcher on Mohawk Mountain.
 - c. Preventing trucks from hauling radioactive stuff through town.
 - d. Keeping a Trident submarine out of the Housatonic.

5. After several residents sued P&Z for reducing setbacks for sawmills, a judge ruled in favor of P&Z, reasoning that:
- a. It was consistent with the Town Plan.
 - b. The noise was unpleasant but easily managed with earplugs.
 - c. There was a local shortage of lumber.
 - d. The sawdust had a nice smell.

6. In 1997 P&Z abolished the Industrial/Residential Zone in Cornwall Bridge because:
- a. "Industrial/Residential" was a senseless contradiction in terms.
 - b. It was located on top of a large aquifer.
 - c. They were sick of dealing with applications for a gravel mine in the area.
 - d. All of the above.

7. In 2010, the Connecticut Siting Council approved a cell tower on Popple Swamp Road, despite a brief from the town attorney opposing it. The brief, which was ignored by the CSC, argued that:

- a. Hardly anyone in town used cell phones.
- b. A better location would be the North Cornwall Meeting House steeple.
- c. CSC's hearings were unfair and the chairman bullied witnesses.
- d. The tower should have been disguised as a tree.



Vlad Markovitch

—Ed Ferman

ANSWERS: 1-c; 2-c; 3-d; 4-c; 5-a; 6-d; 7-c.

Correction: An August brief failed to say that the Cornwall Association paid for part of the new tent.

Cornwall Briefs

•Cell Towers Hung Up: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway has received a letter from AT&T stating that it has decided to defer any action on two tower proposals until 2015 at the earliest. This is after many months of the town working with AT&T evaluating two sites—at the town quarry and at Dark Entry Road—not to mention the expenditure of at least \$2,000 of town funds on legal and engineering fees. The selectmen's reaction to the letter: "disappointing." Verizon's approved tower on Popple Swamp Road is also on hold. For whatever reason, the two giant wireless carriers have decided to place a low priority on improving their networks in Cornwall.

•Covered Bridge Closing: The bridge will be closed from 4 to 9 p.m. on Sunday, September 14, to accommodate the dinner run by Community Table restaurant. West Cornwall businesses will be open. The Wandering Moose will be open 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. for breakfast and lunch and will be closed for dinner.

•New Truck: What do the silky all-electric Tesla Model S and a Freightliner large highway truck have in common? The price: \$87,225 for the truck (and \$89,000 for the car). The selectmen voted to accept a bid for the truck at a recent meeting.

•Bridge Work: Route 43 will be closed to through traffic between house numbers 173 and 259 until mid-September. One-lane traffic continues on Route 4 between Popple Swamp Road and West Road.

•CCT Scholarships: Four local college students—Adam Cowan, Brian Saccardi, and Katelyn Kearns of Cornwall and Elise Haan of Sharon—have been awarded 2014 Cornwall Conservation Trust scholarships. According to CCT, the grants, which ranged from \$500 to \$1,000, totaled \$3,250 and are given to students who plan to study conservation, environmental preservation, and resource management and show potential for environmental leadership.

•Paint the Bridge Day, a celebration of its 150th anniversary, was a big success. Bianca Griggs and Melissa Andrews gathered about 40 artists, from high profile to novices. Over a third of their work was sold, with 70 percent going to the artists and 30 percent benefitting the West Cornwall Village Improvement Association. *—The Editors*

•CCS Opens on September 2 with an enrollment in the low 90s: fewer than last year, as a result of 15 students graduating and only four currently registered for kindergarten. Special ed teacher Elizabeth Clarke has retired and will be replaced by Susan Hatcher. *—Erin Hedden*

The Cornwall Controversies Quiz

The *Chronicle* has reported on some controversial issues in town over the years. See how many you remember:

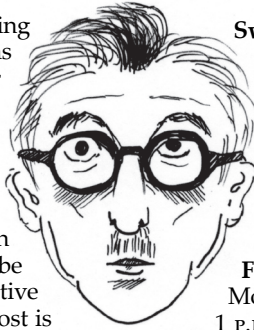
1. In 1991 a trailer was parked near town hall over the objection of Selectman Steve Hedden, who said he didn't like trailers. The purpose of the trailer was to:
 - a. Offer health-screening scans for Cornwall seniors.
 - b. Euthanize cats.
 - c. House the office of the first selectman.
 - d. Provide shelter for homeless persons.

2. We have a history of close votes on controversial referendums, notably the project to add a gym and classrooms to CCS in 2002. A \$4.7 million expansion was approved 275–253, then reversed 451–416. After a complex series of votes, a new plan was finally approved, at a cost of:

Events & Announcements

At the Cornwall Library

A six-week Creative Writing Workshop led by Debra Devins begins Wednesday, September 3, 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. This is for anyone interested in learning how to write novels, short stories, children's stories, poetry, personal essays, memoirs, or family stories. Information on getting published will also be featured. No previous creative writing instruction is needed. Cost is \$50. Enrollment limited to eight people. Reservations required: 672-6874.



James Thurber

Route 43 and Hautboy Hill Road. Refreshments, free.

Swing into September at the Contra Dance Saturday, September 6, 7 P.M. at town hall. Music by Still the Homegrown Band and calling by Peter Stix. All dances taught, all ages welcome. Donation requested to pay the caller. For information: 672-6101.

Free Blood Pressure Clinic: Monday, September 8, from noon to 1 P.M. at the United Church of Christ Parish House. No reservations necessary. For information: VNA Northwest, 860-567-6000 or vnanw.org.

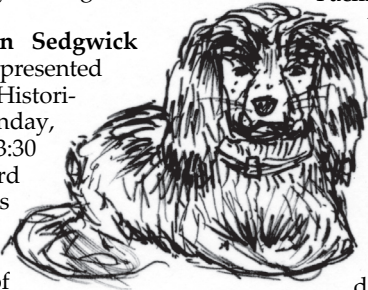
Red Cross Blood Drive: Thursday, September 4, from 1 to 5:45 P.M. in the Red Cross bus at the United Church of Christ. Registration and refreshments in the Parish House.

The Cornwall Association's Annual Meeting and Newcomers Tea: Saturday, September 6, 4 to 6 P.M. at the library. All new residents are invited as well as old timers to welcome the newcomers and share experiences.

23rd Annual Agricultural Fair: Saturday, September 6, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., Village Green. See insert for details.

Farm Market will be at the Ag Fair on Saturday, September 6; back in West Cornwall other Saturdays through October.

Major Gen. John Sedgwick Walking Tour, presented by the Cornwall Historical Society: Sunday, September 7, 2 to 3:30 P.M. David A. Ward of Civil War Tours will lead the tour, which will begin at the corner of



September Song

Maxwell Anderson wrote the lyrics to the great pop standard, which was introduced by Walter Huston in the 1938 Broadway musical Knickerbocker Holiday. You can easily find that out, along with almost anything else, from Google, but only the Chronicle will tell you what's going on in Cornwall. Please don't play the waiting game; send us a donation today.

Senior Luncheon: Tuesday, September 9, 11:30 A.M. to 1 P.M. at the Wandering Moose. No reservations necessary. Questions: 672-6101.

The Board of Assessment Appeals will meet Saturday, September 13, 2014, between 10 and 11 A.M., at the town offices (rear office building) for the purpose of hearing appeals regarding motor vehicle assessments. No appointment is required. There will be no other time for hearing such appeals.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day: Saturday, September 13, 9 A.M. to 2 P.M. at the Torrington Waste Pollution Control Facility. Preregistration required by September 11: 672-4959.

CCT BBQ & Family Fun Show: Sunday, September 14, noon to 2 P.M., Hart Farm Preserve, Cherry Hill Road. Master falconer Brian Bradley will present his "Sky-hunters in Flight" demonstration. Drinks and BBQ with locally produced pork and beef ribs. Suggested donation: \$10 for individuals, \$20 for families. For reservations, please email: picnic@CornwallConservationTrust.org or you may visit Facebook.com/CornwallConservationTrust. Questions: bonnie.vangilder@gmail.com.

Energy Assistance: Cornwall Social Services will begin taking applications for energy assistance on September 15. The program helps eligible households pay part of their winter heating bills. A list of required documents is available at the town

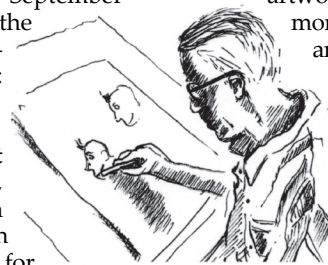
office or will be mailed upon request. Call Jill Gibbons at 672-2603 to make an appointment.

The Cornwall Conservation Commission would like to hear from you about the protection of our open spaces and natural resources. Please take a survey by going online to www.surveymonkey.com/s/CornwallConservation.

Cornwall Fuel Oil Co-Op invites Cornwallians to participate in its program to solicit bids for heating oil for the coming heating season. For more info, contact: richardwolkowitz@yahoo.com.

Art in Cornwall

The National Iron Bank will be featuring artwork by Peter Barrett during the months of August, September, and October.



At the Cornwall Library: Hilary Cooper's exhibit, Faces and Flowers, will continue through October 4.

The Souterrain Gallery will host an opening on Sunday, September 14, from 4 P.M. on, during the

Covered Bridge dinner, for CMandMomart, a project of collaborative artwork by a special needs artist to benefit others with special needs.

Share the Bounty! Too many fruits and veggies from your garden? Why not donate them to the food pantry. Drop off at the back of the United Church of Christ, 9 A.M. to 1 P.M., Monday through Friday (no off-hours drop offs, please, and go easy on the zucchini!)

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