



CORNWALL CHRONICLE

VOLUME 25 : NUMBER 8 SEPTEMBER 2015



Cornwall Shows Off

Cornwall kicked off its observance of 275 years as an incorporated town on August 1 with a one-day extravaganza that celebrated its distinctive traditions. The festivities opened before an overflow crowd in town hall where, despite minimal rehearsal time, 30-some kids of all ages sang, acted, and hammed their way through the Grumbling Gryphons' summer camp adaptation of James Thurber's *The Thirteen Clocks*, costumes modeled on the Marc Simont illustrations.

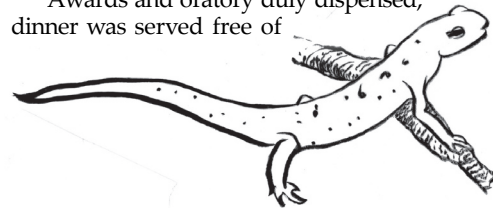
Time onstage may have stood still at 5 minutes to 5, but outside on the green, where sunny summer skies were momentarily overtaken by a ten-minute cleansing shower, the Salisbury Hot Shots struck up the band promptly at 3 p.m.: signal for the start of other activities. These included an hour's games supervised by Park & Rec's Pat Elias, with kids and adults competing in four bouts of tug of war (guess who won), and, in the library, the taping of some 25 personal "Cornwall stories" by Jeremy Brecher, Jill Cutler, and town historian Dody Clarke. Meanwhile over at the UCC sanctuary, a panel of six (John Calhoun, John O'Donnell, Jim Longwell, Ann Schilling, Maryann Bouton, and Joe Markow) parceled out such tidbits of graveyard

history as: the origin of the pest house near the Smallpox Cemetery on Cogswell Road and the checkered history of the Sedgwick Monument's cannonballs.

Shortly after 4 p.m. a parade even grander than the town's usual Memorial Day production kicked off from Valley Road with bagpipes, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal on foot with the town selectmen; the full array of Cornwall fire and rescue personnel plus equipment; fire trucks from Sharon, Falls Village, Goshen, Lakeville, and Norfolk; community and church groups, a mounted rider, ponies and cows, brought up in the rear by Tim Prentice's 1930 Ford trailing the huge Green Man. The parade's only reported casualty: a gutter at the UCC sideswiped by the church's straying float.

After the march, the formal ceremony moved along quickly thanks to emcee Dave Cadwell and the brevity of speakers Ridgway, Blumenthal, and Schlesinger, not to mention suspense over the winner of the flag presentation (see below).

Awards and oratory duly dispensed, dinner was served free of



charge to some 400 or more celebrants at dozens of round tables on both sides of the green. As townspeople lingered, gentle music from the local band HAT wafted from the outdoor stage. Soon dozens joined in country dances to the music of Cornwall's own Still, The Homegrown Band.

During one of the day's high points the historical society's Richard Schlesinger paid tribute to the town's sense of neighborhood and natural beauty, and to its qualities of "cool, calm, and quirky." This spirit was underlined by Catherine Tatge and Dominique Lasseur when they explained to this reporter why they had decided to abandon an earlier plan to relocate to Manhattan: the Cornwall community is just "too good to give up."

—Paul De Angelis

Invasion of Airbnb

Ten years ago, Stacey Marcin and Mark Hampson searched from Maine to Maryland for the perfect place to fulfill their dream of owning an authentic country inn. Their choice was the Cornwall Inn, whose main house goes back to 1821. They never dreamed that they would be competing with a \$20 billion hospitality giant called Airbnb. A child of the Internet and the

(continued on page 2)

SEPTEMBER 2015

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Every Week This Month: Mondays: Yoga, 8:30–10 am Library; Karate, 6:30–7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ Wednesdays: Tai Chi, 5–7 pm Town Hall call 672-0064		1 ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall	2 ♦ Creative Writing Class begins (six weeks) 6:30–8:30 pm Library	3 ♦ Woman's Society Meeting 10 am Library ♦ Red Cross Blood Drive 1–6 pm UCC	4	5 ♦ Senior Ice Cream Social 2:30 pm Library ♦ Community Contra Dance 7 pm Town Hall
6	7 LABOR DAY	8 ♦ Economic Dev. Comm. 9 am Town Hall ♦ Senior Luncheon 11:30 am–1 pm Wandering Moose ♦ P&Z 7 pm Library ♦ Housatonic River Commission 7:30 pm CCS	9	10 ♦ Town Meeting 7:30 pm CCS	11	12 ♦ Farm Market in the Village Today ♦ Cornwall Ag Fair 10 am–4 pm Village ♦ Bd of Assessment Appeals 10–11 am Town Office
13 ♦ Rain Date for Ag Fair	14 ♦ Free Blood Pressure Clinic Noon–1 pm UCC ♦ Region 1 BOE 6 pm HVHRS Room 133 ♦ Park & Rec 7:30 pm Town Hall	15 ♦ Deadline: October Chronicle Copy ♦ Special Meeting Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall	16 ♦ Board of Ed 4 pm CCS Library ♦ Board of Finance 7:30 pm CCS Library	17 ♦ CCC 6:30 pm Town Hall	18	19 ♦ Lacto-Pickle? 10:30 am–1:30 pm Local Farm ♦ Cornwall Assoc. Annual Mtg/Newcomer's Tea 4–5:30 pm Library ♦ Bridge Dance 5:30–9:30 pm West Cornwall Covered Bridge
20 ♦ Rain Date for Bridge Dance ♦ Milk Money: Dairy Farming Today 2 pm Town Hall ♦ Artist's Reception Kim Sobel 3–5 pm Library	21	22	23	24	25	26 ♦ Hazardous Waste Collection 9 am–2 pm Torrington ♦ Keeping a Family Cow 10 am–1 pm Local Farm
27	28 ♦ ZBA* 7:30 pm Library	29	29 ♦ Cornwall Committee for Seniors 7 pm Library	Every Week This Month: Thursdays: Toddler Play Group, 10:30–11:30 am Library; Meditation, 4–5 pm call Debra 672-0229; Mah Jongg, 7–9 pm Library call 672-6874; Adult Volleyball, 7:30 pm CCS gym ♦ Fridays: Yoga, 8:30–10 am Library ♦ Saturdays: Farm Market 9 am–12:30 pm Wish House ♦ Sundays: Yoga 9–10:30 am Library; Meditation 1 pm call Debra 672-0229		

*Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

(continued from page 1)

person-to-person “sharing economy,” Airbnb now has over a million listings, including about a dozen residences in Cornwall.

“In early 2014, we noticed a drop in business,” Stacey said, “and we saw that Cornwall listings on Airbnb had grown. It’s tough to compete with an Internet listing offering a whole house for \$250 a night.” The inn has 12 rooms and one suite that range from \$159 to \$239 per night. It also offers breakfast and a swimming pool.

In January, Stacey and Mark wrote to the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) arguing that Airbnb listings were in violation of zoning regulations. “We’re not asking to close their doors,” Stacey said, “only that we play by the same rules and all of us have the same permits, inspections, insurance, and taxes.”

A few miles up Route 7 is the Hitching Post, which offers 12 motel rooms from \$65 to \$135. Owner Natu Patel shares Stacey and Mark’s dismay. He told us that business has been slow, which he attributes mainly to Airbnb competition.

What does Airbnb offer? Its wide selection ranges from a bedroom in the colonial home of a well-known Cornwall artist (\$85) to several entire homes. Three of the homes are out of the ordinary.

The historic 1880s train depot in Cornwall Bridge appears to have been renovated and furnished in style, “straight out of a Wes Anderson film set” said one review. It’s listed at \$220.

Fans of Bates Motel might favor the three-story Victorian that sits above the West Cornwall post office. The ghosts of Norman and his mom may roam the halls here. The interior has been updated and decorated, but the exterior retains its sinister look. Listed at \$145.

And for those with an adventurous spirit and thick wallet, the oddest of all is a “Prana Residence” in Cornwall Bridge. “Prana” is the Sanskrit word for “life force,” and if you have \$750 a night you may absorb some cosmic energy at this home, which has a spa, solarium, and indoor pool,

Meanwhile, has P&Z taken any action on Mark and Stacey’s complaint? It was handled and investigated by Zoning Enforcement Officer Karen Nelson. In June she sent a letter to the Cornwall Inn stating that P&Z does not have regulatory jurisdiction, except where food is being served. She also says that residential rentals are historically an approved practice and implies that Airbnb listings are simply a broader-based version of putting a notice in a local paper or store.

Mark and Stacey disagree with Nelson’s

ruling and have appealed to the Zoning Board of Appeals. They argue that whether food is served or not, these short-term Internet rentals are a new kind of business that should be regulated by special permit. “Allowing homeowners, mostly absentee, to rent without the safety regulations we adhere to is an accident waiting to happen.” ZBA set a date of August 24 for a hearing and decision (too late to cover in this issue).

P&Z can decide at any time to amend its regulations on the influx of short-term rentals, since they raise many issues: safety, inspections, even property values of neighboring homes. But given P&Z’s historical reluctance to exercise its regulatory muscle, that seems unlikely. This dispute is playing out in towns and cities around the globe. The issue is whether communities and their visitors are better served by providing equal regulatory burdens and safety benefits for all renters or whether residents should be able to earn extra dollars without the government oversight local businesses face.

Will old-style motels and inns survive? Certainly some will, but it’s clear that many traditional businesses face a huge challenge from sharing-economy companies like Airbnb and Uber, and that regulators are still trying to figure out how to deal with their impact.

—Ed Ferman

Real Estate Doldrums

There are approximately 37 to 40 Cornwall houses currently listed for sale. As this issue of the *Chronicle* went to press, there have been but nine transfers of land with houses in 2015. The median price of 2015 sales is \$275,000. The median price in the U.S. is \$237,000. In 2014 there were 16 sales for the equivalent period. According to the Bain Realty website, in calendar 2014 there were 23 homes sold and 27 in 2013.

The *Chronicle* spoke with three local Realtors: David Bain of Bain Real Estate, Pat Best of Best & Cavallero, and Nick Bruehl of Nicholas Bruehl Real Estate. All agreed the market was slow compared to 2014. The wicked winter, which delayed the normal spring uptick in would-be buyers, was a factor. Also, the inventory of foreclosed and distressed properties at bargain basement prices has declined.

Compared to other towns, Cornwall’s real estate market may be slower, but the inventory here is much smaller, and homebuyers interested in Cornwall (gnat lovers?) may not be attracted to the other towns and vice versa.

The highest priced property listed is the 17-room Hidden Valley Castle for \$8.5 million, a stretch for some who contribute to the *Chronicle*, but spare change for the successful venture capitalist or hedge fund

manager. The castle last sold for a mere \$5,925,000 in 2001.

Most of the houses are priced below \$300,000 and, according to Bruehl, may have issues to be resolved. The lowest priced house listed is \$69,900, likely a “fixer-upper” or “handy person’s dream” in real estate jargon.

All of the Realtors stressed the importance of listing a property at a realistic price. “Some sellers don’t realize that pre-2008 prices have not returned,” said Bruehl. In September 2003, a *Chronicle* overview of the real estate market found the median price for homes sold in Cornwall was \$450,000.

Bain advised using a broker, who is a professional, and added that he wasn’t suggesting only Bain’s staff fits that model. Unscrupulous brokers will set an unrealistic price in the hopes of obtaining an exclusive listing. Ms. Best noted that a property must be appropriately priced or it will sit, become a stale listing, and remain unsold.

All of the Realtors thought the market was slowly improving. Ms. Best advised when putting a property up for sale: declutter the insides of the house, bring in someone objective to suggest removing pictures or putting things away or in order, and spruce up the property by doing some minor painting or repairs.

This correspondent will never be able to sell his house should he desire, for he’d never get around to following Ms. Best’s sage advice.

—Jim Fishman

Welcome

Brynn Marie Pastre

to Shanna Miller-Robinson and James Pastre

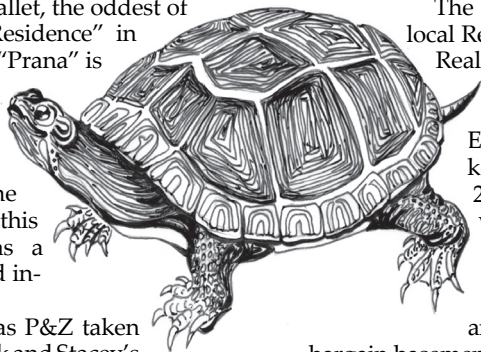
Land Transfers

Neal D. White, Jr., Esq., Estate of Jerome Mazurkewicz and June Mazurkewicz to Federal National Mortgage Association, land with improvements thereon at 261 Kent Road, for \$275,000.

Lance Patterson and Andrea Bernardi to Michael A. Stefanski and Heidi M. Rick, land with all buildings and improvements thereon, at 19 Wright Hill Road, for \$435,000.

The Cornwall Flag

The new Cornwall flag was unfurled on the town green at the 275th anniversary celebration. There were 105 designs submitted in the contest sponsored by the Cornwall Association. Seventy-three entrants were under 18. The panel of five judges, Richard Bramley, Andrea Geisser, Margaret Haske, Heidi Kearns, and Ginny Potter, engaged in a “blind judging of the submissions.” Three finalists were selected and the town voted for a winner. The entries can be viewed on



the Cornwall Association's website or in the library. The idea for a contest was suggested by Richard Griggs. Cara Weigold designed and managed the competition.

The winner was Michael Hemming, an architect. When asked by the *Chronicle* what he planned to do with his prize money, Mr. Hemming responded he was "hoping for third prize so he could post the check on his bulletin board. Not possible with \$275." Tim Prentice, a sculptor and architect, came in second and was awarded \$27.50. Third prize, and a whopping \$2.75, went to Natalie Nesler, a seventh-grader at Cornwall Consolidated School.

Small flags were distributed at the celebration, but they will not be manufactured commercially. The *Chronicle* spoke with Ed Greene, president of the Cornwall Association, who said there were no plans for contests for a town anthem, insect, mammal, or fish. Now that there is a Cornwall flag, could secession from Litchfield County be on the agenda for Cornwall's 300th anniversary? —Jim Fishman

School Opens; Big Changes

The leaves and temperatures aren't the only changes happening as school begins. After a seemingly shorter (eight quick weeks) summer vacation this year, the new school year begins on August 31, a week earlier than last year. I interviewed CCS Principal Michael Croft, who offered some vital stats and described changes at our little school.

Enrollment is down to 87 this year, with 15 students graduating in June and 10 entering kindergarten.

This year, grades one and two will be completely combined, two grades taught by two teachers as one class. Grades three and four are partially combined. Some classes will be together, some will be separate. The middle school is now made up of grades five through eight, with varying combinations of classes among them. This year's eighth grade is the largest class with 18 students. Sixth grade is the smallest, with a perfect split of two boys and two girls.

In addition to structural changes within classes, there is one new staff member. Christina Hanley will be the new part-time art teacher. Mrs. Hanley has taught at Lee Kellogg School in Falls Village for 13 years. —Erin Hedden

Cornwall Briefs

West Cornwall Village is running out of septic treatment options acceptable to Torrington Area Health, as Ian Ingersoll points out in his letter in this issue. The selectmen are starting to tease out a solution by appointing a five-member study commission to look into the engineering and technical questions the town needs to ask. A state grant available

Letters to the Chronicle

SAVE THE RIVER, SAVE THE TOWN

The village of West Cornwall has been declining at an accelerated rate during the past 20 years and left on its current path could deteriorate out of existence in the next 20 years. We are losing the use of one building after another, primarily due to the lack of a village septic system. We now call these water treatment facilities, and given new technology they are affordable for any small village along the Housatonic.

Since returning from the service in the late 60s, I have watched as West Cornwall has continued to lose both businesses and housing due to the inability to conform to state-mandated standards as applied in the Torrington Area Health District. We lost our grocery store (Yutzler's), which could not reopen due to the absence of adequate septic. We lost our general store (Bierce's) and a number of restaurants (The Deck/Freshfields and Sue Kochman's businesses on Railroad Square). Many businesses have passed us by due to the lack of facilities, leaving our buildings either out of use or underused. One can only wonder if it's just a matter of time for RSVP and the Wandering Moose, neither of which has enough land to create a back-up system when their current systems fail.

During the same period the village has

continued to leach effluent into the Housatonic River, increasing nitrogen levels to the endangerment of plants and animal life. Addressing these issues is long overdue. Fortunately new technology offers a solution that the Torrington Area Health District and the state of Connecticut would assist us in achieving if we decide we want to save our village and our river. If one were in favor of having a study made of this situation, now would be a good time to mention it to our elected officials. —Ian Ingersoll

A SPECIAL PLACE

Elizabeth England's story about the North Cornwall Meeting House was inspirational, but missed one fact. The spire was indeed replaced in the 50s when I was quite young. I remember riding up in the chair that was attached to a cable on the tall crane. About ten feet off the ground I started yelling to get me down. I didn't like heights.

Ira Russell built the new spire in his garage on Calkinstown Road. It was a big affair and a lot of people attended. The Meeting House is a special place for me. My mother was married there, as were my sister, my niece, and me in one of my lives. The columns inside were crafted by the families that lived in North Cornwall. My Scoville relatives were responsible for one of them. —Todd Aichele

through the federal Clean Water Act will pay 55 percent of the cost of a study. The selectmen welcome applications from qualified people interested in serving on the commission.

"It's all about water," Gordon Ridgway said as he talked about what's on the selectmen's minds these days. HVA is

who began swimming there 70 years ago. No weeds to speak of back then.

And even more water news is emerging from the questions being asked about the Housatonic **Railroad's practice of spraying** a chemical, as yet unidentified, to suppress the plant growth along the tracks. The result is a scorched wasteland of dead weeds, shrubs, and even trees along the riverside trackbed. Household wells are nearby in some cases. Property owners, the HVA, local tree wardens, inland wetlands agencies in several towns, and Rep. Roberta Willis all want to know more.

The **West Cornwall sidewalk** project is going to a town meeting on September 10 for approval of \$70,000 to construct a walkway (with curb cuts for handicapped access) from the Wandering Moose up to the Cornwall Pottery store. Roger Kane is the supervisor and requests for proposals are already out. The state will reimburse.

War is about to be declared on Japanese knotweed and hogweed, two nasty **invasive roadside plants**. The selectmen are looking at ways and means to get rid of these and other invasives. Again, the steady drip (the water metaphor again) of bad news coming from climate change.

The foundation for the **cell tower** on Popple Swamp Road has been built—"a lovely piece of engineering," according to Ridgway—and the road leading to it is laid down. The tower will cover Route 4 and Cornwall Village, areas now bereft of

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about to begin working on **improved Housatonic River access** in West Cornwall on the old CL&P site. Cornwall will provide parking and other amenities. Look for a town meeting vote on that.

The **Cream Hill Lake weed study** is about ready to be released. Early word is that the health of the lake is better than we had thought. Good news to this briefer

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service. Verizon is the only carrier we know of with plans to put equipment on the tower. Can AT&T Mobility be far behind?

The **Rose Algrant Show** last month showed work by 36 artists and raised \$31,271. Fifteen percent of this, after expenses, will go to the Cornwall Food and Fuel Bank. The **Rummage Sale's** numbers weren't complete by press time, But Woman's Society President Anne Hummel reported sales of over \$33,000, slightly less than 2014, but still robust. —Lisa L. Simont

Events & Announcements

At the Cornwall Library: Creative Writing 1 with Deb Devins begins September 2, 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. Six weeks, maximum class size of eight, \$50. Must preregister: 860-672-6874.

Red Cross Blood Drive: Thursday, September 3, 1 to 6 P.M. at UCC. For appointments, call the Red Cross: 800-733-2767.

Senior Ice Cream Social: Saturday, September 5, 2:30 P.M. at the library.

Community Contra Dance: Saturday, September 5, 7 P.M. at town hall. Music by Still, The Homegrown Band, caller/instructor Peter Stix. All ages welcome. Suggested donation \$5/child, \$10/adult. Information: Jane,860-672-6101.

Senior Luncheon: Tuesday, September 8, 11:30 A.M. to 1 P.M. at the Wandering Moose. Food and friendship that's hard to beat. No reservations needed. Questions: Bob Potter, 860-672-6191.

24th Agricultural Fair: Saturday, September 12, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., village green. See insert for details and schedule of events.

Farm Market will be at the Ag Fair on Saturday, September 12, and in West Cornwall all other Saturdays in September and October.

Great Days Ahead

Summer's closing now and darker days loom, but not for the *Chronicle*. We expect a call-back any day from The Donald, that paragon of free speech and an honest press, to say he'll send us a huge check. In the event that he loses our number, we'd love to have a gift from you instead. Thanks!

The Board of Assessment Appeals will meet Saturday, September 12, 2015 between 10 and 11 a.m. at the town offices (rear 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.

Free Blood Pressure Clinic: Monday, September 14, noon to 1 P.M. at the UCC Day Room. For information: VNA Northwest at 860-567-6000 or vnanw.org.

The Cornwall Association's Annual Meeting and Newcomers' Tea: Saturday, September 19, 4 to 5:30 P.M. at the library.

Newcomers will have a chance to learn about town organizations and meet their neighbors. Refreshments will be served.

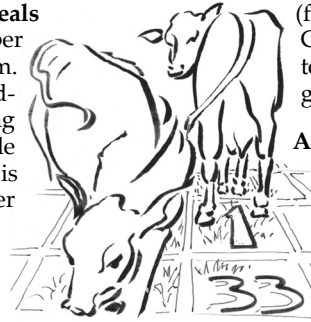
Bridge Dance: Saturday, September 19, 5:30 to 9:30 P.M. Music by DJ Troy Rimcharron, Handy Boy Enterprises. CCS eighth-graders will be selling food prepared by the Berkshire Country Store to raise funds for their class trip. Picnic areas are available near the bridge. Route 128 will be closed from CCS to the bridge from 4:30 to 10:30 P.M. Parking is at the school; buses will bring people into West Cornwall.

Motherhouse Events: Saturday, September 19, 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. Learn about all-natural lacto-fermented food preservation—pickles, sauerkraut, kim-chee. Potluck lunch. \$35/family.

Saturday, September 26, 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. Keeping a Family Cow: finding, feeding, fencing, breeding, caring for your cow. \$35/person, \$50/family up to four. Both events at Local Farm. Must preregister. Debra@Motherhouse.us or 672-0229

Cornwall Historical Society Talk: Milk Money: Dairy Farming Today: Sunday, September 20, 2 P.M. at town hall. Kirk Kardashian, author of *Milk Money: Cash, Cows and the Death of the American Farm*, and Chris Hopkins of Stone Wall Dairy Farm will discuss economic challenges facing small farms. Refreshments, free.

Senior Trip: Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT, Friday, October 2. Bus leaves UCC at 8:30 A.M. and will return about 3:30 to 4 P.M. \$9 per person. Lunch is available



(for purchase) at the museum's Café Flo. Reservations by September 21 email prcornwall@gmail.com or call 672-4071.

Art in Cornwall:

At the Souterrain Gallery: The collective exhibit, "Paint the Town!" will continue through September.

At the Cornwall Library: Catherine Noren's exhibit, "Kitchen Light," will continue through September 12. Kim Sobel's exhibit, "Tangled Up in Blue," opens Saturday, September 19. Artist's reception is Sunday, September 20, 3 to 5 P.M.

Hazardous Waste Collection Day: Saturday, September 26, 9 A.M. to 2 P.M. at the Torrington Water Pollution Control Plant on Bogue Road. Pass required from Joyce Hart at town hall.

CCT Cold-Blooded Creatures Photo and Art Contest: Frogs, lizards, turtles, and snakes are the subject of this year's contest for children and adults. Details on CCT website. Send submissions to contest@cornwallconservationtrust.org or drop off at designated box at the library. Deadline is September 30 and winners will be announced at CCT's annual meeting at Mohawk Ski Lodge on October 17.

New Transfer Station Regulations: Before bringing any paints to the transfer station, please check the detailed new instructions. On the town website, go to transfer station/regulations/PaintCare Recycling Program.

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Visit our website for more 275th Photos.

CORNWALL CHRONICLE
cornwallchronicle.org

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CORNWALL'S 275TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION





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