

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

### **"Ground Hog Day"**

Carroll County Times article for 7 February 1993

By Karl Tomak

February 2 is known as Groundhog Day or Candlemas which has a long history in America. Groundhog Day is when the weather is predicted for the next six weeks, based on whether or not the groundhog sees his shadow. The idea of Groundhog Day came to America when immigrants from Germany and Great Britain settled here. The groundhog or woodchuck is the American version, while the Germans relied on the badger.

Excerpts from the American Sentinel at the turn-of-the-century provide a glimpse of the Groundhog day tradition in Carroll County:

Last Sunday was Candlemas, or, as it is more popularly known, "ground hog day." In this locality the sun didn't shine and no shadow was cast by the marmot, if, as is superstitiously supposed, he made his appearance above the surface of the ground on the occasion. That means, according to the ground hog theory, that a period of six weeks of fair and pleasant weather is to prevail. But all signs fail in such a winter as this, and believers in the sagacity of the woodchuck may find themselves disappointed.

American Sentinel February 8, 1890

The ground hog saw his shadow when he left his den for the upper air last Monday, and speedily returned to enjoy a further six week's nap, until the storms he prognosticates shall have ceased. That is the theory of those who believe in the sagacity of this popular marmot. The experience of last year was in harmony with that belief, and its advocates will find fresh confirmation in the cold wave that swept down upon us Tuesday night. The mild weather of the previous two weeks suddenly changed to a temperature of about 15°, accompanied by a high and piercing wind. But then, our observation is that the theory is frequently not sustained by the fact, and cannot be safely accepted upon the experience of a season or two. The old saw, that "If Candlemas day be fair and bright winter will have another fight." is not entirely reliable, however it may hold good in some instances.

American Sentinel February 7, 1891

Candlemas day was not fair and bright and that popular weather prophet, Arctomys Monax, otherwise the woodchuck or ground-hog, did not see his shadow if, as is popularly supposed, he came out of his underground lair at noon on that date.

American Sentinel February 4, 1899

If the ground hog came out of his hole on Tuesday, he must be possessed of great faith in his own prophetic powers if he didn't scuttle back and wait for a more propitious day to make his next appearance. He didn't cast the shadow indicative of six weeks bad weather, but he did encounter about as disagreeable a combination of rain, hail and snow as winters in this latitude ever produce.

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American Sentinel February 6, 1897

This is Candlemas (commonly called Ground Hog) day, a date which many persons have supposed governed the weather for the six following weeks. The Superstition, like the hog melt prophesy, has been so often discredited by the weather proving entirely at variance with the predictions, that little attention is now paid to it except in the way of ridicule.

American Sentinel February 2, 1895

Yesterday was groundhog or Candlemas day. It was almost cloudless, and according to the believers in the ground hog theory six weeks of inclement weather are to follow. But all such predictions are valueless [sic]. The weather prophets, almost without exception, assured the public that this was to be an exceptionally mild winter, yet during the last week in December the temperature was below the freezing point constantly for twelve days and part of the time the mercury marked the zero temperature and high winds for several days in succession. Ice has formed 6 to 8 inches thick.

American Sentinel February 3, 1900

*Western Maryland College junior Karl Tomak served a January term internship at the Historical Society of Carroll County.*

Photo Caption: [None]