

EDITORIAL

GROUNDHOG'S DAY FEBRUARY 5, 2009

German-Americans have made many contributions to America ranging from trades in carpentry, mining, and translations for government documents; the first available publications of the Declaration of Independence were available only in German. Descendants of Germans have given much to America, its history, and culture.

Another contribution to America and its culture accredited to the Germans is the tradition of Groundhog's Day. Growing up, I didn't pay much attention to the non-traditional holidays or specially named days. As I grew older, I recall hearing references to Groundhog's Day this time of year in the news during the weather reporting, but again, if somebody asked me about it, I couldn't give details specific about this holiday. Recently, while eating breakfast at a local taqueria in Precinct 1, I overheard people talking about the upcoming holidays and I started to think of Groundhog's Day. This inspired me to educate myself about this day.

In a surprising twist, Groundhog's Day is derived from both, the belief that animals could predict the weather and a religious poetry verse, "*If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, winter will have another flight. But if it be dark with clouds and rain, winter is gone and will not come again.*" February 2nd was the celebration of Candlemas Day, which was replaced with a pagan candlelight ceremony that would celebrate the "return of light", or longer days. The length of the day was thought to invigorate the fields and crops. What does this have to do with a ground hog?

According to the story, the belief that animals could predict weather conditions was brought to the Americas during the 18th century, soon after German and English immigrants settled in the colonies. The German belief that their "badger" predicted the weather soon transformed to the belief in the "groundhog" since that was the animal that populated the colonies. The collaboration of a newspaper editor and Congressman can be credited for the selection of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania as the home for Punxsutawney Phil, the world's most famous weather-forecasting groundhog, and the site for the celebration. During the yearly event, people would gather around to wait for the groundhog to pop out of a hole in the ground. If a shadow was cast, then that meant there would be six more weeks of winter. The legend says that Punxsutawney Phil has never been wrong in his weather prediction and 90% of the time, Phil sees his shadow.

So there you have it; the story of Groundhog's Day and Punxsutawney Phil. Now all of you know what I just recently learned. I have always been a strong supporter of education and have emphasized its importance. It is my belief that we should all lead by example. As I have done so today, I challenge you to go out there and indulge in your curiosity and read up on an event or holiday that you are familiar with in tradition, but unfamiliar with in origin and share it with your community. As Albert Einstein once said, "*it is amazing that what is learned through curiosity survives what is learned through formal education.*"