

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

der 2. Februar—Igeltag / Hedgehog Day

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2014

Winter, spring and the groundhog tradition

Earlier today, handlers at Gobbler's Knob were expected to remove Punxsutawney Phil from his den. If he saw his shadow, we'll have six more weeks of winter. No shadow and we get an early spring.

At least that's the myth, the legend, the old wives' tale.

Of course, rousing a groundhog from hibernation to see its shadow is no better a predictor of winter weather than checking woolly bear caterpillar color bands in the fall.

But it's all harmless fun. Just ask the folks in Punxsutawney, where Groundhog Day is a huge event. Thousands of visitors attend and 43 corporate sponsors help make it happen. And it's the one day of the year groundhogs get just a bit of



respect.

It's interesting the way groundhogs came to be weather forecasters. It actually began centuries ago with a European church holiday, Candlemas. A verse from an old English song set the stage:

*"If Candlemas be fair and bright
Come, Winter, have another flight*

*If Candlemas brings clouds and rain
Go Winter, and come not again."*

In that short verse and others like it from Europe lay the roots of Ground Hog Day. Candlemas dates to early Christianity in Europe, celebrating Christ as the "light of the world." On Feb. 2 the clergy blessed and distributed candles to the people to display in their windows. Early Europeans watched to see if hedgehogs saw their shadows to predict the remainder of winter.

In the absence of hedgehogs in North America, early American settlers decided groundhogs would make a reasonable substitute. Germans brought with them the tradition of Candlemas. The belief was that at the midpoint between the winter

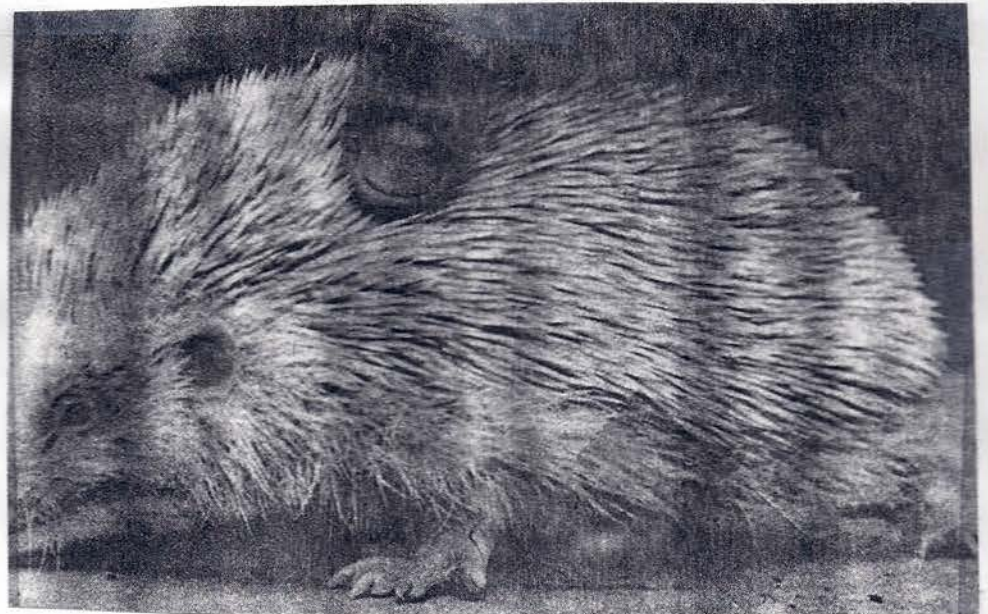
solstice and spring equinox, if the weather was fair, the second half of winter would be cold and cruel. If the skies were cloudy, an early spring would follow.

The first record of using groundhogs to predict the weather dates to Berks County, Pa., in 1842. The first celebration at Gobbler's Knob occurred Feb. 2, 1887.

For details on Punxsutawney Phil and Groundhog Day, visit www.groundhog.org.



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Igeltag
2. Februar



hedgehog