
Totemism and Civic Boosterism in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, 1899-1909

by Christopher R. Davis

CROWDS of onlookers assemble on Gobbler's Knob each Groundhog Day before dawn to bear witness to the wisdom of a prognosticating mammal and to the enterprise of the town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. The second of February is the day the groundhog (also known as woodchuck, or marmot) forecasts the remaining winter weather. Tradition holds that if the weather is sunny and the animal sees its shadow, it will return to its burrow, and we can expect six more weeks of winter weather. No sunshine, and hence no shadow, means spring is just around the corner.

With the dawning of this auspicious day, the president of the Groundhog Club summons Punxsutawney Phil, "The Seer of Seers and King of the Weather Prophets," from his temporary burrow, allows the groundhog time to study his shadow, if any, and renders Phil's official proclamation. According to local lore, this divination has been performed in the hills just south of Punxsutawney since about 1887. The men who carried out the ritual became known as the Groundhog Club.

This curious annual ritual raises three questions: Why has such sentience been attributed to the groundhog? How did Punxsutawney come to identify itself with the groundhog? And what has this identification to do with local enterprise?

The Nature and Culture of Groundhog Day

Animals and their behavior have commonly been seen as nature's weather vane, of particular interest, it seems, when the subject is the severity and/or length of winter. The position of a cat sitting by a fire, the size of the black markings on woolly-bear caterpillars, the measure of fur around a rabbit's feet, the quality of a screech owl's hoot, the bushyness of a squirrel's tail, the angle of a chipmunk's tail, the swarming of butterflies, crickets in chimneys, the height of anthills,

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and the elevation of hornets' nests are just some of the enduring or repetitive clues to winter's otherwise obscure intentions.

The exceptional feature about the groundhog in this regard is that its meaningful behavior occurs on but a single day. Also anomalous is that groundhogs do not normally come out of hibernation until late March or April, although the formula calls for an early February awakening. One is tempted to conclude from these facts alone that we are dealing less with a natural sign in the case of the groundhog, and more with a cultural symbol. Ultimately, we may not be dealing with the groundhog at all.

Groundhog Day, as an American tradition, began when German immigrants in Pennsylvania put their meteorological faith in the woodchuck, which was far more abundant than the badger (*dachs*) used for similar purposes in the old country. In fact, many different animals have been regarded by Europeans as particularly sentient on the second of February, including marmots, badgers, wolves, foxes, and bears, not all of which are proper hibernating animals.

The bear is one of the most prevalent animals encountered in folk belief, saga, and ritual worldwide. Impressive for its size, strength, and anthropomorphic qualities, the bear has spawned cults that, it has been argued, found expression even in the figures of Odysseus and Beowulf. Bear cultists believed that the bear sleeps underground without eating for about six weeks, or from the winter solstice to the beginning of February. The first sight of a bear out of its den in winter was a sure sign of the renewed life of spring. Weather prophets, and oracles in general, have often been associated with caves as a result.¹

Animals sleeping in the ground as if dead reinforce the association of winter with death. True hibernation itself is suggestive of lifelessness. The body temperature of a hibernating groundhog, for example, drops from 37 degrees Celsius to 10 degrees Celsius. The heart rate decreases from an average 100 beats per minute to 14 or less. The animal takes fewer than fifteen breaths per minute, instead of the usual eighty to ninety. Little growth or aging occurs, nor does the animal respond readily when touched.²

The importance of the animal's shadow on February 2 may refer to

1 On bear cults see A. J. Hallowell, "Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere," *American Anthropologist* 28 (Jan. 1926): 1-175, and Rhys Carpenter, *Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga in the Homeric Epics*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962).

2 Suzanne McLaren, "The Woodchuck . . . or Groundhog," *Carnegie Magazine* (Feb. 1980): 21-25. Note that a bear's "winter dormancy" is not quite as deep as hibernation, so it is more easily roused before the advent of spring.

the ancient belief that the underworld robs a being of its shadow, which is what renders it truly dead. An animal can symbolize the coming of spring, then, only if it has truly "died," leaving its shadow underground. Hence, if the animal sees its shadow, it must resume its deathlike state in the ground; the rebirth of spring cannot be attained until death is complete.³

In medieval Europe the second of February was traditionally a day of reckoning debts and establishing contracts between landowners and tenant farmers. It is a day that marks the midpoint of the winter season, and was perhaps a logical time to speculate meteorologically on the remainder of this seemingly long, contemplative quadrant of the year. Shadows were elements of such speculation perhaps because of this association of winter with death, or because the long midday shadows of winter were by this point becoming noticeably shorter.

Belief in the association between shadows and death has faded somewhat in European tradition, despite the Christian juxtaposition of death (symbolized by shadows and winter) and resurrection (spring). Indeed, on Groundhog Day we tend to focus as much on the sun as on the creature's shadow, the latter being merely an index of the former. Rather than conclude that the shadow, if any, means inchoate death, and hence more winter, we see through it the sun, and wonder why sunny weather on February 2 portends six more weeks of winter gloom, and, conversely, gloomy weather on that day heralds an early spring. This paradox finds expression in the following rhymes:

If Candlemas day be fair and bright,
Winter will have another flight. . . .

or If Candlemas be fair and clear,
There'll be two winters in the year. . . .

or Just so far as the sun shines in,
Just so far will the snow blow in.

Does the association between the shining sun and subsequent "bad" weather suggest anything more than the malicious caprice of winter weather? Yes, it probably does. Consider that a sunny, hence dry, winter — once called an "open" winter — is not likely to provide a satisfactory store of moisture for crops. Anxiety is compounded if the

³ The charter of the Slumbering Groundhog Lodge of Quarryville in Lancaster County refers to this latter interpretation.

winter is uncommonly warm, for there is the chance that a late frost will kill premature blossoms and shoots coaxed along by a false spring. In the past, a warm winter also meant shortages of ice which was crucial for refrigeration throughout the year.⁴

The couplet connecting sun and snow can, then, be interpreted as recognizing the need for more precipitative winter weather if conditions have been sunny, as sampled on this pivotal second day of February. Conversely, if conditions have been gloomy, then enough moisture has probably been accumulated, and we can feel justified in looking forward to spring.

As for the second couplet above calling for "two winters in the year," it, too, may express the necessity that winter renew its proper precipitative vigor, or the fear, as expressed in the Saint-Auban d'Oze region of southeast France, for example, that a poor harvest, resulting from the lack of moisture and/or lack of protective snow cover, will bring on another barren "winter" in terms of food supply shortages later in the year.⁵

One version of the Groundhog Day legend tells how the sight of its shadow actually frightens the groundhog back underground for six more weeks. Its fright might have been as much our ancestors' fear of winter weather that was proving to be too "good," as it was fear at the sight of the shadow of death.

Clearly, part of the importance of this day is to be found in the belief that the second of February marks the end of forty days of postpartum isolation for Mary after the birth of Christ. In accordance with Mosaic law, Mary went to the temple that day to fulfill her self-purification, and to consecrate to God her first-born son. Simeon, along with the prophetess Anna, recognized the Messiah upon His presentation at the temple, and foretold Christ's martyrdom and redemption and the suffering of Mary (Luke 2:22-38). Simeon, Anna, Mary, and Joseph are said to have marked the occasion with a candle procession, hence "Candlemas."⁶

Some parallels in both Candlemas and the bear cult (Groundhog Day) are worth noting. There is, for example, the *prophecy* of Simeon, and the *forecast* of the weather prophets. There is also the

4 These same fears were expressed in Western Pennsylvania during the "open" winter of 1889-1890. See, for example, the *Pittsburgh Times*, Dec. 1889 to Jan. 1890.

5 Arnold Van Gennep, *Le Folklore des Hautes-Alpes: Etude descriptive et comparée de Psychologie populaire* (Paris, 1948), 1:372.

6 Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints* (Chicago, 1959), 1:149.

emergence of Mary from postpartum isolation, and of the animal from hibernation or winter dormancy.

Light, too, is significant in both Candlemas and Groundhog Day. The religious celebration features the blessing of candles, based on Simeon's reference to Jesus as "the light of the nations" (Luke 2:32). While candles, as well as religious prophecies and weather forecasts, "shed light," the blessed candles are also used in folk Catholicism to protect people and property against rough climatic conditions, and to alleviate suffering. At the temple, the procession of candles seems to have represented hope, alleviating the more somber aspects of Simeon's prophecy.⁷

When the crowd on Gobbler's Knob outside Punxsutawney groans at Phil's usual forecast for six more weeks of winter, one also appreciates that the groundhog and his official, and ultimately festive, entourage are there to make "light" of, or alleviate, this often begrudged prospect of a prolonged winter, which is, as were Christ's suffering and death, necessary for the redemption of spring and renewed life. Winter is the price we pay for spring. Christ Himself had to be redeemed at the temple on Candlemas by the sacrifice of two turtledoves (Luke 2:24).

The groundhog (a common representative of other seasonally somnolent mammals) merits its day, then, because it is a creature with serious and lasting cultural credentials.

Beyond the many sacred and secular traditions associated with Groundhog Day, however, perhaps the key to the durability of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club was best summed up by one of its current members: "Oh, we have a good time. That's what it's all about."⁸ Toward the other end of the state, members of the Slumbering Groundhog Lodge — which was organized in 1907 in Quarryville, Lancaster County — are equally explicit about their institutionalized merrymaking. Using Groundhog Day and other occasions to poke fun at hubris and self-consciousness, they specialize in spoofing government, politics, current affairs, and other forms of pomposity. Groundhog clubs everywhere, and there are a few, seem to have seized upon the marmot, this "patron saint of a happy people,"⁹ as an excuse for a little diversion.

7 The ancient Roman Feast of Lights, an incantation for the renewed life of spring, was also celebrated at this time of year (McLaren, "The Woodchuck . . . or Groundhog," 25).

8 *Pittsburgh Press*, Jan. 31, 1980.

9 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 7, 1906.

All was not so carefree during the early years of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, and certainly not for the groundhog. Nor did the club originate as part of some winter dawn observance, as is popularly believed. Rather, its roots are to be found around a picnic table in late summer.

The Genesis of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club

The groundhog (*Marmota monax*) is a large rodent, and ordinarily not a particularly valued animal. It was not hunted with any regularity, even when the more prized game animals in Jefferson County and elsewhere in Western Pennsylvania decreased in number and species in the nineteenth century, especially as a result of circular hunts.¹⁰ Pennsylvania's exhibit in the Agricultural Palace at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair was filled with examples of the state's well-known or characteristic animals, both domestic and wild. While even the rat was mentioned in an article describing this exhibit, the groundhog was completely overlooked.¹¹

Back in Pennsylvania, of course, groundhogs were plentiful. They were shot at or trapped by farmers who saw them as pests, and by others practicing their marksmanship. The carcasses often ended up as food for dogs or scavengers. In the nineteenth century, however, some esoteric connoisseurs in the vicinity of Punxsutawney were serving groundhog to visitors as a special local dish. Dinner guests were reportedly pleased at how tender the marmot meat was when properly prepared, tasting like a cross between pork and chicken.¹²

Around 1889, groundhog meat was served at a banquet at the Punxsutawney Elks lodge.¹³ Several Elks and others then began gathering one day each year in late summer on Miller Stoops's farm on Canoe Ridge south of town to capture and feast on groundhog. This group became the nucleus of the Groundhog Club, and was recognized as such at least by 1899 by some accounts.¹⁴

Groundhog cuisine inspired more than just the genesis of the club. The particular characteristics of this fare soon had a direct bearing on

10 William James McKnight, *Jefferson County, Pennsylvania: Her Pioneers and People, 1800-1915*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1917), 1:79-80, 111-12, 121. See also *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Feb. 23, 1902.

11 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 18, 1904.

12 *Ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1903. Marmots are certainly hunted, trapped, and eaten in Europe.

13 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 17, 1909.

14 *Ibid.*, Sept. 17, 1902; *ibid.*, Sept. 23, 1903; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1903.

the club's subsequent activities. Consider that groundhog meat is decidedly more palatable if allowed to marinate overnight. Consequently, the groundhogs destined for the picnic table were actually captured a day or so before each year's outing, which, in turn, meant that the actual day of the "hunt" became more diversified. Fellowship, oratory, skits, and rites of initiation were soon emphasized, along with experimentation with recipes for food and drink, particularly "groundhog punch" (a concoction of vodka, milk, eggs, orange juice, and other ingredients). Since the "hunt" itself was almost immediately less utilitarian, even standard hunting techniques were modified. Instead of using guns and dogs, the men made more sport of it and set out with grub hoes, spades, and rubber hoses for listening underground.¹⁵ As the "hunt" assumed new meaning, so did the hunted. Because the banquet groundhogs were already cooking, the groundhogs unearthed during these outings were more like tokens. It is a short step, however, from these animal tokens to totems. Totems associate nature and culture, animals and men. They symbolize, facilitate, and even ritualize the identification of such groups as the "Groundhog (nature) Club (culture)." ¹⁶

The Incantations of the Pittsburgh Gazette

Eighty miles to the southwest, in Pittsburgh, a cartoonist for the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* (later simply the *Pittsburgh Gazette*), C. M. Payne, was also making symbolic use of animals. His editorial cartoons began appearing daily in 1900 and featured an anthropomorphic raccoon. Beginning in early 1902, Payne also created for the Sunday edition of the *Gazette* a "Coon Hollow" comic strip based on the raccoon and his animal neighbors. On Groundhog Day of that year, Payne's raccoon character was seen threatening "Brer Groundhog, Weather Prophet" in a cartoon entitled "A Cold Weather Protest." Payne, however, did not situate the groundhog geographically, and certainly not in Punxsutawney.

Nevertheless, Payne in Pittsburgh was relevant to the lasting identification between Punxsutawney and groundhogs. The connection was first made by Payne at least by September 11, 1902, in a front-page cartoon that showed the Republican nominee for Congress from the

¹⁵ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1903.

¹⁶ See, for example, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Sociological Theory of Totemism," *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York, 1952), 117-32.

Twenty-seventh District, William O. Smith, who was also the editor of Punxsutawney's newspaper, the *Spirit*. With him in the cartoon, talking to Payne's raccoon, is a pet groundhog tied to Smith's chair.

The following Sunday, September 14, Payne introduced "Brer Groundhog, Punxsutawney" to his "Coon Hollow" menagerie. The cartoon depicted a late-summer excursion to Pittsburgh by all the animals from Coon Hollow. The groundhog was wearing an overcoat and boater, and had a folded umbrella at the ready in one hand, and a valise marked "Brer Groundhog, Punxsutawney" in the other. His nose was up in the air, and he was muttering "It looks like rain."¹⁷

In the following Sunday's Coon Hollow cartoon (September 21, 1902), the groundhog was there again with a few minor changes. For one, he was slightly more loquacious: "It looks like rain," he said, then added, "I'll ask Ridgway [sic]." Frank Ridgway was the official weatherman attached to the United States Signal Service in Pittsburgh at the time. Secondly, instead of wearing a straw hat, Brer Groundhog was wearing a felt stovepipe hat. Still today, the members of the



C. M. Payne's cartoon from the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 21, 1902, in which the groundhog questions the government weatherman about his forecasts.

¹⁷ Back then, Punxsutawneyites probably would have told Payne that a groundhog with its nose up in the air signals dry weather, in fact. See George W. Porter, *Autobiography* (Punxsutawney, 1929), 18.

Groundhog Club in Punxsutawney and the Slumbering Groundhog Lodge in Quarryville sport top hats when performing their official functions on Groundhog Day.

It is likely that Payne's attention was drawn to this aspect of Punxsutawney by John P. Cowan, a reporter for the same *Pittsburgh Gazette*. Both the *Gazette* and the *Punxsutawney Spirit* shared Republican editorial leanings at the time, and Cowan covered the story when Smith, the *Spirit's* editor, won the Republican nomination for Congress that year. Cowan was also interested in Western Pennsylvania folklore, and in 1918 he was to become the associate editor of the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. It is not clear whether or not John Cowan viewed the activities of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club as folkloric. More to the point, he participated, and at least by September 12, 1902, the date of the Groundhog Club's outing that year, Cowan (as he later described it) "first tasted roast groundhog garnished with incomparable Punxsutawney relishes . . . [and] dared fate by quaffing groundhog punch, a mysterious beverage which is the only lawful substitute for gasoline in scientific motoring."¹⁸

By 1902, then, the elements that conspired to form the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club were in place:

First, there was the inherently interesting problem of long-term weather forecasting, particularly in rural areas, and the practice of using animals as well as other natural signs.

Second, there was widespread recognition in Pennsylvania, at least, of the meaning of Groundhog Day, a day of significant calendrical and syncretic meaning. Comments from the *Jeffersonian Democrat*, a newspaper from the county seat of Jefferson County, Brookville, are instructive:

The majority of the people hereabouts seem to believe in this groundhog business, and regard him as a more infallible weather prophet than [Rev. Ira L.] Hicks or G. Wank [popular weather prognosticators]. Because of this belief, the second day of February is looked forward to anxiously, and the people note with care that day whether or not the sun shines out, for that fact will settle in their minds the question of the duration and severity of the following winter weather. There are many things in the natural world that are hard to understand, and this groundhog weather business is one of them. . . . We don't want to appear odd from all our neighbors, and so we believe in the groundhog also, but there are a few things connected with this general subject that worry us a little at times.¹⁹

¹⁸ *The Bulletin*, Jan. 5, 1918; the quote is in the *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 18, 1906.

¹⁹ *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Feb. 9, 1899.

Actually, most people from these parts probably relied more often on goose bones, frogs, toads, and, of course, almanacs for meteorological information.²⁰

Third, there was Punxsutawney's growing identity with the groundhog. However, even as late as Groundhog Day 1902, the *Spirit* itself, while acknowledging the day, made no special claim to it on behalf of the town, and was as speculative as ever: "Brer Woodchuck would need to be very much on the alert last Sunday if he saw his shadow. He probably did not see it, for the weather was so blustery that he would scarcely think of venturing out. Whether he did or did not see his shadow will be shown by the sort of weather we happen to have in the next six weeks."²¹ In fact, for the sixteen Groundhog Days from 1887 (reputed to be the year of the first official weather forecast from Gobbler's Knob) to 1902, the *Spirit* marked only ten of them,²² and even then only with generic comments similar to the one just quoted.

Fourth, there was a proliferation of sodalities in Punxsutawney beginning in the 1880s.²³ One such group, the Corn Cob Club, initiated annual, late-summer picnics around 1881 that featured chicken, corn, and presentations on various topics ranging, apparently, from rabbit hunting in Germany to the comparative merits of Greek and Roman classics.²⁴ Another group, the Masqueraders, also held an annual picnic-with-histrionics.²⁵ In 1896 the local Elks Club began to hold an annual raccoon hunt and picnic, followed by the Groundhog Club in 1899.

Economic Boom or Bust

The year 1899 saw not only the probable genesis of the Groundhog Club, but also the completion of the rail line between Punxsutawney and Pittsburgh, and the staging of Punxsutawney's first fair. The railroad in particular gave hope to such small towns as Punxsutawney

20 Phil R. Jack, "Some Customary Practices of Rural Life, 1870-1913, in Parts of Indiana and Jefferson Counties, Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1954), 144.

21 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 5, 1902.

22 1887, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1895, 1897, 1898, 1900, 1901, 1902.

23 Phil R. Jack, "History," *Punxsutawney Centennial, 1849-1949* (Special Edition, 1949), 26.

24 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Aug. 22, 1900. Members of the Corn Cob Club were sometimes referred to as "gobblers" (*ibid.*, Sept. 6, 1905), from which Gobbler's Knob may have derived its name.

25 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Aug. 9, 1899.

that they could expand in the same way many of the larger, more established urban centers were expanding. In Western Pennsylvania the ultimate example was Pittsburgh, which from 1890 to 1910 nearly doubled in population from one-quarter to one-half million inhabitants. In an article rebuking the mayor of Butler, Pennsylvania, for some derogatory remarks he made about Punxsutawney while attending its first fair, a local editor boasted that Punxsutawney would someday be a city of 100,000 inhabitants.²⁶ A half-dozen years later, adding some water to his wine, the *Spirit* editor predicted a population more on the order of 50,000,²⁷ still a sanguine projection.

Although the railroad promoted overall economic growth, it reinforced a hierarchy of towns. This it did by favoring economies of scale, or the concentration of manufacturing productivity, because it assured the widespread and timely distribution of industrial products from centralized locations. Towns fortunate enough to have a rail line, but not quick to use it to attract new industries, found it hard to compete. They tended to become limited, even shrinking, communities of consumers dependent upon other large-scale manufacturing centers, rather than expanding centers of production themselves. (This is to say nothing of settlements at the bottom of the hierarchy that were bypassed by the rail network.)

The competition between neighboring towns for what was understood to be limited bounty and opportunity was fed by the Social Darwinism articulated by such men as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. That only the "fittest" would "boom" (and the accompanying anxiety) found expression in the following verse written by the editor of the *Punxsutawney Spirit*:

Waitin' Fer a Boom

Times air sorter tough jest now—
The days 'er filled with gloom.
An' every town is waitin'—
Jest waitin' fer a boom.

What's DuBois a-doin' now?
An' how does Punxs'y loom?
They're full o' hope an' promise
But—waitin' fer a boom.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1899.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Sept. 20, 1905.

There's Reynoldsville an' Brookville,
An' Indianner, too—
Seem t' be considerin'
Of what they're goin' t' do.

An' all the other country towns
From Baalbec to Kartoum
Are keepin' up their courage
A-waitin' fer a boom.

Most of 'em will be waitin'
Until the crack o' doom.
And when they're dead and buried
We'll place upon their tomb:
"They didn't keep a hustlin'
While waitin' fer a boom." ²⁸

To compete more effectively with Du Bois, Indiana, and some of the other nearby towns, some local citizens formed a board of trade in the late 1880s to promote new businesses in Punxsutawney.²⁹ There was a significant effort at the turn of the century to project the image of a town that was supremely confident as it crossed the psychological threshold of the twentieth century, a town that was ready to diversify and profit from the apparent economic upturn in the country.

A major part of that effort was the *Spirit's* publication in the spring of 1900 of a relatively slick, thirty-page *Industrial Edition: A Pictorial and Descriptive Synopsis of the Thriving Borough of Punxsutawney, and a Review of Its Industrial and Social Advantages*. Before it came out, the *Spirit* trumpeted the special issue as "the finest specimen of journalistic enterprise from a typographical standpoint ever produced in western Pennsylvania," a publication that would show Punxsutawney to be "an up-to-date, thriving, progressive city."³⁰ Although the special edition, when it was finally issued, warned that "many . . . had gone down in failure, overwhelmed in this fierce struggle of competition,"³¹ it impressed upon its readers

28 William O. Smith, *Fifty Years of Rhyming and an Autobiography* (Punxsutawney, 1932), 74.

29 Punxsutawney *Spirit*, Feb. 1, 1888; *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Feb. 8, 1888.

30 Punxsutawney *Spirit*, Dec. 27, 1899.

31 *Industrial Edition: A Pictorial and Descriptive Synopsis of the Thriving Borough of Punxsutawney, and a Review of Its Industrial and Social Advantages. With Which Is Combined a Summary of the Mining, Manufactur-*

that Punxsutawney would not be one of these. The town was "instinct with the spirit of progress, its citizens being imbued with that kind of optimism which knows no barriers to unlimited advancement." The town's growth to that point, it contended, had been "indicative of the spirit of . . . advancement which now permeates the place."³²

Punxsutawney's growth throughout the nineteenth century was fairly typical of many Pennsylvania towns.³³ Chartered in 1849, it grew from a farming and lumbering borough of several hundred people to a regional center for bituminous coal, ironworks, and railroads with more than 6,000 inhabitants (including Clayville) by 1900.³⁴ By the twentieth century, however, not only was there the need to compete, there was also concern that Punxsutawney's competitive success had been overly dependent upon limited coal and coke resources. The *Industrial Edition*, then, was the vanguard of a campaign to attract other businesses and industries. Moreover, in tacit recognition of the railroad's potential to drain off Punxsutawney dollars (and inhabitants) to other productive centers, the *Industrial Edition* suggested that it was better to spend their money on locally-produced merchandise.³⁵

Punxsutawney's Monopoly of "This Groundhog Business"

In addition to articles describing its industries, commerce, churches, local government, natural resources, economic infrastructure, and prominent citizens, the *Industrial Edition* mentioned its "secret, benevolent, and fraternal associations and societies," which it judged to be numerous given the town's size and population.³⁶ There was no mention of the Groundhog Club, however, which supports the probability that the club did not get under way until the latter part of 1899 and operated without much publicity or following until 1902.³⁷

When notice did come, it was largely through the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. On Sunday, February 1, 1903, there appeared a full-page Payne cartoon entitled "Groundhog Day in Coon Hollow: Will

ing and Agricultural Resources of Jefferson County, Pa. (Punxsutawney Spirit, May 1900, W. O. Smith, editor, John P. Wilson, business manager), 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 1.

³³ Peirce F. Lewis, "Small Town in Pennsylvania," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62 (1972): 323-51.

³⁴ McKnight, *Jefferson County, Pennsylvania*, 1:426.

³⁵ *Industrial Edition*, 13, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁷ See also *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Aug. 29, 1909; *Pittsburgh Sun*, Aug. 28, 1909; *Pittsburgh Post*, Aug. 28, 1909.

"Brudder Groundhog See His Shadow?" Similar to the cartoon of the previous year, Payne's raccoon was waiting menacingly outside the groundhog's burrow to prevent him from coming out to predict more winter weather since the sun had risen bright and shining. This time, however, the raccoon was joined by many of the other characters of Coon Hollow similarly motivated, and with sticks, rolling pins, and axes in hand. Furthermore, there were several signs marking the burrow, most with the emphasis on weather making and dispatching rather than weather forecasting, such as, "Please state the kind of weather you desire (so we can send something different)." Finally, consistent with the cartoon developments of the previous September, one of the signs clearly located the burrow of "Brudder Groundhog, Weather Maker" in Punxsutawney.

Significantly, that week the *Punxsutawney Spirit* took up the defense of the groundhog whom Payne had chosen to intimidate. It reported how, on Groundhog Day, Brer Groundhog "saw his silhouette . . . chuckled malignantly, and scrambled back into his burrow. . . . The Groundhog, having been made light of by the Pittsburgh Gazette, is greatly chagrined, and will take special delight in dumping the meanest kind of weather on . . . Pittsburg. The Groundhog has his war paint on and something terrible may be confidently expected."³⁸ This response appears to have been the first time the *Spirit* allied itself with a decidedly local groundhog. What was more, it seems to be Punxsutawney's first public claim to Groundhog Day, and it was the first time local spokesmen presumed to tell the world what the groundhog saw and did, resorting to the idiom, used by Payne, of weather creation rather than mere prognostication.

Whereas the 1902 end-of-summer outing of the Groundhog Club had nothing to do with the weather as such, the 1903 outing was quite different, no doubt due to the journalistic repartee of the previous February. Although the club met, as usual, on Miller Stoops's Canoe Ridge farm, the location was henceforth to be referred to as the Canoe Ridge "weather works." These weather works were said to be Punxsutawney's main industry, producing the town's chief export.³⁹

When John Cowan and C. M. Payne finally took leave of the "Statesmen, Orators, Epicureans, Philosophers" and other revelers

³⁸ *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 4, 1903.

³⁹ Cf. *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Feb. 7, 1901: "We are not weather manufacturers here at home. We live in a region far distant from the scenes where the great heat and cold waves originate. In a great measure we get what is sent us."

assembled for the outing (about twenty-five men in all), they took with them a live groundhog in a box, a sample of that product. Its purpose was to lend credibility to Frank Ridgeway of the Signal Service in Pittsburgh, for whom it was intended. In a hyperbolic description of the day, Cowan referred to the Groundhog Club as "an ancient and respected organization" whose annual outing had become "the greatest event of the year in Punxsutawney," a town reputed to have "the finest climate in the state" because of its "happy" association with the groundhog.⁴⁰ Henceforth, the Groundhog Club was to derive the meaning of its name more from a myth than from a meal.

By the following year's outing, John Cowan was even more eloquent. He wrote:

all the apostles of good weather look upon Punxsutawney as their capital and the mecca toward which they turn their faces in annual pilgrimages. Here is the official residence of the Groundhog. It is here that the high priests of sunshine . . . , breezes, and of radiant sunsets hold their pious incantations. In short, Punxsutawney is the seat of the weather works and the responsible source of all the time-honored traditions and prophecies linked so inseparably with the whims of the climate.⁴¹

The twenty-five men in attendance feasted on groundhog and other viands, captured thirteen more woodchucks that day for sport, made speeches, mixed groundhog punch, and generally had a good time. All the men bore some official title: for example, William O. Smith as "patriarch," Payne as "artist and sonneteer," Cowan as "press agent," H. C. Freas as "poet laureate," Dr. S. J. Hughes as "mixologist," and undertaker John Fackiner as "master digger." Frank Ridgeway, who was not in attendance, was nonetheless given the title of "assistant to Brer Groundhog." Finally, as if to challenge Mark Twain's remark about the ubiquity of weather complaints and the paucity of action in that regard, the club also prepared the meteorological schedule for the coming year.⁴²

Rather than really *do* something about the weather — after death and aging, the most salient reminder of man's impotence before fate — the members of the Groundhog Club, as is the case with much of humanity, at best could only threaten the gods or assault their messengers. Therefore, justifying the hunting of groundhogs at their "official" residence, the Canoe Ridge Weather Works, these "high

⁴⁰ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1903; see also *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 21, 1903.

⁴¹ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 18, 1904.

⁴² *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 21, 1904.

priests" of 1904 explained it was their "mission" to exterminate the lineage of woodchucks known to have been wrong on an occasional February second. It was a "tabooed marmot," then, that was boxed and returned to Pittsburgh after the September outing. It was to be stuffed and mounted and presented to weatherman Ridgeway "as a horrible reminder of the fate that awaits the forecaster who makes a mistake in his predictions."⁴³

What developments, if any, characterized Groundhog Day itself in Punxsutawney? In his article, "Big Meeting of Weathermen," which described the 1904 September outing at the "weather works," John Cowan imaginatively referred to the midwinter observance. "Everybody," according to him, had heard about how people from the town gathered in the public square at dawn, at which point the mayor sent a delegation to Canoe Ridge to make the official inquiry regarding Brer Groundhog and his shadow.⁴⁴

While this was something like the scenario eventually adopted by the Groundhog Club, it is not clear that anything of note actually took place on Canoe Ridge on Groundhog Day before, very possibly, 1908, despite the *Spirit's* fanciful description of Brer Groundhog's vengeance in February 1903.

In 1904 the *Spirit* did report that "Brer Groundhog saw his shadow yesterday morning," a claim seemingly based more on an article written by Cowan about the groundhog's probable return underground for six more weeks of winter than on any observations on Canoe Ridge. Curiously enough, the paper advised its readers that should "Mr. Groundhog's forecast" prove inaccurate, "there are others," meaning other forecasts. In keeping with its continued interest in the *Pittsburgh Gazette's* treatment of its town, the *Spirit* obligingly reported on Payne's latest cartoon on Groundhog Day: "Pa Pitt" is to be seen plugging up Brer Groundhog's burrow in Punxsutawney.⁴⁵

In 1905, the *Spirit* marked Groundhog Day in typical reactive fashion by repeating a story told a few days earlier in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* about how Punxsutawney's congressman, William O. Smith, was cornered in the Capitol cloakroom by colleagues who were irate

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 18, 1904.

⁴⁵ *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 2, 1904. From another perspective, the *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Feb. 4, 1904, noted Groundhog Day of that year with as much uncertainty as ever about what the generic groundhog could have been up to: "Tuesday of this week was Groundhog Day. We hope the woodchuck did not see his shadow. If he did, . . . etc."

because the winter had been especially cold, coal expensive (\$7.25 per ton), and because a "bright and splendid" sun was shining on February second. Word had it that President Roosevelt was also annoyed because the forecast meant that winter weather would plague his inauguration to be held in early March 1905. The *Spirit* also predicted six more weeks of winter based upon observations of a "herd of groundhogs" made by people in the train passing by Canoe Ridge on the morning of February 2.⁴⁶

Most of the newspaper's eloquence, however, continued to be invested in the annual summer outing of the Groundhog Club. Front-page headlines in both the *Spirit* and the *Gazette* announced an important development concerning the club's outing in September 1905: Frank Ridgeway, Pittsburgh's official government weatherman, showed up. In fact, the outing had been timed so that he could attend. It was said that Ridgeway sought revenge on the competition, and looked forward to eating "a nice mess of groundhog on toast."⁴⁷ Another version had it that his pilgrimage to Canoe Ridge was intended to enhance his own prestige by associating himself more closely with Brer Groundhog. Finally, it was also claimed that, by "sending" Ridgeway, "the government has given official cognizance to Nature's own weather prophet . . . and Punxsutawney weather will hereafter bear the official seal."⁴⁸ In addition to the usual hunting, feasting, oratory, and penny ante, the climax of this outing occurred when Ridgeway was obliged to "shake hands" with one of the unearthed groundhogs. Despite the conflicting reports as to which of the two, Ridgeway or the groundhog, had the most to gain by associating with the other, it is clear that Punxsutawney stood to profit from the encounter.

In February 1906 the *Spirit* continued the practice of the year before of making reference to supposed Groundhog Day activities on Canoe Ridge. It quoted a pessimistic article on Groundhog Day in the *Gazette* that explained the hibernating habits of groundhogs, noting that these animals rarely roused themselves before April, and concluding, therefore, that "Brer Groundhog will not see his shadow February 2, 1906!" as he would still be sleeping. The *Spirit* retorted that not only had several local people seen groundhogs up and about in mid-winter, but that this year "thousands of the faithful in the vicinity of the official weather works were reporting some of the most wonderful stunts in shadowgraphy ever heard."⁴⁹

46 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 8, 1905; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Feb. 3, 1905.

47 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 20, 1905.

48 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1905; *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Oct. 4, 1905.

49 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 7, 1906.

The newspaper also took on the *Washington Post* where an "editorial" on February 2 had referred to the groundhog as a "four-legged imposter, a shabby mountebank, [and] an instrument of humbug," and suggested that we just "watch the next six weeks and see." Apparently assuming that winter weather was the prediction, given the excesses in "shadowgraphy," the *Spirit* countered the *Post* by observing that, as a measure of the groundhog's accuracy and potency, there had been quite a variety of harsh weather in less than a week since Groundhog Day.⁵⁰

The *Spirit* clearly enhanced its position as standard bearer for the groundhog after September 1906 when it became a daily, rather than a weekly, paper. Thenceforth, it was able to do more than merely react to comments in other publications about Groundhog Day. It took the initiative, as seen in its headline for February 2, 1907: "Six More Weeks of Cold Weather. Sure Prediction is Made in Punxsutawney Weatherworks Today." Moreover, not only did the paper combat negative comments about the groundhog, it also took on rival theories about weather predicting:

As we go to press, the lookouts on Groundhog Knob . . . return with glowing accounts of the proceedings at the official weatherworks today. Promptly at 12:22 PM, according to the schedule arranged at the annual meeting of the Punxsutawney Pittsburg Groundhog Club last fall, a rift was riven in the overhanging clouds, and Brer Groundhog sallied forth casting a shadow which shot through a shimmering sheen and sent a shaft of effervescent and effulgent rays athwart the cities of Punxsutawney and Lindsay [now incorporated into the former] with a rebound against John Hoffman's tower on the South Side which knocked his onion theory to smithereens.⁵¹

The lookouts went on to report how Brer Groundhog disposed of derogatory cartoons, other theories of long-range weather prognostication, and United States government weather reports by tossing them all into a "weather hopper." The groundhog was depicted as being accompanied by his "official staff consisting of captains, colonels, poets, statesmen, mixologist, and understudies," no doubt a reference to the Groundhog Club itself. This is quite possibly the first mention in the *Spirit* of an official delegation on the Knob on Groundhog Day, not that anyone was necessarily there, of course.

More threatening than these rivals was the prospect of other clubs and organizations attempting to profit from the general interest in,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The reference is to the hypothesis that a harsh winter can be expected if onions develop more layers than usual. See Robert Levine and Nancy Bruning, *The Cold Weather Catalog* (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), 43.

and widespread uncertainty about, weather prediction as determined by groundhogs' shadows on the second day of February. One such contender was a groundhog club of students at the Millersville State Normal School in Lancaster County, which quite possibly had the distinction of being the first group organized for the express purpose of studying a groundhog's reaction to its own shadow on Groundhog Day. The *Spirit*, to be sure, invalidated every aspect of the Millersville observance it could think of, especially the fact that it was performed on the first of February.⁵²

It may well have been this threat from Lancaster County that prompted the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club into action the following February 2. In the *Spirit* of January 30, 1908, there was a call for all "disciples of Brer Groundhog" to meet at 2:30 P.M. on Groundhog Day to be nominated for the various offices, to observe the behavior of the pet woodchuck of a local man, and to determine the weather schedule for the remaining six weeks of winter. Resorting to the fanciful reporting of the previous five years, however, the *Spirit* of February 3, 1908, told an incredible story of the use of a "silhouetteoscope," "weather pinnacle," "reflector," and "300-inch shadowscope" to study "the official woodchuck" whose shadow covered all of southern Jefferson and northern Indiana counties. It was a "deep purple penumbra" that lasted long enough to allow the observers to gather enough information to forecast the weather for each of the next forty-two days of winter.

Punxsutawney in the Marketplace

Reporting on the September outing of the Groundhog Club in 1905, John Cowan enthused how "Punxsutawney has secured a corner in the weather trust that would grow hair on the head of Rockefeller if he could boost Standard Oil in a fashion so successful."⁵³ In the business climate of the day, success and survival were synonymous; during the early years of the twentieth century, however, Punxsutawney did not exhibit quite the degree of business success playfully attributed to it by Cowan that it had so ardently tried to achieve.

But it was not for lack of trying. After vigorous competition, in fact, Punxsutawney nonetheless lost out on its bid to attract such enterprises as railroad car shops, a new plate glass plant, a candy factory,

⁵² *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Feb. 4, 1907. In defense of the students, it should be noted that in 1907 Groundhog Day fell on a Saturday.

⁵³ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1905.

and a sizable gas engine manufacturing company, nearly all of which went to neighboring towns.⁵⁴ The *Spirit*, which had been drumming up support for business incentives (cash and land donations, for example) and bond issues, warned that "Punxsutawney must get industries or make up her mind to vegetate as a finished town."⁵⁵ It added that if Punxsutawney missed "the road to prominence in the industrial world . . . , it would not be hard to imagine a day in the future when the grass will be found growing in our erstwhile busy thoroughfares, while the groundhog will live and multiply on our undeveloped territory."⁵⁶ The measure of realism in this warning is evident when compared to an earlier, much more optimistic assessment by the paper: "Punxsutawney is the best point in the world for the manufacture of iron. . . . There is plenty of room here for a town as large as New York."⁵⁷

There was still cause for optimism during the first decade of this century, however. For one, the *Spirit* became a daily paper in September 1906, the first paper to do so in Jefferson County. The move prompted evaluations of Punxsutawney as "hustling" and "progressive" from its admiring neighbors.⁵⁸ The newspaper itself used the opportunity to pronounce that "The daily *Spirit* was established for the purpose of boosting Punxsutawney."⁵⁹ A daily edition was able to compete more effectively with the Pittsburgh dailies that had dominated the local market. There was more good news in 1908 with the establishment of a glass company in town that employed 140 people.⁶⁰ By 1909 the town counted 9,000 inhabitants, up 33 percent in nearly ten years.⁶¹

Punxsutawney was also encouraged by what seemed to be its prominence in marketing the groundhog, a creature that, because of its uniqueness in being the only animal recognized on the calendar, and because of its ability to garner attention, provided a handy medium for advertising the town. It eventually capitalized on that publicity by proclaiming itself "The Weather Capital of the World," and even tried to use its reputation for "perfect groundhog weather" in its campaign to lure prospective businesses.

54 *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Aug. 1, 1900, Aug. 22, 1900, Oct. 27, 1906.

55 *Ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1906.

56 *Ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1906.

57 *Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1899.

58 *Ibid.*, Sept. 24, 1906.

59 *Ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1906.

60 Jack, *Punxsutawney Centennial*, 23.

61 McKnight, *Jefferson County, Pennsylvania*, 1:426. Statistics here combine Punxsutawney proper and Clayville, consolidated in 1907.

The year 1909 saw something of a culmination in Punxsutawney's attempts to lift itself on the back of its most celebrated inhabitant. Clymer Freas, poet laureate of the Groundhog Club and one of the editors of the *Spirit*, received a letter from Fred Long of the *New York Telegraph* in early June of that year. The letter was an invitation promising "thousands of dollars' worth of free advertising for Punxsutawney" if club members "in all their solemnity and war paint" would visit that metropolis.⁶² Under a front-page headline that read "Groundhog Club to Hunt in New York's Jungles," the *Spirit* reported on the *Telegraph's* publication of the club's reply. The club would journey to New York to introduce groundhog punch and meat, and "let New York and the rest of the world know that there is such a place as Punxsutawney; that it is a delightful resort; that its medicinal waters are of the best and its whiskey of the purest; and that it wants to be known from something else than . . . coal. . . ." ⁶³ In a similar marketing ploy, the Groundhog Club also promised to attend the World Series in Pittsburgh that year, taking along some live groundhogs to "root" for the home team.⁶⁴

"Death of the Groundhog"

The year 1909 should be better remembered, however, for Punxsutawney's first annual Old Home Week during which the town hosted as many former residents and visitors as it could attract. If we were to think of the *Industrial Edition* of 1900 as a sort of script, then we might view Old Home Week as the actual performance, with both script and performance intended to sell the town far and wide: "The festivities of the week will be valuable as an advertisement. They will cause many people to think of Punxsutawney who had forgotten it, and many more to hear of the town who were not aware that it was on the map." ⁶⁵

Old Home Week itself was probably inspired by Pittsburgh's sesqui-centennial celebration of the previous year. To help ensure the success of Punxsutawney's own ambitious undertaking, every issue of the *Spirit* throughout the summer of 1909 carried some item about the upcoming local celebration. Items ranged from hortatory appeals for citizens to paint their houses and for the borough council to pave

⁶² *Punxsutawney Spirit*, June 5, 1909.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1909.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1909.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug. 25, 1909.

streets and alleys, to commercial appeals for everyone to buy Old Home Week stationery, to informative lists of invited dignitaries. The paper quoted at length these observations from the *Brookville Republican*:

For months past, committees of stirring citizens of this stirring municipality have been at work . . . [on] the biggest Old Home Week celebration in the history of western Pennsylvania. . . . There has been a spicy dish of originality about the publicity campaign which has created a feeling of anticipation far beyond the city's borders. As a result, thousands of people will wend their way back to Gnattown⁶⁶ to ruminate on the time when the thriving city of coke and coal was but a village. . . . They will gaze in wonder at the skyscrapers now raising their heads proudly into the blue on the spots where they stoned the bull frogs. . . . All that is necessary is to name what you want, and Punxsutawney will produce it for you next week. They never do things by halves over Punxsutawney way.⁶⁷

An official lapel button was designed for Old Home Week by the Advertising and Press Committee, but not without some debate over the colors to be used since they were to become the official colors of the community. Red with white lettering was the combination decided upon.⁶⁸ There seems to have been no debate, however, on what was to have most prominence on the button: the image of Brer Groundhog.

Old Home Week opened on August 22, 1909, with "perfect groundhog weather, bright skies, balmy weather, heaven-sent breezes, ideal atmosphere," which only added to the many qualities "Punxsutawney today has to offer to the citizens of the earth."⁶⁹ Each day of this festive week had its own particular theme such as Town History Day, Education Day, and Merchants and Manufacturers Day. The grand finale was, of course, Groundhog Day. Many important personages had been invited to attend that day and be initiated as members of the Groundhog Club. They included the governor of Pennsylvania (Edwin Stuart), President Taft's secretary of state (Philander C. Knox), Mark Twain, New York Senator Chauncey Depew, and master instrument maker and astronomer John Brashear of Pittsburgh, the supposed "manufacturer of the lenses that are used on the Canoe Ridge Weather Works."⁷⁰

The governor was the only one of these dignitaries to accept the invitation, but he was by no means alone. A reported 30,000 people

⁶⁶ "Punxsutawney" is thought to derive from an Indian name meaning "gnats' landing."

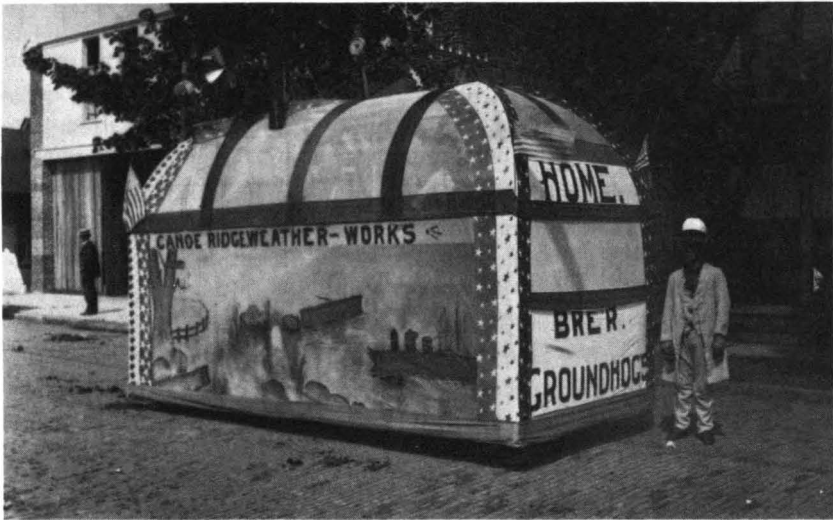
⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1909.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, June 3, 1909.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 23, 1909.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, June 10, 1909.

witnessed "The Circumgyratory Parade of Prophets and Meteorologists of the Canoe Ridge Weather Works" that was held on the final day. For this "monster fantastic parade" there was a "human (American) flag" made up of hundreds of marchers, and floats stretching for two miles. The first float was a replica, supposedly, of the Canoe Ridge observatory complete with instruments needed to decipher the groundhog's shadow. Several other floats were needed to display other aspects of the penumbral science of shadowgraphy.⁷¹



Punxsutawney's 1909 Old Home Week parade featured a float depicting the Canoe Ridge Weather Works and the apparatus used to help determine the groundhog's predictions.

In an obvious allusion to the reigning monarch of mass advertising, and perhaps the true patron saint of Punxsutawney at the turn of the century, H. J. Heinz, there were floats depicting fifty-seven varieties of weather spanning the four seasons. The winter float was so effectively done, according to an all-too-typical piece of make-believe, that "none of the meteorologists could ride on it for fear of catching cold." There was even a volcano float depicting the eruption of Mount Etna eight months earlier.⁷²

Another float featured a hunter, his dog, and a large mound of dirt.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1909; *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Sept. 2, 1909.

⁷² *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Aug. 28, 1909. Cf. Porter, *Autobiography*, 17-18.

In an account corroborated by the *Pittsburgh Post*, the *Spirit* reported how a live groundhog was uncovered from the dirt just as the float reached the reviewing stand. "The hero of the whole day's celebration was killed under the very gaze of Governor Stuart: it was most dramatic, sympathetic,"⁷³ and, according to the *Post*, it "evoked special applause."⁷⁴

This float expressed simultaneously several dimensions of Punxsutawney's association with its groundhog. The importance of the float is underscored, in part, by a peculiar embellishment it received in the *Spirit*. According to the *Pittsburgh Post*, this float was originally dubbed the "Dog Days" float, and was one of the fifty-seven varieties of weather depicted in the parade.⁷⁵ It was the *Spirit* that referred to it as the "Death of the Groundhog" float to dramatize, perhaps, its impact and to give it climactic importance in the parade narrative. This is not at all surprising, given the expressive and ritual potential of totems,⁷⁶ and given that this float had the only live groundhog reported for the entire parade.

Stylistically, the "Death of the Groundhog" float was — like the parade as a whole, the subsequent banquet, and Old Home Week itself — a piece of effective showmanship, a real attention-grabber, motivated by the desire to mark this as an auspicious occasion, and to draw as much attention to itself as possible. In a straightforward, substantive sense, the action on the float as it reached the reviewing stand depicted the seminal act of the Groundhog Club, reminding spectators that its origins lay in late aestival camaraderie more than in folk religion or the dark concerns of winter.

The staged killing of the groundhog also suggests the momentary inferiority of groundhogs to their hunters. Momentary, to wit, given this sentiment expressed by one of the club members (at the 1905 outing) regarding the disappearance of "the noble red man and all his strange animals": "But what do we find on the summits of Canoe Ridge?" he asked. "Here still remain the lineal descendants of Mr. and Mrs. Groundhog in defiance of the frontiersman, in defiance of the modern farmer."⁷⁷ The truth is, then, that groundhogs remain tenacious and numerous, despite being hunted and trapped. It is their persistence, in fact, that inspired the *Spirit* to dichotomize the ground-

⁷³ *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Aug. 28, 1909.

⁷⁴ *Pittsburgh Post*, Aug. 28, 1909.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Radcliffe-Brown, "The Sociological Theory of Totemism."

⁷⁷ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1905.

hog and industrial progress when it warned that with the failure of the latter, "the groundhog will live and multiply on our undeveloped territory."⁷⁸

Ironically, then, the staged killing of this groundhog leads one to think of their abundance, and their abundance is an index of the persistence of rurality over an industrial economy, especially when the latter was not assured. On this subject, the *Spirit* used the terms "Boosters" and "Knockers," those for and those against major industrial development, respectively, to suggest Punxsutawney's search for an identity at this juncture in its history.⁷⁹

This is not to say that the outcome need necessarily be perceived as being simply one (a rural town) or the other (an industrial city). The members of Punxsutawney's voluntary associations no doubt viewed their hunts, outings, and feasts in the grove or up on the ridge as a way to counterbalance the relentless quest for economic success and survival in a highly competitive economic environment. Yet the hunt, with obvious winners and losers, itself became a model of the nature of the changing economic world. This is spelled out in the following editorial comment written, ostensibly, on the subject of the Groundhog Club's annual outing: "It would be fine indeed if both the hunter and the hunted could enjoy the slaughter, but nature has so arranged these matters that what is one creature's pleasure is another's pain. It is the same in the affairs of men. Both sides cannot rejoice over a victory."⁸⁰

Once linked to larger marketing campaigns, even groundhog clubs themselves, of course, were not without competition. In addition to the likelihood of more or less friendly rivalry among the fraternal organizations within Punxsutawney, there was competition with the groundhog clubs in Lancaster County, and with the one in Du Bois established in 1909 "in order to keep up with Punxsutawney."⁸¹

Apart from the obvious attention-getting eccentricity of Punxsutawney as Groundhog Town, was there any other benefit to be had from identifying with this animal? If this emblematic use of the groundhog is totemism, then the relationship is a metaphorical one of mutual resemblances.⁸² For one, the groundhog is a common, heretofore uninspiring animal.⁸³ By its own admission, and despite its name,

⁷⁸ *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 27, 1906, and above.

⁷⁹ Cf. Phil R. Jack, "Two Local Newspapers and Agriculture; 1869, 1911, 1949," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 40 (Summer 1957): 101-8.

⁸⁰ *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Sept. 29, 1906.

⁸¹ *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Sept. 16, 1909.

⁸² See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (New York, 1963), 27.

⁸³ But perhaps not for long. The protein in its blood that induces hibernation,

which was considered "unique in the nomenclature of American towns," Punxsutawney was "a typical American town."⁸⁴ The groundhog is tenacious; it survives hunters and deathlike hibernation. Turn-of-the-century Punxsutawney sought to survive economically by portraying itself as a hustling, progressive, tenacious town. Moreover, if this rodent could be exalted, however much in jest, in the form of "Brer Groundhog, Weather Maker," then why not hold out as much hope for the town itself in the role many of its citizens coveted as urban manufacturer and purveyor of industrial products?

As is the case with the *sacrifice* of a totem animal, the "Death of the Groundhog" float momentarily suspended this metaphorical relationship with the groundhog in favor of a metonymical one. That is to say, the groundhog's symbolic loss juxtaposed . . . not Punxsutawney and the animal that was killed . . . but rather *community* and *sense of community*, which association with the animal had enhanced. With the "Death of the Groundhog," Punxsutawney was invited to peer into the mirror it had been handing to the rest of the world to hold up to the town.

Finally, the "Death" float was a pointed prelude to a unique edition of the annual feast held by the club. On this "red letter day in the history of Punxsutawney,"⁸⁵ the climax was not a comradely picnic, but an evening banquet that was attended by several hundred people, including Governor Stuart, all of whom were made members of the club. The participants at the banquet praised the club, the town, many of the notable guests, and the groundhog with more than three hours of enthusiastic prose and poetry. Not only was Brer Groundhog nominated to replace the eagle as "mystic mascot" and "national emblem," he was also served as the main dish. The parade and banquet, mediated by the "Death" float, brought together the wintry veneration and pre-autumnal killing of the groundhog, as did the *Spirit's* rhetorical question: "Was ever quadruped, biped, centiped, or any other perambulating animal . . . so *toasted*, and *roasted*, as you were last night?"⁸⁶

Conclusion

Totemism has been called "a vast scheme of communication" — a kind of code with a vitality all its own, it seems, which "both orches-

if isolated, may some day prove to be of great value (*Detroit News*, Sept. 6, 1984).

⁸⁴ *Industrial Edition*, 1.

⁸⁵ *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Sept. 2, 1909.

⁸⁶ *Punxsutawney Spirit*, Aug. 28, 1909; emphasis added.

trates and assimilates" events, producing ever-expanding "versions of itself,"⁸⁷ as long as there is an audience, and especially if there is something it has to sell.

There were fundamental economic changes in the latter part of the last century when increased industrial capacity and vastly improved transportation favored the increased concentration of industry and commerce to the detriment of small towns that had hitherto developed fairly rapidly.⁸⁸ Whether or not this trend toward economies of scale was clearly discernible to the actors involved, the rhetoric of winners and losers that characterized the Social Darwinism of the period was unambiguous in the anxiety it provoked among citizens of such small towns as Punxsutawney. They acted as if it were imperative that Punxsutawney make a name for itself as an industrial city if it were to avoid the obscurity, or worse, that awaited those towns not able to adapt to the economic realities of a new age, an age that happened to coincide with a new century.

Where the boosters of Punxsutawney could not point to as much antecedent industrial diversification as they would have liked, they certainly made the most of what natural, human, and capital resources they had, complementing these tangibles with equal emphasis on "the spirit of progress and advancement which now permeates the place."⁸⁹

Unable to make a name for itself ultimately as an industrial city, however, Punxsutawney was, nevertheless, able to make a name for itself using the kind of hyperbole associated with mass advertising in an industrial age. To create a demand for the supply potential offered by a combination of mass production technologies and railroads for nationwide distribution, industries used mass advertising techniques as pioneered by H. J. Heinz of Pittsburgh who began his "57 Varieties" campaign around the turn of the century. Whereas Heinz had the products and used advertising to move them, Punxsutawney used advertising to attract the product makers.

While that was the clear intent of its *Industrial Edition*, it was not the initial *raison d'être* of the Groundhog Club. Rather, it is possible that the advertising potential of the club was first recognized in Pittsburgh where the *Gazette* may have used its links with the club to create a market for itself in Jefferson County which was newly linked to Pittsburgh by rail. This may explain why the club was some-

⁸⁷ Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago, 1976), 184, 203.

⁸⁸ See Lewis, "Small Town in Pennsylvania."

⁸⁹ *Industrial Edition*, 1, and above.

times referred to, even in Punxsutawney, as the Punxsutawney *Pittsburgh Gazette* Groundhog Club.⁹⁰ The turn of the century was a time when the so-called yellow press illustrated for all newspapermen the influence they could wield. Flush with crusading spirit and enthusiasm, newspapers often tended toward sensational, exaggerated, even fanciful writing. Indicative of the confusion between news coverage and news creation that can accompany that kind of rhetoric was Cowan's account of the ritual supposedly performed in Punxsutawney on Groundhog Day in 1904, a ritual that was only subsequently to be enacted, it seems, by a Groundhog Club influenced, perhaps, by what he had written. Another indication of the influence of the press is the extent to which newspaper editors were active politicians themselves. William O. Smith, congressman and editor of the *Spirit*, was an obvious example.

The movers and shakers of Punxsutawney started with advertising in the hope of breaking into the industrial scene in a big way, but it is for this advertising itself that most people learn of and remember this town. The weather as prognosticated or experienced, the groundhog with definite cultural credentials, and the eventual claim to be the Weather Capital of the World combined to provide a model for Punxsutawney's industrial and commercial aspirations with its talk of "boosting," "cornering," and "exporting" a mass produced "commodity" if ever there was one. The model itself, however, became largely self-sufficient. Meanwhile, the Groundhog Club was a fairly innocent way to bring together both "Boosters" and "Knockers" within Punxsutawney, and influence them all with at least the rhetoric, if not the economic aspirations, of the "Boosters." Moreover, the club and its idiom had the bonus of providing a popular forum for poking fun at what struck many people to be a pretentious pseudoscience: meteorology.

As for selling Punxsutawney's industrial image, however, the town's principal representative in the regional press may ultimately have had too many rural connotations. Nevertheless, much in the manner of H. J. Heinz and his arbitrary "57," the turn-of-the-century boosters of Punxsutawney pursued the potential of persistent mass advertising, whatever its theme, to further name recognition. Among them was William O. Smith, whose combined role as newspaper editor and town promoter found expression in his own jingle:

⁹⁰ Punxsutawney *Spirit*, Sept. 23, 1903; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 20, 1902.

Advertise! Advertise!
Send the dollars flying.
Nothing equals printer's ink
To set the people buying!⁹¹

Advertising announces and/or creates the openness and competitiveness of a system — the economic system of Punxsutawney, for example — especially if the system is relatively new, and if its advertising medium has frequent access to an audience, particularly on a daily basis.

Although Punxsutawney did not become a producer of industrial products on a scale envisioned by these early entrepreneurs, the Groundhog Club itself benefited from the entrepreneurial initiative it was so much involved in. Beginning with the mass initiation into membership of the hundreds who attended its banquet during Old Home Week in 1909, and continuing this practice with all those who join in the annual summer outing, which is a reenactment of the club's origins, Punxsutawney's Groundhog Club now must number in the thousands.

Epilogue

Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney is still primarily a "media event." The Groundhog Club has recently raised an earthen mound on Gobbler's Knob so that the crowds of people who gather around can see Brer Groundhog, now called Punxsutawney Phil, and the members of the club as they display their signs with Phil's prediction. It is especially important that the wire service and newspaper reporters and television cameramen have an unobstructed view since they are the ones most responsible for trumpeting Punxsutawney's name to the world on that day. It does not seem to matter that Phil could not possibly hope to distinguish between the rising sun and all the television camera lights trained on him.

Punxsutawney still celebrates what is now called "Old Home Week — Groundhog Festival," which is usually held in early July so as to correspond with the national holiday. The parade is now known as the Firemen's Parade. While weather is no longer a theme, as it was in the first parade in 1909, one is certain to see a large groundhog or two.

Now held on the second Wednesday of August adjacent to Gobbler's

91 Smith, *Fifty Years of Rhyming*, 44.

Knob in Sportsmen's Park on the ridge south of the town, the annual "outing and picnic" is still a Groundhog Club function. As with the banquet held in 1909, all the men who attend are made members of the club. There are some organized activities, especially eating, with hot dogs and kielbassa for lunch, and sirloin steak for dinner. In keeping with tradition, there is a groundhog "hunt" in the afternoon, but Phil is the only game. Rather than eat the groundhog, however, the "hunters" feed him a special (innocuous) mixture of groundhog punch, each gulp of which is supposed to bring Phil seven additional years of longevity. He is already assured life until well into the twenty-eighth century. ■