



## SOME FUN WITH FOLKLORE...



Punxsutawney Phil & friend

When February rolls around each year, there's great anticipation in Punxsutawney, a little town in Pennsylvania. According to folklore, if it is cloudy when a groundhog (Punxsutawney Phil, in this case) emerges from its burrow on February 2nd, it will leave the burrow, signifying that winter will soon end. If, on the other hand, it is a sunny day, the groundhog will see its shadow and scamper back into its burrow, predicting that winter will last for six more weeks.

Punxsutawney held its first **Groundhog Day** in the 1800s. The first official trek to Gobbler's Knob, where the celebration takes place, was made on February 2, 1887. This annual celebration began with the Germans, Pennsylvania's earliest settlers. They brought with them the legend of **Candlemas Day**, which foretells, "For as the sun shines on Candlemas day, so far will the snow swirl in May...". The settlers found groundhogs to be plentiful and decided they were the most intelligent and sensible animal to carry on the legend of Candlemas Day.

The Punxsutawney celebration is televised and shown around the world. The full schedule of events, that begin in January, include "Breakfast with Phil", poetry and book readings, and several gala fundraising events. The official website of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club posts the schedules, and introduces the town's Groundhog Club's *Inner Circle* -- a group of local dignitaries who carry on the tradition of Groundhog Day every year. They not only have the task of planning the celebration's events, but they're also responsible for the feeding and care of Phil himself! On February 2nd, they dress for the occasion in top hats and tux. Folklore it may be, but Phil has a pretty impressive track record for being right about the weather.

When it comes to water, there are many superstitions that have been passed down over the ages. Perhaps one of the most interesting of these, however, is the folklore surrounding "water witching." That's the "skill" of using a forked stick, rod, pendulum, or some similar device that "points" to where underground water is located. The phrase was first used in America around 1810 - 1820, according to the Random House Unabridged Dictionary.

This is a topic on which "practitioners" and science collide, perhaps not surprisingly. The National Ground Water Association *strongly opposes the use of water witchers to locate groundwater on the grounds that controlled experimental evidence clearly indicates that the technique is totally without scientific merit.*

Over the centuries, history tells us that there have been people able to "find" water underground. They have been called water-pointers, dowzers, or sometimes stick-witchers. As long as man grows crops and raises animals, they say, he will need water. The better the supply, the better for his future. Therefore, the water witchers point out, if someone can come along and identify, with relative ease, where to place a well to get a steady supply of good water, he should be appreciated as a benefactor to the community. No mystery or superstition about it. And, if he is good at it, word will get around and he will find water sources for more of his neighbors and his business will grow.



There are people -- including some with scientific educations -- that absolutely believe that underground water can be discovered by this method. There are societies devoted to this craft -- serious followers and providers of the "witching" services -- who remain active today! ♠

