

## Groundhog Day

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Groundhog Day (Pennsylvania German: Grund'sau dâk, Grundsaudaag, Grundsow Dawg, Murmeltiertag; Nova Scotia: Daks Day)[ is a tradition observed in the United States and Canada on February 2 of every year. It derives from the Pennsylvania Dutch superstition that if a groundhog emerges from its burrow on this day and sees its shadow, it will retreat to its den and winter will go on for six more weeks; if it does not see its shadow, spring will arrive early.

While the tradition remains popular in the 21st century, studies have found no consistent association between a groundhog seeing its shadow and the subsequent arrival time of spring-like weather.

The weather lore was brought from German-speaking areas where the badger (German: Dachs) is the forecasting animal. It is related to the lore that clear weather on the Christian festival of Candlemas forebodes a prolonged winter.

The Groundhog Day ceremony held at Punxsutawney in western Pennsylvania, centering on a semi-mythical groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil, has become the most frequently attended ceremony. Grundsow Lodges in Pennsylvania Dutch Country in the southeastern part of the state observe the occasion as well. Other cities in the United States and Canada also have adopted the event.

### History

The groundhog (*Marmota monax*) is a hibernating rodent of the family Sciuridae, belonging to the group of large ground squirrels.

The observance of Groundhog Day in the United States first occurred in German communities in Pennsylvania, according to known records. The earliest mention of Groundhog Day is an entry on February 2, 1840, in the diary of James L. Morris of Morgantown, in Pennsylvania Dutch Country, according to the book on the subject by Don Yoder. This was a Welsh enclave but the diarist was commenting on his neighbors who were of German stock.

### Punxsutawney beginnings

The first reported news of a Groundhog Day observance was arguably made by the Punxsutawney Spirit newspaper of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in 1886 "up to the time of going to press, the beast has not seen its shadow." However, it was not until the following year in 1887 that the first Groundhog Day considered "official" was commemorated there, with a group making a trip to the Gobbler's Knob part of town to consult the groundhog. People have gathered annually at the spot for the event ever since.

Clymer Freas (1867–1942), who was city editor at the Punxsutawney Spirit, is credited as the "father" who conceived the idea of "Groundhog Day." It has also been suggested that Punxsutawney was where all the Groundhog Day events originated, from where it spread to other parts of the United States and Canada.

The Groundhog Day celebrations of the 1880s were carried out by the Punxsutawney Elks Lodge. The lodge members were the "genesis" of the Groundhog Club formed later, which continued the Groundhog Day tradition. But the lodge started out being interested in the groundhog as a game animal for food. It had started to serve groundhog at the lodge, and had been organizing a hunting party on a day each year in late summer.

The chronologies given are somewhat inconsistent in the literature. The first "Groundhog Picnic" was held in 1887 according to one source, but given as post-circa-1889 by a local historian in a journal. The historian states that around 1889 the meat was served in the lodge's banquet, and the organized hunt started after that.

Either way, the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club was formed

in 1899 and continued the hunt and "Groundhog Feast," which took place annually in September. The "hunt" portion of it became increasingly a ritualized formality, because the practical procurement of meat had to occur well ahead of time for marinating. A drink called the "groundhog punch" was also served. The flavor has been described as a "cross between pork and chicken." The hunt and feast did not attract enough outside interest, and the practice was discontinued.

The groundhog was not named Phil until 1961, possibly as an indirect reference to Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

Punxsutawney today



Groundhog Day, Punxsutawney, 2013

The largest Groundhog Day celebration is held in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, where crowds as large as 40,000 gather each

year (nearly eight times the year-round population of the town). The average draw had been about 2,000 until the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*, which is set at the festivities in Punxsutawney, after which attendance rose to about 10,000. The official Phil is pretended to be a supercentenarian, having been the same forecasting beast since 1887.

In 2019, the 133rd year of the tradition, the groundhog was summoned to come out at 7:25 am on February 2, but did not see its shadow. Fans of Punxsutawney Phil awaited his arrival starting at 6:00 am, thanks to a live stream provided by Visit Pennsylvania. The live stream has been a tradition for the past several years, allowing more people than ever to watch the animal meteorologist.

2021 was the 135th, and for the first time, much of the Inner Circle members were required to wear a mask. The groundhog was summoned at 7:25 am on February 2 and saw its shadow. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was held behind closed doors, with no fans allowed to attend.

2022 saw the 136th celebration of the event and the groundhog saw its shadow, predicting six more weeks of winter.

In 2023, during the 137th prognostication event, the groundhog once again saw its shadow, calling for six more weeks of winter.

## Regional celebrations

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### United States

#### Mid-Atlantic

The Slumbering Groundhog Lodge, which was formed in 1907, has carried out the ceremonies that take place in Quarryville, Pennsylvania. It used to be a contending rival to Punxsutawney over the Groundhog Day fame. It employs a taxidermic specimen (stuffed woodchuck).

In Southeastern Pennsylvania, Groundhog Lodges (Grundsow Lodges) celebrate the holiday with fersommlinge, social events in which food is served, speeches are made, and one or more g'spiel (plays or skits) are performed for entertainment.

The Pennsylvania German dialect is the only language spoken at the event, and those who speak English pay a penalty, usually in the form of a nickel, dime, or quarter per word spoken, with the money put into a bowl in the center of the table.

In Milltown, New Jersey, Milltown Mel was purchased in 2008 in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, by Jerry and Cathy Guthlein, and lived in a cage in the Guthleins' back yard. Mel's first event was at the family business, the Bronson and Guthlein Funeral Home, with later events moved to the American Legion Post, with free coffee and doughnuts served afterwards. (Mel died in 2021.)

Stonewall Jackson predicts at Space Farms Zoo and Museum.

Essex Ed the groundhog and Otis the Hedgehog predict at Turtle Back Zoo.

Great Neck Greta, of Great Neck, Long Island, New York, predicted in 2020.

Quigley, of The Hamptons (resident of the Save the Animals Rescue Foundation), predicts at Quogue Village Fire Department.

Staten Island Chuck is the stage name for the official weather-forecasting woodchuck for New York City, housed in the Staten Island Zoo. In 2009, Chuck bit then-NYC Mayor Mike Bloomberg, prompting zoo officials to quietly replace him with his daughter Charlotte. In 2014, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio famously dropped Charlotte during the ceremony, visibly disturbing many of the children present for the event. Charlotte's untimely death a week later prompted rumors she was killed by the fall, although the zoo later said this was unlikely to be the cause of Charlotte's demise. As a result, Bill de Blasio did not participate in the tradition thereafter.

Dunkirk Dave (a stage name for numerous groundhogs that have filled the role since 1960) is the local groundhog for Western New York, handled by Bob Will, a typewriter repairman who runs a rescue shelter for groundhogs. Will is adamant that Dunkirk Dave does not actually predict the date of spring because that is fixed by calendars, but instead predicts the harshness of the remainder of winter.

French Creek Freddie is West Virginia's resident groundhog meteorologist. A resident of the West Virginia State Wildlife Center in French Creek, West Virginia, Freddie made his debut in 1978, and boasts an accuracy rate of approximately 50%. On Groundhog Day, 2022, Freddie predicted six more weeks of winter, with the mayor of Buckhannon and members of the community in attendance.

#### Midwest

In the Midwest, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin is the self-proclaimed "Groundhog Capital of the World." This title was taken in response to the Punxsutawney Spirit's 1952 newspaper article describing Sun Prairie as a "remote two cow village buried somewhere in the wilderness..." In 2015, Jimmy the Groundhog bit the ear of Mayor Jon Freund and the story quickly went viral worldwide. The next day a mayoral proclamation absolved Jimmy XI of any wrongdoing.

Buckeye Chuck, Ohio's official State Groundhog, is one of two weather-predicting groundhogs. He resides in Marion, Ohio.

Woodstock Willie resides in Woodstock, Illinois, the shooting location for the 1993 film Groundhog Day.

Concord Casimir, while not a groundhog, is a weather-predicting cat whose forecast is based on how he eats his annual pierogi meal. He resides in Concord, Ohio, on the outskirts of Cleveland.

#### The South

In Washington, D.C., the Dupont Circle Groundhog Day event features Potomac Phil, another taxidermic specimen. From his first appearance in 2012 to 2018, Phil's spring predictions invariably agreed with those of the more lively Punxsutawney Phil, who made his predictions half an hour earlier. In addition, Phil always predicted correctly six more months of political gridlock. However, after being accused of collusion in 2018, Potomac Phil contradicted Punxsutawney Phil in 2019 and, further, predicted two more years of political insanity.

Birmingham Bill, at Birmingham Zoo, was "taking a break" from predicting in 2015.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, an annual event at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences included Sir Walter

Wally. According to museum officials, Wally had been correct 58% of the time vs. Punxsutawney Phil's 39%. Sir Walter Wally retired after 2022 leaving Snerd of Garner as the only weather-predicting groundhog in the state.

Elsewhere in the American South, the General Beauregard Lee makes predictions from Lilburn, Georgia (later Butts County, Georgia). The University of Dallas in Irving, Texas has boasted of hosting the second largest Groundhog celebration in the world.

#### Statistics

Punxsutawney Phil's statistics are kept by the Pennsylvania's Groundhog Club which cares for the animal. Phil has predicted 106 forecasts for winter and 19 for an early spring. One year he had a partial shadow, in 1942. There were 10 years where Phil's prediction was not recorded, all of which occurred in the 1880s and 1890s. There has been one year where the event was canceled (1943) due to World War II.

Most assessments of Phil's accuracy have given an accuracy lower than would be expected with random chance. Stormfax Almanac gives Phil an estimate of 39% accuracy. Meteorologist Tim Roche of Weather Underground gives Phil an accuracy rate between 1969 and 2016, a range chosen because local weather data was most reliable from 1969 onward, and a 47% accuracy record in that time span when predicting early spring. The National Centers for Environmental Information, using a basic metric of above-normal temperatures for early spring and below-normal temperatures for more winter, placed Punxsutawney Phil's accuracy at 40% for the ten-year period preceding 2019.

The Farmer's Almanac, which itself has been known for forecasts of questionable accuracy, gives an assessment of "exactly 50 percent" accuracy. The National Geographic Society reports a 28% success rate. A Middlebury College team found that Phil's long-term analysis of temperature high/low predictions were 70% accurate, although when the groundhog predicted early spring it was usually wrong. Canadian meteorologist Cindy Day has estimated that Nova Scotia's "Shubenacadie Sam" has an accuracy rate of about 45%, compared to 25% for Wiarton Willy in Ontario.

Part of the problem with pinning down an accuracy rate for the groundhog is that what constitutes an early spring is not clearly defined. Assessments of the accuracy of other groundhogs such as Staten Island Chuck use an objective formula. In Chuck's case the formula is the majority of days that reach 40 °F (4 °C) in New York City between Groundhog Day and the March equinox.



# President's Musings

Angela Smith

For being the shortest month of the year, February has more than its fill of special days – to name a few, Groundhog Day, Valentine's Day, Presidents' Day, Mardi Gras, the Chinese New Year, and the High Holy Day of American sports – Super Bowl Sunday. In 2024, Leap Year also makes its once every four years' appearance.

On a personal note, Leap Year gives me one extra day to be president of Music Club Austin. When one considers the many leaps our club has made over the last year moving this club forward, it's especially appropriate we mark the occasion.

Like Leap Year, which happens every four years, much in music revolves around the number four – quarter notes, the 4/4 time signature, perfect, diminished, and augmented fourths, and the continuing debate as to why 4/4 is so popular in Western music. Does it have something to do with the rhythmic way we walk or run?

Looking for some Leap Year appropriate music? How about Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Pirates of Penzance," which conveys perhaps the most famous story with a leap year theme. Those familiar with that work know that the character Frederic is expected to be a pirate apprentice until his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The glitch comes when Frederic learns his birthday is February 29, which creates for him some unexpected challenges.

Since Superman's fictional birthday is February 29, John Williams' "Superman Theme" would also be a good choice for your Leap Year playlist.

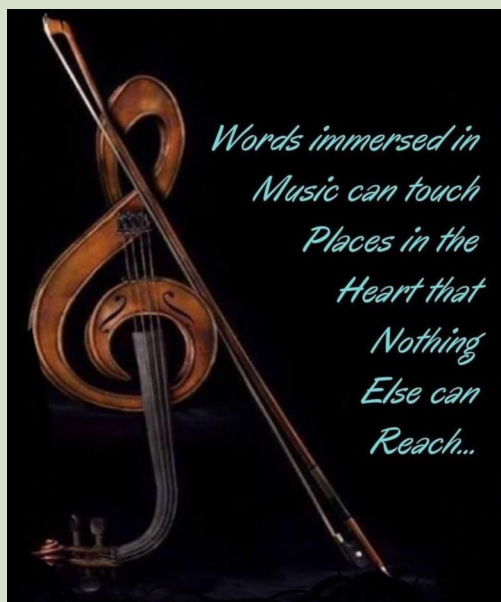
The chance of being born in leap year is 1 in 1,461, or .068 percent.

In the music world, artists with Leap Day birthdays have included jazz musician Jimmy Dorsey and composer Gioachino Rossini. No Leap Year playlist is complete without the "William Tell Overture" or at least two or three selections from the Jimmy Dorsey catalog of number one hits from the 1930s and 40s (e.g., "Tangerine," "Green Eyes," "Besame Mucho," "Pennies from Heaven," "Lullaby of Broadway").

And then there are those songs not so technically correct for this particular year. "Seasons of Love" from the musical "Rent" may be a beautiful piece, but mathematicians know five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes doesn't quite make leap time.

And for most of us who are busy, just the opportunity to have an extra day with a few extra hours can be a blessing. So enjoy your Leap Year February, listen to some great music associated with it, and be thankful that the extra day gives all of us one more chance to get it right.





## THE MUSIC CLUB AUSTIN

### PIANO AND FRIENDS, FEBRUARY 7, 2024

#### Program

Program Leader: **Pat Yingst**  
Song Leader: **Carol Brannon.**  
Accompanist: **Melanie Richards**

Scenes from Childhood, Op. 15 by Robert Schumann (1810-1856)  
*Nos. 1-8, 13: Of Foreign Lands and People; A Curious Story; Blind-Man's Bluff; Pleading Child; Happy Enough; An Important Event; Dreaming; At the Fireside; The Poet Speaks*  
Performed by **Felicity Coltman**, pianist

*Allegro non troppo* from Sonata in e minor, Op. 38, No.1 by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)  
Performed by **Terri Freeland**, cellist and **Brian Grothues**, pianist

*Allegretto* from Sonata in d minor, Op. 31, #2 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)  
Performed by **Janie Keys**, pianist

Vier Klavierstücke, Op. 119 by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)  
*Nos. 1,2,3,4: Intermezzo in b minor;  
Intermezzo in e minor;  
Intermezzo in C major;  
Rhapsodie in E b major*  
Performed by **Tim Woolsey**, pianist

## MEMBER NEWS

Music Club Austin's esteemed, long-time recording secretary, Virginia Kniesner, suffered a serious fall in early January that required surgery and a lengthy hospital stay.

She is now recovering at Central Texas Rehabilitation Center.

Short visits and cards are welcome.



# MEMBER HIGHLIGHT



## Deborah Scott Hammons

Deborah Scott Hammons knew she was going to be a singer from childhood, when she first sang in her elementary school talent show. She went on to receive a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from Biola University, then a Master of Music in Vocal Arts from the University of Southern California. After completing her master's, she performed with LA Opera, LA Master Chorale, and on concert stages throughout Los Angeles. She also worked as a studio singer for TV and film. An early career highlight was singing in the chorus for "The Three Tenors at Dodger Stadium." Some favorite roles include Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, Servilia in *La Clemenza Di Tito*, Mimi in *La Boheme*, and Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. She sang for many LA area schools, as "Miss Soprano," with Operantics, an opera outreach program, which was great fun. She has also dabbled in Musical Theatre, and she was a member of the professional theatre company Actors Co-op in Hollywood, CA, where she had the opportunity to play Jack's Mother in *Into The Woods*, and Leslie in *An Evening With Stephen Sondheim*. Just prior to becoming a real life mom, she presented a one-woman show, "My Favorite Things," which included an eclectic mix of opera, musical theatre, and old pop standards.

After the birth of her son, she, along with her husband Shamus, decided to relocate to Texas, where she has been a guest soloist with the Starlight Symphony on many occasions. She is the founder of "Opera, Etc." a mostly classical performance group, which presents opera arias, duets, and the occasional trio in small venues. She is also a voice and piano teacher. In her free time, she enjoys reading, wine tasting, spending time with friends, and, of course, singing!

## Poetry Corner

### Hearts were made to give away (by Annette Wynne)

Hearts were made to give away  
On Valentine's good day;  
Wrap them up in dainty white,  
Send them off the thirteenth night.  
Any kind of heart that's handy -  
Hearts of lace, and hearts of candy,  
Hearts all trimmed with ribbands fine  
Send for good St. Valentine.  
Hearts were made to give away  
On Valentine's dear day.

Annette Wynne (1919-1922) was an American poet specializing in children's poetry.

These poems are in the public domain.

I'm Not Just February  
( by Annette Wynne)

I'm not just February  
With winds that blow  
All day, and piled-up snow;  
I'm Washington and Lincoln, too,  
Who kept our country's flag for you!  
I'm Valentine and airy grace -  
With golden hearts and hearts of lace  
And pretty cards that people send,  
Quite as a secret, to a friend.  
Though I am short of days and small,  
I'm quite a big month, after all.

### A Valentine (Author unknown)

Frost flowers on the window glass,  
Hopping chickadees that pass,  
Bare old elms that bend and sway,  
Pussy willows soft and gray.  
Silver clouds across the sky,  
Lacy snow flakes flitting by,  
Icicles like fringe in line  
This is nature's Valentine.

# Upcoming Events

**Arts On Alexander** <https://www.artsonalexander.org/events> Philharmonie Austin | Brahms & Mendelssohn: Friday, February 9th and Saturday, 10th.

**Austin Chamber Music Center** <https://austinchambermusic.org/concert-season/> Silent Wood, Deep River: Friday, February 23rd and Saturday, 24th.

**Austin Civic Orchestra** <https://austincivicorchestra.org/events/> Texas Rising Stars - from the Butler School of Music: Saturday, February 3rd.

**Austin Classical Guitar** <https://austinclassicalguitar.org/events/> Live at The Rosette - Xuefei Yang: Saturday, February 3rd and Sunday, 4th. Also, ACG Originals - Presence: Saturday, February 17th.

**Austin Jazz Society** <https://austinjazzsociety.org> The Pamela Hart Quintet: Saturday, February 4th.

**Austin Opera** <https://my.austinopera.org/> Cruzar la Cara de la Luna (To Cross the Face of the Moon) - the first ever Mariachi Opera: Thursday, February 1st - Sunday, February 4th. Also, Serenata - El Encanto De Mexico: Saturday, February, 24th.

**Austin Symphony** <https://my.austinsymphony.org/events?view=list> "USA and the UK" Anton Nel and Chorus Austin: Friday, February 9th and Saturday, 10th.

**Austin Shakespeare** <https://www.austinshakespeare.org/our-season> O. Henry Stories: February 16th - 25th.

**Balcones Community Orchestra** <https://www.bcorchestra.org/> Sungeun Park, Piano: Sunday, February 18th.

**Ballet Austin** <https://balletaustin.org/performances/seasontickets/> TRIAD - Three Bold Dances: Friday, February 16th thru Sunday, 18th.

**Beerthoven** <https://www.beerthoven.com/upcomingshows> To Invoke History at Saenggerrunde Hall - Invoke Quartet: Friday, February 2nd and Sunday, February 3rd.

**Central Texas Philharmonic** <https://www.centraltexasphilharmonic.org/> Celluloid Sounds, featuring Panoramic Voices: Sunday, February 18th.

**Chorus Austin** <https://www.chorusaustin.org/events-calendar.html> Southwest Voices - CrosSING Home: Saturday, February 24th and Sunday, 25th. You can get a FREE ticket on the website to go to the Sunday performance at the Austin Central Library.

**KMFA** <https://www.kmfa.org/events> KMFA Offbeat Concert Series - INSECTUM: Thursday, February 22nd.

**La Follia** <https://www.lafollia.org/upcoming-concerts> Pianoforte Plus, featuring Anton Nel: Friday, February 23rd and Saturday, 24th.

**The Long Center** <https://thelongcenter.org/upcoming-calendar/> Bhumn Arts Ensemble Winter Sessions: Saturday, February 3rd. Also, Black Violin: Monday, February 19th and Renee Fleming: Tuesday, February 20th.

**The Metropolitan Opera** On stage: <https://www.metopera.org/season/2023-24-season/> On Demand: <https://www.metopera.org/season/on-demand/>

**UT Butler School of Music** <https://music.utexas.edu/events> DON'T MISS THE MANY wonderful events on their website!!! And many are FREE! Including Trio Los Vigilantes: Friday, February 2nd.

**UT-Texas Performing Arts** <https://texasperformingarts.org/events> Many great events listed here. Including, Actors From The London Stage presents A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM: February 29th - March 2nd.