

The Athenian

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LEAP YEAR 2024!

Lucky you, if you were born on Feb 29th then you only age 1 year every 4 years! So where did Leap Years come from and what would happen if we didn't have them?

The practice of adding a day every 4 years keeps time in sync with the seasons and was developed over thousands of years. An early Roman calendar, the Republican calendar, had 12 months, but only 355 days. To make up the 10 days, a leap month was thrown in the mix every two or three years.

Aside from the making it confusing for anyone born on Leap Day figuring out when to celebrate their birthday on 3 out of every 4 years, things would get out of whack. Seasons would be thrown off by 10 days every 40 years, or after 700 years, our New England Christmas would fall in the heat of the summer, it might snow in July.

Because Christian holidays like Easter and Mardi Gras are tied to celestial events, Pope Gregory XIII had his astronomers figure out a more accurate plan. But, due to the need to subtract a leap day in three out of four centuries to keep the calendar in sync with the seasons, there wasn't a leap year in the year 1700, 1800 or 1900, but there was in 2000. There won't be one in 2100, 2200 or 2300 either. Just think about all that math!

- Sherry Maher

Select Board Meeting Tidbits

The Board had a working meeting with the Budget Committee on 1/16/24. See the minutes on the Town website for the details discussed. In addition to news in other pieces below, here are a few things from the January Select Board meeting that might be of interest.

- Discussions about new policies or ordinances continued, with also some discussion of the distinction between a policy and an ordinance. Ordinances have an enforcement mechanism such as issuing a ticket, while policies do not. Debate continued as to whether the proposed Driveway Access policy is in fact a form of zoning.
- A heated discussion centered on a resident quoting the Town Health Officer/Constable

saying he would shoot their tenant's dog. David clarified the role of the Town Health Office and Town Constable as to the dog ordinance.

- An informational meeting will be held at the Community Center on Monday, February 12th at 7:00 PM where the Board will explain what the policies are for and where the public can ask questions or raise concerns. The proposed Driveway Access, Conflict of Interest and Delinquent Tax policies will be discussed.

- A request was received from a Reed Rd. resident suggesting a new

Lighting Ordinance might be needed. David and Krista will visit the homeowner whose lights are causing concerns.

- Voter petitions were received and resulted in 3 articles being added to the Warning - one to eliminate Australian ballot voting for officers and return to the paper ballot process following nominations from the floor as had been done prior to the pandemic. The others related to ending Athens' status as the few remaining "dry towns" in the state.
- There was discussion on how to word a trash pick up article and concern that it might not be clear to the voters. The aim is to have the voters decide if we should return to the alternating week schedule that we had in the recent past. There will be no change through June 12, 2024 which is the end of the current contract. By putting this in as a separate article, and if approved, then a cut to the general budget would not have an impact on the trash removal schedule.
- Further work was done in preparation of budget details for Town Meeting Warning and the Board set out the Articles for the Warning.
- Krista asked if an answer was ever found as to why the average income went up so drastically, impacting our eligibility for certain USDA grants.
- At the end of the meeting, David announced that Steve Oakes has resigned his positions of Health Officer, Constable and Justice of the Peace.

- Sherry Maher



Voting Options for March 5th Elections

Election Day for the Presidential Primary, local officers and school articles is March 5th from 10:00am - 7:00pm.

If you don't wish to come to the polls, absentee ballots may be requested in the following ways:

1. In person at the Town Office
2. By phone
3. At <https://mvp.vermont.gov>, Vermont's My Voter website.

Absentee ballots can be voted early, in the Town Office, or returned in person or by mail before 7:00pm March 5th. [Note - ballots can be returned Monday night at Town Meeting, but absentee ballots cannot be picked up at Town Meeting.]

Any voter, family member, health care provider, or authorized person can request an absentee ballot in Vermont without any reason. Voters who want to vote by absentee ballot may apply to the clerk no later than 5 p.m. or the closing of the town clerk's office on the day before the election. §2531(a)(1). If a town clerk does not have regular office hours on the day before an election and the office will not otherwise be open on that day, a voter may apply for an absentee ballot until the closing of the clerk's office on the last day that office has hours preceding the election. §2531(a)(2).

Home Delivery of Ballots:

If you are sick or have a disability, a ballot can be delivered to your home on Election Day. You may request an absentee ballot up until 5 p.m. on the day before the election. Two justices of the peace will deliver a ballot to you, and then will bring the ballot back to the polling place so that it can be placed in the ballot box and counted.

More information is available on the Secretary of State's website:

<https://sos.vermont.gov/elections/voters/early-absentee-voting/>

- Hannah Regier

Notes from the School Board

Save the date: Pre-town meeting for the school board will be held at 6:00 PM February 29th at the GES. Please come out as we will present the budget and be open to any questions.

There are two elementary school board seats that need to be filled this year at the March voting. One position has a name on the ballot, but the second position has no one running. Athens has been short a board member for over a year. Anyone who is interested in helping our school do the best



job we can to educate our children please let people in town know so your name can be written in.

We are very fortunate to have Hardy Merrill of Grafton on the Athens-Grafton school board. He is very knowledgeable about finances. As a result he has come up with a plan that adds portions of our surplus funds, that were returned from past years, to last year's, this year's and next year's budgets so the actual expenditures are within the states allowed per pupil expense. This keeps us from getting state fines for going over that pupil expense.

Our next school board meeting is 6:00 PM February 8 at the GES .
- Lynn Morgan

GES Grades 3-4 Bond with the Athens Community Forest

Third and fourth graders at Athens Grafton Elementary School have been bonding with the newly established Athens Community Forest, also known as the Raymond Bemis Community Forest. Made possible through the generosity of several foundations and local individuals, Bull Creek Common Lands, Inc. (BCCL) successfully conserved this 36.5 acre parcel for the enjoyment of people of all ages.

Teacher Vanessa Stern, in partnership with Doug Francis, the school's Mental Health Clinician, plans on taking these enthusiastic students to visit the forest monthly. Each visit begins with "circling up", a time to set an intention for the outing, and ends with a reflection circle during which the students share something they noticed or wonder, or an emotion they felt during the nature based experience.

In December, the students brought pine-cone bird feeders to hang on their "adopted" trees as gifts to the forest. Before they silently adorned their tree with this gift, they shared about things they were thankful for in nature and offered words of gratitude. This month, students will be joined by a forester from Vermont's Fish and Wildlife Department to search for evidence of the animals who make this forest their home.

There is increasingly more research confirming the mental health benefits of time in nature for children. Stern and Francis value the time spent in this beautiful natural environment with their students for many reasons, not the least of which is the therapeutic benefits of time outdoors. During a recent closing circle, many students chose to share an emotion they had felt during their time in the woods. Peaceful, happy, and calm were just some of the words shared by a

serene and joyous group of children at the end of our hike.

- *Vanessa Stern*

[NOTE - The BCCL is expanding their board and looking for people of diverse backgrounds. Email them at hello@bullcreekcommonlands.org for more info]

SEVCA Provides Free Tax Preparation

Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) is providing free tax preparation for lower income taxpayers for the 2023-24 tax filing season through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

The VITA program offers free tax help to people who are low to moderate income, persons with disabilities, elderly and limited English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. IRS-certified volunteers provide free federal and state income tax return preparation with electronic filing.

Vermonters can find SEVCA's VITA volunteers at many locations across Windham and Windsor counties. They will be at the Townshend Town Hall, 2006 VT Rte. 30 with appointments from 9:30 - 2:30 on

- Friday February 16,
- Friday March 22
- Friday April 12

Check the SEVCA website www.sevca.org for more locations.

To make an appointment or ask about drop-off options contact SEVCA's VITA Program Coordinator, Emily Strasser: estrasser@sevca.org or call/text 802-428-3032.

- *Emily Strasser*

Rep. Chase Constituent Meetings

I will be having constituent meetings in our communities throughout the legislative session on the dates and times as set out below. I look forward to meeting face to face with you and hearing your thoughts and discussing matters of importance. This schedule is through April. More dates and times will be planned for May and June.

Meetings with constituents are scheduled as follow:

February 24th - Windham

Windham Meeting House 10-11 am

April 13 - Grafton & Chester

Grafton Library 204 Main Street 11:30 am to 12 30 pm

Chester: Whiting Library 117 Main Street 9:30-10:30 am

I will be attending the annual town meetings:

Athens: March 4-- 6pm

Chester March 4-- 6pm

Grafton: March 5--10am

Windham: March--Time to be determined

Thanks and please reach out during the session at HChase@leg.state.vt.us

- *Heather Chase*

Regional Support Expands Grafton Fire Dept. Capabilities

Have you ever wondered how our small Fire Departments in our very small rural towns cope with large fires or manage to maintain necessary skills as well as keep up with ever changing advances in firefighting? There are two key reasons for these capabilities which are especially significant: the regional Mutual Aid system and the West River Training Group.

The Grafton Fire Department is a member of the Mutual Aid network which encompasses Southeastern Vermont and Southwestern New Hampshire that is responsible for dispatching the various Fire Departments and Rescue Squads in this region. Alerts, or tones as they are called, are broadcast to First Responders on multiple systems out of its base in Keene , N.H. and include pagers, computers, and cell phones where service is available. In Grafton Village an alert may also be sounded on a siren at the old firehouse when there is a major incident. Once a response, or call, is underway First Responders then communicate with Mutual Aid Dispatchers via mobile and portable radios. Depending on the classification of an incident, such as First, second, third alarm, etc. the Dispatchers will automatically alert other Fire Departments as needed. These alerts for additional equipment or personnel are based on pre-planned scenarios for certain types of incidents in various local areas. In turn, Grafton Firefighters respond to incidents in other towns which have included Townshend, Brookline, Chester, Rockingham, and Londonderry in the past year. A large incident could bring over a hundred Firefighters here such as was the case for a wildland fire a couple of years ago.

While an incident is underway the Dispatchers continually monitor the event providing assistance to the incident commander with personnel accountability, and additional resources such as police, EMS, utility companies, and highway crews. I can say from personal experience how reassuring it is to be able to speak to a Dispatcher while responding to a call at 3 am while on a lonely road during a snowstorm. The Mutual Aid system allows the Grafton Fire Department to expand its capabilities and resources far beyond what otherwise might be expected in a small town.

The other key way in which the Grafton Fire Department is able to expand its capabilities is through its participation in the West River Training Group. This is a coalition of Fire Departments centered around the West River area that supplements monthly in-house

training with additional monthly training sessions using experienced instructors in order to stay up to date with current practices in the fire service and become familiar with new innovations. These sessions have also provided the opportunity for the officers and Firefighters from the various Departments to work together as a team and to become familiar with the apparatus used by each Department, increasing the overall effectiveness of the fire service in the region.

Both the West River Training Group and Mutual Aid provide for the Grafton Fire Department to respond to incidents with skill, confidence, and a pool of resources from which it can draw upon in order to provide the best possible protection for the communities it serves. If you'd like to be part of this dynamic group of volunteers contact Chief Sprague at graftonfire@vermontel.net or 802-384-2288.

Emergency Responses Athens Dec. 21 – Jan. 24
Rescue Squad – 1 lift assist

- Dave Ross

February Library Corner

Smiles and Gratitude:

We extend heartfelt thanks for the following special donations to the 2023 Grafton Public Library Annual Appeal. In memory of: Bill Chapman, Harry and Luella Conklin, Lucy Daniels, Bea Fisher, Thomas Wells Hall, Truman and Margaret Hayes, Dorothy Heiser, Hans Hollstein, Stan Mack, Patricia D. Parker, Phil Rowley, Horace Royal, Marlene Whitacre, and Cordelia the Library Dog. In honor of: Lucia Corwin, Beverley and Sabin Streeter, Ann Record, and Michelle Dufort. We are thrilled to announce we have met the budgeted goal for the annual appeal! Thank you all for your incredible support.

Programs @ Your Library

Please mark your calendars for two offerings in the new Neighbor to Neighbor Lecture Series.

Demystifying Artificial Intelligence (AI), presented by Paul MacEachern, has been rescheduled for early February. Near the end of February, Dr. Rachel Lovins will present *Ketamine Assisted Therapy for the Living and Dying: treating depression, anxiety and existential angst at the end of life and before*. Dr. Rachel Lovins is a physician, death doula, teacher and singer. She has trained at Yale, Harvard, and Dartmouth Hitchcock. Rachel has practiced Internal Medicine for over 20 years and is now specializing in Palliative Care and Hospice medicine, as well as ketamine assisted therapy. Palliative Care focuses on relieving total pain: physical, emotional and spiritual. She lives in Grafton with her husband Andrew Hogan and their two spectacular poodles.

In mid-February we invite you to *Be Our Valentine*, with a party to celebrate and honor our public. Treats

(Rachel Laliberte's cookies!!) and prizes will be available.

We continue with the Winter Nature & Books Discussion Series, co-sponsored with the Nature Museum, and our Spanish Conversation Group. The full calendar appears below.

Library Programming

Spanish Group on Zoom, Tuesdays, 11:00am-Noon on Zoom. Intermediate level.

Neighbor to Neighbor Lecture Series: Sunday, February 4, 2-3:30 pm *Demystifying Artificial Intelligence (AI)*, presented by Paul MacEachern, Sunday, February 25, 2-3:30 pm *Ketamine Assisted Therapy for the Living and Dying: treating depression, anxiety and existential angst at the end of life and before*, presented by Dr. Rachel Lovins

Nature & Books Discussion Series: Wednesday, February 28, 6-7:30 on Zoom, *Alife and Me* by Carl Safina

"Be Our Valentine" Party, Saturday, February 17, noon, Public is invited for treats and prizes in a celebration in YOUR honor.

www.graftonpubliclibrary.org

librarian@graftonpubliclibrary.org

802-843-2404

- Michelle Dufort

Grafton Cares Updates

January, so peculiar weather-wise, was no obstruction for us in carrying out our regular duties. We provided Meals on Wheels to 13 customers, 2 rides to medical appointments, \$225 in gas cards for travel to medical appointments, 3 sunshine baskets, 2 welcome bags, and one shawl from our knitters. We also loaned 1 wheelchair, 1 raised toilet seat, 1 walker, and 1 pair of crutches.

Our community meals calendar for February is as follows:

Friday, February 2, dinner at 6 p.m. in Athens

Wednesday, February 7, lunch at noon in Grafton

Friday, February 16, dinner at 6 p.m. in Grafton

Wednesday, February 21, lunch at noon in Grafton

We hope you all feel welcome to enjoy great food and great company at our community meals. They are free of charge, although donations and dessert offerings are gratefully accepted.

- Bill Toomey

Free Art Classes, Lunches for Seniors in Saxtons River

A new "Creative Aging" partnership between Main Street Arts in Saxtons River and Senior Solutions is providing new opportunities for Athens seniors. From February 6 through the end of May, a series of free art classes is being offered to seniors. There are a variety

of classes, most of which run once a week for several weeks. No experience is necessary, and while there is a \$10 registration fee, the classes are free and all materials are provided.

In addition, from 12 noon to 1 pm, there will be free lunches for seniors at Main Street Arts every Tuesday. These will be soup and sandwich spreads catered by Smokin' Bowls of Rockingham. The timing is arranged so that seniors may take an art class and stay for lunch, come for lunch and stay for a class, or simply join the lunch.

More information is available at:
<https://www.mainstreetarts.org/creative-aging.html>

- Thom Simmons



Thoughts to Ponder

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart.”

– Helen Keller

“February is like a trial run for the New Year’s resolutions we forgot about in January. Keep going, maybe this time you’ll remember!”

-Anonymous

Reed Road Weather Summary

We’ve had a wide variation in temperatures this month from almost balmy to polar vortexes, but we have yet to see even zero degrees this winter. Since February is upon us with the warming sun, we may not get there. In my 76 years of living in New England, I have never experienced a winter that didn’t have at least a small period with sub-zero temperatures. We may be in record territory here!

High temp.: 46.2 degrees

Low temp. : 2.3 degrees

We got approx. 24 inches of snow interspersed with melting rains throughout the month.

- Treah Pichette

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Select Board Meetings: 3rd Thursday 7:00 PM

Budget Committee: 2nd & 4th Tuesday 7:00 PM

Planning Commission: 1st Tuesday 10:30 AM

Meeting House Committee: 2nd Monday 10:00 AM

School Board: 2nd Wednesdays 6:00 Grafton School

Do you have a news item for The Athenian or a favorite family story to share? Or would you like to be on our email list and get the newsletter in your inbox?

CONTACT US at theathenianvt@gmail.com.



TRASH PICK-UP: FEB 19

RECYCLE PICK-UP: FEB 5

Charles Perham Journal - January 1873, Age 28

- 1 Have been breaking a road into the woodlot today had a very hard time of it. Frannie brought grandmother here today. Took Jim Eagers horse got old stove today \$4.00 pipe for \$1.00.
- 3 Drawed wood today. In the evening carried Elizabeth to a social. I went up to John Austins to see Charles Davis about some taxes. Mr Ranney here about money for the minister. Paid him what was signed \$5.00 and have signed \$1.00 more. Paid him today town money \$23.97. The amount due to the treasure is \$261.75.
- 4 Drawed two loads of wood today. The oxen got to crowding. In the evening went down to Alvins to meet Charles Davis with the selectman about his taxes. He did pay all but one cent.
- 5 Have been to meeting alone today. A very stormy day. Received letter from Mrs. White, Grafton. In the evening went down to Mr. Whitneys.
- 6 Have been up in the wood lot came with the oxen. They crowded so had to give it up. Went four times with the old mare.
- 7 Have been to Bellows Falls. Carried the beef hide it weighed 78 got 8 ½ per pound. Carried the sheep skin sold it for \$1.75. Paid for this diary .75. Carried grandmother down to Mr. Ranneys did not get home till after dark. Paid for fathers coffin today \$18.00.
- 8 Have been down to Cambridgeport to get Jim ---- shod paid for it \$1.18. Brought grandmother home. In the evening glued splints.
- 9 Have been up on the hill to get one load of wood with the oxen. Mrs. Whitney here to work on mothers dress. Harry Kimball here and bought my piano for \$84.00 with the stool and two instruction books Bakers and Richardson to be delivered Saturday next. Took out of Fathers money \$18.00 to pay for his coffin. In the evening, went to our meeting house to a meeting. Mother went with me. Got Eller Stevens piano box tonight to carry off my piano.

- 10 Went and got one load of wood. Also got one load of Hemlock for the sheep. In the afternoon went and got James Eager to help get the piano in the box. Mr. Whitney helped. In the evening went with Elizabeth to our meeting house to a meeting. Mr. ----- preached.
- 11 Have been to Saxtons River to carry the piano. Took a note for it. Brought the Buckboard home from A Stevens. Called to see Mr. Grant for he is very sick. Got James Eager \$4.62 worth of goods and paid for it. Mr. Eager has been chopping here today.
- 12 Have been to meet with Elizabeth with Jim. Received letters from E.W.Smith for the butter. (Side note: Elizabeth is Charles Perhams wife married in 1869. Jim is the name of Charles horse.)
- 13 Have drawn two loads of wood today. Mr. Eager has chopped here today.
- 14 Went down as far as the jetty with Jim. In the afternoon went and carried grandmother to Uncle Daniels. Went down to Uncle Hiram. Elizabeth went down to Mr. Deens for his Bay is very sick. Called there when I came home.
- 15 Drawed two loads of wood. Elizabeth has been down to Mr. Deens. Mr. Deens came after her. Just at night went up to Grafton to Allen Davis after a barrel to salt the beef in. Called to Charles White. Did not get home to quite late. Mother got a letter from Uncle ----- today.
- 16 Have drawn one load of wood. Blacked up the new harness. Cut up the beef. In the evening planed splints and filled some chairs. Quite a rainy day and evening.
- 17 In the forenoon went down to the sawmill. Called to Dodges and Smiths. In the evening filled some chair seats and wrote some notices to post for collection of Taxes on Thursday January 30, from 9 AM till 3PM.
- 18 Have been to town meeting today. Voted not to have any ---. Called to Martha Balls and Merrills.
- 19 Have been to meeting with Mother went with Jim. Uncle John here when got home to pay for bull and heifer I sold him last fall. In the evening went down to Mr. Deens with Elizabeth to see his little boy. Whole amount of town money on hand \$15.11.
- 20 Have been down to Cambridgeport carried 24 cottage an 12 office down to Merrills to go to Falls. Signed the receipts. Sent letters to Dunham, Mason, Ranney, Phelps, Hall, Fletcher, Holden, Davis, Ira Hitchcock estate. Collected of Cushing, Parkhurst. Brought all the chair frames home from Merrills today. (Cottage and office that he referenced are chairs that he put together. It was piece work that companies would pay people in rural areas to assemble for extra money)
- 21 Have been to Saxtons River with Jim. Collected taxes of Wyman, Rice, Bemis. Came home in a very hard snow storm. Gave George Howard until the 30th of this month to pay his taxes today.
- 22 Have not done much today. George Eager here after the old mare. Went down to Mr. Whitneys to have him grind hay cutter knife. James Powers here in the evening. He agreed to put in the school house wood for 5er and Shakespeare Proverbs.
- 23 Have been breaking a road down as far as Mr. Whitneys. Went up to the Lilly Pond woods and got a Hemlock for the sheep with the steers and oxen. In the afternoon went and carried 15 office and 15 cottage (chairs) down to Merrills with Jim. Went as far as Alvins.
- 24 It has been snowing all day. In the forenoon fixed up the old seigh. In afternoon and evening worked on chairs.
- 25 Have been up on the hill and got the remainder of the wood that Eager chopped. Made two loads of it. In the evening worked on chairs.
- 26 Have been shoveling out the road so Mr. Whitney could get home from Jamaica. Went down as far as Smiths. In the evening went down to Mr. Whitneys to hear from him.
- 27 To home all day. Snowing most all day. Worked on chairs some today and evening.
- 28 Have been to Bellows Falls with Jim. Carried 40 children and 12 cottage(chairs). Brought home only cottage and office splints. He paid me today \$13.25. When got home found was not paid enough less a \$1.00. Received a letter from Ranney about taxes. Received money on the check for butter \$28.75.
- 29 Have been shoveling snow most all the forenoon. In the afternoon went down the hill with the oxen and steers with a load of school wood. Think shall not try it again.
- 30 Have been down to the town clerk office to collect taxes today. Whole amount of money collected is \$314.65.
- 31 Have been to Bellows Falls to carry the money to pay up the state. Paid in \$294.64. Saw Mr. Cobb about keeping sheep. Paid for drawers \$1.37. Carried 15 Douglass, 12 square, 12 children. (chairs) Mr. Johnson paid all up today 4.36. Making it all \$17.61. George Eager here in the evening to pay taxes.

Transcribed by James Trimble