



# Windham News & Notes

*Volume IX, Issue V*

*March/April 2012*

Where's the Snow? *by Lydia Pope France*

With March still out there, maybe I shouldn't even say that out loud. But this has been a seriously gentle winter. Again, maybe I shouldn't say that out loud!

We all know what a terribly wet summer we had. The numbers were high even before Irene came along and dropped 10 inches in just a few hours. It's said that over time seasons tend to average out, both in terms of temperatures and precipitation. We waited a long time for our first snowfall, which came on October 27<sup>th</sup> this winter. A little late but a respectable 5 inches, followed by a foot the next day in an early season Nor'easter. After that it really slacked off, and we all began to wonder, where's the snow? A few days before Christmas brought 4 inches, covering the ground nicely and making it look the part even if we knew it was mostly window dressing. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were made quite perfect with flurries and an overnight dusting.

By this time last year we had had 89 inches of snow. We are up to a mere 36 inches for the current season. Last year all the talk was of how nature was reverting to good old fashioned winters, this year it would appear we have shifted a few hundred miles to the south! Drive to the other side of Bromley and you will see that there is virtually no snow from Manchester to Bennington. Even when we have had snow, it has been followed by warm weather and has disappeared rather quickly.

What this has been is a winter of icy trees and icier driveways. If I hadn't sold my skates at a yard sale I could have used them right from my door this year. The fluctuating temperatures are an issue not just for the rain and ice that they cause, but also for the tender perennials in our gardens. For one thing, many are lacking the fluffy snow insulation that keeps them warm and growing even while we can't see them. Frost heaves can be an issue, not just for our roads but also for our gardens. When spring comes you may see some of your plants not sitting just right. That would be down to frost heaves in your garden ...

People have been talking about the reduced numbers of birds at winter feeders. The experts put that down to the fact that with all the rain and the mild temperatures into fall, there has been an abundance of food available for them elsewhere. And with mild temperatures now, there are even more insects available than would usually be the case. If you watch, you will notice that they do appear to spend more time at feeders after snow falls.

Robins have been reported around the state in big numbers this winter, even at higher elevations. While you don't always see them, robins are often around in winter, not in the same sort of numbers, but not completely absent either. They don't do the wholesale migration of many of our other songbirds.

*Continued on page 3*

**Town Meeting March 6, 2012** Bring Annual Report, pot luck and \$1.00 for drinks.



## Select Board

We spent January preparing the 2012 budget for your review at Town Meeting, March 6<sup>th</sup>. This has been a joint effort among us, our treasurer Carol Merritt, her assistant Ernie Friedli, and our auditors Ginny Crittenden, Imme Maurath and Sally Hoover. We have made every effort to produce a document that is easy to read and understand. We encourage everyone to review it before the meeting. Town Meeting is the one place in the world where you decide directly how much money to pay out for government.

Several months ago we informed you that the state's Redistricting Committee had proposed a plan that would drastically change the existing alignment of Windham with other culturally similar small towns; the plan would also have reduced our representation to one person rather than the two we currently have. These changes did not come to pass; the legislature has worked diligently to preserve existing districts and the new bill will allow Windham to continue in District 4 (but be called District 3) and still have two representatives.

Back in August we received from the state an Order of Reappraisal. After consulting with the listers we appealed the order. The order has been rescinded and our plan for a multiple-year reassessment of all town properties has been approved. The listers will have more to say about this important issue at Town Meeting.

As most of you know by now, Walter Woodruff will be retiring this election cycle. Walt has not only been great fun to work with but his integrity and love of Windham have guided the decisions the Select Board has made over the last 30 years. We thank his lovely wife, Mary Lou, for lending him to us for such a long time and wish them both many years of health, happiness and the freedom to do all that they wish.

Thanks Walt, from all of us. You have served us well; now go have a good time. And remember, we meet the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays of the month. We'll keep the light on for you!

Margaret and Mary and Carol

## **Town Meeting is March 6 in 2012** *by Edith Serke*

Our annual Town Meeting, when we all decide on our town budget, elect town officials, and get intimately involved in our town government, will be held on Tuesday, March 6, starting at 10:00 a.m. at the Town Hall/Meeting House. Everyone is encouraged to attend and participate. Before that date, you will all have received the 2011 Town Report from the auditors, which you are requested to bring with you.

Some of the Articles to be voted on are as follows:

The Windham School District Budget of \$341,810, up from \$329,984 last year.

The Town Highway Budget is proposed to go up from \$370,000 in 2011 to \$387,000 in 2012.

The voters will be asked to authorize the Board of Selectmen to spend \$40,000 to retain the services of a Professional Appraisal firm to conduct a town wide reappraisal.

Appropriating \$189,793.35 for the General Fund, up from \$171,036 last year.

Town officials, whose current term expires in 2012, will be up for re-election.



## Where's Winter? *continued from page 1*

They are more nomadic than migratory, opportunistically searching out food that goes well beyond worms. They find plants, berries and crabapples to keep themselves fed. I saw two myself just the other day on Windham Hill just north of Burbee Pond Road. If you have a crabapple tree with any fruit left on it you may well be seeing them on your own property. But it is also worth keeping in mind that birds are a good means of gauging climate change (think of the proverbial canary in the coal-mine). Their comings and goings can help to cue us in with what is happening with the weather beyond our general and often subjective impressions ...

A few weeks back a friend and I were on Burbee Pond Road when a real snow squall came through. We turned onto Windham Hill Road and while I wouldn't say the sun was shining, it was a totally different day. So now we joke about Pond Effect Snow. Our own personal weather phenomenon!

Once we do get through whatever winter has in store for us, we have to get through that most unpredictable of times – mud season. I've been wondering if less precipitation might mean less frost in the roads compared to other years, and if that might mean a gentle mud season as well. But then again, maybe I really shouldn't say that out loud ...

## L&G SCHOOL BUDGET PASSES *by Edith Serke*

Despite the heavy snow on Wednesday, February 2, the Leland & Gray school budget for the coming year was passed with a comfortable margin of 156 votes in favor and 71 opposed. The vote was by Australian ballot in the participating towns. In Windham, of the 324 voters on the checklist, 30 people cast a ballot, 27 voted in favor, and 3 opposed. Of the 379 students, 12 are from Windham. The proposed budget of \$6,552,332 for FY 2012 is up \$223,348 from the current year.. There is a projected slight decrease in enrollment in the near future. Windham is represented by Diane Newton on the school board.

### Vermont Presidential Primary Vote on March 6.

Along with the Town meeting, Vermont is also scheduled to hold the Presidential Primary on Tuesday, March 6, from 10.00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Meeting House. On the GOP ballot, there are six candidates, while on the Democratic ballot there is only the incumbent, Barack Obama. There is also an opportunity to write in your preference.



## WINDHAM NEWS & NOTES

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### THE WN&N TEAM

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### Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who provided articles. Their names are noted with their submissions

Send articles of around 300 words to the address on last page. Email to:

[windhamnews@hotmail.com](mailto:windhamnews@hotmail.com)

### Next deadline

April 13, 2012



**PORCUPINES** *BY Mary Crittenden Aller*

We used to see many more porcupines in the woods (or slowly crossing the road) than we do now. What happened to them? The answer lies with the Fish and Game Department, now called Fish and Wildlife, and its program of fisher repopulation.

Fishers, often called fisher cats, are virtually the only animals that will kill and eat porcupines. Fishers are fairly large forest-dwellers related to weasels and minks. They are both beautiful and frightening with thick, glossy, dark fur coats, big snouts and fierce faces. They are good tree climbers but prefer the forest floor. They were common in Vermont until the early 1900's when trapping and habitat loss due to earlier logging and clearing of land for farming almost wiped them out. As fishers disappeared from the woods, porcupines increased, until their appetite for the bark of commercially valuable trees began to cause considerable damage to timber stands. At that point, the Fish and Game people began to try to reduce the number of porcupines.

Starting in the 1950's, a bounty was put on porcupines. You could take a pair of ears to Harry Hall, the Town Clerk in South Windham, and he'd give you 35 cents. (Certain folks were known to have fashioned ears out of pieces of the porcupine's hide, but those could not be counted on to get past Harry Hall.) It turned out that the bounty didn't have much effect, and in the early 1960's, the Fish and Game Department reintroduced fishers to Vermont, intending that these animals would kill off the porcupines. Now that porcupines seem to have almost vanished --although my brother Dave says he sees them now and then -- the program could be deemed a success.

Our father, Ben Crittenden, didn't like porcupines any more than the Fish and Game people did, because they gnawed his apple trees, as well as parts of buildings and salty-tasting pieces of leather harness. You can kill a porcupine with a sharp rap on the nose with a 2 X 4 or an axe handle or something similar. (I know this myself from personal experience.) So Ben used to go after porcupines when he saw them, but sometimes the porcupines went after him. Once he saw a porcupine chewing on a gnarly old apple tree up behind the house, and he started to climb the tree with a stick to rap the porcupine. But as Ben started up, the porky started down, and Ben had to descend quickly from the tree and retreat, as his disrespectful children laughed.

Another time, he saw a porcupine high up at the top of a tall, skinny soft maple. He tried to shake him down but couldn't, so he decided to chop down the tree. (This was during the pre-chain saw era.) Just as the tree was about to topple, the porcupine deftly stepped over into an adjoining maple and watched as the first tree crashed down. Ben let that porcupine go and always admired him.

I miss seeing the big old porcupines. Even though they ate a big hole out of the plywood subfloor of our cabin and almost gnawed through the posts of the back porch -- with chomps that resounded through the night -- I would like to know that they are still living in the woods up behind the house, eluding the fisher cats when they can, and taking their share of the bark of trees. Maybe somebody will call me up and tell me that there are still plenty of porcupines in the woods behind his or her house, so what am I so worried about? If that's true, I'd be happy to hear it!





## Talented Windham *by Imme Maurath*

*In this issue, The News and Notes launches a new column featuring talented folks in our town. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at the amazing range and depth of the talent all around you!*

### Ginny Crittenden – Fiber Enthusiast

Ginny Crittenden has been knitting since she was 14. (She wouldn't say how many years that was, not that I asked.) She certainly has a number of beautiful projects under her belt. Her mother was a knitter and Ginny learned the craft from her. I asked her what kept her at it all these years, and her answer was typical of the fiber enthusiast: "Fiber stuff is like an addiction," she said. "In other words, I'm a fiber junky!" Ginny's enthusiasm for fiber in all its lovely forms has led her to spin her own yarn as well, making it possible for her to get the fiber weight and content that she wants for an individual knitting project. So if you see Ginny in a knitted garment, ask her about it. She might be able to tell you its story going all the way back to when its beautiful wool was still on the sheep!



### Richard and Sue Paré – Taking Sugaring to a Higher Level

The Parés grew up making maple syrup in the woods. Their family had a sugar house built close to the trees so they wouldn't have to cart the sap back to the house. (A good thing too, as it takes approximately 40 gallons of sap to make 1 gallon of syrup.) Last March, the Parés of Windham, Richard and Sue, along with Richard's brother and sister, Jacqueline and Louie Paré, built themselves a beautiful new sugar house. It is truly the envy of all who see it! They placed 600 taps and in their new sugar house produced 95 gallons of syrup. This year they are aiming for 1000 taps. The Parés appreciate all the homeowners who lend their trees for this purpose. In exchange, they give finished maple syrup to the tree owners.



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## Billie Van Alstyne defies expectations *by Mary McCoy*

Born and raised in Vermont, Billie Van Alstyne might seem like a typical Green Mountain woman. She has a deep love for the land here, and she gardens and cans. She values her family and spends frequent time with them. She even works multiple jobs, like many men and women in our state find they must do.



Billie picked a common career for a woman. Since she was in elementary school, she knew she wanted to be a nurse, especially one who helped older adults. She's been a visiting nurse, has worked in a nursing home, and was employed at the Mountain Valley Medical Clinic. But she prefers what she doing now, private care with the elderly, helping them to stay in their homes. She has also cleaned houses, worked as a cashier, mowed the North Windham Cemetery, and done whatever else she could find to support her family.

You might begin to think that Billie is different from her peers when you know how much she has given to the community. When her two daughters, Abagale (now 15) and Erika (now 13) were at the Windham Elementary School, Billie ran the hot lunch program, providing hot meals for the students two days a week. Even though her daughters are now in high school, Billie says, "If I had time, I'd do it again. Kids need a hot lunch, and they are so grateful for it." (There is no similar program at the school now.) Billie also supported the summer camp at the Meeting House, first assisting Kathy Campbell, then taking over when Kathy moved away. "I loved doing that," she says. "The kids were great."

But you really begin to understand that Billie is an unusual woman when you know why she became our town's constable. "We'd never had a woman constable before," she says. "It's a neat title to hold." When Billie goes to the two trainings held by the state each year for constables, she is the only woman there. So far, her job in Windham has focused on complaints about dogs barking or biting. She talks to the parties involved and works out an agreement. In some towns, the constable has the authority of a police officer. Although that requires more training and more hours on the job, she might like doing it, if she were paid. Her current job is completely volunteer.

Billie's father, Gary Clay, Sr., taught her that women can do anything men can do and that she could do whatever she set her mind to. Billie says, "I tell my daughters the same thing. We all hunt and fish."

Billie started hunting when she was 10 and has shot many deer since then. Abagale was with her in 2010, when she bagged a 580-pound moose by the power lines off Route 121. Her only regret was that she spotted and shot him only two hours into moose season, ending her hunting for the year. *Continued on next page*



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It took six people to move the bull with his 13 points into a six-wheeler truck. Lisai's Market in Chester cut it, and Billie gave half of it away. "We can only eat so much," she said. "People wanted to try it, and I didn't want it to go to waste." Billie's pleasure in breaking tradition is evidenced in another experience she pursues – driving in demolition derbies. She was told she couldn't do this because she was "a girl," which only made her more determined to try. "I haven't done that well at it," she says, "but it is fun." She enjoys preparing the car – finding an old one with a good engine, removing all the chrome and glass, taking out the backseat and putting the gas tank and battery there, and painting the car with the number on the door and roof. Although she likes smashing into other cars, she says she's learning that to be the last remaining car running, she needs to be less aggressive and to hide and wait.

That's not easy for someone who says she's always been a tomboy. She loves kayaking and has no interest in quilting. She doesn't wear dresses or dress shoes. She lives in her jeans. Although she considers herself a good cook, she has other things she'd rather do. Any indoor activity is second-rate compared to being outdoors. "I'd love to live back when all was simple. I don't need TV, electricity, phones, computers. I'd rather spend my time raising my food."

It's hard to see Billie as the petite woman she is. She *feels* like a large person, yet she is only four foot ten inches tall. "I like being small," she says, just as she says she likes the other aspects of her life. Perhaps it is this contentment and her self-confidence that makes her seem like such a large presence. She admits to only one dislike – flying. "I love driving and will go anywhere if I can get there by car. If I can't, I don't go." She goes to Maine regularly, went to Pennsylvania last year, and plans a trip this year to North Carolina.

But nowhere compares to Vermont for her. Born in Rutland in 1974, she lived on dairy farms in Middlebury and Andover. When she was 14, her father died, and she moved to North Windham with her mother, Cathy Clay, and brother, Gary Clay, Junior. Cathy's grandparents, Dick and Daisy Field, had land on White Road, where Cathy and Gary now have homes, as does Cathy's mother (Billie's and Gary's grandmother), Edith Hussey. Billie lives nearby on Popple Dungeon Road. "We've always been a close family," Billie says. "It's one of the reasons I'd never leave Windham."

She also likes our small-town, country environment. The people are nice and the place is quiet "except," she says smiling, "for barking dogs." There is only one thing she would change, and that's the way people speed on our roads. "Everyone is in a rush these days," she says. Billie has learned that every day, every moment is worth slowing down for and savoring. "My daughters have grown up so fast," she says. "You think they won't, but they do."

Cathy says, "Even when Billie was a small kid, she was a powerhouse who went after whatever she wanted. She thinks she's hard, but inside she isn't. She's kind and considerate." It's this mixture that makes Billie such an unusual woman. Her barrier breaking combined with her generous giving make her an unforgettable person and a huge asset to our town.



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## The Life of the Windham Meeting House *by friends of the Windham Meeting House*

### *First in a series*

The Windham Meeting House has been a landmark and a magnet for community and church activities since 1802, just five years after the town was chartered. The building is one of only two or three Meeting Houses left in the state owned jointly by a town and a church. A sizable portion of the ground floor is actually titled to the Town of Windham. The reasons for the shared deed are lost in the mists of time, but today's usage of the building continues in that same spirit. The downstairs is the site of Town Meeting, but many other non-church activities fill the calendar throughout the year. The Windham Congregational Church worships in the sanctuary in the warm months and in the ground floor room during the winter. The sanctuary is also available for special events such as musical or dramatic performances.

The church makes the largest contribution to the building's operating costs; but the Town of Windham also makes an annual contribution approved by voters at Town Meeting. Since 2008 the amount requested and approved annually has been \$5000. This year the amount of the appropriation is \$6000, or slightly less than half of last year's operating budget. The increase mostly reflects the increased cost of fuel oil in recent years.

Other contributions to operating costs come from users. Weddings, funerals and other special events such as family reunions or artistic performances result in fees which are paid into the operating fund. The weekly exercise and yoga groups and the Library also make contributions to the cost of heating oil and electricity. The Windham Community Organization, which publishes the News and Notes, also contributes to operating funds.

In addition to the town and the church there is a third entity important to the physical and financial life of the building. "The Society of the Friends of the Meeting House" is an organization of residents who acknowledge and respect the value of the building in terms of both its present uses and its historic significance. The mission of The Friends is to insure that major repairs and improvements beyond the normal operating expenses, but necessary to the building's preservation, are adequately funded and carried out in a timely manner. The Friends raise funds through special events and through individual bequests. Membership is open to all who share an interest in preserving the building as a center of community life for future generations.

In future articles we will talk more about the many ways the Meeting House is used today, and we will explore its history and the aspects of its design and construction that have contributed to its longevity. We will also look at steps we can take to insure its future place in the community.



**The Valley Bible Church** invites you to check out their updated website at [www.valleybibleVT.com](http://www.valleybibleVT.com) for more information and a calendar of upcoming events.



## Windham Town Library News *by Bev Carmichael*

We would like to thank Jerry Dyke for the installation of new shelves in the library last month. This addition completes our plans for expansion. Please continue to support our library with your attendance on Wednesday afternoons. We add new books to our shelves weekly, our book club continues on the first Wednesday of every month, and we are more than happy to pursue any requests you may have.

### Library Trustee Position – Five Year Term

Regarding the upcoming vote for Library Trustee, I, Bev Carmichael, would be happy to serve the town for another five-year term. For the past ten years I have enjoyed the time I have spent pursuing my personal goals for the expansion and for the user friendliness of our town library. I would like to continue helping in any way I can.

**Mark your calendar ! Green-Up day is May 5th**

### Fresh Food in Winter

#### Winter Farmers' Market in Brattleboro

Every Saturday through March 31 from 10AM to 2 PM you can find over 25 regular market vendors who will be offering local apples, potatoes, garlic, carrots, eggs, and grass fed meats, along with maple syrup, jams, mustards, preserved pears, fresh baked breads and beautiful sweet treats. You'll also find beautiful jewelry, and other one of-a-kind handcrafted gift items.

Come for the local food, and beautiful homemade products and stay for a tasty lunch. Live music from 11 am -1pm. There is something at the market for everyone.

The Winter Farmers' Market is sponsored by Post Oil Solutions and is held at the Robert H. Gibson River Garden, Main St., Brattleboro. Watch calendar listings for weekly musical talent and special market happenings. Contact us at [farmersmarket@postoilsolutions.org](mailto:farmersmarket@postoilsolutions.org) or call 802-869-2141.

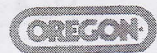


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## Windham by the Numbers *by Frank Seawright*

Windham occupies 26.17 square miles ( 16,748.8 acres). The size of its area ranks 210th of Vermont's 242 towns and unincorporated areas. Windham has lots of non-resident property owners. We used data from Windham's 2011 Grand List to answer the question, Where are the primary residences of Windham's property owners and how much land do individual owners own?

SIZE OF PARCEL IN ACRES

	<=1	1 to 5	5.01 to 10	10.01 to 50	50.01 to 100	100.01 to 500	>500	Row total
State								
AR	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
AZ	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
CA	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
CO	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
CT	15	45	9	18	8	3	0	98
FL	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	7
IL	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
MA	8	11	5	11	1	4	1	41
MD	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
ME	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
NC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
NH	1	0	1	3	1	0	1	7
NJ	5	15	4	12	3	1	1	41
NY	5	22	4	15	3	5	0	54
OH	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
PA	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
RI	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	5
SC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
TN	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
TX	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
VA	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
VT	35	51	20	37	7	9	0	159
VT(R)**	13	29	12	32	9	1	0	96
WA	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Column	91	179	59	143	35	25	3	

\*\*VT(R) = Windham residents



## Country Diary

### Beech Drops *by Frank Seawright*

A Plant that is Hiding in Plain Sight

*Beech drops* are small nondescript plants always found under beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) trees. Windham has lots of beech trees and, therefore, this little plant too. Beech drops are easy to overlook. They are usually about six inches tall, but can grow taller. You'll hardly ever notice these little plants, but they're really a botanical curiosity. They are colorless, or nearly so, because they don't have chlorophyll. They do make flowers and produce seed so how do they do that without chlorophyll to trap the sun's energy.

Oddly, they have evolved so that they are totally dependent upon beech trees. They live as parasites on the roots of their beech tree host. And they are specific to beech – if you find beech drops you've identified the tree you're standing under.

Beech drops do produce flowers and seed, but many of the flowers are *cleistogamous* which means they don't open and can't be open pollinated. Some of the flowers do open though, and can be cross pollinated. Perhaps those few ambitious flowers are the plant's effort to stitch together a genetic combination that will restore the ability to make nice green chlorophyll-drenched leaves again - if they ever did.

When I moved to Windham I had never seen Beech drops. Walking in the woods, I noticed these small colorless plants but assumed the shallow soil had dried out and the plants had died. I probably thoughtlessly tromped down hundreds. Eventually, though, the sub-conscious part of my brain told me I was seeing something odd and I undertook to identify this small, unassuming plant. The name says it all; I found that its name is *Epifagus*, from the Greek words “epi” meaning “upon,” and “*Fagus*” which is the botanical name for the beech tree.



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## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Every Sunday - **Windham Congregational Church (UCC)** has worship services at 9:30 AM: everyone invited.

Every Sunday and Thursday - **Valley Bible Church** has services: Sunday - 9:55 AM Sunday School; 11:00 AM Worship, followed by pot luck lunch at 12:30 and 1:10 PM Afternoon Bible Study; Tuesday - 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting and Bible Study.

Every Wednesday - **Windham Town Library** open at Meeting House from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. Also at that time: reading group on first Wednesday of the month.

Wednesdays, 9:00 to 12:00 - **Town Listers'** office hours at the Town Office.

Mondays, Mar. 5, 19 and Apr. 2, 16 - **Select Board** meets at 6:30 PM at the Town Office. Open Meeting.

Thursday, Mar. 8 - **Planning Board** meets 7 PM at the Town Office. Open Meeting.

Wednesday, Mar. 28 and Apr. 25 - **Windham Community Organization** meets at 7:00 PM at the Meeting House.

Tuesday, Thursday and Friday - **Town Office Hours** - 10:00 to 3:00 PM.

### Save the Date!

**Town Meeting and Presidential Primary—March 6, 10:00**

**Pot luck lunch and \$1.00 for drinks**