

## You Picked the Date. We'll Help Pick Everything Else

You've spent what seems like a lifetime waiting for this day. And when it comes time to register, help your family and friends choose the gifts that will enhance every room in your home for years to come. The Store in Waitsfield offers Vermont's premier selection of gifts that indulge bed, bath, kitchen, body, and soul. Cookware from All-Clad, Calphalon, and La Creuset. Cutlery from Wüsthof.

Kitchen accessories from Cuisinart. And a wide range of linens, serving pieces, antiques, and pottery. We can even help you choose the perfect gift for your attendants.

But we can do more than help your guests select the perfect gifts, we can help you as well, with a wedding consultant who can assist you in choosing everything from invitations and flowers to a caterer and photographer. Best of all, in addition to accepting all major credit cards, we're also happy to accept all unions endorsed by the State of Vermont.

All the personal attention you deserve is just a phone call away. Why not contact the professionals at our Wedding Registry today? Start putting finishing touches on the day you started dreaming about years ago.

### The World Comes to Waitsfield

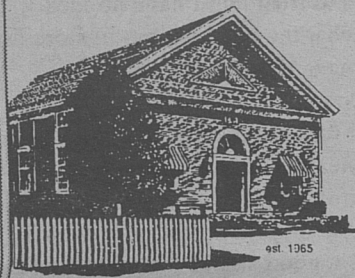
The Store has everything you could imagine, yet it's like nothing you've ever seen. It's shopping for the truly adventurous, offering a wellspring of delights for the kitchen, bathroom, palate, and imagination.

### The Setting

The Store is located in a carefully restored, two-story 1834 Methodist Meeting House. In fact, the only thing more exquisite than our eclectic mix of products is the fascinating ways they're displayed.

No matter if you are in the area or out of town, we are only a phone call away on

The Store Wedding Hotline 1-800-639-8031.



## THE STORE

Route 100, Waitsfield, Vermont  
(802) 496-4465 FAX (802) 496-7719  
Est. 1965  
Open 10-6 Daily

Email - info@vermontstore.com  
Web Site - www.vermontstore.com

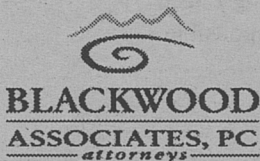
### Susan McKenzie MS.

Jungian Psychoanalyst  
Licensed Psychologist – Master

Specializing in issues of Gay, Lesbian,  
Bi-sexual and Transgendered individuals and couples

Quechee – White River Junction (802) 295-5533  
Insurance Accepted

P.O. Box 875  
90 Main Street



Burlington, VT 05402  
802-863-2517

blackwood.law@verizon.net

fax: 802-863-0262

Concentrating in Employment, Special  
Education and Civil Rights Law. Also Wills,  
LGBT Issues, Estate Planning, Personal  
Injury, other litigation and mediation.

### Elizabeth C. Campbell, CPA, PC Certified Public Accountants

15 East Washington Street, Rutland 05701  
802-773-4030 / liz@rallyCPA.com

Tax specialists serving individuals  
and small businesses

# Spiritual Essence: Of Groundhogs, Shadows and Very Small Gods

*If Candlemas be fair and bright, /  
Come, Winter, have another  
flight; / If Candlemas brings  
clouds and rain, / Go Winter, and  
come not again.*

– Old English Folk Song

I never understood what possessed anyone to come up with the concept of Groundhog's Day. Poor Punxatawny Phil, harassed and prodded out of deep sleep, forced into the waiting glare of hundreds of bizarre humans popping flashbulbs (check out [www.groundhog.org](http://www.groundhog.org) if you don't believe me). These humans must seem crazed to poor Phil, as they scream and cheer, desperately hoping for a cloudy day that might provide them with some sort of anthropomorphized illusion of a Very Small Animal proclaiming Spring. Why do we have this strange idea that a cloudy day in western Pennsylvania on February 2nd will assure us of an early spring?

When I was a child learning about this strange custom, I didn't get it. I suspect this had something to do with my provenance as a native Vermonter. We never get spring until May, regardless of rodent behavior in Pennsylvania.

It wasn't until many years later that I really started to appreciate Groundhog's Day. For Americans, the holiday is the last remnant of the worship of an ancient Goddess. Novelist Terry Prachett writes "There are billions of gods in the world ... They are the small gods – the spirits of places where two ant trails cross, the gods of microclimates down between the grass roots. And most of them stay that way. Because what they lack is belief." Prachett argues that "belief" is the operative factor in making small gods into big gods.

Writer Neil Gaiman takes up the theme as well, arguing in several stories that old gods die slowly, dwindling from the height of their power into sad reflections of their former selves as those who once believed, who offered prayers and reverence, also dwindle to nothing. One of Gaiman's stories depicts Ishtar, the ancient Sumerian goddess of love, as an exotic dancer, stripping for dollars in a lonely club on a barren strip of American highway.

So we come to Groundhog's day. Certainly Punxatawny Phil is a Very Small God. But is he a new god just beginning to create believers or an old god whose believers slipped slowly away?

Celebrated on February 2nd, Groundhog's day is one of the last remnants of an ancient celebration in honor of the Celtic Goddess Brigid. Known as

## pippin

Imbolc, it is perhaps the least understood of the four great festivals of the Celtic world. The other three, Beltaine (May Day), Lammass (the festival of the first fruits in August) and Samhain (the day of the dead or Halloween) remain present in many of our seasonal rituals during their times of the year. But of Brigid and her Imbolc festival, little remains but the hope of spring and a startled groundhog in Pennsylvania.

At one time Brigid was one of the most powerful incarnations of the triple goddess of Celtic spirituality. She was worshiped widely throughout pre-Roman Europe, but especially in Ireland and Wales. As a triple goddess, she was the patroness of poetry, smithcraft, and healing. Brigid's festival is associated with the return of the light after the darkness of the Winter Solstice. Imbolc is a fire festival and celebrates the returning light as the days begin to get noticeably longer and signs of the coming spring begin to manifest.

While it is virtually impossible to perceive signs of spring in Vermont's landscape in February, it is the time when the seed catalogues begin to crowd our mailboxes. But if we go to the source of Imbolc, the signs of spring are manifest. In Britain six weeks from February 2nd, one might see the blossoming of crocus and daffodil. One of Brigid's symbols is the lamb, and her festival celebrates the ewe's cycle of pregnancy, birth and lactation. Traveling through rural Britain in February and March, there are lambs and their mothers everywhere.

Much of what we know of Brigid and the festival of Imbolc survives because of her assimilation into the Christian tradition. As happened for many of the ancient goddesses, Brigid had to pass for Christian or head for the hills. Saint Brigid (or Saint Bride) of Kildare was, as legend has it, the daughter of a Druid and a contemporary of St. Patrick. Her shrine was watched over by virgin women and her sacred fire was always kept burning. She is the patron saint of spring and new growth. Her symbol is the new-born lamb. Her feast is celebrated on February 2nd and known as Candlemas. Candlemas celebrations invoking

Brigid's sacred flame and the return of the light have been celebrated right up until modern times.

Part of the ritual involves lighting candles and bringing them to all of the dark places of the church and the home to drive away the shadows and celebrate the returning light of spring. While the worship of Saint Bride suffered a blow during the Reformation, when her rituals were banned due to their "magical" associations, remnants of the Candlemas celebration still exist in many parts of the Celtic World and in America. Through some bizarre transcontinental transmogrification, the worship of Brigid, the poet, smith, and healer, has been transformed into a celebration of the lowly groundhog.

While groundhogs might be the most common form of Brigid worship in today's world, Starhawk, a priestess of the Reclaiming Community based in San Francisco, writes this about

## Of Brigid and her Imbolc festival, little remains but the hope of spring and a startled groundhog in Pennsylvania.

Brigid's feast day:

"This is the feast of the waxing light. What was born at the Solstice begins to manifest, and we who were midwives to the infant year now see the Child Sun grow strong as the days grow visibly longer. This is the time of individuation: within the measures of the spiral, we each light our own light, and become uniquely ourselves. It is the time of initiation, of beginning, when seeds that will later sprout and grow begin to stir from their dark sleep. We meet at Imbolc to share the light of inspiration, which will grow with the growing year."

And, while my heart aches for the tragic romance of Neil Gaiman's stripper Ishtar, I would prefer to imagine Brigid laughing and celebrating the remnants of her worship through