

# History of Groundhog Day

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This special day began as the pagan celebration of Imbolc; it came at the mid point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. Superstition held that if the weather was fair, the second half of winter would be stormy and cold. For the early Christians in Europe, it was the custom of Candlemas Day for clergy to bless candles and distribute them to the people in the dark of winter. A lighted candle was placed in each window of the home.

When the Romans conquered northern Europe, the idea that if a hibernating animal sees its shadow, winter will last another six weeks, was picked up by the Germans. When German settlers arrived in the new world in the 1700's, they brought this tradition with them. In Europe they had looked for hedgehogs, which they considered to be a sensible and intelligent animal which, if the sun did appear on February 2, this wise animal would see its shadow and scurry back into its underground home for another six weeks. In Pennsylvania, where many of the Germans settled, they found many groundhogs, which resembled hedgehogs, and thus the replacement was made.

Pennsylvania's official celebration of Groundhog Day began on February 2, 1886 with a proclamation in *The Punxsutawney Spirit* by the newspaper's editor, Clymer Freas: "Today is Groundhog Day and up to the time of going to press the beast has not seen its shadow." The groundhog was given the name "Punxsutawney Phil, Seer of Seers, Sage of Sages, Prognosticator of Prognosticators, and Weather Prophet Extraordinary!" His debut performance: no shadow, early spring! The legendary first trip to Gobbler's Knob was made the following year.

Over the years Punxsutawney Phil's forecasts became more wide spread. In July of 1966, Gobbler's Know was officially opened year-round to the public. In 1986, Punxsutawney Phil went to Washington D.C. to visit President Ronald Regan at the White House. In 1992, the movie "Groundhog Day," starring Bill Murray, became a smash hit.

Today, the popularity of Groundhog Day continues to grow. As the big event of February 2 draws near each year, the town of Punxsutawney comes alive with special activities, celebrations and lots of fun! Thousands of visits travel there each year to see Punxsutawney Phil make his annual prediction!

The name Punxsutawney comes from the Native American Indian name for the location "ponksad-utene" which means "the town of the sand-flies" that plagued the early settlers there. Punxsutawney is located about 80 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is pronounced: Punx su taw ne.