

Winter 1920

This January of 1968 has been so severe in its extreme cold and snow that many of us will be relating stories about it many years hence. It seems that every generation or so we get what is called an "old time winter" – 1948 was one, 1920 another. Modern equipment today clears roads in generally short order, though frequent complaints are made to the authorities that it should be practically instant. Let us hark back to 1920 – and count our blessings. The following will be verbatim from the Maynard News.

February 6, 1920 – 'Maynard Feels Blizzard' – Supt. Driscoll commended for keeping plows in action. Maynard is emerging from the worst blizzard experienced in this section for many years. Traffic was delayed and people were put to great inconvenience, but as there were no fires or casualties reported, nothing but good-natured badinage is heard. The storm commenced its work early Thursday morning and kept on the job throughout the day. In the evening the snow changed to sleet, which cut the faces of those forced to go out of doors. Town employees and railroad men suffered most, but all were more or less affected by its severity.

John J. Driscoll, Supt. of Streets, informed the News that it was the worst storm he has experienced since he came to Maynard to reside. Roy Worden, Supt. of the Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street Railway, is in accord with Mr. Driscoll and says it was the worst blizzard that the oldest man in his employ has any recollection of.

Mr. Driscoll had four plows working all day and some of these made three trips around the town. At noon there was a change of horses and at night these horses could go no further. In addition, he had men at work shoveling. These were augmented today and if possible more will be set to work again tomorrow. This Friday morning five plows were at work at 4:30, in order to make the streets passable for the operatives in the mill and others forced to leave their homes early.

Supt. Worden ordered cars and plows out early Thursday morning. Two of the cars reached Hudson. One of these was left there and the other became stalled with the plow in Gleasondale. One of the cars on the Concord end of the line reached as far as Paper Mill Corner on its return trip, but the other became enmeshed in huge drifts at Concord Junction.

It took just six hours to make a run from the Sudbury Street turnout to the car barn, according to Mr. Worden. He expects to get into Hudson sometime this afternoon and with any degree of luck will also reach Concord. The steam railroad had its difficulties also. Trains left on time in the morning, but were hours late at night. The mail arriving at 9 AM was the only one which was delivered. Some of the morning mail was on cars stalled.

During Thursday afternoon the wind rose to a gale and huge drifts precluded any chance of railroad men fighting their way through. Automobiles were placed in the discard. Doctors made their rounds on foot and credit is due them for their untiring efforts in visiting the sick. People residing in the outskirts and surrounding towns were kept from work in most cases. At noon Thursday, restaurants and lunch carts did a thriving business, as people who had any distance to walk and who came from work patronized these places. Many had foresight enough to carry lunches with them and many more stayed in the mill at noon, depending on relatives or friends to return at one with lunches for them.

Grocery and meat men also came in for a hard day. In some cases orders were taken in the forenoon which were not delivered. Many wondered why the no-school signal was not blown in the morning. Supt. of Schools Millington, says that he was undecided, as Friday is

visiting day and he did not wish to lose two days' time. However, at noon, it became apparent that children could not return, so the signal was blown.

The storm had its amusing features as well. One in particular was the frequency in which some pedestrians passed on snowshoes or skis. Earlier in the week these articles were used for pleasure, but the fact was emphatically borne out that they were indispensable for commercial purposes as well. Late Thursday afternoon the Powder Mill pung put in its appearance drawn by a team of six horses, enabling the help to arrive home without delay or inconvenience.

During the night the sleet formed a crust on the snow and as a result it did not drift as bad as anticipated, so that as the old weather man said; 'it might have been worse.'

February 6, 1920 - Hudson - Whittier's "Snowbound" may be a beautiful thing to read when one is seated by an open fireplace, listening to the crackling logs, but it is a different proposition to be obliged to brave such a storm as raged yesterday, the worst since the memorable blizzard of 1898, the year the steamer Portland went down.

There was a decided icy feeling in the air Wednesday afternoon and evening, but nobody dreamed that the world would awaken yesterday morning to find itself facing a storm of unusual proportions and severity.

Electric cars were quickly put out of commission. The Clinton Line did not land a car in Wood square after its last trip Wednesday night, and is still among the missing. The Maynard Line got to Hudson at 8 AM but has not been seen since. The Marlboro Line got two cars through in the early morning, after which service was completely at a standstill until late in the evening, when service was resumed with the Armory as the terminus.

Schools were closed yesterday and the no school signal sounded again this morning. Nearly all the stores which keep open Thursday evenings closed at six o'clock. Trains were from four to five hours late, with mails delayed correspondingly. The midnight train did not reach Hudson until four o'clock this morning. Marlboro people waited at the Fitchburg Station from the time they left work until nearly eleven o'clock to get a train home. Many returned to factories in which they work and remained there overnight. Lodge rooms were also resorted to as bedrooms by snowbound ones. One elderly man who started to walk to Marlboro was given a resting place at the Town House, a comfortable bed being made up for him in the court room.

The Boston morning papers did not arrive until late in the afternoon, being brought from Marlboro on a snow plow, and the early afternoon papers reached Fairbanks at 5:20. No Worcester papers reached Hudson.

At midnight a snow plow left the iron on the Felton Street crossing of the Boston & Maine, and three freight trains were held up by it until four o'clock, it being necessary to send out a wrecking train to straighten out affairs.

People obliged to be out this morning, going to work or otherwise, were forced to wade through deep drifts, and fortunate were those that could wait until somebody else had broken a path for them.

A remedy for the complete extermination of the groundhog is in order.

February 13, 1920 - Because of limited transportation facilities, as a result of the snow storm of last week, Maynard people have experienced considerable hardship. There has been no schedule on the electric car lines, and Boston Freight has not reached town in two weeks. Besides being inconvenienced in travel, there has been a shortage of living commodities to

add to the general discomfort. Residents have shown a commendable spirit and this will be rewarded by better things next week.

This Friday there is a schedule maintained from the center of the town to Gleasondale. It is expected that snow and ice will be removed from the tracks so that cars can run as far as the Fitchburg Depot in Hudson this evening.

Supt. Worden will turn his attention to the Acton Line Saturday, and hopes to have a clear track for railroad connection by Monday. On the Concord end of the line the street department of that town are engaged in clearing tracks. The workmen have been contending against ice ranging from three inches to twelve inches. Every foot of the ground conquered so far has been by the use of the pick axe. An illustration of this phase of the work may be gleaned from the fact that it took seven hours to make a clear track from opposite the residence of William Jones, Great Road, to the car barn Wednesday evening.

Local businessmen have been hit hard. One grocer says that he can trace a loss of \$75 on his Saturday business from South and West Acton. Another one says that these towns, plus Concord Junction doubles his loss. Samuel Lerer suggests that the merchants pool their interests until the tracks are cleared and engage drivers for pungs . . . allow them to collect regular fares between the towns mentioned and reimburse the drivers to the extent of a fair profit over what is collected in fares.

The Express Company has been doing double duty since the failure of the freight and have been doing it exceedingly well. There is practically no sugar in town today. In some cases stores are out of butter, egg and cheese, and unless a Boston Freight hoves in sight this Friday afternoon, Maynard will have to subsist on canned goods for the time being. Things looked serious at the mill early in the week. There was an apparent shortage of acids and dyes. About 250 carboys are used weekly and Monday there were only fifty on hand. The company got in touch with the Government and as a result there was a special engine brought into requisition and a carload of the necessary product brought to Maynard. Dyes came by express. Unless traffic is opened, a shutdown is imminent. Carloads of coal were taken from the mill early in the week by the Government and sent to the Watertown Arsenal. Automobiles put in an appearance Thursday, the first since the storm last Thursday. The truck of the United Cooperative Association was the first and this was a signal for others, and they were run with more or less difficulty. But there are better things to come in sight and in the meantime, everybody 'Cheer Up'.

February 20, 1920 - Maynard was treated to the novel sight of hundreds of volunteer workmen Saturday and Sunday, to open the car tracks between Maynard and South Acton. Practically every resident of Maynard is inconvenienced by the lack of transportation between the two towns. In order to offset this, Roy Worden, Supt. of the C. M. & H. Street Railway Company, petitioned businessmen to aid in opening the line. A meeting was called Friday afternoon and the response was gratifying indeed. The movement was not an individual one by any means. All are concerned. The town has suffered through the storm to the extent of lack of transportation, mails, morning and evening papers, and many other necessities. It was a call for civic duty and while there were not more than fifty or sixty at work at one time, fully 500 people participated in the movement.

Triumphantly swinging his pickaxe Saturday morning, B. J. Coghlin started the ball a rolling. He was quickly joined by other businessmen, laborers, and in fact during the two days, men and boys from every walk of life. It was not for the railroad, the business man, but for all concerned and this was evident from the cosmopolitan number who enthused over the

work. As in many other places, the railroad could have suspended and waited for the warm sun and rain to do the work at no expense. The businessmen could have hired punks for transportation, which was at first conceived. However, a splendid cooperative spirit was shown when Joshua Naylor called the meeting which results in opening the road as far as Parmenter's crossing. This was done through many discouraging conditions. Solid ice had to be cut through and water in many places was as high as the ankles of the workers.

February 20, 1920 – The first Boston freight in more than two weeks arrived in Maynard Saturday afternoon. It was hailed like the rescue ship of old, as it brought delayed and necessary supplies.

March 5, 1920 – Employees of American Woolen dug out congested freight in South and West Acton, Saturday and Sunday. In addition they shoveled the sidings clear in Maynard and Gleasondale; paid time and a half for Saturday and Sunday work.

March 12, 1920 - Responding to an appeal from the Boston & Maine Railroad to repeat the work of last week made necessary by the storm Saturday, more than 50 men responded to clear the sidings and switches in Maynard, Marlboro, South and West Acton, and Gleasondale.

March 12, 1920 – While very little damage was done by the storm last Friday night and Saturday, great inconvenience was experienced. It slowed things to a standstill temporarily. Trains were stalled and people waited hours. Lights went out in one section of town.

The memorable blizzard of 1888 was nothing to Saturday's storm. There was greater snowfall then, but the high wind which accompanied Saturday's storm with a near zero temperature beat all records. Even steam service was paralyzed. Nobody ventured abroad after the noon hour. A number of horses had to be dug out of drifts and it was a common sight to see some person step on what seemed a safe place, only to go through to the knees. Many cellars are now flooded because of the thaw Monday.

March 19, 1920 – Ice sweeps away the Maynard Coal Co. Bridge over the Assabet. Thousands of tons of ice along the river from the rear of the Main Street School to Florida Court were loosened by the rainstorm Wednesday.

March 26, 1920 – Cars on C. M. & H. Line had reached Concord Junction; hope shortly to be opened to Concord and West Acton.

Spring finally came and all was well again in the little Town of Maynard along the Assabet.

Read at the January, 1968 meeting of the Maynard Historical Society – B. R. Koski