

The Mayflower Log



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SNOW and COLD

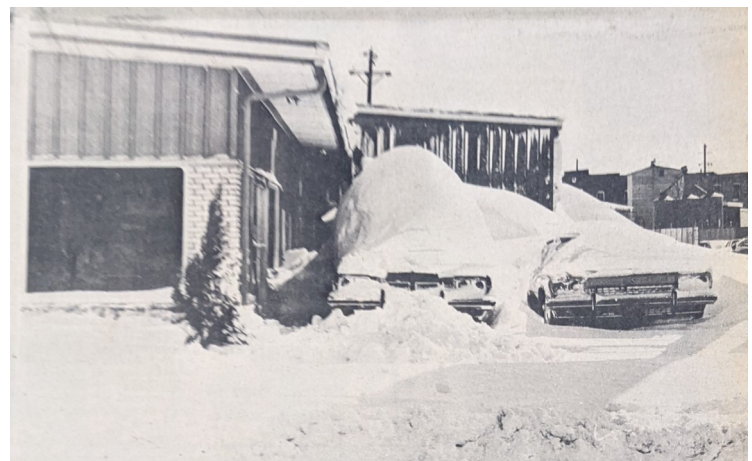
After being shut down since March 2020 because of the pandemic, then being without power for nearly a week after the derecho, we certainly were not ready for the winter of 2020-21. The on-line site Grinnell Weather reported a total of 47.1 inches of snow in December, January, and February. In addition, the polar vortex, pushing and holding frigid air over much of the U.S., brought us temperatures entirely below zero on five days in February, with lows below zero on 13 days. All the snow and cold did, however, bring a wealth of winter stories from Mayflower residents, many of which are printed below. If anyone can top these, we will save them for next winter!

Blizzard of April 1973

Rockefeller University in New York has a small but superb graduate program in the sciences. Grinnell College was pleased and honored to receive a visit on April 8, 1973 from one of the Rockefeller faculty, the noted photochemist, William Agosta, who was on the lookout for exceptional graduate students. When Joyce and I hosted Bill for dinner the night of the 8th, snow was flying as he stepped onto our front porch in a light trench coat. A native of Texas, Bill wanted to know if snow was common in

Iowa in April. I assured him that it was not, and that this would be over by the end of dinner. It was not. Bill finally made his way out of town three days later. He did take appointments with students on the 9th and gave us a seminar on his research that evening at the height of the storm. Grinnell students are a hardy bunch. I loaned Bill my heavy red wool Mackinaw, boots, and gloves, to weather the storm that deposited 15 inches of snow amid north winds up to 50 mph. I remember a snow drift at the northeast corner of the Science Building; it covered the parking lot and went above the eaves of the one-story wing. The *Herald-Register* photo below shows a downtown scene. The biggest blizzard ever that came in April is fixed in my memory and also that of Professor Agosta.

Gene Wubbels



Wind-sculpted snow drifts, *Herald Register*

Early snow. terrible spring

One year on the farm we had an early and very heavy snow and I could not get to work. On the fourth day we were snowed in, I ended up walking about three quarters of a mile to where the road was cleared and a friend could pick me up. In one place I was walking eight feet above the road bed!

At first this appeared to be a normal winter situation. However, because the snow had started before the weather got cold and before the ground was frozen, when the spring thaw started the ground was very soft. The snow melted and made a mess in the gravel roads. At the end of our lane for some reason there got to be a very soft spot about 6 to 8 feet in diameter that vehicles could not get through. Mud would just come boiling up out of the hole. We could get our car out but could not get it back in so we would park the car along the road in front of the yard, then drive three miles out of the way to get to town.

The county road crew put signs at the intersections east and west of our house indicating there should not be any through traffic, but obviously not everybody paid attention to that and I would have to pull them out with a tractor. One evening a young woman came to the door and asked if she could use the phone. I asked if she needed to be pulled out, but she said no she just wanted to use the phone. She called her husband and in a very exasperated tone she said, "Well I am stuck down here again." Another time two men

stuck in a station wagon came to the door and asked to be pulled out. They got in the station wagon and then wanted me to get out of the



tractor cab to hook the chain up to their station wagon! I told them no! I asked those guys if they could read the sign at the intersection.

Eventually the county road crew came and dumped a load of gravel into the hole. After a while the road did get drier but it had a sponge to it. You would drive over it and it would just feel spongy --not normal at all. One day a fuel truck came and met somebody just in front of our house and had to pull over to let the car by. He got over to the edge of the road and immediately the wheel on the side next to the ditch sunk down to the axle. I couldn't pull him out and neither could a neighbor with a bigger tractor. Finally the company sent out an empty fuel truck and the driver pumped all the fuel out of the first truck into the second one. This of course took the whole road, so it was quite an operation, and nobody could get through until the transfer was completed. The spring thaw eventually ended; no one wanted a repeat.

John Graves

No electricity!

In February 2010, after attending a conference in Washington DC, we planned a visit to my cousin in nearby Virginia. As we were driving to the house, my cousin told me that snow was expected, but reassured us that she had prepared and was ready.

The next morning we woke to find that a heavy, wet snow had fallen, draping the nearby pine trees, breaking off limbs and causing a power outage.

The power would be off for 33 hours. But my cousin was prepared—she used Sterno to keep water hot for coffee, tea, cocoa and soup. She used a barbecue grill to cook whole meals; she found an old bottle of champagne and served mimosas for breakfast.

We spent hours wrapped up in blankets and sleeping bags by the fireplace reading, talking, and playing games.

Darwin and her husband went out shoveling and even helped a hapless snowplow driver to rock the truck to get it out of a ditch.

The power had the good grace to return 10 minutes before the Super Bowl was scheduled to begin, so the men could enjoy watching their big event.

Suzanne Schwengels

A vet's winter stories

As a veterinarian, I've had my share of winter adventures. One snowy day I was called to a farm where they kept ostriches, and there were a bunch of them in a pen and there was blood all around. Come to find out, one of the ostriches had a laceration on the bottom of its middle toe.

Now, ostriches have three toes and the middle one, which was the injured one, has a claw on it that they like to use to slash at people, threatening severe injury.

We finally got the injured bird into a pen by itself. I asked the farm workers if they would be willing to hold onto the bird while I tried to treat the laceration, but no one volunteered. After watching him for a while, I advised them to let the bird out onto the snowy field, where the cold snow helped the cut to clot.

In another memorable adventure, Suzanne came with me one extremely cold night when I had been called in the middle of the night to help with an animal that was having difficulty calving.

She was watching from outside the metal fence surrounding the field where the calving was happening. Now, when an animal has had difficulty calving, often the calf is born with lots of mucus in its mouth and nose that needs to be drained out quickly so it doesn't go to the lungs. To accomplish this, often the farm worker will hold the calf up by its hind legs for two minutes or so. But a calf can weigh from 70-100 pounds, and so the worker uses whatever it needs to to help with the inversion.

In this case, we were near the fence behind which Suzanne was standing, and we lofted the calf's hind legs up over the fence to help invert it. Suzanne, by this time very cold, had been thinking of the movie where the kid gets his tongue stuck on the pole, and thought immediately that the calf was going to have its skin ripped off, and began screaming.

I got ribbed about that every time after that when I went to that farm.

Darwin Kinne

WINTER

In 1971, Sandy, our young son, Ruben, and I moved from a small farm (an acreage, really) in North Carolina to Grinnell, a small town in Iowa.

Right away, we found much to like: the people, the huge blue sky, the rich and rolling land—though none of us cared much for our first Iowa winter. Following friendly advice, we bought down jackets and wool socks, and gradually got used to wind chills and blizzards. And we began to look for a small farm—an acreage.

In mid-1972, we relocated to the country, to an eight-acre spread miles from town, with an old farmhouse and a wonderful barn. We knew we were hobby farmers, but our neighbors were tolerant and helpful, and, having survived one winter, we felt seasoned and tough.

In early April of 1973, we became the proud owners of a four-wheel drive Dodge Ram Charger, and felt prepared to cope with any kind of weather. And then, the notorious April blizzard hit, its 60 mph winds piling nearly 20 inches of snow into huge, sculpted mountains. It was a little terrifying, but we knew we could get to town if we needed to.

Soon, we realized others weren't so lucky. Sandy learned that numbers of cars were stranded on the interstate. We figured they were tourists, folks who didn't know how to drive in snow, probably from somewhere down South, and we smiled, feeling superior. Then came the request for anyone who had a four-wheel drive vehicle to rescue people who were in real danger of freezing.

"Sure," we said, and the three of us bundled up and plunged through the snow to our car. It started right away, as if eager

to get on the road. Sandy shifted into low gear, and we were off.

We traveled all of four yards—right into a snow drift that left the mighty machine stranded three feet off the ground, all its wheels spinning. Sandy turned off the ignition, and we trudged back inside.

Our Ram Charger sat immobile for three days, reminding us that we still had a lot to learn about Iowa winters.

Betty Moffett

Haiku

**Invigorating,
Frigid air awakens me.
Enough of that.**

Chris Hunter

Winter in Moscow

Several decades ago, a few faculty colleagues and I took a group of Grinnell College students to the Soviet Union as part of their international education. This trip happened during winter break. I knew Moscow was extremely cold in the winter and it lived up to its reputation.

While the cold and snow made seeing the city less pleasant, it also presented an opportunity. I had long known that in the center of the city there was an outdoor swimming pool, built on a site originally an Orthodox Church, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. It had been destroyed by the communist government to build a Palace of the Soviets. This, in turn, was razed to construct Moskva (Moscow) pool, a year-round outdoor pool, one of the world's largest.

I had wondered what it might be like to swim in the winter there. Fortunately, I had a free afternoon. I went to the pool, bought a ticket and went into one of the many changing rooms surrounding the immense pool. My first shock was the changing room, where I and other male bathers changed in front of a clearly bored group of elderly female attendants. Then I entered the pool. It was wonderful. Along the edge was piled up snow. I reached over and made a snowball, just for fun. The temperature of the water was room temperature, very comfortable. Because of the difference in temperature between the air and water, a fine mist rose from the water, creating an eerie sensation.

When I finally tired of the pool, I climbed out, looked around me at the fifty changing rooms, and, standing in the cold, realized that I had only a rough idea of which of them held my clothing. Luckily, I got it right on my third try. A great part of a great trip!

Bob Grey



The Moskva (Moscow) pool, a year-round heated outdoor pool

Coasting on Schoolhouse Hill

One Christmas in the late 1930's, Santa left my older sister and me each a sled with red runners. That began the saga of our winter coasting.

The notorious Searsboro hills were ideal for sledding. In those days, the snowplow left a layer of snow on the streets which the local traffic packed down, making a middle fast track with deeper snow on the sides.

We would join the other neighborhood kids to spend a Saturday afternoon coasting down the schoolhouse hill. "My sled is faster than yours," called my classmate Billy.

"Prove it," I hollered, belly-flopping on my sled.

Billy knew I'd take his challenge and was a little ahead of me. Snow blew in my face, blinding me, but I held a straight line. He drifted a little to the right, throwing more snow, as I flew past him. When he stopped beside me at the bottom of the hill, he declared good-naturedly, "I'll beat you next time."

The exercise of walking back up the hill kept us warm. But in extreme weather, cold faces, fingers, and toes would call a halt to our play, and we would hurry home into the cheery warmth.

Marilyn Schuler



My First Memory of Sledding

I stand beside my brand-new sled,
Staring fearful down the hill:
The slope falls steeply far below,
Snow rutted deep, all icy slick,
Dying at the distant hedge.

The others yell to urge me on,
The smallest of the eager lot.
Yet I stand pat, too weak to move,
Till, at long last, force fears aside,
And lay thin frame on wooden planks.

The Flyer erupts on runners slick,
With me not in control.
I grab the bar as others had:
But frigid mittens slip their hold.

We hit a rut, we buck askew,
My legs slip off the feral ride.
Ice-cold with fear, I crawl half on,
And seal my eyes and lips tight shut.

Then sudden smash, a breakneck stop
Against the looming, tattered hedge.
I shake it off, fight from the ground,
And slowly rise, lift arms on high,
Triumphant now, an unbowed pro.

Chris Hunter

Winter weather: a perspective

We Iowans enjoy talking about the weather, especially severe winter weather. Most of what has been written about Grinnell weather concerns twentieth-century weather events, like the snowy, cold winters of the 1930s.

But we in Grinnell are lucky to have the weather journal of a Grinnell area man, Richard Spire (1853-1924), who for many years farmed in Sheridan Township, northeast of Grinnell. Spire's account, which reports on most years between 1884 and 1918, indicates that our recent cold spell is not unlike some Iowa winters of a century ago.

"The winter of [18]99 was severe," Spire wrote. Weeks of strong winds from the northwest pushed down temperatures, "some days in the middle of the day 17 below zero. . .frost went down very deep, fully 4 ft. and 5 ft. in places."

January 1909, however, Spire found "variable." A muddy first few days soon gave way to "much colder weather for about ten days [with temperatures] as low as 16 below zero. "Then it warmed up again, and "on the 28th [of January] close to two in. of rain fell. . . .In the night the wind changed to the NW and the next day witnessed the worst blizzard known to Iowa. Hundreds of cattle perished in the storm."

January 1910 presented "solid winter weather. A very cold deep snow fell the 4th. . . . All this snow brought . . .cold weather. The thermometer ran to 20 below zero. . . ." January two years later saw another deep snow; "[news] papers stated it was not so cold since 1884; many times it was 15 or 18 below. 1-half of the month was the worst: on

[the] 7th [it was] 27 below and [on the] 12th, 29 below. Frost got in many cellars and froze potatoes severely."

So, don't take our recent cold too much to heart. From the warmth of your Mayflower residence you can read more of Spire's weather reports here:

<https://digital.grinnell.edu/islandora/object/grinnell%3A12351#page/112/mode/2up>



In the early 1900s in Grinnell, winter activities included sledding down the hill at the entrance to Hazelwood Cemetery. Archived photo by Cornelia Clarke in collection of Poweshiek History Preservation Project.

Dan Kaiser

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