

Snow Days In Hyannis

Blustery Boreas took his own sweet time in bringing a blanket of snow to Hyannis this winter. Many there were who hoped the god of the north winds might have remained in his polar demesne through the season, but in vain.

The above was dashed off, days after the mid-February snow storm hit the Cape, in the style of the editors of old who tried to put a little poetry into their weather reports. Today's roaring plows and incessant back-up beeping tend to drown out anyone trying to compare a snow-whipped tree to a glorious birch.

Snowfall is more inconvenience than marvel these days. If only we could step out with 9-year-old Alvah Bearse just before Christmas 1916 as he walked up to Main Street from his Ocean Street home:

"Yesterday's heavy snowfall no longer blocks the streets of Hyannis. Men and boys turned out with shovels to clear the streets, each paid for his labors by the town. At the corner of South and School Streets, I watched ten or fifteen men shoveling out a single giant drift.

"But today the air is clear, the sun is shining and everything looks clean and new. It is a grand day for a walk."

Later in his classic *Physic Point/Memoirs of Hyannis/1914-1929*, Bearse recalls his childhood's "principal winter amusements – sledding and skating..." If the snow was just right, the Hyannis Port Golf Club was the prime spot, where one "could start at the club house and slide past the second tee into the swamp, a distance of perhaps five or six hundred yards...The next best location was the Bumps...at the dead end of Pearl Street in Hyannis."

For ice-skating, the village's resourceful youth would mount skates on a pair of ankle-high shoes ("...it would have been a waste of shoes to have a pair that could be worn only when skating.") and head for the Lilly Pond on the southwest side of Lewis Bay near the fish hills, Snow's Creek off Ocean Street, and Aunt Betty's Pond at the west end of Main Street. In years that Lewis Bay iced over, Bearse would skate to Egg Island and ride ice boats.

In 1955, *The Barnstable Patriot* reported, Lewis Bay was frozen solid for the first time in seven or eight years. The paper ran a picture of Walter and Carl Sherman spearing eels through the ice while a crowd of youth watched.

As the years passed, the costs of cold weather overshadowed its several joys. A *Patriot* story in 1952 reads like a battlefield inventory: "Equipment used in plowing the town out of the recent snowstorm was 8 bulldozers, 9 town trucks, 5 fire trucks, 4 snow loaders in Hyannis, and one snow loader each in Barnstable and Osterville. Cost of snow removal and plowing for the storm was approximately \$17,000." In February 2003, a single storm cost the town \$200,000-plus, with total expenses for the year approaching \$600,000. "The town is hopeful that nature will take its course and melt away what was deposited (on sidewalks)."

Sometimes the intensity of a storm was a matter of life and death. In February 2009, area churches were cooperating in the Overnights of Hospitality program. Members would drive to the Salvation Army in the afternoon and pick up homeless men and women enrolled in the day program there. The

houses of worship would provide a meal and overnight accommodations in their buildings. But one storm was so strong that volunteers could not drive in to the shelter, and emergency funds were used to house the men and women at the Cascade Motel on Main Street.

Sometimes a good snowfall was an unalloyed joy. In 2007, the *Patriot* related, “When six inches of new snow blanketed Hyannis last March 2, Beard Chevrolet and Subaru customers weren’t cursing the white stuff... A sales promotion by the dealer promised \$5,000 to anyone who purchased a new or used vehicle during a specified week if it snowed at least five inches on March 2.”

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