

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 8, 2018

Winter Storm at Auburn Heights, February 6, 1978: In retrospect, this may not have been the greatest storm in my lifetime, but it was recorded as it was happening. On other occasions, I remember one clear day in the late 1970s when the thermometer at our side door registered 7 degrees below zero at 11:00 A.M. Another time, on March 20, 1958, no vehicles got in or out of Yorklyn; 30" of wet snow was measured on the Walp Coal Yard scale at Avondale, and many neighbors were without power for six days.

When I was in Junior High School, I had to read John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "Snowbound," which told of a New Hampshire blizzard in the 1820s at his boyhood home. I have often recalled that poem. We don't have storms like that in Delaware, but old-timers used to talk about the Blizzard of '88 (1888), which occurred on March 12-14 that year. Also, my mother often told of being snowed in at the farm near Odessa where she grew up. I must have thought a major storm needed to be detailed, so here it is:

"Sunday, February 5 (1978), was a dull day that felt like snow, but with little wind, it was not bitter. After a cold Saturday night with 10-degree temperatures, the mercury had hovered around 27 degrees most of Sunday. Snow was forecast.

"There was about one inch of old snow on the ground, on average, with many bare spots where it had blown or melted off. Many snowbanks remained from January snows, as temperatures had not been above the freezing mark for at least a week. Though January had seen more than average snowfall for this region, the week prior to February 6 had seen little or no precipitation.

"The snow started about 8:30 Sunday night, with temperature still about 27 degrees. Apparently, the tempo of the fall did not pick up until around 2:00 or 3:00 Monday morning. By daybreak, the temperature had dropped to 19 degrees and there was probably 4 inches of new snow. The temperature remained at about 20 degrees through the morning with snow continuing, heavy at times. It was a very light snow, and gusts of wind tended to make it drift. By noon the depth was about 8 inches, and by 1:00 P.M. the temperature had climbed to 24 degrees. Between 1:00 and 3:00 P.M. snowfall was lighter, but temperatures started to drop again, and by 4:30 it was down to 21 degrees. Snow was very heavy at times after 3:00 P.M. At 5:00 P.M., random measuring indicated depths of new snow at between 12 and 15 inches, with wind velocity 15 to 20 mph and snow drifting badly.

"At 8:00 P.M. Monday, it was still snowing with temperatures holding at about 20 degrees. Winds were gusting to 30 mph. It was difficult to tell how much new snow was on the ground because of the drifting, but it appeared to average about 14 inches. Two piles outside the side door measured 30" deep.

"At 11:00 P.M. it was still snowing and blowing, with temperature about 21 degrees. Apparently, the snow stopped about 1:00 A.M., but gusts continued to drift the lightweight snow all night.

"At dawn on Tuesday, February 7, the skies were clear, and temperature was about 20 degrees. By mid-morning, the thermometer registered 25 degrees. The average depth around Auburn Heights was estimated at 15 inches. Many drifts were in excess of two feet in depth. In the middle of the driveway at the front gateposts, the depth was 18 inches. The first road plow came through at 9:45 A.M. and had little difficulty in opening up one lane (of Route 82), as the snow was so light in weight. Now the task of digging out begins."