

Blizzard of 1888

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O.W. Meier Relates Experience He Had in the Blizzard of 1888.

"The awful blizzard of Jan 12, 1888," said O. W. Meier, cannot be forgotten by anyone who experienced it as I did." He and his brothers were attending school in District 71, 15 miles [wouthwest?] of Lincoln, and this is his story of that blizzard which swept over the country 50 years ago.

"The weather had been mild, after a heavy fall of snow. Deep snow lay over all the ground in fields and on the roads. Long hanging icecicles dripped melting snow water from the eaves of the house and barn. The sky was dark and heavy. Beautiful big white flakes were falling fast that morning of the fateful day. Father and mother said, "The girls must stay at home, but the boys may go to school."

"At half past eight Walter, then 8, Henry 12, and I, 15 years of age, started out thru the deep white snow. Pretty starry flakes made us look like snow men before we reached the school, a mile and a half from home. When we got there we found other boys, and some girls, playing "fox and geese". Henry and I jointed in the game.

"The bell rang, calling us in to study and recite. The heavy snow kept falling all that day. By the middle of the afternoon, at the last recess, the snow was about two feet deep, and on the top it was almost as light as feathers. At a quarter to three, the school bell rang for the last time that day. We rushed for the brooms to sweep the wet snow from our boots. Just when we got settled down to our books as swiftly as lightning, the storm struck the north side of the house. The whole building shivered and quaked. With deafening whack the shutters were slammed shut by the terrific wind. In an instant the room became black as night, then for a moment there came a ray of light, I stood and said, "May my brothers and I go home?" The teacher said. "Those boys who live south may put on their coats and go, but the rest of you must stay here in this house."

"The two Strelow boys, Robert and George, with John Conrad, my two brothers, and I, put out into the storm for our homes. We had not gone a rod when we found ourselves in a heap, in a heavy drift of snow. We took hold of each others' hands, pulled ourselves out, got into the road, and the cold north wind blew us down the road a half mile south, where the Strelow boys and John Conrad had to go west a mile or more. When they reached a bridge in a ravine, the little fellows sheltered a while under the bridge, a wooden culvert, but Robert, the oldest, insisted that they push on thru the blinding storm for their homes. In the darkness they stumbled in, and by degrees their parents thawed them out, bathed their frozen hands, noses, ears and cheeks, while the boys cried in pain.

"My brothers and I could not walk thru the deep snow in the road, so we took down the rows of corn stalks to keep from losing ourselves "till we reached our pasture fence. Walter was too short to wade the deep snow in the field, so Henry and I dragged him over the top. For nearly a mile we followed the fence "till we reached the corral and pens. In the howling storm, we could hear the pigs squeal as they were freezing in the mud and snow. Sister Ida had opened the gate and let the cows in from the field to the sheds, just as the cold wind struck and froze her skirts stiff around her like hoops. The barn and stables were drifted over when we reached there. The roaring wind and stiffling snow blinded us so that we had to feel thru the yard to the door of our house. {Begin note}{Begin handwritten}C15 - 2/27/41 - Nebraska{End handwritten}{End note}

"The lamp was lighted. Mother was walking the floor, wringing her hands and calling for her boys. Pa was shaking the ice and snow from his coat and boots. He had gone out to meet us but was forced back by the storm. We stayed in the house all that night. It was so cold that many people froze {Begin page no. 2}to death in the snow, and the loss in livestock was big. The next morning we walked out upon the hard deep drifts shoveled a way thru to the barn where we gound our cows and horses alive on top of the snow that had drifted into their stalls, but a lot of our hogs were frozen stiff in mud, ice and snow. The road we came over on our way home was strewn with frozen quails rabbits, dead.

"That was an awful night on the open plains. Many teachers and school children lost their lives in that blinding storm, while trying to find their way home. The blizzard of 1888 has not been forgotten."

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Jan 12, 1888:

Blizzard brings tragedy to Northwest Plains

On this day in 1888, the so-called "**Schoolchildren's Blizzard**" kills 235 people, many of whom were children on their way home from school, across the Northwest Plains region of the United States. The storm came with no warning, and some accounts say that the temperature fell nearly 100 degrees in just 24 hours.

It was a Thursday afternoon and there had been unseasonably warm weather the previous day from Montana east to the Dakotas and south to Texas. Suddenly, within a matter of hours, Arctic air from Canada rapidly pushed south. Temperatures plunged to 40 below zero in much of North Dakota. Along with the cool air, the storm brought high winds and heavy snows. The combination created blinding conditions.

Most victims of the blizzard were children making their way home from school in rural areas and adults working on large farms. Both had difficulty reaching their destinations in the awful conditions. In some places, though, caution prevailed. Schoolteacher Seymour Dopp in Pawnee City, Nebraska, kept his 17 students at school when the storm began at 2 p.m. They stayed overnight, burning stockpiled wood to keep warm.

The next day, parents made their way over five-foot snow drifts to rescue their children. In Great Plains, South Dakota, two men rescued the children in a schoolhouse by tying a rope from the school to the nearest shelter to lead them to safety. Minnie Freeman, a teacher in Nebraska, successfully led her children to shelter after the storm tore the roof off of her one-room schoolhouse. In other cases, though, people were less lucky. Teacher Loie Royce tried to lead three children to the safety of her home, less than 90 yards from their school in Plainfield, Nebraska. They became lost, and the children died of hypothermia. Royce lost her feet to frostbite.

In total, an estimated 235 people across the plains died on January 12. The storm is still considered one of the worst blizzards in the history of the area.

THE BLIZZARD OF 1888

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The blizzard was preceded by a snowstorm on January 5 and 6, which dropped powdery snow on the northern and central plains, and brought an outbreak of brutally cold temperatures from January 7 to 11. On January 11, a strengthening surface low dropped south-southeastward out of Alberta, Canada into central Montana and then into northeastern Colorado by the morning of January 12. The temperatures in advance of the low increased some 20–40 degrees in the central plains (for example, Omaha, Nebraska recorded a temperature of -6°F (-21°C) at 7 a.m. on January 11, while the temperature had increased to 28°F (-2°C) by 7 a.m. on January 12). The strong surface low rapidly moved into southeastern Nebraska by 3 p.m. on January 12 and finally into southwestern Wisconsin by 11 p.m. that same day.

The blizzard was precipitated by the collision of an immense Arctic cold front with warm, moisture-laden air from the Gulf of Mexico. Within a few hours, the advancing cold front caused a temperature drop from a few degrees above freezing to -20 degrees Fahrenheit (-40°F in some places). This wave of cold was accompanied by high winds and heavy snow. The fast-moving storm first struck Montana in the early hours of January 12, swept through Dakota Territory from midmorning to early afternoon, and reached Lincoln, Nebraska at 3 p.m.

What made the storm so deadly was the timing (during work and school hours), the suddenness, and the brief spell of warmer weather that preceded it. In addition, the very strong wind fields behind the cold front and the powdery nature of the snow reduced visibilities on the open plains to zero. People ventured from the safety of their homes to do chores, go to town, attend school, or simply enjoy the relative warmth of the day. As a result, thousands of people—including a significant number of schoolchildren—got caught in the blizzard. Approximately 500 people died of hypothermia. Travel was severely impeded in the days following.

Two months later, another severe blizzard hit the East Coast states: This blizzard was known as the Great Blizzard of 1888.

