

- EST. 1958 -

# WYANDOTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

January 2024

VOLUME 1



The satirical article below ran in the **March 4, 1954** Detroit Free Press after an early March snow-storm hit the area following a mild winter. It may be 70 years old but it holds so true today, regarding some imaginations of past winters. Inside this January newsletter, read an in-depth look at some of our winters of the past. Some were indeed severe...but some were not.

## Think This Is Bad? Back in '73---



### Ask Grandpa About Snow—He'll Give You the Facts, More or Less

**BY JAMES S. POOLER**

Special by Eskimo Dog Team

**ROYAL OAK**—While snow-bound out here, shooting wolves from the second-story windows and through our binoculars watching cars being saved by other cars, we got to thinking about what grandpa always said—

"Winters aren't what they used to be."

At least, what they were up around Oshkosh, Wis., and in Northern Michigan where he lived as a boy.

**TAKE THE** winter of 1873, grandpa said, although nobody in his right mind would.

Should have known it was going to be a doozy, for that fall the usually mild south wind got so strong it blew all the ducks and geese back to Michigan and Canada. Grandpa said you had to learn to shoot behind the ducks because the wind was blowing them back—tailfirst!

And, grandpa said, if you watched the little animals you would have known it was going to be a blinger of a winter. They just didn't grow heavy coats—some grew two coats and a muffler. And some of the beaver began buying back pelts from John Jacob Astor.

That winter they didn't measure the snow in feet. They couldn't. Everybody's were frozen.

And, grandpa said, there was some talk of measuring it by



the yard but they gave that up. The snow was so deep you couldn't tell one yard from another.

**PEOPLE TOOK** to sending the smallest boy up the chimney to burrow up and find out how deep the snow was. But those kids had to be careful for some of them dug right out of the snow into the clouds and without knowing it got carried as far away as Cleveland, O.—which was a miserable place to spend winter or any other season.

Sometimes we wish we had grandpa's imagination when it came to talking about winter. We probably will when we get to be called "grandpa" and start telling about the winter of 1953-54.

FROM THE PREZ-

Did you know the Wyandotte Historical Society has a new book available?

Soldiers Untold - the biography of Civil War Soldiers is available for \$15. Uncover the stories of more than 100 Civil War soldiers who lived in Wyandotte before or after the war. Learn about their lives prior to enlistment and the journey through the war. This book was written by Marty Bertera and myself, 100% of the profit goes to the historical society where they can continue to support local history.

Also if anyone is interested in having one of their favorite recipes published, we are currently accepting recipes for a new cook book. A cookbook of Memories will feature stories, photographs and a collection of recipes from Wyandotte families.

~Mary-Johna Wein



*Santa & Mrs. Claus Visit* by Beth Labadie

Bacon Library once again hosted our Santa Program on December 2. It was a fun day with 107 children visiting Santa & Mrs. Claus. The library staff beautifully decorated the Bacon Home and opened their Makers Room so the children could decorate a gingerbread man to take home. Thank you to the many volunteers who worked to make this event a success – Library staff, Library Board, Friends of the Library, Wy-

**VINTAGE  
VALENTINES:  
COME SEE US IN  
FEBRUARY!**

"A Vintage Valentine" will be held Friday, February 9th from 5pm-8pm & Saturday, February 10th from 1pm-4pm. Come visit the Wyandotte museum and see vintage wedding dresses, photographs of Wyandotte weddings, and vintage Valentines from the past. The event is free for all to attend!!!



PET OCELOT "Haji" didn't have much freedom last week but he gave a few scares to shipping room employes at Detroit Diamond Screw Products, Wyandotte, on Thursday morning. It took four policemen to corner him before he was taken to Wyandotte's dog pound to await his owner. That owner proved to be Patrick Galeski, 464 Eureka, brother of none other than Patrolman Daniel Galeski (right). The ocelot, just five months old, is just a "kitten," says his owner, even if his growls sound ferocious. News-Herald Staff Photo.

Retired Wyandotte policeman, and Wyandotte Historical Society Vice President, Dan Galeski found this old newspaper clipping of him & a "pet", circa 1965

## WINTERS IN THE DETROIT AREA – A LOOK BACK by Josh Halasy

Winter. It's a long season, and one that some love for its beauty, while others dislike it for its uncomfortable chill. But winters themselves are like the snowflakes they produce- no two are alike. We have all heard the tall tales of grandpa walking uphill to school in 6 feet of snow, or claims that "we always had a White Christmas when I was a kid", or "winters were more severe when I was a kid". Is there any truth to that? Well, as for White Christmases, our area has around a 50% chance of a White Christmas, and the general 50/50 ratio has remained consistent since the beginning of the climate record. Were winters more severe when you were a kid? Some were...and some absolutely were not. We average between 40-45" of snow per season, but amounts can vary greatly year to year. Let's take a look at some of the more extreme examples of winters in southeast Michigan since weather records began at Detroit in 1870. \*NOTE\* When a season total snowfall is referenced, it is the total accumulated fall for the entire season, usually November thru April.

Lets start with the winter of 1880-81. It was a very severe winter, with Detroit logging 93" of snow, and lots of bitter cold too. The winter was so harsh in the Midwest, that Laura Ingalls Wilder's book, "The Long Winter", is a chronicle of her surviving that winter on the Dakota prairie. But the very next winter, 1881-82, saw one of the most extreme examples of turnaround you will ever see. Hardly any snow was seen the entire winter, and to this day it stands as by far the warmest winter our region has seen. In 1886, Detroit saw its biggest snowstorm on record, 24.5" with 6 foot drifts...on APRIL 6th! The winter itself was nothing special, but talk about ending with a bang! Just a few years later, the winter of 1889-90 was so warm, that after 61 degrees and thunderstorms Christmas Eve, the December 26, 1889 Detroit Free Press ran a story on it, noting that dandelions were blooming and maples were beginning to bud. The warmth and snowlessness continued most of winter, with multiple days in the 60s in January, until a little bit of winter showed up... in March.

The winter of 1899-00 saw very little snow through the beginning of February and the ground was bare most of the time. Then February & March saw a siege of severe snowstorms, the two months coming to drop around 60" of snow! After a very mild and snow-free winter of 1905-06 (this was another one that got a taste of winter, finally, in March), a stretch of hard winters hit for the next several years, including heavy snows in 1907-08 & 1911-12, and excessive cold much of the rest of the time. In fact, cold winters dominated the 1910s, and though snowfall was not particularly heavy, the ground remained white much of the time. Then 1918-19 hit with its very mild weather, an epidemic of flu, and hardly any snow. In fact, until a snowstorm finally hit March 8th, the entire winter had yet to see the grass fully covered in white once!

The 1920s saw a few snowy winters, with 78" of snow falling in 1925-26 & 66" in 1929-30, but once the 1930s hit, the Great Depression & the Dust Bowl were the big stories. Perhaps a cause and effect of the dust bowl and its torrid, dry summers, most winters of the 1930s were mild with little snow. The winter of 1931-32 was so warm and rainy, that the ground did not see white once until February. Even then it barely lasted a few days, and the coldest month of the season was March, complete with a snowstorm on the first day of spring, after dandelions and other flowers were seen blooming throughout January! The winter of 1936-37 wasn't particularly mild, but it just wouldn't snow. Only a smattering of dustings spanned the whole season, with just one shovelable snowfall, a 3" fall on January 22nd. Getting shovelable snowfalls was important during the Depression because it gave the men a little bit of money, as the cities would pay them to shovel streets in lieu of the higher cost of using plows. 1936-37 stands as Detroit's least snowy winter on record, with only 13" of snow falling.

The 1940s winters weren't as mild as the 1930s, but they were very low on snowfall. If any of you have a grandpa who used to talk about '40s winters being harsh, he may have inhaled his corn cob pipe too hard. Snowfall was puny the entire decade, with no memorable snowstorms, although there was a paralyzing ice storm on New Years day, 1948. Seven of the ten winters that decade saw 26" or less of total snowfall, and the last winter of the decade, 1948-49, was mildest and least snowy of them all, with under 14" falling the entire winter season, and most of that fell January 26th-February 4th.

The 1950s kicked off with a wild winter in 1949-50. It was a roller coaster of snowstorms, rainstorms, warm and cold fronts, and a coal crisis causing mandatory brownouts. The high of 67 degrees on January 25, 1950 stands as the warmest January temperature on record, with some places seeing over 70 degrees! In 1951-52 the area saw 2 feet of snow in December, which had to be a shock to the system after the puny 1930s-40s winters. By the time the '51-52 winter was over, 58" of snow had fallen. The next winter could not have been more different. Only 16" fell the entire mild 1952-53 season, but what stands out this year is that at no time during the entire winter was there more than 2" of snow on the ground, a feat that has never been matched. The next several winters saw a bit more snow but remained quite mild. Colder winters closed out the decade, but snow remained light. In fact, in 1957-58, though 18" managed to fall the entire season, the largest single snowstorm was just under 2", a futility marker we have yet to match. *(continue on next page)*



## WINTERS IN THE DETROIT AREA — A LOOK BACK (continued)

Winters of the 1960s turned much colder than those of the previous 3 decades, but weather remained dry much of the time. So while snow was on the ground frequently, it was rarely deep. In fact, 3 snow seasons this decade saw 18" or less of snow (1960-61, 1965-66, & 1968-69), with 1968-69 being the last time to date Detroit has not seen 20" or more of snow in a season. The highlight of the decade, by far, was a blizzard on February 25, 1965 which dropped around a foot of snow with much higher drifts, a storm that is still remembered by some today!

The 1970s actually saw a few mild winters to start, but by the mid-1970s a stretch of brutal winters was beginning. The winter of 1974-75 started with a bang, with 20" of wet snow falling on December 1st. The winter itself wasn't all that cold, but snow totaled 63" by the time all was said and done. But what cements the 1970s in weather lore is the trio of brutally severe winters of 1976-77, 1977-78, & 1978-79. What may be surprising for some is that of the 3, only 1977-78 saw above average snowfall (62"), but all 3 had plenty of snowcover and brutal cold winds causing blowing, drifting, stalled cars, etc. The blizzard of '78 is probably the most infamous of all storms, but only around 9" of snow actually fell here from that. Of course, add in the old snow on the ground and the hurricane winds, and it was a crippling blizzard nonetheless.

Early in the 1980s, we saw another crazy about-face. The winter of 1981-82 was very harsh, with 74" of snow falling, bitter cold winds howling (remember, the Superbowl was in frigid Pontiac that year), and Tigers opening day snowed out with 7" of April powder. Then we move to 1982-83 and its crazy warm weather in December, including 64 degrees on Christmas Day. It got a bit colder in January, but it barely snowed until two spring snowstorms made up well over half the seasons total fall of 20". The rest of the 1980s saw quite a bit of cold, including a record -21 degree temperature in January 1984. Snowfall surpassed 50" each of the next 3 winters after 1983's clunker, though no individual storms stood out. The decade ended with a mild 1988-89 winter that saw little snow, but yes, it managed to snow that May!

Winters of the 1990s were similar 1950s. A few good storms & wintry stretches, but overall mild and unexciting for snow lovers. A fierce storm buried us in 14" of snow January 14, 1992, complete with thunder & lightning. Winter to that point had been very mild and relatively snow-free. The next few winters grew colder & had slightly above average snow, with January 19, 1994 holding the distinction as the coldest day on record for Detroit, when after a low of -20 degrees, the high only reached -4 degrees. The last half of the 1990s saw a succession of mild winters with below average snowfall, peaking with the mild, low snow winter of 1997-98 when only 23" of snow fell. Then in 1998-99, after a mild and near snowless November & December, January started with the infamous "blizzard of '99". The storm itself dropped a foot of snow with deep drifts, but the snow continued the next few weeks, and by mid-month 2 feet lay on the ground. It rapidly melted in late January before another snow blitz in March. In the end, it was a mild winter that still managed 50" of snow.

Snowfall really picked up in the 2000s. After we saw well over 60" of snow in both 2002-03 and 2004-05, the winter of 2007-08 saw between 72" of snow! Snowstorms on Feb 20th & March 5th each dropped around 10" and were accompanied by thunder & lightning. Right on its heels, 2008-09 was another harsh winter that was actually much colder than 2007-08, and nearly as snowy with 66". These were the snowiest back-to-back winters on record. Following a 1-year break of a "normal" winter, we were right back at it with almost 70" of snow falling during the cold winter of 2010-11. It always puzzles me when people talk about the 1970s when the 2000s/2010s were so much more recent!

Hard to believe it's now been 10 years, but the winter of 2013-14 stands as the most severe winter on record in our area. Not only did the 95" of snowfall break the previous 1880-81 record, but it was brutally cold, the drifts were insane, and the number of days with snow on the ground broke the previous 1977-78 record. The actual depth of snow on the ground, frequently in the 1-2 foot range, smashed all records for number of deep snow days. What a winter! The following winter, 2014-15, was another severe one. This time the snow was much less (48" total, though we did have a 17" storm to start February), but it was all about the bitter cold. February was the coldest month we had seen since 1875! Also, never before had back-to-back winters seen so many days with snow on the ground.

Since those brutal winters of 2013-14 & 2014-15, we have been in a stretch of mostly milder winters, though 2017-18 was a harsh one (cold and 61" of snow). Snowfall for the past 5 winters has been 31", 44", 45", 47", and 37", so nothing memorable either way. What will the winter of 2023-24 bring? Well as I type, we are in a stretch of unseasonably mild December weather. Oh, and it snowed on Halloween. So one thing you can be sure of, you will never know what a Wyandotte winter brings...until it's over. See the next page from some pictures of winters past, and stay warm my friends!





Feb 1, 1944—a light covering of snow is the first of a very mild winter



This photo, circa January 1948, shows ice skating at “Burrels Slip” in Wyandotte



Jan 16, 1932—winter was so mild to that point that this lady posed with grass clippings she just mowed



This Wyandotte youngster explores deep drifts after the blizzard of Feb 25, 1965



This Jan 27, 1978 pic shows rutted streets after the blizzard of '78



Wyandotte resembles a tundra Jan 6, 2014. The snow would grow much deeper in February!

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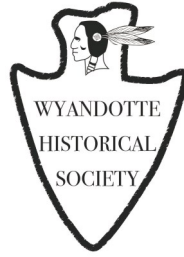
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