

The
PALIMPSEST
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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

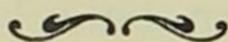
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Winter Peril

The weather is like news — only the unusual is noticed. Early settlers, being generally exposed to the extremes of heat and cold, fair weather and foul, remembered most vividly the bad storms and abnormal seasons. For instance, Ambrose C. Fulton never forgot a blizzard that caught him on the prairie in 1843. His adventure, as reported by David N. Richardson in the Davenport Democrat fifty years later, is here reprinted from Fulton's autobiography entitled A Life's Voyage, pp. 388-392.
— The Editor.

The weather in pioneer times was not all good. There were some phenomenal spurts of fine weather, as, for example, the winter of 1853-54, when farmers plowed all through December, and some of them through January, and when the grass was to be found green and fit for grazing all the season through, but there were some other winters that were rougher, the old settlers think, than any we of these days have to show.

The winter of 1842-43 was something awful.

On November 16th the river closed at Davenport, crushing two or three steamboats that had taken refuge at this point, and sinking one of them on the Rock Island shore. Two days later A. C. Fulton crossed on the ice, and the bridge that carried him over then held fast to its abutments till late in the spring, and between the closing and the breaking up of the river was included some of the most grievous winter weather that this part of the country ever saw.

One experience of that winter still makes Mr. Fulton shiver and want a heavier coat whenever he thinks of it. He can bring on a chill in mid-summer by reviving its memories.

On this memorable occasion he was driving across the unmarked prairies of interior Iowa in a cutter, drawn by a team of horses. He was out in the neighborhood of Independence, and had gone there to look up practicable water powers, with the idea of building a mill somewhere in that neighborhood, for the local manufacture of the wheat that was then so plentifully grown by the few farmers who had opened farms in that region. He was on his way home, on Sunday, February 26, 1843, following an unmarked course toward his next stopping point, for there were no roads out there then.

A snowstorm came on. The term blizzard had

not then been given to such phenomena, but this was a blizzard of undoubted authority and genuineness. The snow came whirling down as it can do in such a storm, hurried along by Arctic blasts that were enough to pierce the thickest overcoat and overcome the stoutest heart. In a little while the horizon line was lost. Earth could not be told from sky. Direction was undistinguishable. The instinct of the horses was as much baffled as the skill of their driver. They were lost on the prairie.

Mr. Fulton says he was clad then about as he is now for fine fall weather, which is to say that while he was clothed for comfort in Indian summer he was in fine trim for an early death by freezing in such a storm. He had a buffalo robe, and it was about all the protection he had that was worth naming. It was useless to stand still. There was no refuge within many miles, and it was hardly to be hoped that man or team could live to reach it; but the horses plodded on, while the storm held on and the snow whirled past them.

The day passed into the night, and still they made their way ahead, the direction of the wind being their only guide. They could be sure that it was from the northwest, and they held it to their backs and made tracks as fast as they could toward the comforts of civilization. Morning

came and still the storm held. All through Monday, the horses, unfed and unwatered and un-rested, held their way. The man in the sleigh was so stiffened in his buffalo robe wrappings that he could not have cared for them if he had found a place to alight. Monday night came on, and with it no sign of shelter. Monday night passed and Tuesday morning dawned, and still the cold was intense, and there was no trace of human habitation or possible place of refuge. Tuesday dragged its slow length along, but by this time, tiresome and torturing as they were, the hours did not move slower than the worn-out horses. They had almost reached the limit of their endurance and strength, but they moved forward at a pace compared with which the gait of the average funeral train would have seemed a welcome burst of speed. It could barely be called motion.

It was with feelings of the deepest despair that Mr. Fulton saw the light begin to fade on Tuesday afternoon. The situation was as hopeless then as it had been before, save for the fact that the homes of settlers were a good many miles nearer, but with his fagged team a mile might mean death. Rescue could not be much longer delayed if it was to be worth accepting. In a short time the end would surely come. Cold and

hunger were doing their work. The frozen fingers and the well-nigh frozen arms could no longer guide the tottering steps of the poor half-dead animals, and they moved, what little they did move, without a master's hand. And in this hopeless, pitiful condition the miserable party of two horses and their master were, as night again settled over the white prairies, so black with the abandonment of hope that it was no longer worth while to think of living.

If the reader can bring himself to imagine this case fully and completely, he may be able to understand what a tumult of emotions were aroused in Mr. Fulton's breast when he caught — for a faint, flickering instant — the dimmest kind of a gleam of light through the blackness which rimmed the horizon. It was just a glint that was speedily extinguished, and it was too faint and far away to found hope upon; but it shone again, and clearer. That light meant warmth and food and life, with all that life means; but it was so far away, so dim and distant, and the half-dead team was so near its last strained effort that it also meant the saddest of all deaths — death within sight of escape and safety.

The horses were turned toward that star of hope, and they dragged, dragged themselves forward, so slowly and painfully that they seemed to

stand still. The hours had been long with monotonous despair before, but now they were long with the agony of fear that the way of escape would be barred at the last steps of the retreat. But the horses were still alive, though barely so, and barely able to move, and they did make progress, though it was so slow and distressful. Little by little the light grew plainer. What if it should go out? It had been hours since dark fell, and the settlers were all men of steady habits, who went early to bed. What could keep this particular light burning, and how soon might it disappear and leave the wanderer in darkness to miss the window from which it shone?

But it burned on, and after a while it was near enough to show the window panes from which its faint rays were filtered through the rime of frost, and in time the perishing party drew up at the door of Farmer McLoughlin's humble settler's shanty. A shout called him out, and the storm was robbed of its prey.

Mr. Fulton was unable to walk. His feet and legs, and his hands and arms, and face and ears, were frozen. He was carried into the house. Both feet were planted in one bucket of ice-cold snow water, and both arms in another, while wet applications of pulped raw onions were laid upon his face and ears. The frost was drawn with

these homely remedies, and amputations and perhaps death was averted. The poor horses escaped death by freezing, but though all possible care was given them, out of gratitude for their heroic effort, they died in a little while, and as long as they lived had bare existence. They never had the spirit of horses after that three-days' pull, from Sunday morning till Tuesday night at midnight.

It was a rare chance that placed that candle beacon in Farmer McLoughlin's window. He had killed a beef animal that Tuesday, and that evening he was seized by an unusual fit of industry, and resolved, without any special reason for the resolve except a mere whim, to cut up the carcass and salt down the meat before he quit work that night. The rest of the family retired, but he worked on. The candle stood on the table in front of the window, and it reached out over the prairie far enough to catch the frosty eyes of the man in the cutter and guide him home.

During that cold snap, one of the severest of the winter, the mercury in this city, quite a distance southward of the place where this wandering occurred, registered between 25° and 28° below zero. It was a wonder that there were eyes left to see that candle's light.

DAVID N. RICHARDSON

When Blizzards Blow

The snow lies thick around us
In the dark and gloomy night,
The cold blizzard wails above us,
And the stars withhold their light.

The pioneers looked forward with genuine concern to the long winter months. Distances to mill, store, or postoffice were long and the means of transportation were cumbersome and slow. The bleak Iowa prairies afforded no protection from the raging blizzards that swept across the wilderness between the Mississippi and the Missouri, burying fences, cattle sheds, and log cabins, and obliterating the ordinary landmarks that served as guides for the early settlers. Tales of untold suffering have been handed down by those luckless Iowans unfortunate enough to be caught in a blizzard on the thinly populated prairies. The hardships endured by many of these frontiersmen left an indelible impression on their minds which the passing of years did not erase from their memories.

Each generation is inclined to regard the cold weather of its youth as the worst ever experienced. "Never, during our residence in the mines", de-

clared the Dubuque *Miner's Express* of November 17, 1842, "have we witnessed so terrible a snow storm as that with which our city was visited on yesterday. . . . We heard old bachelors complaining bitterly of cold lodgings. Poor fellows — we did not feel surprised at hearing them complain — for it was bitter cold."

The month of November, 1842, actually ushered in what Theodore S. Parvin described as the "long winter" in Iowa history. During this period residents of Muscatine enjoyed "continued and uninterrupted" sleighing for 126 days beginning with November 26th. The Mississippi River was closed for 134 days at Muscatine and 147 days at Le Claire. Forty years later, in 1882, Parvin wrote: "We have had other winters with a lower mean temperature and with lower temperature, (as low as 30° below zero), lower daily temperature and more days of extremely low temperature, but none of such long continuance as that famous winter of cold, prolonged cold, of ice and snow, through a longer period than ever before or since."

It was on December 17th of this "long winter" that five Delaware County pioneers set out from Bailey's Ford to drive hogs through the deep snow to Fort Atkinson. On their return they were caught in a blizzard on the Little Turkey River on January 1, 1843. Unable to light a fire,

ravenously hungry, exhausted from struggling through the deep snow all day, sleep was sorely tempting, but sleep meant death. They wrapped their blankets around them and stood huddled together, stamping to keep up the circulation in their feet and talking steadily to prevent any one from falling to sleep undiscovered in the darkness. The following night they reached Beatty's cabin after struggling through the snow all day. They were almost past caring whether they lived or died. One man was laid up several weeks; another could not walk for three months; a third lost eight toes and was a cripple for life.

The sufferings of Inkpaduta and his Sioux Indians during the bitter winter of 1856-57 have been described as an important factor in precipitating the Spirit Lake Massacre. The white settlers likewise endured great privations that winter. As late as 1893 William Larrabee asserted the "unusually severe" winter of 1856-57 was never equalled in the memory of most Iowans. "Snow fell to an enormous depth, and the mercury not infrequently ranged from 20° to 40° below zero for several days in succession." Larrabee recalled "a series of great storms — now called blizzards" which swept the prairies, "whirling the dust of the powdery snow in a wild dance and piling up large banks wherever natural or artificial

obstacles interrupted their turbulent course. During that long severe winter nearly all the deer in northern Iowa were destroyed, some freezing, others starving to death, still others getting fast in the deep, crust-covered snow, and being killed by the merciless settlers while in this helpless condition. Few of the frontier people were prepared for such a winter, and certainly none had anticipated it. Thousands suffered for want of sufficient clothing and fuel, and many a man, overtaken by a blinding storm, or tired out wading through the deep snow, froze to death on the prairie, perhaps only a stone's throw from home." Larrabee himself almost met a similar fate.

It was during this same bitter winter, on December 28, 1856, that Reuben and David Williams were caught in a severe snow storm while watering cattle in Willow Creek, which flowed through the bleak prairie lands of Cerro Gordo County. Through a bitter cold night eighteen-year-old Reuben fought stubbornly to keep his younger brother moving and awake. At sunrise Reuben found they had wandered to within hailing distance of one of the cabins in Masonic Grove (now Mason City). "I was brought back to a drowsy consciousness," David Williams recalled, "by being pulled out of the snow by Reuben. The air was so cold it seemed fairly

blue, and its cutting bitterness struck into my flesh like steel . . . I tried to walk, but my feet were dead. As if wooden, my benumbed body refused to respond to a still more feeble will. Reuben's efforts to get me towards the house were fruitless. The last I recall was hearing him shout to some one. When I came to I was in bed."

A Black Hawk County pioneer recalled that there was snow on the ground when the family moved into their new farmhouse on November 27, 1856. The first snow had fallen before the corn was gathered, and it had to be left in the field all winter. December 1st dawned bright and clear but by night a fierce blizzard was blowing which lasted three days. One Sunday a short time later a small group gathered for religious services at the schoolhouse. It was found that there was not enough wood so services were adjourned to the Nelson Fancher house, about a quarter of a mile away. "In a little while a heavy snow began to fall and the wind blew a gale", according to Mrs. Fancher. "A few near neighbors went home, but the rest waited for the storm to abate. The minister, John Kirkpatrick, ate some lunch and started home. Instead of taking the road, he went through the river timber until he reached a spot in the woods which he knew was directly opposite his farmhouse, a short dis-

tance away. With the aid of a pocket compass he reached his home, but was badly frozen.

"About 3 o'clock in the afternoon the storm reached its climax. The air looked blue and there was a humming sound. Two peddlers drove up, and we took them in, as it was sure death to go on.

"We had thirty-two guests that night. I found beds for all the women, but the men had to bring in their buffalo robes and sleep on the floor in front of the fireplace. Ropes were stretched to the barn so the men could find their way back after feeding the stock. After the storm passed it was intensely cold. I remember we had to cut the ham for breakfast with an ax."

The pioneers were quick to challenge anyone who claimed that a certain winter was the coldest, the longest, or the snowiest. When William Larabee's description of the winter of 1856-57 was printed in the *Des Moines Register* in 1909, Sumner Smith of Melrose admitted it was a "bad one" but contended that the "worst and coldest storm" took place on December 31, 1863, and January 1, 1864, the latter date being the "coldest day" he had ever known since his arrival in Iowa on April 25, 1838. The second worst storm, Smith thought, occurred on January 13, 1855. Many old-time Winfield residents, Smith believed,

would remember "how we used to drive heavy loads over the fences, after that storm."

Although his records were incomplete, Charles D. Reed, former chief of the United States Weather Bureau at Des Moines, thought that December 31, 1863 and January 1, 1864, might possibly mark the date of the "great blizzard" in eastern Iowa, while January 12, 1888, was probably the date of the worst blizzard in western Iowa. Newspaper reports clearly indicate that the great blizzard of 1864 took a firm grip on the entire eastern half of Iowa. A Des Moines dispatch dated January 1st read: "Whew! old Boreas is rampant today, and is blowing in the new year in a rage, and with a frosty touch that bids beware to noses and toeses." The editor thought he would rather risk his life "in front of rebels, with a chance of one to four" than to brave the terrors of driving a stagecoach over the snow-blanketed, windswept prairies of Iowa.

The *Muscatine Courier* asserted that many would long remember the "big storm" of January 1, 1864, which the "oldest inhabitant" believed was the most severe one ever to visit Muscatine County. The first of January was such a "snapping cold day" that New Year's calls were at a low ebb. The roads into the country were blocked and few people came into town, except by foot.

Railroad tracks were blockaded, trains late, and no mail was received or forwarded. "We hear of a large number of persons who had limbs frozen," the *Courier* reported, "and almost everybody on the prairies had some of their stock frozen to death. Buyers of hogs found their droves freezing on their hands, and it did not help the matter any to load the cars with them, for cars were 'no go'." In one instance, out of a flock of 400 sheep, 300 perished in the storm.

At Iowa City, Theodore S. Parvin recorded that the "most violent snowstorm known in this region" commenced on January 1st. The temperature stood at -26° at 7 A. M. and it did not rise above zero until January 7th. The *Iowa City Republican* of January 6, 1864, declared the weather was not ordinarily a proper subject of editorial discussion, but apparently the first of January, 1864, was an exception. Old Boreas stood in the streets of Iowa City shaking whirlwinds of snow from his garments as if intent on destroying the town. "It was deposited on your hat and under your hat; in the front of your neck and the back of your neck; in your pockets and in your boots. It blew down your chimney and up your cellar way; through your cornice and beneath your shingles. It covered your pig-sty, buried your wood-pile, obstructed your gate-way

and barricaded your side-walk. And the little boys, on their little sleds, say they never saw 'such a crackin' big snow'. . . . Railroad men are digging away to get the mails through, and we are scribbling away to fill our columns up. Charge this gust of words to the gust of snow."

There were many cold winters and many heavy snowfalls between 1864 and 1888 — the year the "great blizzard" struck western Iowa. Late in January, 1867, the *Oskaloosa Herald* recorded a snowfall of from twelve to fourteen inches. A pioneer of Montgomery County thought the winter of 1866-67 was the coldest he had ever experienced. A Decatur County pioneer declared that the snowdrifts were up to the eaves of log cabins that year. "After the snowfall the weather turned colder and the snow froze hard. We could drive in any direction across the prairie over high fences. We had just put out a washing before the snow and it was six weeks before we were enabled to find it all. Heavy snows were common, but this one was the heaviest I ever saw."

So wary had many Iowans become of the sudden frigid blasts that swept the State that newspapers frequently carried forecasts by local weather prophets or printed accounts that might enable farmers to foretell the approach of a hard winter. On November 8, 1867, the *Oskaloosa*

Herald chronicled the following sure signs of a hard winter. "Hives are said to be overflowing with honey; the husks of corn are declared to be of extra thickness, and the furs of animals are pronounced exceedingly rich and heavy. It is observed, too, that the rats are traveling eastwardly in great numbers, and the squirrels are making arrangements on an increased scale for the storage of nuts."

Out of the harrowing experiences of the Iowa pioneers was coined the word blizzard, a word now best defined to mean a sudden and violent storm of fine driving snow accompanied by intense cold. The word blizzard itself was not new, for it had been used as early as 1829 to denote a "sharp blow, or a shot, or volley of shots". Its use to describe fierce winter snowstorms seems to have originated in Iowa, though blizzards are more common farther northwest. Apparently the term was first used in this sense by the editor of the *Estherville Northern Vindicator* when he noted on April 23, 1870, that a pioneer had had "too much experience with northwestern 'blizzards' [sic] to be caught in such a trap." The following week the editor used the accepted spelling when he recorded that the "unfortunate victim of the March 'blizzard' . . . is rapidly improving."

The word "blizzard" quickly became popular

among Iowa editors. On January 11, 1873, the *Sioux City Weekly Times* referred to a "blizzard" or "customary annual winter storm" that had broken out in Woodbury County on Tuesday morning. "During the day the wind blew a gale," the editor declared. "The snow was almost blinding, and the thermometer indicated stiff freezing air." On March 9, 1874, the *Dubuque Telegraph* noted that a local gentleman had been hooted for predicting a blizzard. On December 3, 1876, the editor of the *Wright County Monitor* at Clarion wrote: "A genuine blizzard set on its hind legs and howled for twelve or fourteen hours while the mercury lurked at from ten to fourteen degrees below zero."

Both the weather bureau and the pioneers recognize the big blizzard of 1888 as one of the worst. Although it caught many Iowans unprepared, readers of the daily newspapers had ample warning of its approach. Early in January the temperature fell to 50° below zero in northern Minnesota. A dispatch from Bismarck on January 13th was hopeful that the fury of the "terrible blizzard" had been spent, but expected that the railroad tracks would not be cleared for several days.

In the path of this "deadly blizzard" stood Rock Rapids in the northwesternmost county in

Iowa. The *Lyon County Reporter* of January 6, 1888, had quoted a Rock Island weather prophet as forecasting that January would "average equal to or above the mean of the season." A week later the *Reporter* gave the following account of the "worst blizzard" in several years: "The storm began here about five o'clock in the afternoon and raged with unabated violence until morning. The temperature was fully thirty degrees below zero and the wind blowing a perfect hurricane made it impossible for those who were out to distinguish objects at a distance of fifty feet. The snow was very fine and dry and blew into every crevice while the piercing cold seemed to penetrate the most solid buildings."

A Greenfield editor recorded that the "snow, fine as powder, was hurled along by the gale. On the prairie an object forty feet distant could not be seen. A man's voice could not be heard six feet distant." The snow darkened the sky, creating the "most dismal, drear, and forsaken" scene that man had ever looked upon. At Eagle Grove the *Boone Valley Gazette* of January 19th declared the blizzard "surpassed in violence anything we have ever seen in this climate. Friday morning the storm still raged with the mercury 22° below zero."

The great blizzard of 1888 was notable for the

loss of human life, especially among children who were caught returning from school in the afternoon. A few miles north of Rock Rapids, for example, the two Cushman boys were on their way home when one "separated from the other and was obliged to pass the night in a cornfield." Though he was found in the morning he was badly frozen and it was feared that he could not survive. Thirty-four years later, the *Rock Rapids Review*, commenting on the "big blizzard", remarked that the person who had most reason to remember the storm was Tommie Cushman, rural mail carrier, who lost his hands as a result of being frozen. The *Review* also noted that it was necessary to amputate both the hands and feet of John Langfeldt, an operation which attracted widespread attention in the medical world.

There were stories of heroism and devotion. Near Archer a brother and two sisters were caught in the blizzard of 1888. When the girls were unable to go farther the brother took off his coat and told them to stay there while he went on for help. The brother himself became lost and was badly frozen. The bodies of the two girls were found just where the brother had left them. Conductor Charles Gustafson was "terribly frozen" while he went back up the track with his lantern to stand guard and flag a train which

would have run into his own that had been blocked by a snowdrift. Mrs. Temple at Paulina sent her little boy across the street on an errand, not realizing what a violent storm was raging. Thoroughly frightened by the power of the wind and the cutting snow, the boy cried for help, and fortunately his mother heard. But when she dashed out unprotected the wind carried her in the wrong direction and before she could rescue the boy her face and arms were severely frozen.

Pat Quigley, who married an Irish lass on January 12, 1888, was returning to his homestead with his bride after dinner, when he was caught in the blizzard. "Pat had an excellent team, a double wagon box, a lot of wedding presents, among them a cake and a jug of wine, a lot of bed clothing and robes. With terrific suddenness the storm began. He faced the storm and drove steadily onward until the horses refused to go farther. So Pat unhitched them and turned the double box over himself and bride. . . . The couple ate the cake and drank the wine — spent that night, all the next day and the next night under that wagon box and when Pat tried to turn the box over — and he was a brawny Irish lad, he couldn't budge the thing. It was snowed under and he had to call upon his newly wedded wife to help him." After much effort they managed to

crawl out. The storm was over. And Pat found he was just twenty feet from his stable!

In the half century between the creation of the Territory of Iowa and the frigid winter of 1888, almost two million people had settled in Iowa and railroads crossed the State in all directions. Groves of trees had been planted on many farms and neighbors were of necessity much nearer than in former years. Nevertheless, death still stalked the Iowa prairies whenever a mid-winter blizzard howled through town and countryside.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Variable Winters

When the mild winter of 1943-44 came to a close, many old timers were ready to assert that the cold, snowy weather of pioneer days was a thing of the past. Off-hand observations tend to emphasize the changes in climatological conditions. A study of available weather bureau statistics, however, coupled with a generous use of old newspaper files, reveals no pronounced trend in the weather during any season of the year in Iowa.

There are plenty of reasons why the winters of yesteryears should seem colder. In the first place both the log cabin and the early frame houses lacked the heating equipment and the insulation in use today. Secondly, modern Iowans can travel from Davenport to Council Bluffs faster and more comfortably by automobile than the pioneer could cross the average county in his bobsled. Roads were not well graded in pioneer days, there were no slat fences to serve as snow breaks, nor were State highway crews maintained to remove the snow from the main-traveled roads. Today, the radio gives almost hourly warning of an approaching snowstorm so that there is rela-

tively little danger of Iowans being caught unprepared. Finally, the commonplace is soon forgotten whereas unusual weather, such as a raging blizzard or a balmy Christmas, makes an indelible impression.

While not overlooking the "long winter" of 1842-43, the severe winter of 1856-57, or the great blizzards of 1864 and 1888, it might also be well to remember that exactly the opposite type of weather was experienced in many winter months. As early as 1836 Albert Miller Lea observed that "we often have fine pleasant weather in mid-winter" and declared that even as far north as Prairie du Chien there was "never so much snow" as to interrupt traveling. James Newhall considered wintertime in Iowa "decidedly more cheerful than dreary." The season of "sleighing and hunting is upon us", he wrote, "with all their accompanying allurements. Our young Nimrods are buckling on their armor for the sports of the forest; parties form hunting campaigns for the elk and deer; young lovers rig out a 'jumper,' and with their smiling lassies, hie away to the minister or magistrate to tie the 'true-lover's knot;' and 'quiltings,' mirth, and weddings make the prairie fireside resound with their joyous notes of rural pastime."

Iowa newspapers frequently confirm the high

estimates of Lea and Newhall on Iowa's mild winters. The winter of 1838 was so pleasant that the editor of the *Iowa News* saw a Dubuque farmer plowing his field on New Year's Day. Six years later, on December 27, 1844, the *Bloomington Herald* expressed delight over the "mildness of our Iowa climate" when Christmas dawned "as balmy and delightful as one could expect to witness in the month of May". The day was unmarked by the appearance of "sleighs, buffalo robes, and the merry jingle of sleigh-bells, with which our eyes and ears have been so often greeted in colder climate and which to the eye of a genuine son of New England, are so indispensably necessary to a proper observance of the day."

Apparently such winters were common during the next few years, for it was not until 1848 that a Davenport editor reported a real December snowfall. The sleighing was never better, he declared, than that enjoyed during the Christmas-New Year season of 1848-49 and did much "to make amends for the deficiency" of the previous four or five years.

The value of a warm winter was not overlooked by Iowa editors. "The fine weather we are having these days is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to Iowa", declared the *Keokuk Daily Gate*

City of December 5, 1855. "The farmers are enabled to finish up their fall work," while thousands of immigrants would have time to finish their new houses. Many emigrants, both native American and foreign, came to Iowa during the late fifties, lured in part by Nathan H. Parker's praise of Iowa's climate in his *Handbook for 1856*. After observing that the Hawkeye State occupied three degrees of latitude, Parker called attention to "some variations" in the winter climate. "In the northern part the winters are cold and dry, but short. Spring comes on early, so that the farmer commences his work in the month of March, seldom as late as April. In the southern portion of the State the winters are more mild, and spring somewhat earlier. The climate is free from the sudden changes of New England, and from the long drizzling rains and foggy weather of portions of the Middle States, and those States within the influence of the Great Lakes."

Similar mild winter seasons were enjoyed during the 1860's. The editor of the *Weekly Gate City* recorded that Christmas at Keokuk in 1867 dawned cloudy with a weak attempt at rain. As the hours passed the clouds disappeared and the "warm sunlight and genial breeze made it very pleasant out-doors, if one could move along unmindful of the mud under foot."

The many mild winters of pioneer days led the *Winterset Madisonian* of December 26, 1872, to query: "Has Our Climate Changed?" The editorial continued at some length on the mild winter and fortified its conclusions by quoting the *Good Health Magazine*. "We do not have those continual piercing and sharp winds that made our winters so very severe a few years ago. Our climate is getting more and more friendly." The editor of the *Sioux City Weekly Times* also lamented the absence of snow in 1872. "It promises to be dull here, in the way of amusements, during the holidays", he wailed. "The absence of snow, no doubt, is the cause of it. Christmas is no more like Christmas without sleighing than Fourth of July is like New Year's." But Sioux Citians had their fun at Christmas time nevertheless, for the editor observed that "racing oxen in the streets is all the rage now."

If Fort Dodge shivered in the big blizzard of January 12, 1888, the town fairly basked in the delightful weather three years later. "The balmy breezes of Monday", declared the *Fort Dodge Messenger* of January 22, 1891, "brought out a few tennis players with net and rackets and a regulation set was played on one of the local courts in the afternoon. All of which be it remembered occurred right here in Fort Dodge in

the state of Iowa, upon the 19th day of January, A.D., 1891."

Such variable winters have been recognized in Iowa since pioneer times. "The past week has been marked by very undecided weather", declared the *Davenport Gazette* of December 23, 1841. "It was cold, warm and pleasant; snowed, hailed and rained; froze, thawed and froze again; calm, blustering and mild; in brief, as a Yankee would say, we have had 'considerable weather', — enough, however, to suit the most fastidious taste, if properly proportioned." Three years later, on January 18, 1844, the *Davenport Gazette* observed: "Our weather is as fickle as fortune. Alternately it smiles and frowns upon us till fatigued we, for once, sigh for sameness. If we were not right sure the clerk of the weather, like our Legislature imitating Congress, would disregard a petition, we would get numerous signers for cold weather."

The winter of 1909 illustrates how variable Dame Nature could be in Iowa. It was marked by the heaviest snowfall ever recorded in the State. And yet, a Sidney editor saw the "unusual spectacle" of Fremont County farmers plowing in January. The Marshalltown *Times-Republican* felt that if the present weather man continued in office Iowa would be "alternating her apple and

peach trees with orange trees and planting pine-apples along with potatoes." Writing in the *Des Moines Register* Isaac Brandt declared that the first month in 1909 was the "most pleasant January" he has seen in fifty-three years of Iowa residence. "When we have weather like this it is certainly nonsense for anyone to leave for the rainy days that they will meet in California. While I like the splendid weather we are now enjoying, I hate to think of the disappointment that we will meet when old Jack Frost makes up his mind to pay us another visit."

Scarcely had Brandt penned these words when Jack Frost put in his appearance, bringing one of the worst blizzards ever experienced in Iowa. "The high winds caused the snow to drift badly, blew down hundreds of windmills and thousands of telegraph and telephone poles. All street car and railroad train service was practically abandoned, and many head of livestock would not face the wind and flying snow to seek shelter. The maximum velocity of the wind during the storm ranged from 31 miles an hour at Dubuque to 72 miles an hour at Sioux City, and was probably higher on the prairies."

The blizzard of January 28-30, 1909, was followed by two others in February. To cap it all the March snowfall exceeded all previous records

at some weather stations. The greatest amount of snowfall at any Iowa station occurred in the calendar year of 1909 at Northwood — 113.4 inches; the greatest 24-hour snowfall was 20.0 inches at Humboldt; the greatest monthly snowfall was 32.0 inches at Perry; and the State average was 49.0 inches. After comparing these figures with the State average of 29.9 inches between 1892 and 1943 and the record low of 13.5 inches that fell in 1922, one can readily grasp the difference between light, average, and blizzardy winters. The following are the heaviest annual Iowa snowfalls since systematic records were inaugurated in 1892.

1909 . . . 49.0 inches	1897 . . . 38.8 inches
1936 . . . 48.9 inches	1901 . . . 38.5 inches
1940 . . . 46.4 inches	1932 . . . 38.5 inches
1929 . . . 41.8 inches	1905 . . . 38.3 inches
1898 . . . 40.3 inches	1912 . . . 38.0 inches

Since 1892 eight out of the ten heaviest snowfalls have occurred in the twentieth century. Moreover, the second, third, and fourth heaviest snowfalls have occurred since 1928. The winter months of 1944-45 bid fare to challenge some of the snowiest months. A heavy snowfall occurred at Iowa City where 14 inches fell in the space of 24 hours on December 10th. Subsequent snows built the total for the month to over 20 inches in

several southeastern Iowa areas, while the December average for the State was 10.2 inches, the ninth snowiest month since 1892. Snow and temperature joined to keep the ground snow covered at Des Moines for the "unusually long" period of 74 days, from November 28th to February 9th inclusive. Scarcely had this snow melted when a heavy snowstorm blanketed northern and western Iowa once more, Red Oak reporting over 26 inches.

Between 1892 and 1944 the heaviest average snowfall has occurred between December and March. Although 4.9 inches fell in October of 1925 the average is only 0.5 inches for that month. The average for November is 2.6 inches and the greatest fall for that month 8.7 inches in 1898. April has averaged only 1.6 inches, but in 1893 as much as 6.0 inches were recorded. The following table shows two things: first, the average snowfall for each winter month between 1892 and 1944; and second, the heaviest State average snowfall recorded in each of these months, with the year in which it fell.

MONTH	AVERAGE SNOWFALL	HEAVIEST SNOWFALL	YEAR
December	5.9	15.9	1897
January	7.0	19.4	1936
February	6.7	15.9	1936
March	5.6	19.1	1912

Temperature statistics began at Council Bluffs on October 22, 1819, and have been kept at various places in or near Iowa ever since. The coldest temperature ever recorded in Iowa was -47° at Washta in 1912. The coldest month in the past 125 years was January, 1912, with a State average of 4.2° , comparable with the next coldest average of 4.9° in 1875. The coldest two months were January and February, 1875, with a State average of 5.6° . The coldest three months were December, 1874 to February, 1875, with a State average of 11.8° . Starting with a cold wave on January 18, 1936, and continuing almost unabated to February 22nd, Iowa experienced its most prolonged period of very low temperature in the 125 winters of recorded weather history.

Apparently the winter climate of Iowa is not changing significantly. Variations of temperature and precipitation are still as extreme as they used to be, the memories of old settlers to the contrary notwithstanding.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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