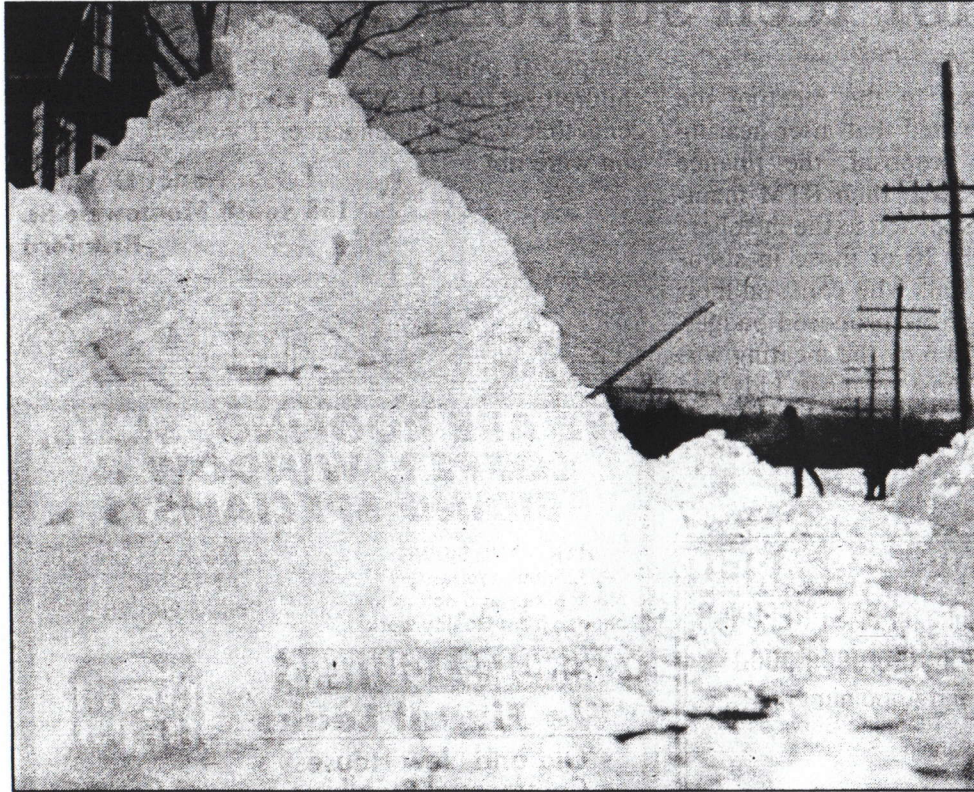


*Pictures of the past*

# No storm can compare to the Blizzard of 1888



Courtesy of the Branford Historical Society

*Branford Hills was nothing but a mound of snow after the blizzard of 1888.*

The most famous storm of the 19th century was the Blizzard of 1888. The snow began Sunday, March 11, and because it was warm, most thought it would turn to rain. However, during the night the temperatures plunged and it snowed for two days with total accumulation in New Haven of 36 inches with drifts up to 20 feet. Transportation and communication ceased for days and many people were stranded at work or in trains. There were fears of fire and shortages of food and fuel. Dozens of photographs were taken in New Haven to record this historic event.

Less is known about the effects of the storm in Branford. There was no local newspaper at that time and few photographs exist. Edison Monroe of Branford Point, a young man of 17, made the following entries in his diary. Monday, March 12: "The most severe snow blizzard that New England has ever witnessed visited our section today. Streets are entirely blocked with drifts over 6 feet high with terrible piercing winds." Tuesday, March 13: "Colder, 4 degrees, heavy winds and continues to snow. The post office was closed today, the first time in many years. Not a wagon of any kind out, no work in the shops." Wednesday, March 14: "Cloudy and warm, men and oxen are out digging out the streets. The train is still blockaded at

Branford Hills, no mail, no work in the shops, drifts are 20 feet deep in some places. Snow is said to have fell 3 feet."

Fifty passengers were stranded in a train by Lake Saltonstall without light, heat or food for three nights. Workers were also stranded at the Malleable Irons Fittings Company factory and at the Branford Lock Works. Some made it home walking through the blizzard. One of the major problems in Branford was clearing a path from the house to the barn to tend to the livestock. William and Edward Knowles reported they could not get out of Short Beach for two weeks. George H. Pond of Branford remembered that no trains ran for one week and that the streets were not cleared for two weeks. He noted that there was still some snow on the ground until the last of May.

There were no deaths in Branford during the height of the storm. However, Charles Osterle died a few months later from the effects of exposure. During the storm, Isaac Hobart Palmer of 750 Main St. fetched the doctor for a neighborhood woman was having a baby. He fell ill and died in July at the age of 35. There have been subsequent blizzards of note in 1915, 1934, 1978 and 1996 but none that compare to the Blizzard of 1888.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the historian for the town of Branford.*