

# Blue Earth County Historian

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Blue Earth County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter  
Winter 1998

Minnesota winters are notoriously fickle. Some years, such as our current one, see only a minimal amount of snowfall in our backyards, leaving skiers and other winter enthusiasts sorely disappointed. On the other hand, most people seem to enjoy being able to move about freely (for the most part) without the snow's lurking danger. Other years drop inches upon inches of snow onto our streets and country fields, often making it difficult to travel. Then there are the years where the snow seems to fall continuously, when we measure snowfall not by the inch, but by the foot.

Mankato has been witness to mega-snowstorms in years past. Some of the most famous blizzards occurred in 1909 and 1951. The storms of 1909, as you will read ahead, put telegraph wires out of commission, caused electric wires to snap, closed schools and wreaked havoc on the railroad system coming into town. In 1951, massive snowstorms late in the winter were responsible for some of the worst flooding Mankato has seen.

If this current winter has you longing for more snow, then reading these articles reprinted from the *Mankato Free Press* will serve as a reminder of what bad storms are like. If you are enjoying this year's reprieve from damaging storms, then reading these articles will make you even more thankful for the calm.

## **Mankato Hard Hit by Raging Blizzard; City Cut Off From Outside World; Trains Held Up**

*From Mankato Free Press, Jan. 29, 1909; page 1*

The hardest blizzard in fifteen years struck this section last night and raged all day today. The city was completely isolated from the outside world, both as regards transportation and telegraph and telephone service. Not a train was moving today, except a couple of passenger trains that started from this city, but it is not thought that they got very far. Wires and poles were snapped off by the weight of the ice that had formed on them and the wind that blew a terrible gale.

Rain fell practically all day yesterday, and in the evening turned to snow. The rain and sleet, driven before the wind, froze to poles and wires and to everything else, and the wet snow formed a thick coating outside of that. Sometime after midnight the wind began to blow from the north, and increased steadily in velocity until by daylight it was blowing a gale and the air was filled with blinding snow. Ice particles beat pitilessly in the faces and eyes of all who were obliged to go out and snow drifts encumbered their feet. The temperature also fell rapidly, and was only a few degrees above zero by morning.

## Change Was Most Severe

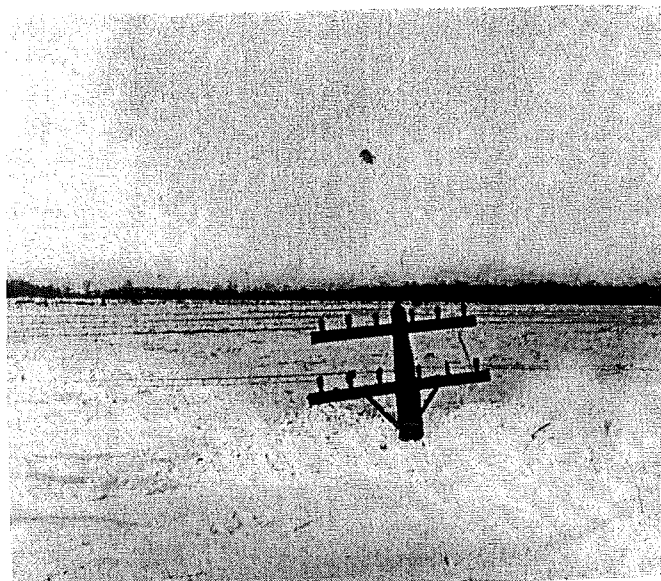
The change from yesterday was most severe, yet similar changes have often occurred in the past. The snowfall was not excessive, but the ice that formed preceding it was the cause of all the demoralization.

All railroad traffic today was abandoned, for all practical purposes. All efforts were directed to getting passenger trains through, but the roads met with small success in this. The Milwaukee train left Mankato on time this morning, and expected to get through to Wells. The Great Western train left forty-five minutes late, but how far it went is not known. The last passenger train to arrive in Mankato on the Omaha road was the 12:45 a.m. train for the south, known as No. 9, and the last one on the Chicago & Northwestern road was No. 501, west bound, that passed through at 11:15 p.m.

## Telegraph Wires Out of Commission

All telegraph wires of whatever description went out of commission during the night, so that train dispatchers had no means of sending orders today. It was thought that this would not interfere with sending passenger trains out, but only those going in one direction would be sent. It is hardly thought that any trains will arrive in Mankato today, or until the storm subsides.

The local telephone companies were hit as hard as the telegraph companies. The Citizens Company was the hardest hit, for its numerous wires on many cross arms caused a strain on its poles that could not be withstood when the heavy coating of ice was backed in its destructive ability by the high wind. Scores of this company's



Only the top of a pole sticks out from the piles of snow near Mankato in 1908.

poles broke off in North Mankato, obstructing streets and alleys, West Mankato and other outskirts. Wires snapped all over the city, but the pole went over only in the more exposed places. In the alley between State and Front streets a line of poles went down, and on West Fourth Street every pole went over.

## Dangerous to Pedestrians

On Front Street crossing the slough, on Mound Avenue and other streets, the fallen poles blocked traffic. It was dangerous for anyone to try to drive or walk through the mass of tangled wires, for the electric light wires crossed them in places and the electricity could be seen snapping and shooting off the ends of the broken wires. A person ran danger of electrocution to touch the wires.

The Northwestern Telephone System suffered in the city, poles being down and wires broken. Outside of the city every line was out of order except one wire to St. Peter. No other town was in communication with Mankato. The Citizens Company was cut off from all outside connections.

The fire alarm system suffered with the rest, and also the electric lighting system. The electric fire alarm system was put out of commission, and Chief Kleinschmidt requests that people telephoning fire alarms be sure and give the location, street number, etc., distinctly.

The wind was so strong that it blew down one of the railway gates at the Main Street crossing. Dead branches of trees were blown off all over the city.

### **Schools Were Dismissed**

Owing to the cold wave and the decreased attendance on account of the storm, the school board gave instructions that the public schools be dismissed for the day, and this was done at nine o'clock in both the high school and the grades. The schools will not assemble again until Monday morning. The normal school closed at noon for the day, and there was no session of the kindergarten department this morning.

The street railway company made a gallant effort to operate its cars, and did so, but they were unable to follow any schedule. The wheels slipped on the rails in spite of all efforts to sweep the tracks, for the snow immediately drifted upon the tracks again. Two cars were attached to each other, to get more power, and in this way a fair service was maintained.

### **Train Crew Caught Here**

Omaha freight train No. 23 from St. Paul arrived at 2 a.m., and No. 19, also from St. Paul, arrived at 3 a.m., and both tied up in this city. The Kasota switch crew also got caught here and was unable to return home. Nothing was heard of passenger trains 2, 8 and 10, from the north, or 5 from the Twin Cities. There

was no way with communicating at division headquarters at St. James.

The local telephone companies put every available man at work this morning making repairs, and the same was true for the electric light company, and the telegraph companies. Every effort is being made to open the lines, and the railroads are also making every effort to get trains through, and the blockade is not likely to be of long standing. Old settlers recall how a storm shut the city off for nearly a week, in the winter of 1880-81.

### **No Street Lights Tonight**

In view of the danger of accidents with so many telephone wires broken and crossing the electric light wires, Mayor Andrews has directed the Mankato Gas and Electric Light Company not to turn on the street lights tonight. He has also notified the telephone companies to push their work of repair so that the lights can be turned on tomorrow night as usual.

Owing to poles being across the rack in West Mankato, the streetcars could not be operated beyond the slough on Front Street today.

The rural route mail carriers did not go out this morning, owing to the fearful storm. They will get out tomorrow if the storm abates.

Omaha passenger train No. 5, due from the north at 10:30 a.m., arrived at noon, and No. 3, due at 12:30 p.m. from the north, arrived at 2:50 p.m. No. 5 took another engine and went south, and No. 3 followed it. Nothing has been heard from the trains from the south and the wires were still all down late this afternoon.



Two men look at Minnoepa Falls frozen in time in February 1951.

Photo 1  
*"Snow and  
 In Blue Earth  
 Winter and Early*



Heavy ice weighs down these elect around Thanksgiving 1951.



This car peeks from behind massive snow piles on March 22, 1951.



Flood waters engulf part of the on April 8, 1951.

ssay  
ts Effects  
n County”  
Spring, 1951



ic lines and poles near Mapleton



Snowdrifts surround this car as it travels on the road to Gordon Door's, March 22, 1951.



James Gemlo home in LeHillier



Is it a lake or a street? Gas pumps aren't usually found in lakes, so this must be down on West Front Street (Minneopa Road) near Briggs' on April 9, 1951.

## Snow Drifts and Icy Tracks

### Not Train In or Out On Northwestern; Omaha Calls Off Nos 1 and 11; Wires Are Down

*Mankato Free Press, January 30, 1909; page 1*

The demoralized condition of traffic and communication left in the Mankato vicinity by the storm has not cleared much since yesterday afternoon. The storm itself has abated, but has been followed by much colder weather. The mercury fell to eighteen degrees below zero by this morning, but with quite a strong wind blowing, but not near as heavy a one as yesterday, and the snow has ceased to fly. As the wires are still down, no weather report has been received for a couple of days.

The railroads are having a hard time resuming traffic in the face of hard drifts, icy tracks and bitter cold. Numerous men are employed at the work, but not much has yet been accomplished; however, it is thought that regular schedules can be resumed Monday, at least for passenger trains and through freights.

### Bad on Northwestern

Up to noon today there had been no trains in or out, east or west, on the Chicago & Northwestern road, and as the wires were still all down there was no predicting when any trains would reach Mankato.

The Omaha road is still tied up south and west of Mankato, but trains are running between this city and the Twin Cities. Passenger trains No. 1 and 11, south bound, were annulled last night, and No. 9 started out from the cities on the time of No. 1, which is due to arrive in Mankato at 12:40 a.m., but it did not

reach here until 4 a.m. This forenoon, about 10:30 o'clock, a freight train with half a dozen cars, and an engine at each end, started north with the intention of reaching the Twin Cities, or going as far as possible. The caboose was full with passengers. This was the first train to leave for the north on this road since Thursday afternoon. One wire was gotten in working order to St. Paul this morning.

The Milwaukee train from the north that was due to arrive in Mankato at 3:30 yesterday afternoon did not get in until 11 p.m. A passenger train started north on this road at 10:55 a.m. today, and was the first passenger train north out of Mankato since the storm began.

The train from the south due at 10:00 a.m. yesterday did not arrive until 7:30 p.m. and then came only from Wells. This returned to Wells this morning. The main line east of Wells seems to be clear, but west of Wells it is said to be tied up.



Streetcars on Front Street seem paralyzed by the drifting snow.



## Conditions on Great Western

The Great Western road got its train through to the cities yesterday, and one came in about three o'clock yesterday afternoon, but the evening train did not come. The morning train out today left at 7:45 a.m. with two engines.

Streetcar service today was much improved. A force of men was employed this morning in shoveling out the track, and cars were running everywhere except in West Mankato where the current was cut off because a number of broken telephone wires crossed the trolley wire and made it dangerous to life.

## People Use the Hacks

Eugene Coy carried 200 passengers in his busses yesterday, and did no depot business, either. It was the best day that he has had, and he handles the business in an expeditious manner.

Neither of the commercial telegraph companies doing business in the city had any wires in operation today. All day yesterday Manager Jones of the Western Union could hear St. Paul calling on one wire, but was unable to make St. Paul hear.

The Gamewell fire alarm system is still out of commission.

The telephone companies are doing the best that they can and improving the service as fast as possible. They have a great deal to do, as so many poles are down and wires broken, and the work of the repair gangs is hazardous and disagreeable. People will have to have patience.



The sidewalks on Front Street are clear after this 1909 snowstorm, but high drifts in the street make street car travel difficult.

People got to work today in earnest shoveling off their walks, and this should be pushed this afternoon and evening, so that the walks may be cleaned in time for church goers tomorrow. There were only three or four callers at the courthouse all day yesterday.

## Carrier Boys Did Nobly

All of the Free Press carrier boys except one were on hand yesterday afternoon and delivered their papers, in spite of the biting wind and cold and the snow drifts to go through. These boys did themselves proud, and should receive the gratitude of the patrons, who were enabled to get their papers in spite of the worst condition of affairs in years.

Parties in from Eagle Lake report that the Northwestern Company's telephone poles are all down and wires tangled up.

The telegraph and telephone poles around Jordan are said to be all down.

The electric lights were cut off last night to avoid danger of accidents from crossed wires. One or two parties received shocks from touching or stepping on crossed wires yesterday.

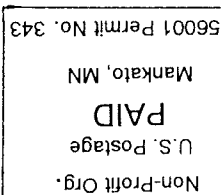
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