

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Palm Sunday snowstorm made spring late in 1942
By Jay Graybeal

Fifty years ago local families awoke to a heavy snowfall on Palm Sunday. Thirty-three inches of snow fell on this holiday, which traditionally falls on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. The April 3 issue of the Westminster *Democratic Advocate* carried a long front page story about the storm:

"Our citizens did not think spring had arrived on Palm Sunday morning, when they peered from their windows to see the ground covered with snow several inches deep and coming down in a heavy fall.

"By 10 o'clock the snow was about 15 inches and by night it measured to a depth of 33 inches, the heaviest fall since 1892, about 50 years' duration.

"The deep and impassable snow stopped traffic dead here until Monday noon, but the city corporation officials ordered a number of trucks, scoops into action and by 10 o'clock Monday night had Main Street in the business section clear for traffic.

"The churches had prepared a program starting Palm Sunday and was to continue until Good Friday, but the morning services attended was with about a handful of worshippers. In the evening a special union service was to be held in Westminster High School which was cancelled due to the impassable streets.

"The State Roads crew was caught unprepared, for the snow, as well as the Maryland weather prophet, but the state men did well keeping traffic on the move by many snow plows pushing the snow clear of the thoroughfare.

"But a number of Greyhound and Blue Ridge Busses became fast in the deep snow in this city. Outside of the city the state roads were in fine condition.

"The C. & P. Telephone Company experienced considerable trouble by poles and trees falling, breaking the wires connections, due to the heavy clinging of snow on them. Trees and shrubbery were damaged or destroyed. The Carroll County Roads Department was on the job opening roads.

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"It seems that the heavy snow was confined to Maryland, but nearby states received a good fall averaging from 8 to 18 inches which caused no trouble.

"The trains on the W.M.R.R. were behind schedule. When the snow was falling the fastest a long and heavy freight train with three engines blocked Main Street crossing for 42 minutes to allow the train to side track a number of cars.

"Monday morning was clean-up and dig out day in our city. The open air garages on our streets did not afford any shelter for the cars, so the garage man came into his own, by rescuing the stranded cars, which now resembled large snow banks Monday along the streets. The cars were covered completely over. Our rural people coming into this city were surprised to see the ugly conditions of our streets.

"A suggestion was heard to have the State Roads Commission build a thoroughfare around the city thus doing away with delayed traffic at such times.

"Well, the snow has disappeared, but not as fast as it came. One thing it helped the farmers and streams by a replenishing by the thaw.

"A large caterpillar tractor leveled the snow on Green Street and alleys over the city Monday afternoon, causing better travel. Our city officials did their best to clear the snow away. But it takes time and plenty of money to remove a snow of this proportion.

"Superintendent Hyson ordered all schools closed Monday, Tuesday sessions were resumed with good attendance."

The anonymous suggestion to build a "thoroughfare around the city" proved prophetic. The 1948 State Highway master plan included a Westminster bypass. Construction began in 1952 and the new bypass was opened on July 1, 1954 by Gov. Theodore McKeldin.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: This photo shows Main Street in Frizzellburg two days after the Palm Sunday snow storm of 1942. Photograph by Edward L. Haifley, taken from "The First 150 Years: A Pictorial History of Carroll County, Maryland 1937-1987."