

Deep freezes appearing a thing of the past

There is nothing New Englanders like doing better than talking and arguing about the weather and Branford has had its share to talk about. The granddaddy of all the winter storms was the

Blizzard of 1888 in which over 40 inches of snow fell in Branford. Drifts were 12 feet high on the Branford Hills and 50 passengers were stalled for three nights in a train at Lake

Saltonstall without food or heat. The workers at the MIF were stranded at the factory for two days and farmers couldn't get to their barns to feed the animals. There was no local newspaper in 1888 so the memory of most of the events in town during the storm are lost. It will always be the storm to which all others are compared. Ice harvesting was a major business in Branford and depended upon a cold winter, but there were many winters that ice had to be imported from Maine. A stormy winter also provided work for many men in town. Each neighborhood had a crew of men that dug out the streets and were paid by the town long before the days of state highway crews and town snowplows. A few men had horse-drawn plows and the trolleys had a special plow to clear the tracks.

Only a few times a century does the Sound freeze solid as it did in 1917. People rode their horses on the ice from Stony Creek to Branford Point and delighted in a bit of "sea skating." Earle Bradley, the master mechanic, had a homemade ice boat and he with friends the Averill and Baisley brothers sailed all around Branford Point harbor.

The worst winter of this century was that of 1934 which started with a cold



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley

December and 12 inches of snow Christmas week. That February saw temperatures sink to an all time low of -22 degrees and the Sound froze several inches thick. The water was frozen past the Thimble Islands and people walked, skated and rode their bikes on the Sound. A new sport was to drive an automobile on the ice and an adventurous fellow drove his car around Green Island in

Indian Neck. Jim Kelly and Clair and Addison Bradley drove a car to Governor's Island in Stony Creek.

The winter of 1934 was not complete without a blizzard and on Feb. 19, a total of 23 inches fell and brought the town to a standstill. It took several days to clear a passage through the streets and Stony Creek and Indian Neck were cut off for several days. Trolleys were stranded in several parts of town and were snowed in for nearly a week. Grocery stores sold out of most of their goods and school was closed for four days. It would not be until the two blizzards of 1978 that a comparison could be made to the winter of 1934.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the town historian in Branford.



Photo courtesy of Branford Historical Society

A horse-drawn carriage attempts a trip through the mounds of snow on Kirkham Street after the Blizzard of 1934.