

Blizzard of '88 Remains Vivid in Memory Of Charles Ryder, 85, Native of Stratford

Let there be snow in sufficient quantity to harrass city officials and inconvenience [sic] the residents of Bridgeport, and it invariably stimulates the recollections of many an old timer in connection with the greatest blizzard of them all . . . the blizzard of '88.

The snowfall of last week and the highs [sic] winds which whipped it into blizzard proportions brought the historical saga of '88 vividly to the mind of Charles H. Ryder, 85, who now resides at Hastings-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry, N. Y., but who was then a resident of Oronoque, Stratford.

Mr. Ryder still has relatives living in Bridgeport and one of them, Gifford L. Ryder, of Box 88, Broadbridge road, has made available to The Sunday Post, this graphic description of the blizzard of '68 by the elder Ryder, who left the Bridgeport area in 1901 and now resides with his daughter, Anita.

"The Blizzard Of 1888 As I Remember It"

By CHARLES H. RYDER

I was born in Oronoque, Connecticut, Town of Stratford on the 26th of May in 1873.

I lived with my father, mother and older brother on a small farm of 20 acres on which we raised fruit and vegetables and took them to the markets.

Our home was a fine, roomy old house located on the Westerly bank of the Housatonic river.

We always kept a good supply of food and coal on hand for the long winter months and it was well that we did when that great storm struck us. On the afternoon of March 11, it started to snow and before dark, the wind was blowing a gale and the fine snow was coming thick and fast.

Senses Intensity

When father came in from feeding the stock at the barn, he shook the snow from his heavy coat and fur cap and pulled off his rubber boots. Then he said to us:

"I have never seen the wind drive the snow the way it does now. This is going to be a bad storm. It cuts as if it were fine sand."

All that night the wind was blowing with gale force of 50 miles an hour, driving the snow past the windows so that in trying to look out, all you could see was a blank wall of snow rushing past.

The next morning it was just the same. My father and brother tried to go out to feed the stock, but as soon as they closed the

door behind them, they were out of sight in the driving snow.

By holding hands, they fought their way to the barn about 100 feet away and you may be sure mother and I were much relieved when they at last stumbled in.

This was the 12th day of March and all that day and night, the .next day and night and the following day there was no let up in the storm.

Landmarks Buried

On the morning of March 15, the clouds broke away and the sun shone upon a strange world to us. Old familiar landmarks were gone, buried out of sight in the snow. The south side of the barn was hidden up to the eaves. On the north side, the wind had played a strange freak. The ground was swept bare for a space of about 20 feet wide, entire length of the building. There, the snow had piled up a straight wall about six feet high, sloping back to a depth of four or five feet.

The lane that connected us with the highway ran beside quite a high bank and the snow had filled this part to a depth of 10 to 12 feet.

A young peach orchard of an acre and a half was buried from four to five feet deep. Just the top twigs showing above the snow. To the west of our farm, quite a steep hill separated us from our neighbors land and here the land lay in almost level fields.

The level fields covered about 12 to 15 acres of high ground, extending out to the bank of the. Housatonic river at which point, the bank is steep and about 45 feet high.

The wind sweeping the level fields and over the bluff had carried all the snow off the field and piled it into the river. So much snow was blown off the fields that It built out from the steep bank a distance of about 150 feet into the river channel.

River Ice Foot Thick

The thermometer had registered 15 above zero all through the storm and the wind had blown at 50 miles an hour. There was so much snow in the river that the ice froze at least a foot thick and did not break up until late in April.

It was impossible for us to get out through the lane which was completely blocked. We made several attempts to get out to the road across our own land without success. Some of our neighbors had large farms with cattle and horses and yokes of oxen, which they used for heavy hauling, such as getting timber out of the woods for winter.

They used heavy wooden sledges sometimes with two yokes of oxen to haul it. They were used to deep snow in the woods. Well, one morning about the 12th of April we heard loud voices and quite a commotion coming from just beyond the barn. There we saw three yokes of oxen and sledges with about a dozen men with shovels, they were our neighbors, come to open up our lane so we could get out. The strong, heavy oxen floundered about in the deep snow, dragging the sledges.

In the worse places, where the snow had drifted deepest, the men used their shovels, and I may add, father and brother and I did our share of the digging.

Neighbors Pitch In

It was a tough job and you may be sure we thanked them for the wonderful help they gave us. There was no question about paying them. Their work for us was done in the spirit of good neighbors and good fellowship.

They asked no more. It was late in May before the snow had melted away and the promise of Spring made life worth living again. If you should happen to drive up that way sometime on the Stratford-Derby turnpike at the point where the Merritt parkway crossed you can see the sign: "Ryder lane."