

The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended, and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. Leo XIII., Columbus, Queen Isabella, and

# Annals from the Archives

## The Blizzard of 1888

**CUT OFF.**

**Boston Isolated by the  
Blizzard.**

**Severest Storm for a  
Generation.**

**New England Railways  
Blockaded.**

**Telegraph Wires All  
Down.**



Shoveling Snow in Boston After the Blizzard of 1888  
Image from Collective Commons

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Headline From the *Boston Globe*  
March 13, 1888

—Just three weeks ago, we remembered the fortieth anniversary of the Blizzard of 1978. With winds gusting to over 100 m.p.h., bringing in more than two feet of snow, it stranded thousands of people on highways and destroyed many coastal homes. At the time, some compared it to the Blizzard of 1888, otherwise known as the Great White Hurricane. Today it is still recognized as one of the most destructive storms to hit Massachusetts. But while there are similarities between the storms, the Blizzard of 1888 caused much more suffering for the people of Massachusetts.

First of all, it was March. Spring seemed to be on its way. Crocuses had begun to bloom; farmers were starting to prepare their fields. The *Boston Globe's* forecast for New England on Sunday, March 11th was that warm weather with some rain was on its way. In fact, it did begin to rain that night, but by the following morning, the rain changed abruptly to snow, which soon began to be driven by 80 mile an hour winds. Despite that, most people made the trek to their places of employment. With little or no job security in those days, employees who failed to arrive for their shifts lost pay or their jobs. And because few realized the severity of what was to come, most children also went to school.

By noon, whiteout conditions prevailed. The blizzard raged on for the next thirty-six hours, leaving more than four feet of snow in its wake. The force of the winds caused drifts up to fifty feet high. Temperatures ranged between zero and forty below. Those stranded on trains that could no longer move on the snowbound tracks were so cold, they took to ripping the seats out of the cars to light fires in an effort to keep warm. Many workers and children attempting to get home froze to death and were buried in enormous drifts, only to be found days or weeks later. If they had called out for help, their cries most likely were drowned out by the howling winds. By the end of the storm, over 400 people had died. More than 200 ships at sea were destroyed. And because the snow was so heavy, it brought down telegraph wires and prevented trains from delivering necessary coal and food. Unscrupulous merchants used that opportunity to raise the prices on many necessities.

In Chicopee, MA the sisters at the Holy Name Convent wrote that "...[on] the 12th a very great snow storm. . . lasted thirty hours and . . . caused the closing of the school for three days."

At the Sacred Heart Convent in nearby Springfield, MA, the sisters wrote that "On March 12 a famous snow-storm visited our city. This storm is popularly called a 'blizzard.' The snow was so high that the children could not come to school. When the Rev. Father came for Mass the next morning, he was obliged to walk on top of the fence because the snow completely hid the door. Then it was that the good neighbors showed their attentions to the Sisters. Milk wagons could not get into the city, consequently, milk was sold for 25 cents a quart." In 1888, milk usually sold for 8 cents a quart.

The sisters also wrote that, "One woman, whose baby was using a bottle, went to the parochial residence begging for milk for her baby who could not be pacified."

The *Boston Globe* reported on March 13th that Springfield was completely buried. Hundreds of workers who could not get home sought shelter in the city. But the snow prevented trains from getting into or leaving all cities and with the telegraph wires down, everyone was isolated with no chance of food or coal getting to those in the greatest need. When the storm ended, farmers were the most helpful in using their oxen to pull rollers over the snow to allow traffic to move once again.

Officials in the city of Boston were so alarmed at how isolated and desperate the population had been during the blizzard that they began plans for a new method of travel, one which they believed would not be subject to the vagaries of the weather. Their solution? The Boston subway system, which was completed in 1897.

Train stuck in the snow after the blizzard  
Image from TeachingAmericanHistory.org



#### THE WEATHER.



WASHINGTON, March 10.—Indications for 24 hours commencing 7 a. m. Sunday, March 11: For New England and eastern New York, fresh to brisk southerly winds, slightly warmer, fair weather, followed by rain.

#### Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Holy Name Convent Annals, 1867-1937. Chicopee, Massachusetts. SND New England Archives, 2016.17.
- ◆ Sacred Heart Convent Annals, 1877-1890, Springfield, Massachusetts. SND New England Archives, 2017.02.
- ◆ Massmoments.org

Weather Forecast on March 12, 1888  
From the *Boston Globe*