

ON THE BLIZZARD OF '72

OSWEGO, NEW YORK

BY

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1. "This will be a good conference on the banks of Lake Ontario, where they really have SNOW!" So wrote Secretary Gordon R. Ayer, in his notice about the twenty-ninth annual meeting of the Eastern Snow Conference at the Holiday Inn, Oswego, New York for February 3-4, (Oh, and the 5th and 6th, too) 1972. Gordon had faith in what he had heard about Oswego weather. Alas, he had not been at the 24 June Executive Committee meeting in Oswego, so he did not know of the "special snow plans;" namely, that the conferees "would get to Oswego, would have plenty of snow, but --." Anyway, it happened this way-- quoting in part from material given at about 10 A.M. in the morning to the Oswego Palladium-Times for its Friday, February 4, 1972 publication: "What we have is a major low pressure system, which before noon was northwest of Quebec City and moving very slowly (eastward) and stagnating. This is not quite the same path as the storm that caused the Blizzard of '66 (January). That major center moved up the Hudson Valley to Burlington, Vt., late on the 30th and during the 31st. The 1972 storm moved a little west of that path and actually involved two low pressure centers rather than one (the older one from the west and the newer one from the south, southwest-- added by the author now).

2. "The present center, which is causing our trouble, is the one that is northwest of Quebec City and is the deep low,

which at about noon-time today had a pressure of about 966 millibars (28.53) barometric inches). It is bringing arctic air around on its western side across the Lake; and we are beginning to get rather heavy lake effect snow, now.

3. "The lake effect snow started lightly at about 6 A.M., but was noticeable by about 7:30 A.M., in a series of snow squalls or snow showers. It followed (some 10) inches of heavy wet snow, and some sleet and freezing rain Thursday afternoon and evening and early this morning. The amounts would vary around the Oswego area (10-12 inches).

4. "The highest winds developed about 4:15 A.M., today, when gusts of between 60 and 70 mph were common until shortly after 5 A.M.

5. "There are a number of similarities between this storm and that of '66. The most important is the stagnation of the low pressure center around which the cold air is coming from (Canada) across the Lake. There is very little ice on the Lake, so there is a great source of water to evaporate upward into the air and, subsequently, to form into a snowband, when the flow and frictional and thermal convergence factors attain the 'proper' relationships.

6. "If this system remains nearly stationary, we face a prolonged period of flow across the lake and over our area. While there may be variations in snowfall intensity, the general vicinities of Oswego, Fulton, Pulaski and inland should experience blizzard-like conditions, often for many minutes at a time.

7. "It would not be surprising, if three to four feet of snow would actually fall during this situation by early Saturday morning. However, the blowing and drifting will be so bad that it may not be possible to prove that we have had so much snowfall by conventional measurement methods."

8. The break from about 3:30 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. Friday the 4th provided a dubious|opportunity|forsome Conference members to leave by bus (one load) and by convoy: Liv Lansing, Ray Falconer and Don Quick. Also, Rosemary Lawler, who helped Gordon Ayer with administrative duties, made it south over the same precarious one lane on N.Y. 57. Liv and Mrs. Lansing decided against going on to Boonville, as there was a 48 inch or more snowfall in the making there, too. It seems that the band of heaviest snowfall-- say 3 feet or more of fall-- for this storm period was about 6-8 miles wide in the vicinity of Oswego and centered from SW Oswego east and eastsoutheastward across the southern part of Oswego City, past Mexico and Parish to Boonville.

9. Incidentally, for the third time in 126 years, the "Pall-Times" failed to print. The other two occasions were on January 31, and February 1, 1966-- during the Blizzard of '66. (The paper does not publish on Sundays; e. g., the 30th of January-- a really bad day, too!)

10. In the Monday, February 7, 1972 issue of the Oswego paper was this headline: "Oswego Struggles out From Under Snowfall of 56 Inches Coming During 50 Hour Storm." Extracted in part were these comments: "the storm ended in Oswego at 4:30 P.M. Saturday. (While some main roads became passable during the evening, parking lot and driveway conditions prevented most of the remaining attendees from doing much more than observing the storm's aftermath-- supplemental comment.) The southern part of the city and Southwest Oswego cleared (of storm conditions) earlier, because the clearing moved from the south. Improvement was rather dramatic, actually, in the interval of about half-an-hour. Thus ended the main part of this storm.

11. "There was not nearly as much snow in this area this time, as there was in the Blizzard of '66. The winds were not as high, but they came at times when people were very conscious of them; i. e., on those good shopping days, Friday and Saturday. In 1966, the main part of the storm with its strong winds came very early in the morning on Sunday and during Monday. Many people were already trapped at home. People noticed the wind more in 1972; but it wasn't as high, in general, over the area.

12. "This Friday and Saturday situation was a lake effect snow with a narrow band of clouds and a narrower band of heavy snow. The heavy snowband, on Friday and Saturday, was from five to ten miles wide. This was a final two to two-and-a-half day period (3-5 February) on top of some storminess which really began on January 25th. So far for the month of February, we have had just under five feet of snowfall."

13. Comparisons are difficult between the 1966 and 1972 storms. The '72 storm was much more local with the heaviest snowfall associated usually with one or two (for a time) 5-to perhaps- 15 mile-wide-West-East "action bands." Hour for hour, there was less windiness and somewhat less snowfall in 1972. While there was a good deal of blowing and drifting, there was truly some real heavy snowfall in 1972, though. One cooperative observer, Mrs. Paul Edwards, living immediately on the lakeshore about a mile west of the College, reported that with the west to west northwest wind directly off the unfrozen Lake, for many hours at a time during this two-day period, visibilities were 50-75 feet or less! Of course, there cannot be much blowing and drifting of snow from off an open water surface! The "plastered" appearance of the vertical sides of the Holiday Inn, noted by many of the attendees, is characteristic of lake effect snowfalls, when windy conditions prevail.

14. The Blizzard of '72 was peculiar to the Oswego Area and one of the outstanding snowstorms in Oswego weather history, although it was less of a storm than the 1966 Blizzard. It combined aspects of the conventional blizzard and the snowburst; truly it should be called a "blizzard-burst." So sharp was the snowband, at times, that only 1 to 2 miles separated nearly continuous "0/0" conditions with 2-5 inch per hour rates of snowfall from areas with little or no snowfall and even with sunshine.

15. All weather-- and conferences-- must end. Sunday morning, the 6th, the now-rested but remaining attendees, more than 1/3 of those originally present, said "Farewell" to the temporary "snow capitol of New York State." The snow events of 3-5 February 1972 were transformed into legend, aided by reports on radio, national TV and the press. Listeners, viewers and readers, 100's even 1000's of miles away, chuckled good naturedly at the plight of the now mistakenly lumped together as "more than 100 weather specialists here to discuss snow and got more than they bargained for --." Yes, Gordon, "they really have SNOW" there in Oswego!