

The Winter of My Childhood

By Helen Pierce Gerlock
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Photos by Christine Pierce Dailey
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If you are a baby boomer or older, you probably often lament that winters are not what they used to be, and you would be absolutely correct. There are at least several distinct reasons why we would think this: first, our memories are not what they use to be; second, the equipment that once was used for snow removal was not as effective as today, and; third, the winters, in fact, were much snowier than they are today. Listening to the older generation, one would have to believe that the snow storms of yesterday were as tough as walking miles to and from school, 5 miles uphill, both ways. Thank goodness we have the benefit of having photographs to support our seemingly exaggerated memories. The 1940's and 1950's reportedly had some of the worst in memorable history.

Helen Pierce Gerlock and Christine Pierce Dailey are the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Roland M. Pierce. They grew up in the Town of Canandaigua on Bliss Road west of Route 21 (Cheshire Road) and east of Hickox Road. The winter of 1944 /1945 was just one such winter as can be enjoyed now through Helen's memories.

RWHenry, Town Historian 6/24/09



Bliss Road, Canandaigua 1945

Photo by Christine Pierce Dailey

Dated: February 24, 1994

"The old man is back! AGAIN! He headed south for a few days last weekend but then turned around and returned with a vengeance. I speak of Old Man Winter, of course; it seems to be the main topic of conversation these days --- what an awful winter we are having!"

"Granted, it has not been the most enjoyable one I have seen but, as I sit here warm and cozy listening to the wild huffing and puffing and trying to blow my house down, my thoughts go back to my childhood and the winter of 1944-45."

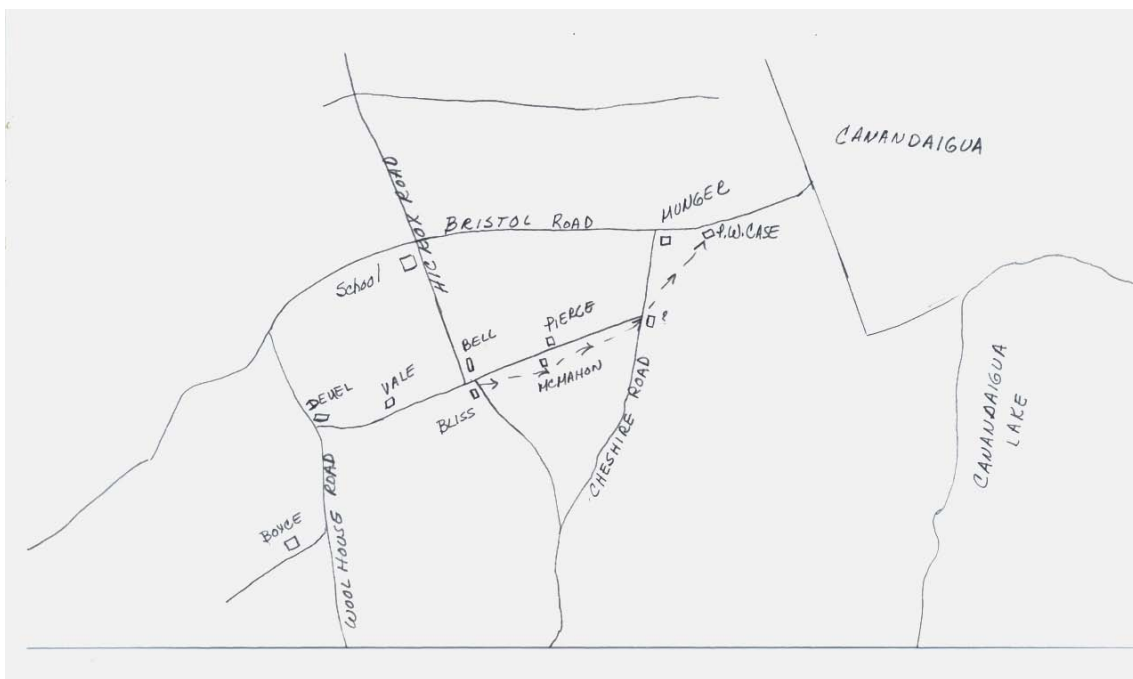
"Keep in mind that our lifestyle was a whole different world than that we have today. In the fall, we prepared for winter and there was more to it than just putting the lawn mower away. The garden was harvested and canned, chickens were butchered and also canned (there were no freezers) and a goodly supply of sugar and flour was put in for the winter. I believe beef and hog butchering was put off until about January, probably so they would cool out faster?"



Canandaigua's Winter of 1944 - 1945

Ray Henry Collection

"You see, it was a common occurrence to be snowed in for days at a time when you lived in the country and it was no big deal. You had food and warmth (you had also filled the coal bin and, for good measure, had a supply of wood in case you ran out and there was too much snow for the coal truck to get thru) and a radio for contact with the outside world. IF you had time and energy for entertainment, there were simple toys, games and there was always sledding and building snowmen, etc. The neighbors would visit for a game of cards, apples and popcorn, AND hard cider! Sometimes you walked home, sometimes you stayed all night."



Helen and Christine's neighborhood

Map by Helen Pierce Gerlock

"It was also not unusual for the electricity to go off and, again, it was not a tragedy; the kerosene lamps were always clean and full on the pantry shelf for just that reason. We did not rush to the phone to report it to the electric company - there was no phone to rush to!"

"As for the winter of 44-45, I don't remember how it got so bad - if it was a whopper of a blizzard that roared through or if it was a series of storms that just kept piling up. I do remember walking on top of snow banks to get to school. I don't know the mileage but we walked from where we lived on Bliss Road to the corner of Hickox and Bristol Roads where

the school house (district school #3) was - probably 1 to 1½ miles; some kids walked much farther than that."



District School #3, Hickox Rd.

Ray Henry Collection

"I do remember that we were snowed in for a total period of about SIX WEEKS! School eventually closed but some days were clear enough that we could 'slide - down - hill' in McMahon's field across the road from our house. We had sleds and we had skis but I think that it got so bad that the sled runners would just sink into the snow so Daddy took a piece of metal roofing and made us a toboggan. It held several of us at once and I can't remember how he made it curl up on the front. There was a much larger hill up the road by Bell's house and occasionally we would go up there."

"We would bundle up and go out until we got tired or wet; then we would return to the house to get out of the wet clothes and warm up. Our house was heated by what we called a 'one-lunger; furnace: the only register was directly above the furnace in the archway between

the living room and the dining room but that one register was about three feet square, at least. The amount of heat one got was controlled by two chains mounted on the wall that controlled the draft to the furnace. When you needed to dry your clothes, you hung them on clothes bars beside the huge register and, in no time, they were dry. If only your mittens had soaked through (hand knitted wool) and you weren't ready to come in, you flew in the door, threw them on the outside edge of the register (cooler there) and grabbed a dry pair. It seems that Mom had also made some mittens sewn from scraps of wool material (she could also make snowsuits from cast off ladies coats)."

"The most exciting thing that I remember was GOING TO TOWN! While most farmers now had some kind of tractor (Daddy had a 'doodle - bug' - half Dodge and half Ford), some of the neighbors still had sleighs and teams of horses: As I remember, Lester Bliss had an outfit as did Augie Vale and I think Mel Deuel and Chet Boyce between them managed to make up the other one. Chet Boyce (I think) had the horses and on Saturday morning he would start out from his house on Moran Road (great hill for tobogganing there, too) and go down to Deuel's on the corner of Bliss Road. From there they would continue down Bliss Road and pick up Vale's outfit; then they continued to Bliss' and the three continued on down road. Walt Bell's family were across from Bliss' and next on the route were McMahan's and us.

I'm sure they must have rested the horses at each place they stopped so there was no chance of being left behind but Mom would get nervous and, since you couldn't see out from the ground floor of the house, she would make us put our warm clothes on and go upstairs to an unheated bedroom and watch out the window. As soon as we saw them coming over the hill at Bliss' and Bell's, we had to come down and let her know so we'd be ready when they got to our house.

I'm not sure what route they took between Boyce's on Moran Road and Bliss' on the corner of Hickox but from the top of that hill they could not travel the road as the drifts were too bad. They would then take to the south side of the road and come down through McMahan's fields to the back side of their house. After picking up all of us they would stay in the fields south of the road and come out on the Cheshire Road (Route 21). I'm not sure if Borncamp's lived there at the end of Bliss Road or who it was but we probably picked them up too. Then it was cross lots down behind Munger's on the Bristol Road (a bed and breakfast now) to P. W. Case's. There was no other way to get around the infamous Cheshire Road Hill so going "kitty - corner" we were able to get through.

By this time, they had been able to plow the Bristol Road as far as Case's so it was easier going the rest of the way to Canandaigua. Plowing was not done down to the bare road at that time; everyone had chains they put on their cars to get around - then you'd get to town where the streets were bare and the chains would clatter and clang!

Fish and Brewer's store (now Kennedy's Funeral Home) still had a hitching barn out back and the men could rest and feed and water the horses while everyone went to do their shopping. Sugar was rationed at that time and, of course, by the time Mom would get to town, the supply would be gone. My aunt lived down on Clark Street so the manager of the grocery

store let Mom leave her ration stamps with her and she would get the sugar for her when it came in. I guess we probably walked to Clark Street to get it when we came in to town.

When everyone had finished what they had to do, we met back at the sheds, hitched up and did everything in reverse! It must have been a very long day for the horses but there was only once that I remember a problem. It was on our sledding hill across from the house and someone's horse (a black one) fell trying to get up the hill. The sleigh was unloaded of people and provisions but the poor thing was so exhausted, it just gave up and lay there. There was talk of having to shoot it (and did we get sent to the house in a hurry!) but they let it rest for a while and then unhitched the other horse of the team and began to lead it to McMahon's barn. The exhausted horse got so upset to see his partner leaving him that he jumped up and followed him to the barn! As I remember, they left that team there to rest and recover for a day or so as the two worst hills were yet ahead of them.

Ruth Bell was "expecting" that winter and when her time came, they managed to get her out and to the hospital in the same manner. (My husband remembers that a neighbor lady died and they took her body out with horse and sleigh).

One day there was lots of excitement! They were trying to plow us out but good old Cheshire Road Hill was a problem as the crust on the snow was so hard they couldn't break through it. Every able-bodied man in the neighborhood grabbed their shovels and went down to break trail for the plow. It seems like they were there all day but there was no way the plow could even begin to make it through those banks. What a disappointment!

I don't remember how long it was but finally they were able to get a huge rotary plow from somewhere else in the State and that got through but apparently they were only using it on the main roads as I remember them using a bulldozer on the hill in front of our house to break through.

I'm sure there is more that I have forgotten just as I am sure that it was not nearly as much fun or as exciting for Mom and Dad as it was for a kid; just the problem of carrying water from the well to the house and to the barn through the banks must have been exhausting but I don't remember that anyone complained. (No we didn't have any inside plumbing either!)

Sooooooo - - - as I sit here today, I don't think this winter has been all that awful. There are few days that I couldn't get out if I really had to; if I'm cold, I have only to set the thermostat up a little; if I'm thirsty, I turn on a faucet; if I'm hungry, I turn a button to cook my meal; if I'm bored, there's the telephone or the T.V.; but best of all, when nature calls, I can stay inside and push a handle when I'm done!!!!

at Devel's house



1945

Photo by Christine Pierce Dailey



1945

looking east toward Cheshire Road



1945

Christine Pierce Dailey

CORNER BRISTOL + CHESHIRE ROADS



←
NOTE
ROAD
SIGN



No snowplows in those days could get through snow banks like these. Generally it was the responsibility of men in the area to meet with their shovels and manually break a path through the snow for the plows.

Christine Pierce Dailey photo

McC Mahon's Barn





Photo by Christine Pierce Dailey

Daddy ↓



1945

The men in the neighborhood often gathered as above to tackle jobs like clearing the road.

Photo by Christine Pierce Dailey