

1936 – A Year of Weather Extremes in Martin County

Weather is an ever present phenomenon affecting everyone in many different ways. Everybody talks about it, weather forecasters try to predict it, but no one can really do anything about it. Minnesota's weather can be challenging at best with snow and subzero temperatures in winter to the heat and humidity of the summers. Considering this, in 1936, Martin County experienced a roller coaster year of weather extremes.

The winter of 1936 saw record breaking sub-zero temperatures combined with massive amounts of snow. This created what was referred to at that time as "snow blockades." There were thirty-six consecutive days of below zero temperatures in January through February. That were accompanied by what was called five of the worst "snow blockades" since the advent of the automobile and the improved highway systems. Snowfall for that winter up to March 1st totaled four feet and ten inches. In comparison, this was in sharp contrast to the open winter of 1934 when dust storms swept through the plains states.

The first "snow blockade" took place in mid-January. Temperatures dropped to twenty-two below zero closing schools. The cold snap was broken on February 2nd when seven inches of snow fell; however, heavy winds followed that halted rail and highway traffic.

During the month of February the high winds created snowdrifts and, coupled with frigid temperatures, isolated many farms and even entire communities. Mail was delivered by dog team in Triumph; there were serious shortages of coal, fuel oil, and grocery items. Coal was limited to one-half ton per customer in Fairmont as temperatures dipped to twenty-three degrees below zero including stiff winds. From January 18th to February 22nd, the temperature failed to reach zero ranging from minus two to minus twenty-six.

The spring of 1936 heralded a much different kind of weather phenomena for Martin County, and it resulted in some serious damage. It was Thursday, April 30th and what was initially a rather windy and dusty day gradually began to appear quite ominous with menacing clouds creating a murky appearance to the sky.

A devastating tornado had developed near Sheldon, Iowa. It traveled over 100 miles, never leaving the ground, and cut a twenty-mile swath through Martin County. The townships of Tenhassen, Silver Lake, East Chain, and Pleasant Prairie were hard hit. The tornado caused widespread damage to approximately 100 farms and 300 farm buildings while killing several people. Hand's Park reported extensive damage and debris from the Gay Paree Ballroom blocked the county road running from Highway 15 west to Ceylon. In the aftermath of the storm, an estimated 15,000 cars combined with 60,000 sightseers came to view the damage. The size of the crowd was said to be only surpassed by those viewing the 1934 National Corn Husking Contest.

Minnesota weather, be it in winter or in summer, can certainly be unpredictable, entertaining, sometimes dangerous, and always a topic of conversation. Whether reminiscing about the frigid winters of the past walking to and from school, uphill both ways, to recollections of those summers so hot you could fry eggs on the sidewalk, these conversations are always entertaining. Perhaps those memorable weather events from the past have been somewhat embellished over time, however, there is no question that the diversity of seasons in Martin County provides an distinct array of interesting weather related experiences. It's been said that if you don't like the weather today, wait until tomorrow. The seasonal changes experienced in this part of the country seem to provide something for everyone.

For more information on this topic or to become a member, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.

CAMERA SHOWS FRIGHTFUL AFTERMATH OF MARTIN COUNTY TORNADO



HERE'S PROOF!

The following official figures on the history-making cold spell of 36 days below zero in January and February, 1936, are from Weatherman James Lamperd, Fairmont, Minn. It was the longest arctic wave in the weather station's history.

Jan. 18	.....	-12
Jan. 19	.....	-18
Jan. 20	.....	-22
Jan. 21	.....	-11
Jan. 22	.....	-30
Jan. 23	.....	-27
Jan. 24	.....	-17
Jan. 25	.....	-20
Jan. 26	.....	-21
Jan. 27	.....	-16
Jan. 28	.....	-14
Jan. 29	.....	-18
Jan. 30	.....	-9
Jan. 31	.....	-21
Feb. 1	.....	-16
Feb. 2	.....	-14
Feb. 3	.....	-2
Feb. 4	.....	-20
Feb. 5	.....	-26
Feb. 6	.....	-18
Feb. 7	.....	-26
Feb. 8	.....	-14
Feb. 9	.....	-18
Feb. 10	.....	-17
Feb. 11	.....	-18
Feb. 12	.....	-15
Feb. 13	.....	-6
Feb. 14	.....	-23
Feb. 15	.....	-21
Feb. 16	.....	-29
Feb. 17	.....	-14
Feb. 18	.....	-19
Feb. 19	.....	-20
Feb. 20	.....	-4
Feb. 21	.....	-20
Feb. 22	.....	-5



