

The Snowstorm of 1947

Many Milwaukee area residents still remember the snowstorm of January, 1947. **Harold H. Cardo**, a former C.& N.W. engineer who now resides in Montello, WI recalls that storm. So does **Betty Knuth Baumann**, a former Milwaukee resident now residing in Sun City, CA. **Betty's** recollections appear at the bottom of the page. Some of our members will remember **Ida Knuth** who, in the late 1940's, wrote the Wisconsin Division Column in the North Western Newsliner. **Betty** tells us she is from another branch of the **Knuth** family. *(Similar contributions from others are certainly welcome! Just e-mail the [webmaster](#))*

I was a Locomotive Engineer on the Chicago & North Western Railway in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and was called to report for work at 7:00 am at the Chase Roundhouse. Since I was a qualified Engineer, I was put into service as a Main Line Dispatcher – which meant hostling locomotives from Chase Yard to the Third Ward Roundhouse, to the depot at the foot of East Wisconsin Ave. and to any of the outlying yards.

It snowed all day, and when I finished my day at 5:00 pm, my car was snowed in. It stayed there for more than FOUR days because of the storm. I had to go to East Wisconsin Ave. and get a hotel room for the night. Was I ever lucky to get the last streetcar that left that evening from the south side at South 6th Street and Chase Ave. The storm was so bad that going up hill on South 6th St., we had to get out of the streetcar to push it up the hill.

We finally arrived at East Wisconsin Ave. and the first thing to do was to register into a hotel. They had just one cot left in a room full of 15 other men. This crowded room was a structure added to the present brick building and not too sturdy. While just lying there on the cot, I heard a heavy wind coming off Lake Michigan and could feel that the room sort of swayed with the wind. It was scary!

I slept about four hours when someone tapped me on my shoulder, and I was told to report for duty at the depot. It was still snowing and blowing with snow drifts as high as the street signs. At the depot, people were sleeping on the steps and on benches. They were all over the area.

My assignment was to take coal and water on the passenger steam locomotives. When I opened the cab window, which is about seven feet from the ground to the window sill, I was LEVEL with a snowdrift. Some trains, which were under the depot train shed, had to have heat supplied to them because everybody would not fit in the depot. The section men were shoveling; tractors and trucks were pushing snow, and people living near the depot came down with baskets full of sandwiches and beverages and helped shovel snow.

The railroad ran a “snow train” up from Chicago to Milwaukee with men they'd gathered up on Madison Street-Chicago. When they arrived in Milwaukee and started to unload, some men only had oxfords on. They said “forget it” and went back to Chicago. *There's a little more about the “snow train” including a couple of pictures at the end of this story.*

Section men were still cleaning the switches when I reached the south end of the depot, and the locomotive got stuck in the snow. As the section men shoveled snow, snow and more snow, we could finally couple with one engine ahead of mine and one engine to the rear of mine. We finally got out of that drift. As we slowly moved along, we tried to make it to the roundhouse, which was about six blocks away. As I neared the roundhouse, the engine went on the ground. Well, I almost made it, I told myself. The section men's help was needed again, and we finally did get to the Third Ward to supply and service the engines with water and coal.

My next assignment involved the depot switch engine - a diesel. I was surprised and wondered where did they pick this thing up? It was a relic, one of the original Ingersoll Rand/G.E. box cab diesel switchers, and was operated from both ends and did look just like a box. I was told to transport crews to wherever they were needed. I worked on this assignment for four or five days. There was one day that we never turned up anywhere. We just sat and waited to be told what to do and where to go.

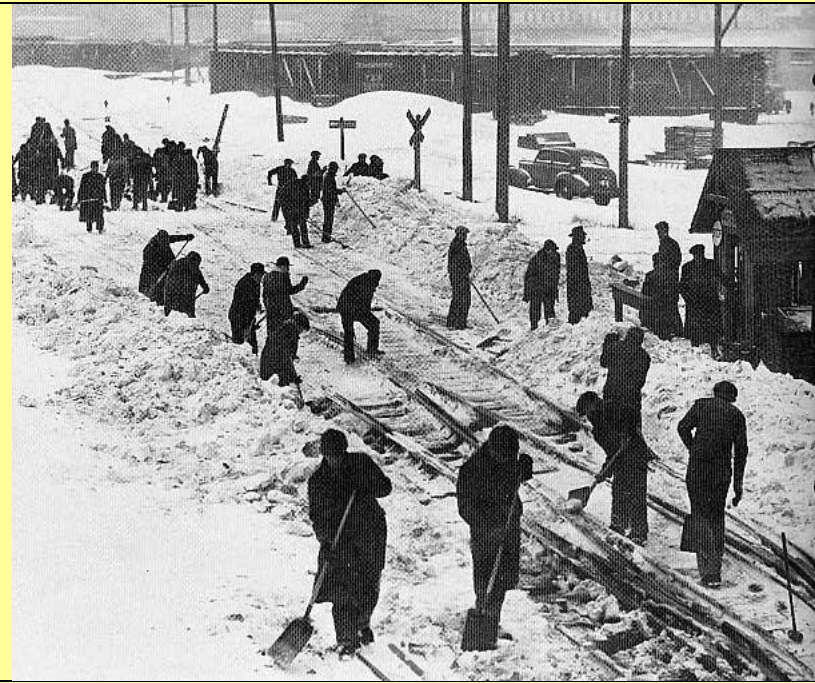
The Milwaukee Fire Department was very helpful to us as they were able to get to the depot and supply some engines with water. That is one snowstorm I will never forget!

And how, he won't forget it! The storm lasted three days (January 28 through January 30, 1947, dumped 18" of snow, tying up Milwaukee for 4 days, and was accompanied with winds of up to 60 mph. The Milwaukee Journal told it like it was a day or so later with the headline – "Snow Paralyzes Milwaukee."

The "snow train" mentioned by Harold came up from Chicago with the **1619**, Engineer **Joe Parichy** (better known as "**Parachute Joe**") and Fireman **Ed Pietschmann**. They are in the top picture. Below are some of the snow shovelers. For those not familiar with Chicago in those days, "gathering men up on Madison Street" meant recruiting the more ambitious skid row residents (bums).



"Parachute Joe," Ed Pietschmann & the 1619



Snow removal from the tracks and slip switches near the Milwaukee River Bridge.



CNW 1001 at Milwaukee, WI, 28 Dec 1947

This is the engine **Harold** refers to, less the snow. I
Photo courtesy of **Don Ros**



snow and many drifts after the 18 inches had fallen. Because of the fire station, our street was one of the first to be plowed out, along with Fond du Lac Avenue which was just a block away. The main thoroughfares were opened early too.

Our Dad worked at Station B of the Post Office, which was on 13th and Fond du Lac Ave., and so was fortunate when that street was cleared early and the street cars were running again.

The vintage plow used to clear the street is shown in the picture. Also, my Dad and my two brothers, Ed and Eugene, along with other snow removal crew in front of the Emmer Bros. Dairy building. Eugene Knuth is standing closest to the camera with his back to us. Ed, Jr. and Ed. Sr. (my father) are standing facing us below

Here is Betty's story. We lived just one block from the railroad tracks on Locust and Fond du Lac Avenue, where a bridge for the trains echoed daily with their whistles. An open field just before that bridge, which we called "Chicken Village" was a perfect place to wave to the railroad engineers as they passed. Many of them waved back to us, pleasing all of us little ones.

My family, parents and we eight children lived on N. 30th and Locust St. I was only 12 then. On the corner was a fire station with our fireman friend Charlie. Our street, N. 30th, was blocked with much

the Emmer Brothers sign. The picture was taken by my sister, Audrey Knuth, from our front porch. You can see the post of our front porch to the right.

The two small windows to the left and on the front of the building were for loading milk crates. The cheese making vats were located behind the next two or three larger windows. The peaked roof way in the background belongs to a foundry building.

We children loved the snowstorm. We didn't have to go to school. We could make snow angels on the front lawn hills, have snowball fights, and even try to build an igloo in our backyard, using a baby's bathtub and packing the snow tightly, then overturning it at spaced intervals. All went well until we got to the height when we were supposed to start leaning the large sections inward – it didn't work, but still was fun trying.

We took our sleds into the alley and were able to climb onto a garage roof, and sled down into the alley. It was not the best, but still lots of fun.

When most of the snow was cleared from the streets and sidewalks, we had the best winter of ice skating, especially at the Washington Park Lagoon. It was beautiful with the snow and ice sparkling, and a few boys grabbed snow shovels and skated with the shovel in front of them, so there were paths for skating on much of the lagoon. In the evening, after dark, it was an experience rarely seen by anyone.

Of course I'm seeing this through a child's eyes, and wasn't aware of all the hard work the storm entailed for the adults - but what a winter; never to be forgotten.

Brian Emmer, grandson of one of the founders of Emmer Brothers Dairy, saw this picture on our web site and fills us in on the dairy's history.

William Emmer purchased and operated a farm on what is now Good Hope Road and he and his brother Al had a vegetable route. In 1933, Gridley, the largest dairy in Milwaukee, was buying milk cheap from the farmers and selling for a large profit to end users. William and Al, upset with this, began selling milk from their farm on the vegetable route. They sold the milk for less than Gridley did and thereby made a good profit by cutting out the middle man. Their neighbors soon learned of their enterprise and asked them to sell their milk as well. The business grew rapidly and soon they asked the two youngest Emmer brothers, Raymond and Ervin, to join the business.

As the business expanded, they purchased a former warehouse building on Locust street (the one you see in the picture) and began the dairy operation in earnest. Though relatively new at that time (it was built in 1925) the building was in poor shape as the previous owners had gone bankrupt. Thus, the Emmers were able to buy it at a good price. The Emmer Brothers continued to sell milk in Milwaukee until 1950. At that time, Golden Guernsey, another competitor, offered them \$100,000 for the dairy. This was an unheard of amount in those days and they agreed to sell.

Later, in 1959, they sold their farms (they had 5 by this time) to developers and moved north. William bought a farm in Mayville, WI (near Beaver Dam) and Al bought one near Hartford. Raymond and Ervin, the youngest brothers remained in the Milwaukee area. -

Betty, Brian & Harold: Please accept our sincere thanks for these fine stories and thanks also to **P.J. Cleary** who provided some additional details.

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