

# It seemed like a season in Siberia

Mpls. S.T.

Many of us remember the Halloween snowstorm of 1991— pretty early in the season to be dealing with traffic-snarling, serious-shoveling snow. But worrywarts might appreciate being reminded that Minnesota's earliest blizzard occurred 126 years ago, on Oct. 16, 1880 (some sources say Oct. 15). More than a foot of snow fell quickly in western and southwestern Minnesota, blowing into drifts 20 feet high in places. 10-15-06

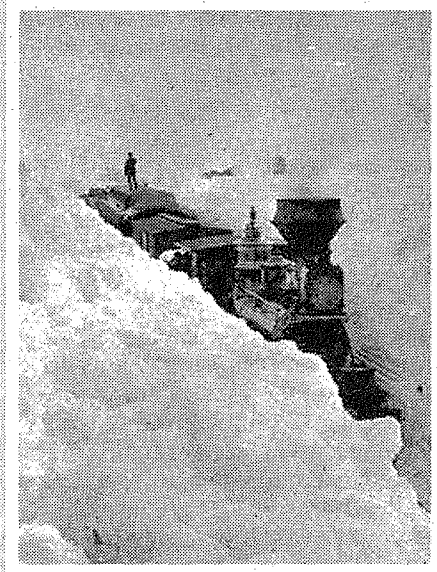
It was the beginning of one of the state's most severe winters, remembered by historians as "the winter of the deep snow" and "the season of Siberian frigidity." At least six people died in the October blizzard, according to the Minnesota Historical Society, and in a December storm Michael Dowling, age 14, became lost outdoors in Yellow Medicine County and suffered frostbite that cost him parts of both legs, his left arm and his fingers. (Dowling grew up to become a teacher, superintendent of Renville County schools, newspaper publisher and owner, speaker of the Minnesota House, state GOP secretary and U.S. education commissioner. A Minneapolis public school is named after him.)

With rail lines blocked, the Pipestone County Star ran out of newsprint and published its weekly editions on brown wrapping paper for eight weeks.

When spring 1881 finally came, it didn't bring relief from weather miseries for everyone. The thaw caused flooding in the Minnesota River valley.

DICK PARKER

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
A locomotive made its way in southern Minnesota on March 29, 1881.