

“Area Engulfed By One of Worst Ice Storms in History” No, this isn’t a newspaper headline of 2007, but instead is found in a January 10, 1949, newspaper. The article continues, “Wire Services Crippled, Trees Give Way Under Heavy Coatings and Crash to Earth, Blocking Streets in Some Instances, and Transportation of All Kinds Is Hit – Havoc Is Comparable to That Caused by Record Breaking Sleet of Jan. 8, 1937.”<sup>1</sup>

The ice storm spread over large areas of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma, isolating many areas, bringing business to a stand-still, and closing many schools. Trains and a few Greyhound buses were the only means of transportation available - other than the automobile, if one was brave enough to venture out. It caught many unaware, particularly the Livingstons who came to attend the funeral of the matriarch of the family, Bessie Livingston.

On a gray and gloomy Sunday, January 9, all of Bessie’s children (except Charles) and their families, along with many friends and acquaintances, gathered for the last rites of Bessie. The services were held at the Bethel church, northwest of Jasper.

Through the years the little country church had played a vital role in the lives of the Livingston family. When living in the neighborhood, they were always in attendance for Sunday School and church; Charley frequently led the singing in his deep bass voice. Every August friendships were renewed as old friends and neighbors met for the yearly Bethel reunion; a program was presented in the afternoon, but more important was the non-stop visiting (and Bessie did her share!) while enjoying a lunch from the groaning tables of good country food.

Inside the warm, flower-scented church the minister read the obituary and gave a short sermon. As the old favorite hymns “In the Garden,” “Abide With Me,” and “Near the Cross” were sung, memories of the identical music from their father’s funeral caused the older daughters to shed a few tears. From the back of the church came a few suppressed nervous giggles from the younger generation.

Outside was a different story - a misty rain that had fallen all day became heavier and the temperature began to slide downward. On leaving the little frame building, great care had to be taken for the big steps at the entrance had become coated with freezing rain. The glazing continued as the procession carefully drove on the gravel roads and headed the short distance west and south to Waters cemetery.

The cedar trees, each one planted in lieu of a tombstone by early settlers, were beginning to accumulate the wintry moisture in their branches. The undertaker’s tent, covered by a solid sheet of ice, crackled in the wind. The family and friends gathered on the hillside under the tent, protected to some degree from the elements. Verses of scripture were read. Then, escorted by Len Quillin, Bert Quillin, and grandsons Guy, Jr.; Philip; John, Jr.; and Robert, Bessie was laid to rest beside her husband, Charley. Close by were the graves of her infant children, Clifford and Pauline. Lightning flashed across the sky and thunder rumbled. As the coffin was lowered into the grave, a deafening clap of thunder echoed through the cemetery. One of the mourners said, “Well, there goes Bessie!” The services were quickly concluded so all could get home safely.

Freezing rain kept building, layer by layer. Electrical power was gone by 10:00 p.m. George of Westfield, New Jersey, spent the night with Esther and family; Josephine of Kansas City stayed with Daisy. Mabel and family attempted to return to Kansas City but were forced to spend the night at Rich Hill. On Monday, W.B. took all of those from out of town to Pittsburg to Effie’s and from there to catch their northbound train. The slippery trip from Jasper to Pittsburg took two and a half hours.

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<sup>1</sup> *Carthage Press*, January 10, 1949.

Aftermath:

Esther recorded in her diary on Tuesday, January 11, that there was still no electricity, and she didn't enjoy evenings with only coal oil lights. Freezing rain continued; limbs broke constantly from the heavy weight of ice and fell down with sharp retorts. The tall sycamore trees lining the driveway in front of the Scott home sustained extensive damage. A huge branch from one of them crashed to the ground – right where the car was usually parked – immediately after W. B. had left for the trip to Pittsburg. Later it took four trips with the tractor to pull the limbs from the driveway. Electrical power was off for eleven long days. The biggest hardship was not having the milking machine for the dairy cattle; other than that, the lights were missed, but kerosene lamps sufficed. Heat was provided by the coal stoves, and water was pumped to the water system by the windmill. Cooking was done on a kerosene stove.

Before the storm ended, more than five inches of sleet had accumulated on top of the ice. Bell Telephone officials reported damages of \$250,000; close to 500 poles were broken or down, and some 300 men were at work to restore service. There had been a run on candles and only a few kerosene lamps were available in the stores. The Union Bus terminal saw the arrival of most buses, though all were behind schedule. Ninety percent of the trees had sustained extensive damage. Fortunately, no accidents happened except where a few cars skidded into ditches. Hard hit were the local dairies that operated with electric milking machines.

Regardless, life and social events went on. On Friday, W. B. and Esther had a card party. In attendance were the Goss, Henderson, Sumners, Ritchhart, Biggerstaff, and Shaw families. All brought coal oil lamps.

A repeat performance of ice, sleet, and snow occurred two weeks after the first onslaught.

*The ice storm of 2007 caused an estimated 107 million dollars over a fifty mile swath across Southwest Missouri. Empire District Electric replaced 2,000 new poles, thousands of cross arms, and uncountable new lines. Over 1,500 people worked on recovery operations. Shelters were set up to house those without heat. Five people in the area were asphyxiated. What things were missed the most? Certainly not the same ones as in 1949. After heated homes, cooking facilities, and in rural areas, water, the people of this era miss their creature comforts and entertainment. Computers, televisions, microwaves, electric blankets, garage door openers . . . How times change!<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Carthage Press, January 30, 2007.