

## THE BIG SNOW

Wednesday, January 26, 1972

5 PM

Olympia, Washington



*"What bothers me, is that we don't seem to be doing better with satellites and all that scientific junk than we used to do with Uncle George's bunions when I was a boy. When Uncle George couldn't put his carpet slippers on, we knew we were in for a spell of the weather."*

*The Daily Olympian Jan 26, 1972*

The forecast on Sunday was for a few inches of snow. But for twenty-four hours from Monday to Tuesday, Olympia received 20.5 inches of the white stuff. It was a record for this century and was rivaled only by Dec 21, 1892 when the capital city was blanketed by a whopping 30 inches in a single day. This morning, families gathered around the radio to hear the familiar voice of KGY's Dick Pust announce that again today, all schools would be closed. As a result, the hills around town have been getting heavy use all day by crowds of mitten-clad thrill seekers who have scrounged every sled, toboggan and innertube they could get their hands on. Capitol Lake and other lakes in the area have frozen over and been transformed into temporary skating rinks.

For only the second time in its history, the Olympia Brewery stopped operating, with plans to restart by morning. Others are staying open out of necessity, like the new St. Peter Hospital which has been accepting patients for a year now. The medical center offered its 9th floor to staff so they could sleep there between shifts rather than brave the storm.

Employees of Olympia's brand new city-owned bus system, Intercity Transit, are working hard to navigate the streets on schedule with one minor setback: the wrong snow chains were sent with the new busses! City manager Eldon Marshall is discussing the situation with the driver of the 21 North Bethel route.

Around town, shop owners and restaurant workers are swapping weather stories and serving up hot food and drinks to the few intrepid customers who have ventured downtown. As they look out at the starry winter scene, they discuss the forecast from the airport weather bureau: cold and clear tonight with a low of 10 to 15 degrees. However, South Sound residents will get another surprise when they wake up tomorrow and learn that the thermometer overnight hit a record-breaking minus 7!

In Sylvester Park, students who are part of the first class at The Evergreen State College create a snow sculpture. Since the last scene,

Olympia has become home to Washington's sixth public four-year college. Classes began October 4th with 1,100 students enrolled. Coincidentally, the campus is on Cooper Point where John Chaplin envisioned his unique People's University back when the century was new.

The students on Olympia's fledgling campus echo the thoughts of many young people across the nation today. They have found themselves in the middle of the Vietnam War conflict, the civil rights movement, environmental issues and women's liberation. Evergreen's innovative programs and alternative methods of measuring progress are drawing praise and criticism, and often cause as much debate in the town as the current weather forecast. In any case, thanks to this youthful addition, Olympia is sure to reap a harvest of new perspectives in the years ahead.

The South Sound region is also home to two other institutions of higher learning: 77 year old St. Martin's College in Lacey which now has a grand new pavilion that accommodates 6,000 people, and the Olympia Vocational Technical Institute (OVTI) which just moved from downtown to its new campus at the Mottman Industrial Park last May. (This will later be known as South Puget Sound Community College.)

Since the last scene, the one regional high school on Capitol Way has been replaced by four: a new Olympia High on Carlyon Avenue, North Thurston and Timberline in Lacey, and Tumwater High School. Plans are in the works for another high school on the Westside. Olympia School Board members like Esther Knox are hard at work on this project. Five years ago, North Thurston High built a swimming pool, while OHS got a new grandstand in 1968 to replace the one at Stevens Field that burned.

A building that burned and cannot be replaced is Edmund Sylvester's pioneer home. When it was slated for demolition in 1961, citizens banded together and raised the money to move the historic structure to a donated lot on the Eastside. It was painted and renovated and ready to serve its new purpose as the Thurston County Child Guidance headquarters when, in December of '61, an arson fire completely destroyed the valued landmark.

Today the towers that watch over Edmund Sylvester's town have huge plate glass windows and panoramic views. The nine-story Miesian style Capitol Center Building on the isthmus opened in 1966, and is still downtown Olympia's reigning skyscraper. The Best Western Governor House Hotel on Sylvester Park is a close second with eight stories. It will be joined by the seven story Evergreen Plaza building, opening next fall.

The population in Olympia this year is 23,111, Tumwater is 5,373, and Lacey has grown from a crossroads area to a city of 9,696. Those statistics represent real people who work and make a difference in their

communities, like Olympia electrician Irv Lassen, Tumwater grocer Carl Reder, Lacey's future mayor Tom Huntamer, and Squaxin activist Joyce Cheeka, all braving the wintry streets tonight. Governor Dan Evans, in his second of three terms in Olympia, pauses on Capitol Way to discuss the reopening of state offices after the storm.

There are three local newspapers: The Daily Olympian, the weekly Olympia News and the weekly Lacey Leader. KGY radio now shares the airwaves with a second station: KITN, 920 on your dial. If you plan to watch tv tonight, you have a choice of about six channels with shows like "Dragnet", "Star Trek" and "Gilligan's Island." For those willing to put on snow boots and venture downtown, you can take in a Clint Eastwood, James Garner or Disney movie at the Olympic, State and Capitol Theaters.

Although Olympia still has downtown department stores such as Penneys, Miller's, and the Yard Birds/Sea Mart complex in the old cannery, the shopping habits of local citizens have been changing since the South Sound Mall opened in Lacey six years ago. Sears moved to the mall from its old home at Legion and Franklin leaving a large empty building behind. Woolworths also chose to leave downtown for the mall, where its customers can enjoy a climate controlled environment going from store to store, and where parking is plentiful. Plans will soon be revealed for a new shopping mall on Olympia's westside. The remodeled Penneys store is likely to be the first to move out, leaving another darkened storefront. City leaders are weighing the popularity of these covered malls, with the growing impact they will have on businesses in the heart of town.

What downtown has that the mall cannot offer is the character of its past and the beauty of its setting. It is a short walk to the Capital Campus, or the shores of Budd Inlet and Capitol Lake. Citizens have been drawing people back downtown through events such as "Lakefair" which blossom into local traditions. Lakefair began 15 years ago as an effort to bring the community together around the new urban lake, with fireworks, rides, and food booths to help nonprofit groups. Though it's a long way to July, volunteers like Dee Hooper, have already put in hours on float designs for the parade, new activities and a yearly theme for the summer festival.

Each December, huge crowds gather downtown to be inspired by the beauty of Christmas Island: a holiday display of lights, music and angels with moving wings, that first sparkled from the center of Capitol Lake back in 1959. Between this winter event and Lakefair, citizens are planning a new festival to celebrate the rich history of wooden boats and the waterfront. Two years from now, Harbor Days will debut and become an instant Olympia tradition.

However the part of town where the wooden boats used to dock has now fallen into disrepair. At 4th & Water the old Copeland Lumber warehouse is an eyesore, blocking people's view of the inlet as they drive by. It is followed to the north by a string of dilapidated warehouses and docks that are being leased. This section of waterfront which was once known as "Olympia's front door," is now a safety hazard and a visual detractor. The city will soon start to develop strategies for returning this area to the public welcoming place it used to be.

Further out on the port fill, the steady hum of the plywood plants has been silenced and the smokestacks are gone. Georgia Pacific, Simpson and St. Regis all closed their doors five years ago, moving their operations to modern plants with cheaper labor in the southern states. This resulted in the loss of 600 local jobs. However West Bay Drive is still an active industrial strip with such companies as Solid Wood Inc, Hardel, Reliable Steel, Delson Lumber and Buchanan. West Bay Marina now sits near the north end and can accommodate about 50 pleasure boats. Out on Budd Inlet, the last of the mothball fleet remain for a few more months.

At the end of Olympia's peninsula, sits the KGY office and 200 foot radio tower. To the east Cascade Pole operates its wood preserving business, and to the west is the Jacaranda Restaurant located in the "House of Living Light," which was brought down by barge following the Seattle World's Fair. The Olympia Marina operates between the restaurant and the port's massive yards of raw logs waiting for export.

The sewage treatment plant which was completed soon after the last scene, now serves all three cities and the brewery, and will soon be needing upgrades. Near the plant, talks are underway to dredge part of the east channel and build East Bay Marina. Today, across the channel, East Bay Drive remains closed for road widening. Boston Harbor residents look forward to September when the road reopens after two years of detours.

The completion of Interstate 5 now means that most of the traffic in Olympia is local. People driving to Portland, Seattle or the ocean beaches now bypass downtown. This makes the streets less clogged, but also reduces visitors to restaurants, motels and shops in the city center.

If you wish to travel by means other than automobile, you can book an Air West flight to Seattle from the port-run airport, or take an Amtrak train from the lean-to out on Rich Road, (there is no depot), or get on a Greyhound Bus at the 7th Avenue station. Olympia's new city bus system has no station. City busses line up between 4th and 5th on Capitol Way and they share the bus barn on Wilson Street with school busses.

Park goers now enjoy Capitol Lake Park on the east side of Olympia's

man-made lake, complete with bathhouse and restroom facilities. The city's first farmer's market will debut at the lake in 1976, and then move to a site on Plum Street. Tumwater Falls Park has been open for almost a decade, and of course, there is the hometown original: Sylvester Park where John Rogers' statue remains the city's only public art.

However, a new group called POSSCA\* which formed four years ago is hoping to improve the visual and cultural atmosphere of the city. They are discussing the need to once again have a gazebo in the park for music events. A while back the Lions Club set up a "tapeathon" system that played four hours of continuous classical music in the old town square.

Equal rights for women have come a long way since Julia Waldrip Ker argued her first case in Olympia court surrounded by curious onlookers. Today Dixy Lee Ray is visiting the capital, where 5 years from now she will be sworn in as the first woman governor in Washington history.

History is also about to be made by a determined, and frequently arrested, Nisqually activist named Billy Frank who has come to Olympia to argue for Indian fishing rights. In 1974, the landmark Boldt Decision will validate his efforts by ruling that under the Medicine Creek Treaty of 1854, Native Americans have the right to fish in their usual and accustomed places, and are entitled to half of the fish harvest.

Lately, the historic treaty ground has become the site of a battle between environmentalists who want the Nisqually Delta to be protected and industrialists who envision the economic boon of a superport. Two years from now, the Nisqually Wildlife Refuge will become a reality.

Up on the hill, the State's campus has now spread to both sides of Capitol Way, and the beautiful Tivoli Fountain has been operating for almost two decades. On the Eastside, Olympia's Community Center still stands, the public library is still in the Carnegie Building on Franklin, and the capital city's oldest continuously-run family business is Bettman's Mens Store at 410 S. Capitol Way. Talcott Jewelers is a close second.

The current public swimming area, docks and park on Capitol Lake were part of a vision presented to the voters by a dedicated group called "The Committee For the 60's." Besides the lake improvements, Henderson Boulevard was extended from Interstate 5 up to the new high school, and a modern, spacious police station and city hall now stand on Plum Street.

This evening downtown merchants will finish shovelling snow off rooftops, awnings and marquees, and children in outlying neighborhoods will abandon snow forts and sled routes. All will retreat to the welcoming lights and warmth of home. It is not often South Sound residents see extreme weather. The big snow of '72 will be remembered.