

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Are all bets off for a mild winter in 1979-80? Is the new Old Farmer's Almanac wrong-as-wrong can be, this time? Just because a freak snowstorm hit most of the Middle Atlantic and New England states, October 10th, and broke all existing records for the year's earliest snowfall, doesn't necessarily prove we're doomed to a long cold winter.

It doesn't necessarily mean we're not, either. When winter arrives even before Indian Summer, it makes everybody apprehensive. This October has been a queer month, weather-wise, and there's no arguing about it.

Around the Cape some timers base their predictions on what happens after a storm rather than depending on when the first snows fall. They tell us if the wind comes from the northwest as the storm clears, a severe winter's in store; but if the wind stands from southwest, we can look for a mild-er season.

Those who keep diaries and record weather patterns can look back over the past several years and check this theory. You might start a weather diary for your own future reference. Along with temperatures, wind directions and precipitation figures, you may make note of when the leaves turn on the big maple at the corner, when geese fly south, the number and variety of birds at your feeder, and the date of the first killing frost.

Later in the year, you could measure the depth of snowfalls, both on the level and in the highest drift on your driveway. If you're an amateur photographer, you might add picture proof to your diary.

And, as spring follows winter (just as inevitably as winter will follow fall), record the date red-wing blackbirds first reappear. They're a true harbinger of spring.

If you're planning to winter-over on the Cape, however, you're not thinking that far ahead. Your concern now is the next four or five months. Many of us, in an attempt to cope with rising fuel costs, have installed woodburning stoves; there are few things more reassuring than a stove ready to light and a shedful of hardwood.

If you're among those lucky ones, be certain you're truly ready. If you've had a stove for a season or two, be sure your chimney is in good shape before you settle back to enjoy its warmth.

Although there's much to be said for burning wood, it can become a nightmare. The small inconveniences of tending the fire, keeping the woodbin full, cleaning out ashes, and sweeping up inevitable litter pale into insignificance when compared to the disaster of a chimney fire.

Chimney fires result from creosote deposits, and creosote in the chimney results from burning wood. Some deposit is inevitable, although it can be kept to a minimum by burning hot fires of hard woods like oak instead of smudges with soft woods like pine. Creosote is combustible and once it starts burning inside your chimney, it can be both frightening and dangerous.

Should you ever be so unfortunate as to have a chimney fire, you'll hear it. There'll be a loud roaring noise as the fire burns. What's happening inside the chimney? Tiny particles of creosote explode. Billions of them. The heat can be intense enough to destroy the mortar. As the stuff burns, flames and fiery particles will fly from the top of chimney, carried up by the rising draft. Your roof could be next to go.

Step one: When you install a woodburning stove, have it inspected and approved by your fire department. Step Two: Make certain your chimney is clean. Step Three: Burn hard woods with enough draft to assure combustion.

Should you ever even suspect your chimney's afire, call the fire department before you do anything else. After that, you can use the fire extinguisher. It might help keep things under control until the firemen arrive.

Assuming you've burned wood for a couple of seasons, assuming you suspect your chimney could use a good cleaning, and assuming you don't feel inclined to climb up on the roof and do the job yourself, who do you call to eliminate soot and creosote? Why, the chimneysweep, of course.

Ken Hakala came to my house. He arrived in his red truck, dressed in his black top hat and tails. Around his neck he wore a scarlet muffler and on his face, a broad smile. When he left an hour-and-a-half later, our chimney was sootless and free of creosote, the mess was entirely cleaned up. We'll start this winter's fires with easy minds.

Ken moved to the Cape from New Jersey where he worked sixteen years for a newspaper. He and his wife and teen-

age son had vacationed on the Cape for years; when his job at the paper was eliminated by automation, Ken gave a lot of thoughts to their future. He decided to become a chimney sweep.

There weren't any schools where he could learn the trade, but Ken heard of a man near Buffalo, N.Y., who'd teach its fine points to newcomers to the field. Although it was February, and New Jersey winters aren't exactly tropical, Ken decided to apprentice himself for a week's training.

It was around 16°F. when he left home. Buffalo's temperature was 20° below zero. The warmest day he spent there, the thermometer rose to 3° above. Ten hours a day for the next week, he spent scrubbing chimneys.

"Cold? I've never been so cold in my life; but I learned by experience instead of from a manual. Then I invested in my outfit, and moved the family to Centerville. I'm keeping busy, especially in winter; in summer, people don't worry about their chimneys," he said.

Before he drove away, he left some literature that's well worth sharing. It advises those who burn wood, either in a stove or a fireplace, that it's time to have your chimney cleaned if it has a black coating inside, especially if the lining appears "fuzzy" or "lumpy".

It warns that inspecting a chimney can be hazardous. Eye injury can be avoided by wearing goggles and using a mirror and flashlight when checking for creosote deposits. Annual inspection and cleaning is recommended.

Smokey furnaces signal trouble; proper adjustments by burner servicemen can save fuel. Burning wastepaper in fireplaces creates fly-ash, a dangerous combustible that may accumulate inside your chimney.

Birds, squirrels and raccoons sometimes build nests in chimneys. If "somebody" is living in your smoke chamber, it's a good idea to call a chimneysweep. An angry frightened raccoon is distinctly impolite.

Always use a firescreen or glass doors when there's a fire in the fireplace. Sparks could ignite your rugs or furniture. Never remove hot or warm coals from a fire; always use a fireproofed container and scoop; always dump ashes, even cold ones, into a hole in the ground or a metal ash can.

Burn well-seasoned hardwood that's been cut and dried for several months before being used. Open dampers create better drafts and keep flues hot enough to reduce creosote deposits to a minimum.

Hard winter or mild, fireplace or stove, hard wood or soft, winter, spring or fall, if your chimney needs cleaning, call a chimneysweep. He'll gladly come in summer, too. A chimney fire is a hard way to learn a safety lesson.