

# VILLAGE VIEW

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"What goes up must come down." I wonder who the first person was to make that observation...it was well before Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity, I'd wager. And now you're wondering why I'm rambling on about it.

It's because of the weather. A lot about the weather this winter doesn't suit me, and most of what I don't like comes down in the form of white stuff. It lays a blanket over the brown leaves and pine needles that fell a few months ago. It becomes slippery on the highways and lanes. It turns to ice wherever a tire tread, or even a shoe compresses it. It must be shovelled or plowed from driveways and paths. And we're getting more than we think is our share of it, this winter.

Pretty? Sure, it's pretty. To look at, and if you don't have to go out in it, it's breathtakingly beautiful. Still, I'd settle for an open winter. No snow. I'd also settle for warmer temperatures, (mostly because of the heating bills), but if I had a choice between snow or cold, I'd opt for cold. This winter we don't seem to have any choice because we're getting both in ample quantity. And in unusual quantity.

I can't be alone in wondering what the reason is, can I? I think I've figured out the reason for all the snow. I'm not sure the reason for the cold is the same, but I'm blaming the snow on Mt. St. Helens, out in the Pacific Northwest.

What goes up must come down. And an incredible quantity of stuff — ash, dust, particulate — rose high into the sky each time the volcano erupted, and a lot of it came down again and landed on the surrounding countryside, some as far as 50 or 100 miles from the mountain.

A certain amount, however, hasn't yet descended. It's suspended in the atmosphere in minute particles. And as the earth spins on its axis, the atmosphere's content of debris from Mt. St. Helens is spread out in a broad band covering most of the United States and extending out into the Atlantic Ocean, and eventually will be distributed in the atmosphere of the entire northern hemisphere of our planet.

At this time, however, New England lies directly in the path of the currents carrying a goodly burden of particulate from the eruptions. Along comes winter. It gets cold up there. Each tiny mote of dust attracts and holds a little bit of moisture. The combination creates billions upon billions of particles that are heavier than the atmosphere can support.

So down it comes, flake after flake. And we're blanketed. It's even possible there's enough fly-ash in the atmosphere to reduce to a very small degree the amount of heat reaching us from the sun. That could account conceivably for the unprecedented cold weather that's accompanied the unusual quantity of snow. It doesn't take much to change our weather, here on the Cape, because the few degrees difference between here and some nearby areas gives us, most years, our reputedly milder climate.

There are compensations, and because we don't have much choice in the matter (unless we call the plumber and have our water pulled, pack our bags and head for the Sun Belt), we might just as well look on the bright sides of things.

One such facet is the glorious sunsets and dawns we've been enjoying. Have you noticed how much more colorful they've been than usual? The eastern sky, some mornings, has spread its rosy glow over half the heavens, and hardly a week goes by we're not treated to a sunset that can be described deservedly as spectacular. If it weren't so cold outside, there'd be a strong temptation to watch it flare and fade from a beach or a hilltop with an unimpeded view in all directions.

The extra-special color parade, however, is but one benefit to be realized, for if my own personal explanation for all this wintry weather has any basis in fact, we'll reap a rich harvest from all the snow we're having. And I mean, literally, a rich harvest.

Volcanic ash is loaded with nutrients and minerals; as it falls upon the woods and fields, on gardens and into water supplies, in the form of snow, it enriches our soils and next summer's crops will flourish. Look for a good harvest next fall. Nothing but scarcity of water supplies will prevent it, and that's unlikely because volcanic activity increases chances of rainfall as surely as it does chances of snowstorms, for the same reasons.

In the midwest, during the summer of 1980, the rainfall was so persistent many of the farmers complained their crops were rotting in the fields. While we in New England were crying for rain, they were virtually flooded. The mass of atmospheric-borne material from Mt. St. Helens hadn't been distributed far enough east to affect us, last summer. This spring, though, look for plenty of rain. Prepare to read of flooding of lowlands along rivers. And anticipate a wet summer for 1981.

The old generation of farmers who once tilled the fields of Massachusetts' agricultural acreages called snow "The poor man's fertilizer." They didn't know why; they probably didn't even know whether a volcano eruption had occurred; but they did learn from experience that a snowy winter promised healthy crops and a good harvest the following year.

You may think, right now, that I'm just making all this up just to make you feel good, but that's not the case. I doubt there's really anything I could say that would change the way you feel about wintery blasts and lots of snowfall and the sub-zero temperatures that are causing your fuel bills to skyrocket. Besides, I'm really not famous for my

Pollyanna-ish attitudes. I'm more likely to be talking gloom and doom than looking at things through rose-colored glasses.

And, of course, I'm sticking my neck out when I make predictions about the weather as far ahead as next spring and summer. My meteorological education is cursory at best. But now I'm on record in public print, and this is my forecast. Only the coming months will prove me right or wrong.

"What goes up must come down," and "Snow is the poor man's fertilizer," are a couple of old saws. Standing alone, they don't mean much. Put them into context with the physical events of the world we live in, though, and the information could be useful. Those with a gambling streak might even invest in futures, based on the logic expressed here (but I don't recommend it).

In the meantime, brace yourself for more of the same sort of weather for the rest of this winter and perhaps for several winters to come. Unless I'm more mistaken than usual, which is always a distinct possibility, we're in for it. Take comfort in the knowledge that we're far closer to spring, now, than we were in September.

That's one thing I'm absolutely positive I'm right about.