

Late October Northeast Snowstorm Is Not Unprecedented

By Art Horn, Meteorologist

The massive snow storm that buried the parts of the Northeastern United States on the last weekend of October was not an unprecedented event. Claims have been made that this storm was something new and strange and that it was caused by global warming. The people that made these claims have not done their homework. In order to understand the present we must know and understand the past. One can't put current events in proper perspective if we are ignorant of past events. That is why we teach children history in school. Apparently many adults do not appreciate the need to know history. Rabid claims that all so called "extreme" weather events are caused by climate change come from ideologically and politically driven people who are ignorant of past weather events.

A look back at historical weather events in New England and surrounding areas reveals that October snowstorms have always occurred. On October 26th 1859, [4 inches](#) of wet snow covered New York City. This amount is similar to the 6 inches reported at Fieldston in Bronx county New York from this past October's storm. Much earlier in history, on October 27th 1765 more than [a foot of snow](#) fell at Boston, Massachusetts. There is little information available about this event being it was nearly 250 years ago. However from a meteorological point of view it is reasonable to assume than many areas around Boston and perhaps Southern New England were also buried under large amounts of snow. Water temperatures off Boston would have been relatively mild in late October keeping snowfall amounts lower near the coast. It is possible that amounts of snow higher than fell in Boston occurred west of the city that day being that they were farther from the modifying influence of the still mild water temperatures. Large amounts of snow in Boston do not come from anything else but coastal storms this early in the season. These coastal storms, more often than not, affect large sections of Southern New England. If it snowed that much in Boston from this storm it is quite possible many other areas had large amounts of snow as well.

It is difficult to reasonably infer that the remainder of Southern and Central New England received large amounts of snow from this storm. On the other hand Boston would not receive this large amount of snow from anything other than a large coastal storm, especially being that it was so early in the season. It is possible that this was a widespread snowstorm and that many areas of Southern New England received amounts of snow equal to or greater than Boston this day. In retrospect, however this storm played out, it is very significant that a major snowstorm hit Eastern New England on October 27th 1765 and that the snowfall was greater than what happened in Boston on October 29th and 30th of this year.

Another heavy snow event in late October occurred in Salem, Massachusetts on October 29th 1746. A [foot of snow](#) covered the ground by storm's end. Again there is little additional information available to make reasonable assumptions about how widespread the storm was. Meteorological experience tells me that such a great fall of snow would not have been limited to one location, especially being that the water was still mild

offshore. Additionally, amounts of snow this large do not occur in isolated areas this early in the season in Eastern New England but instead are associated with large coastal storms known as Nor'easters that frequently cover all of southern and Central New England. It is reasonable to assume that this was a large coastal storm that produced heavy snow across much of Southern and perhaps Central New England and is another example of the reality that the storm of late October 2011 is not unique.

Over 200 years ago an October snowstorm hit New Southern and Central New England that appears to be very similar to the event of this past October. On October the 9th 1804, three weeks earlier in the month than this year's storm, a massive fall snow buried parts of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire. Historical accounts indicate that a tropical storm moved up the Atlantic Coast, possibly merging with a pre-existing coastal storm and generated very heavy rains, strong damaging winds and feet of heavy, wet snow. New Haven, Connecticut right along the coast, report a small accumulation of snow (just as they did in this October's storm). Low elevation cities in the Connecticut River valley reported 4 to 6 inches of wet snow. One foot of snow was recorded at Goshen, in northwestern Connecticut and amounts as high as [20 inches](#) were reported in Northern Connecticut. Farther north in the Berkshires of Massachusetts massive amounts of wet snow fell with up to 30 inches reported (exactly the same amounts as fell of this October's storm). In Vermont and Central New Hampshire amounts of 2 to 3 feet of heavy, wet snow buried everything in sight (same as this past storm). Amazingly all of this took place three weeks earlier in the month than this year's snowstorm. Given this fact there would have been massive and catastrophic tree damage but in those days there was no power to knock out so the impact was severe in a different way.

There were far fewer people and far, far fewer snowfall reports as well back in 1804. Today our network of snowfall measuring sites is vastly denser than in the past. This results in snowfall measurements picking up isolated large totals that would have been missed in the distant past making storms seem large today than in the past. The snowstorm of October 9th, 1804 has remarkable similarities to the storm of this past October. This should serve as a reminder that nature repeats itself over and over again but on time scales that humans have difficulty comprehending due to our relatively short life spans.

Those who claim that this October's snowstorm was caused by global warming or climate change are either too lazy, too politically motivated or too afraid to look into the past see what they might find...the truth. This October's snowstorm was not unique and not caused by climate change. It is simply part of the sumptuous variety of weather here in New England and for that matter, around the world. If you don't know history, everything that unfolds is new.