

# Ed Henry and Merrill Price Remember

## Enjoyable Winter Railroading in Iowa!

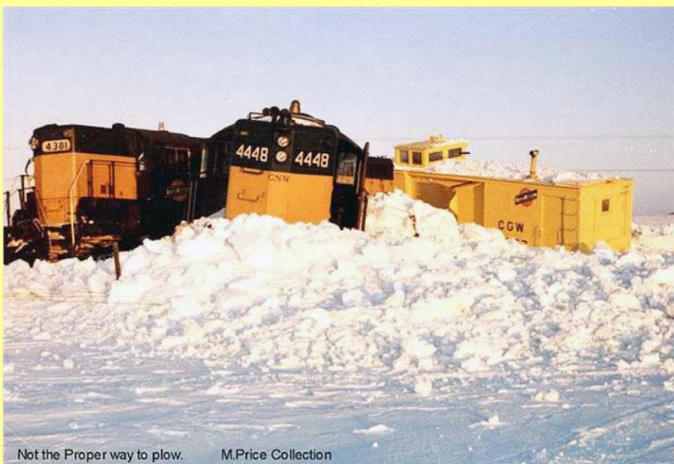
[Home](#)

**Ed Henry** starts it out... Way back when I first started on the railroad near Chicago, the C&NW had a little newsletter, I remember reading about trains getting stuck in the snow in a cut somewhere in the "middle of Iowa." I remember thinking to myself: "What a God forsaken place - why would anyone want to work out there?" Well, about eight years later, I found myself as the Roadmaster for this very area - MP 173 on the Iowa Division.



This was March 1983 and the mainline was blocked with snow. The plan was to take four covered wagons running light and "blast" through the drift. **Vern Squires** was the engineer, don't remember the Conductor and **Don Betherds**, Machinist, was riding with us. **Rick Lawe** was at that time the Mechanical Shop Foreman and was suppose to have bolted the front door shut, but that didn't happen. Well, I believe it was the second try that **Vern** got a real "run for it." They hit the snow drift and in our trucks on the highway, we heard a call for help. The front door had broken open and buried everyone inside with snow. **Don** & the Conductor were buried almost to the roof in snow. **Vern** had the F-unit control stand keeping the snow from him. The Conductor was sitting in the middle seat and when the snow came through both front doors, he was flipped over the seat & buried. **Don** was buried in the seat on the firemen's side. **Vern** & who ever else got **Don** out first and then got the Conductor out. **Don** had frost bitten hands. The C&NW tried to hang **Don** for not having his hard hat & gloves on in the cab but that was shot down in a hurry. That's the engine, over at the left, thawing out in the Marshalltown Diesel Shop the next day.

=====

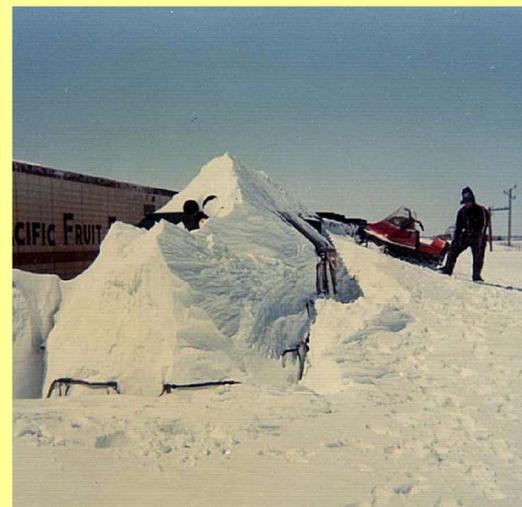
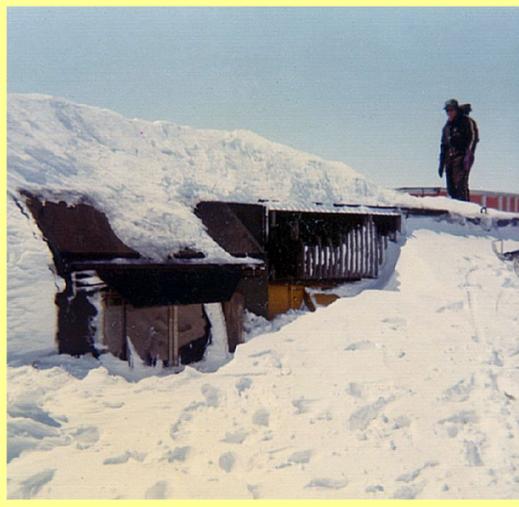


**Merrill Price** remembers another one that had to do with the Oskaloosa Job. It got buried south of Marshalltown and the cats had to come clean the snow and pull the GP38-2's back. They were buried up to the catwalks or better and this in turn lifted the wheels off the rail. Several of us from the shop had to go out there to inspect the engines to make sure the water did not freeze and that the engines were running. We helped the section men shovel the snow out from under the locomotives. The snow was over the fence line and hard enough for us to walk across on. The cat broke a cable trying to pull the locomotives out. That was the good old days when we had no common sense.  
*Comment: Maybe so, Merrill, but you guys got the job done!*

=====

**Ed** continues.... Colo, Iowa, Mile Post 173 on the Clinton Sub Division, was a trouble spot and a priority. When the 4-R money came along we did much grading and helped the situation quite a bit by removing a lot of dirt.. We also talked with the farmer and would install snow fence for the winter. One of the last winters I spent on the railroad (1999), we had a bad March snow storm. That winter we failed to get the snow fence up. It a Friday in early March and a long underpowered eastbound train entered the "Colo Cut" and didn't come out. He had two units, one went down and he was trapped. Four or five units were sent light out of Boone. I thought with this much power, pulling him back will be no problem. I sat at the rear end of the train in Colo waiting to see him pull this train out but the power couldn't budge them. I thought: man, what are we going to do now? We wound up getting Hulcher with lots of equipment and dug the train out, almost car by car. When we finally got the track cleared, Wearmouth and I got a brand new large unit and, running light, blasted into Marshalltown clearing the drifts over the tracks as nothing had been on the rail in this area for a good day or so. It was nighttime and still snowing. We couldn't see out of any windows and were hitting the snow drifts, not knowing if or when we'd leave the rail, or where we were - hoping we wouldn't hit anything at a grade crossing! We were strictly relying on cab signals. When we stopped in the town of State Center, we could barely get out the rear door and had to dig out the front of the unit so could have lights and horn again. This was better than any roller coaster ride I've ever been on!

Toward the end, I came up with a great idea, actually kind of copied from the state. I got along good with the farmer in this area and talked him into planting about 6 rows of corn instead of having to putting up the snow fence. We paid him a few bucks every year to do it and it worked great. These photos were taken in the Colo, IA area in the 1970's, just to give you an idea of what it can be like!





=====



**Ed** winds it up... My last year on the railroad, coming back from rerailling an engine on the Marshalltown sub just south of Eldora Iowa, it was December 22, 2000 and I was heading home, hit ice right in a right hand turn at the bottom of a hill and knew I was going for a ride. Lucky lots of snow in the ditch cushioned this incident. I had to climb out of driver's window. My endloader an hour behind me; I got him on the radio and was able to get out of ditch.

[Home](#)

Revised: 05/06/08

Copyright © 2004-2009 - Veterans' Association of the Chicago & North Western Ry.  
All rights reserved