

# [PDF] The History Of The Snowman

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Author: Bob Eckstein

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## **Description:**

**About the Author Bob Eckstein** has been a humor writer for more than twenty years, and is most recognized for his popular weekly columns in Newsday, the *Village Voice*, and now, *TimeOut*. His cartoons and artwork have also appeared in publications like *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Spy* magazine, and *Details*. He splits his time between his studios in Manhattan and Pennsylvania.

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**The Age of Expansion:** The Twenty-first Century

snowman: A figure of a person made from packed snow, usually formed by piling large snowballs on top of each other.

-- *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*

The era we currently live in is The Age of Expansion, a time of grandeur when the snowman was never bigger. Our society's stance on size is that it still matters. From SUVs to plasma-screen TVs to McMansions to six-foot heroes, living large is being in charge. Putting deli meats aside, today we all want to make an entrance with class, and right now that means the largest diamond, the biggest pecs, the largest breasts, and the most headroom of any sedan on the market. This preoccupation carries over to Christmas decorations, which have gone to another level -- it's not enough to keep up with the Joneses; it's necessary to squash them like a bug. So it's no surprise that our snowmen now need to be either world-record holders or rubbernecking freaks of nature. Snowman contests, snowman festivals, marathons, lollapaloozas...like much else today, if it's not a spectacle, it doesn't bother.

Today if you want a snowman for your lawn, you drive to the store. In an attempt to find another angle to cash in on the holidays, price clubs and better stores everywhere are well stocked with inflatable snowmen and snowman "kits." In this get-it-done-before-it-snows, fast-paced world of ours, there are different brands of snowman kits to choose from, all with prefabricated hats, buttons, pseudo coal and carrots conveniently packaged in a box so you or your kids don't have to get up and look for them yourself. Yes, everyone's snowman is going to look the same, but think of the time we're all saving. We're all too busy to go out and make snowmen, and, besides, what's the point of making one less than twelve feet tall? The buying of the largest possible snowman comes on the heels of The White Trash Years (1975-2000) as a backlash against all those cutesy gift-shop snowmen we all got sick of up to here. But that's the cynical side of the story. The positive spin on this is that "Mr. Huge" and other inflatable rubber substitutes of the real McCoy finally give those who live in temperate regions the joy of having a snowman in their front yard. Think of the children. Think of the money.

Speaking of which, what about snowman making as sport and its gambling opportunities? It's all part of The Age of Expansion, when the snowman continues to blaze trails for tourism. Hundreds of snowman festivals and contests take place around the world every year and continue to grow. In Pennsylvania, there's an annual charity ice golf tournament on Lake Wallenpaupack after it freezes that includes a contest where golfers tee it up and aim for the vulnerable "Wally, the Snowman" down the fairway.

There are hundreds of similar events throughout the world. The biggest is the Ice Lantern Festival (Ice and Snow World) in Harbin. This bitterly cold, northern Chinese city, once known mainly for its expensive exotica cuisine of bear paws, deer nostrils, and white Siberian tiger testicles, is now recognized as the ice sculpture capital, attracting artists from around the world. Each year millions travel to the "Ice City," where the temperature stays below freezing nearly half the year. Held from the beginning of January to the end of February, thousands of enormous sculptures and buildings are exhibited and paraded on floats through the city. Although these snow shows date back to 1963, snow sculpture there dates back to the Qing dynasty about 350 years ago. During the Manchu days, "ice lanterns" were carved and then lit by placing candles in them.

A similar tradition is also enjoyed today throughout Japan, where snowmen have candles placed in their stomachs during the many snowman festivals that take place every winter. Each year snowmen outnumber, at least for a while, the populations of northern Japanese towns. But are they big snowmen? Well, no, but rumor has it that the Japanese are eyeing that big prize, the world's largest snowman, an honor they enjoyed for almost four years thanks to a ninety-six-foot-tall snowman. Then, in February of 1999, Bethel, a town in Maine, placed itself on the map by breaking the coveted

record, spending fourteen days piling snow skyward into what would become Angus, the King of the Mountain, named after the Maine governor, Angus King.

Extreme snowman making has come a long way since the day a bunch of frat boys from Dartmouth made the thirty-eight-foot-high Eleazer Wheelock, the headline act for the 1939 Winter Carnival. Today, making a huge snowman involves cranes, teamsters, and insurance. Don't even think about making a snowball the size of an igloo without a working permit. In Bethel, their record-breaking snowman required sixty volunteers, ranging from kindergartners to senior citizens and the cooperation of the whole town. Angus's arms were made with two ten-foot evergreens. Volunteers created a mouth with six automobile tires and eyes with four-foot wreaths. The local elementary school made a six-foot carrot out of chicken wire and muslin and then painted it orange by having each student place his or her handprint on it. When finished, Angus reached 113 feet and entered the *The Guinness Book of Records*, attracting thousands of visitors and appearing on *Good Morning America*. Afterward, the town held a contest to guess when Angus would melt, and by mid-March, Angus had become "The Leaning Tower of Bethel."

Not every large snowman dies a quiet, slow death. Each year in Zurich, the Swiss celebrate *Sechseläuten* by using large amounts of explosives to blow up an innocent snowman. Always on the third Monday in April, bakers, butchers, blacksmiths, and other tradesmen parade on horses and throw bread and sausages to the crowds. In return for free meat, girls decorate the riders with garlands made of spring flowers. *Sechseläuten* (which means "six bells ringing") comes from the tradition that, at six o'clock, the guild members put down their tools and call it a day. Meanwhile, the *Boogg* is schlepped through town. The Boogg is a large, cotton-wool snowman with a corncob pipe, button nose, and two eyes made out of coal -- he looks the same every year because the same guy has been making the *Boogg* for over thirty-five years. Unfortunately for Mr. Boogg, he's filled with firecrackers and plopped onto a forty-foot pile of very flammable scrap wood. For him, things will only get worse. After the bells of the Church of St. Peter have chimed six times, representing the passing of winter, the townspeople light the pile and watch the carnage. It is believed the shorter the combustion, the hotter and longer the summer will be. When the head of the snowman explodes to smithereens, winter is considered officially over.

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