

'63-'64 New Year's

People across North Alabama needed snow shovels back on New Years Eve 1963 and New Years Day 1964. Snow began falling around 8pm New Years Eve, and lasted through most of New Years Day. The Huntsville Airport tallied 17.1 inches of snow from this event, and 11 inches were reported on the ground at 6am New Years Day.

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From the Huntsville Times on December 31, 2003:

New Year's Eve snow shocked city back in '63

It could happen again, but probably not this year

By JOHN ANDERSON
Times Staff Writer
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Forty years ago this morning North Alabama partygoers-to-be woke up to a typical National Weather Service forecast for early winter here: cold rain throughout the day, possibly mixed with sleet.

It was not a forecast for the ages. About noon the rain turned into snow as cold air slid farther south than expected. By the stroke of midnight 12 hours later, 15.3 inches of snow smothered the city. That's the most snow ever recorded here by the weather service, which opened its Huntsville office in 1958.

But even old-timers said other major and side streets as the wintry blast reached its peak last night. Hundreds of vehicles were abandoned and still stranded today," the reporter wrote.

Another Times story reported that the Civil Defense revived a man found unconscious as his car's motor con-

tinued running after he plowed into a snow bank on U.S. 431 near Big Cove School late New Year's Eve, and police rescued a family of seven - including five children - stranded in their car on Leeman Ferry Road.

then the New Year Eve's snow-storm was the worst since 1899. It snowed so much that Huntsville had the dubious distinction of recording the most snow of any weather service station in the continental United States that last day of 1963.

"Huntsville Crowned Nation's Top Snow-Getter for New Year," *The Times* headline proclaimed New Year's Day, 1964. Another two inches or so fell after midnight, bringing the total snowfall in this part of the Heart of Dixie to over 1.5 feet.

The result? Bedlam. In a town that goes nuts when a dusting falls, a Times reporter described Huntsville as a "paralyzed, helpless city."

"Traffic jams involving thousands of cars backed up on Memorial Parkway and

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Snow

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The snow was so heavy it squashed shrubs and tore awnings off store fronts.

So impressive was the storm, John Gordon, chief weather service meteorologist in Huntsville, is gathering as much data about it as he can to help train his staff on the rare, but always possible, mega-winter storms in North Alabama. He's even asking anyone with photos of the snowstorm to e-mail them to the local weather service's Web site.

"We're going to do a case study," Gordon said Tuesday afternoon. "We're using it as a learning tool."

Gordon said the '63 New Year's Eve storm vividly rebuts the misconception that North Alabama's severe weather consists only of thunderstorms, tornadoes and flood-

ing. "Everyone thinks that Huntsville is just tornado alley, that we don't get any (severe) winter weather. That's nonsense," he said.

Gordon also warned that the last few mild winters shouldn't lull residents into believing it's just one six-week cold rain from Christmas until daffodils begin blooming by Valentine's Day. "We've been very fortunate," he said, "but it's going to happen again."

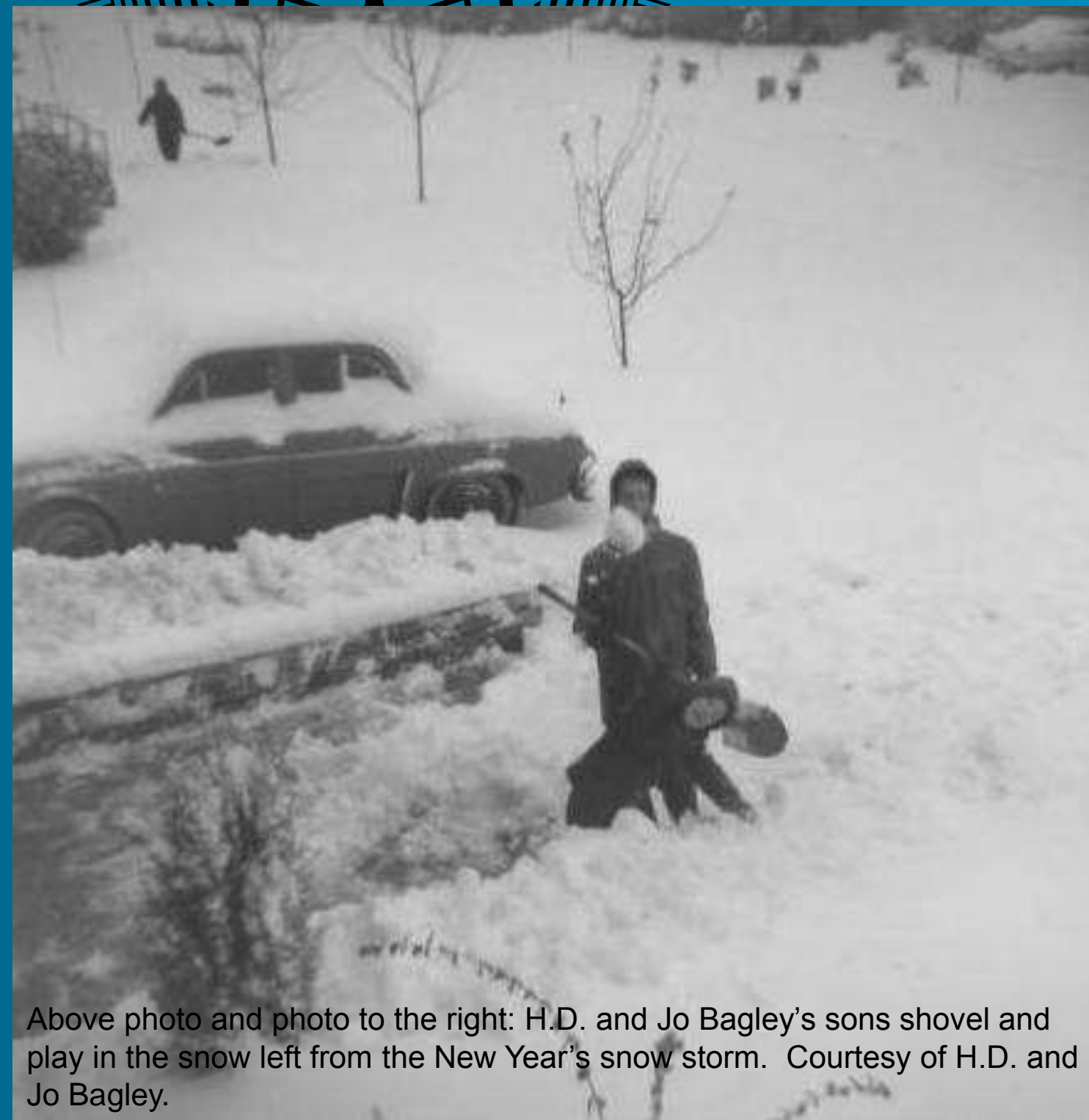
It won't happen this New Year's holiday, though. Today's highs should reach the upper 50s, and approach 60 New Year's Day. There's a chance of showers New Year's night through Monday with continued mild temperatures.

The big snowfall 40 years ago did produce one benefit on the roads, according to the Times' cop reporter: "There obviously weren't any speeding citations issued," he drily noted in the annual roundup of New Year's Eve traffic stops.

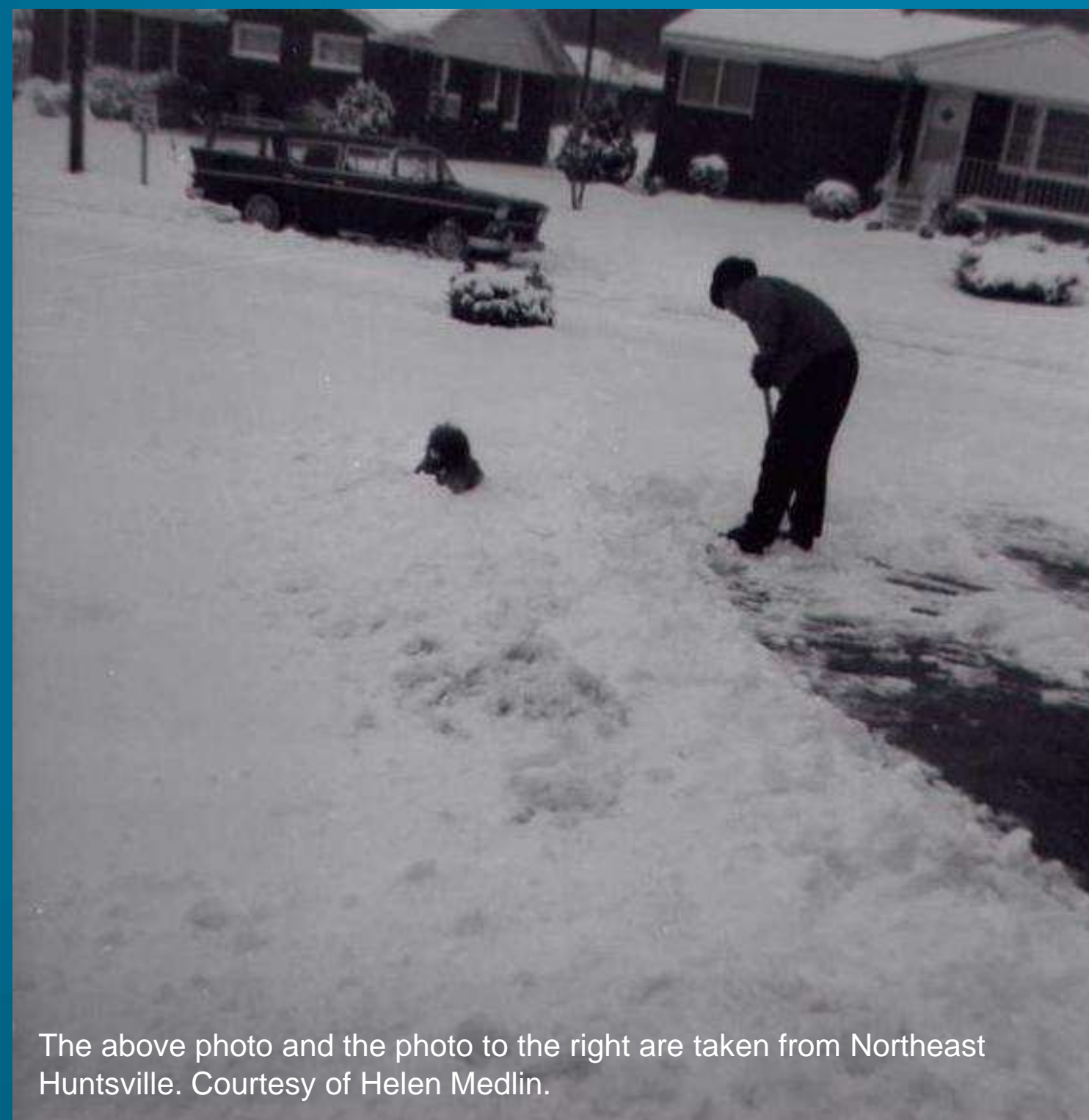
on the Net.
Huntsville weather service office,
www.srh.noaa.gov/hun.

Snowfall Totals for December 31, 1963-January 1, 1964

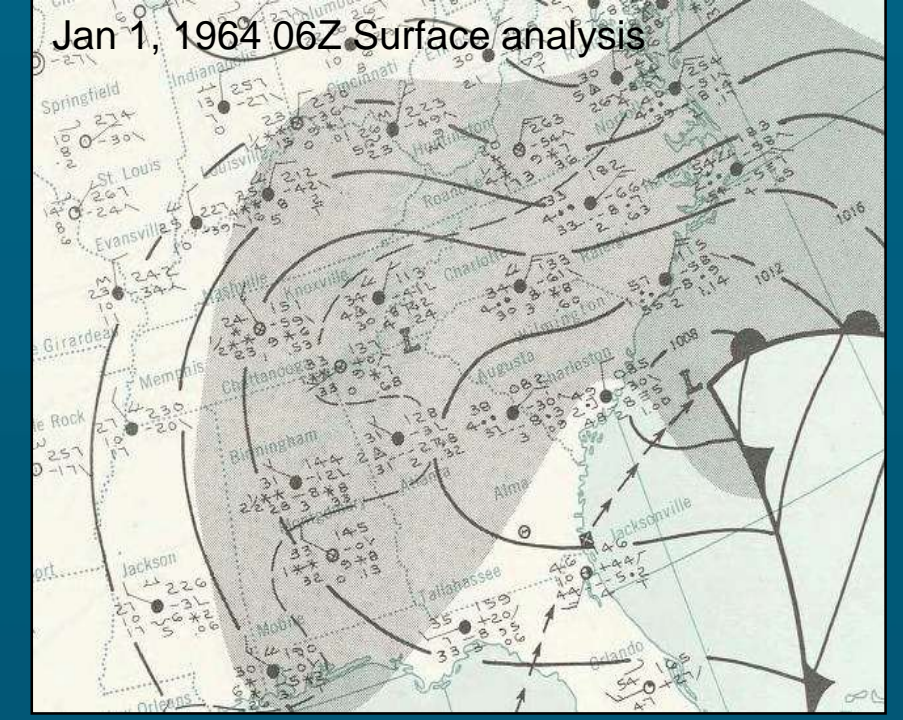
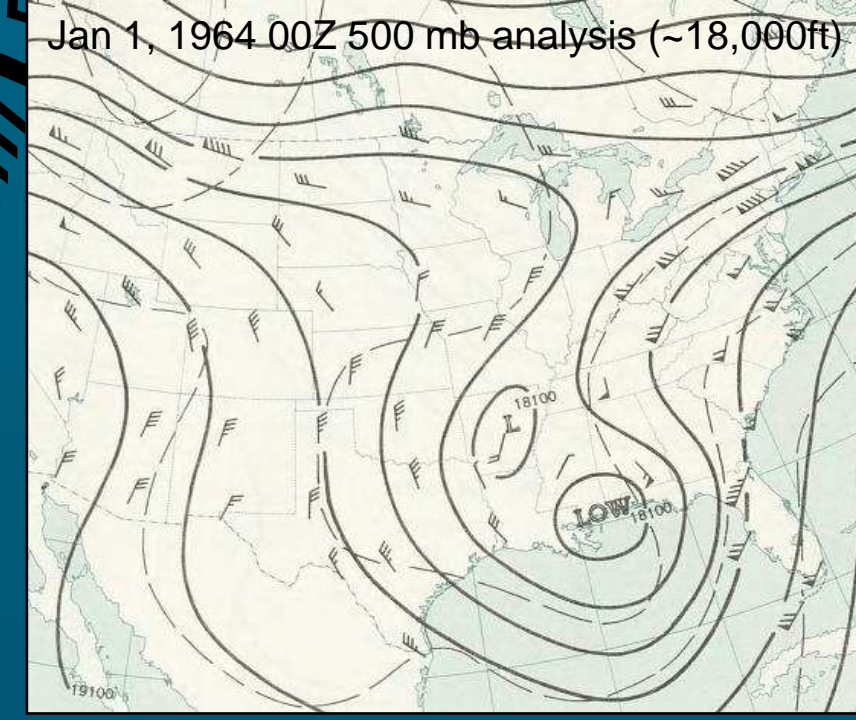
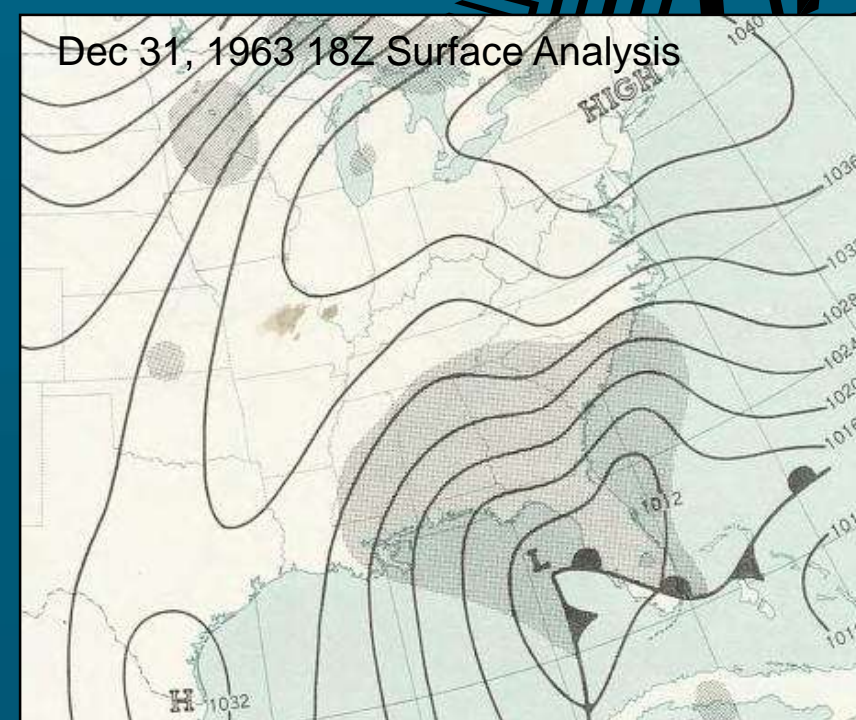
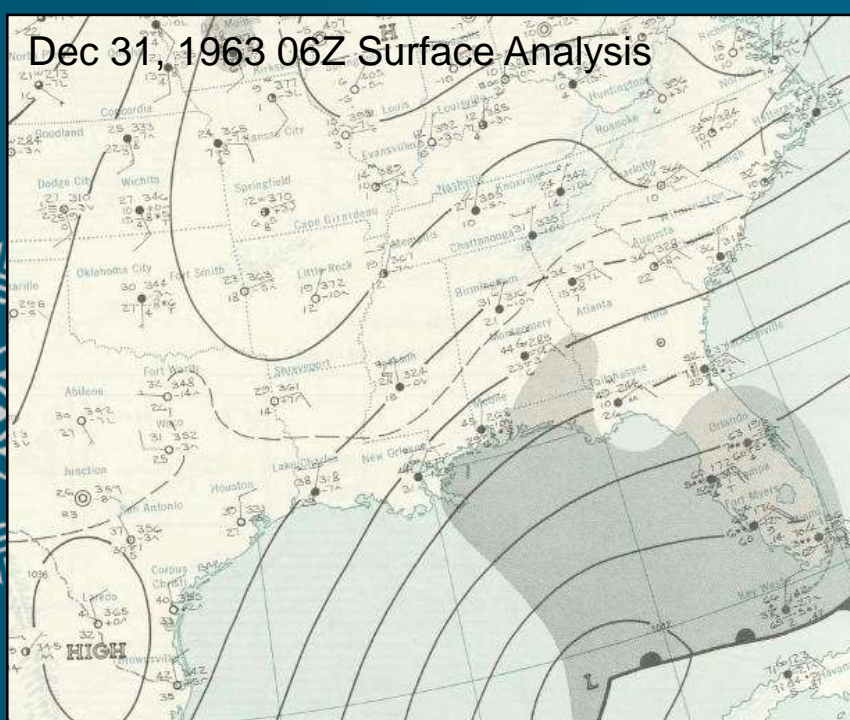
Huntsville Airport	17.1"	Bay St. Louis, MS	10.5"
Meridian, MS	15.0"	New Orleans, LA	4.5"



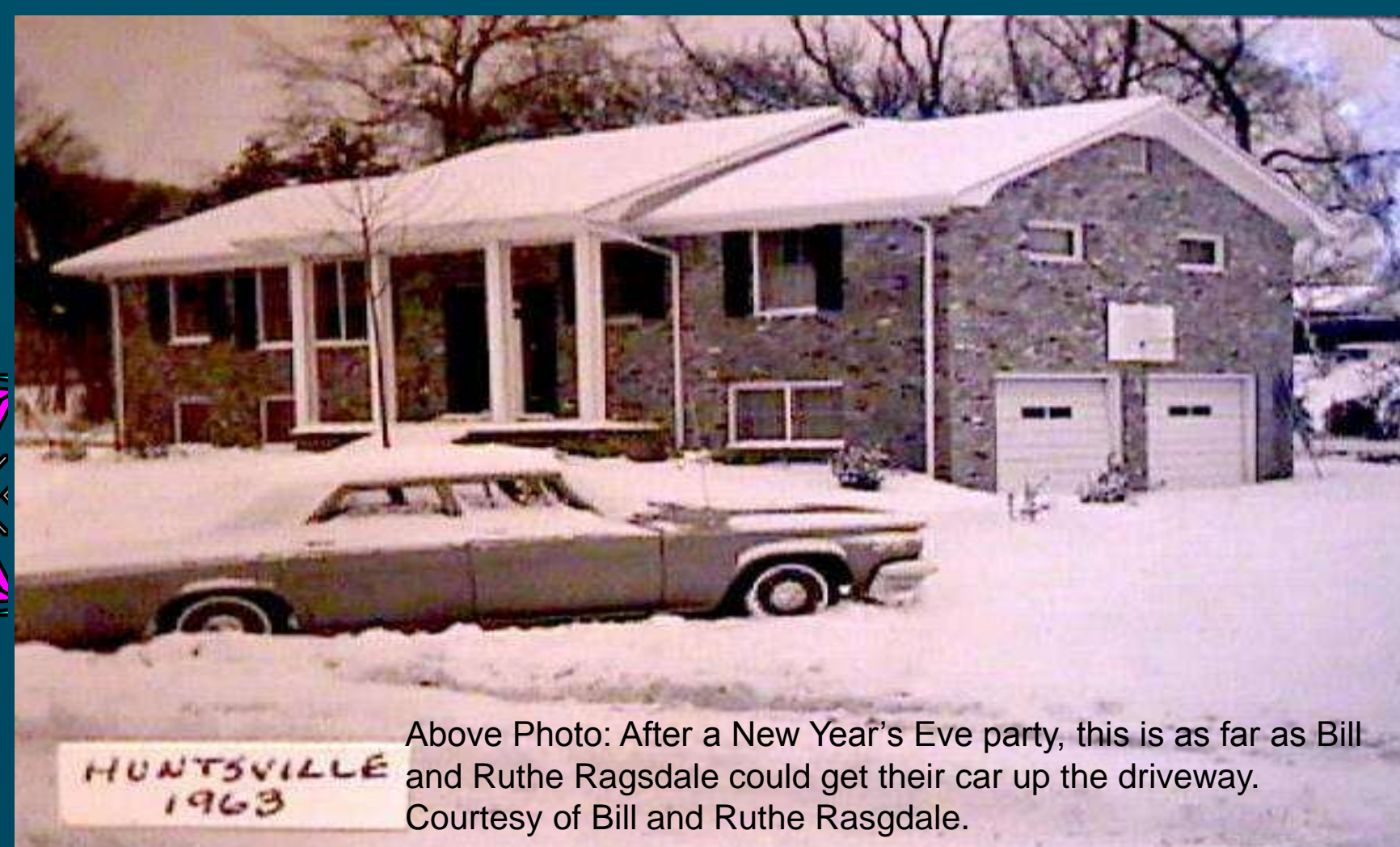
Above photo and photo to the right: H.D. and Jo Bagley's sons shovel and play in the snow left from the New Year's snow storm. Courtesy of H.D. and Jo Bagley.



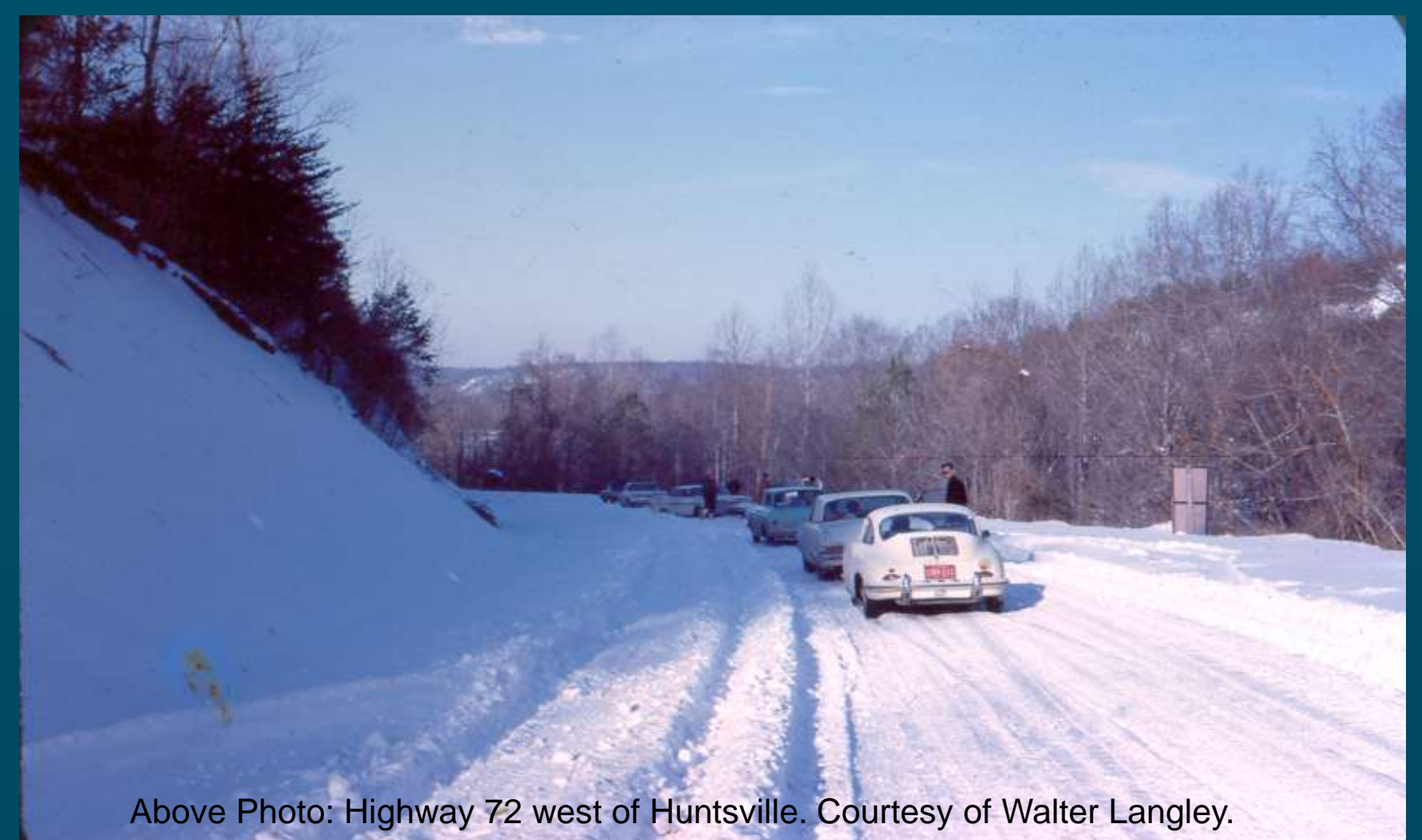
The above photo and the photo to the right are taken from Northeast Huntsville. Courtesy of Helen Medlin.



After a cold air mass pushed into the southern Gulf on December 29th, cold air advection filtered around high pressure in the Midwest and into the Deep South. The upper level trough amplified and on December 30, 1963, a wave developed on a front in the central Gulf. The frontal wave matured and moved northeast into northern Florida on the 31st. At this time, the upper level trough developed two closed lows along the northern Gulf coast. Most of the snow fell in Huntsville between noon and midnight on the 31st as the surface low moved across northern Florida. As the low made its way up the Eastern seaboard, wrap-around moisture continued to fall through the morning hours of January 1, 1964. -Courtesy of William R. Schaub, Jr.



Above Photo: After a New Year's Eve party, this is as far as Bill and Ruthe Ragsdale could get their car up the driveway. Courtesy of Bill and Ruthe Rasgdale.



Above Photo: Highway 72 west of Huntsville. Courtesy of Walter Langley.