

The Burlington Journal

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BIG FLOOD INUNDATES SKAGIT VALLEY

The Skagit lowland region is passing through another memorable flood period. In consequence of which thousands of dollars of property have been destroyed in the path of the flood. Six weeks of excessive rains, followed last Sunday night till Monday noon by compelling Chinook breezes at the beginning of which the Skagit River was ban full, opened the flood gates in the foothills, and mountains of water poured out to the sea, inundating the greater portion of the valley of the Skagit. The last crushing flood disaster, which inundated the valley of the Skagit occurred January 1, 1918¹. The widespread destruction wrought then, if estimated in dollar losses, doubtless greater than that caused by the flood of last Tuesday. It is needless, foolishly, to minimize the enormity of the devastation wrought by the recurring floods, as it is a growing menace, of such huge magnitude that efficient engineering methods must be employed to control the river during these flood periods. The present diking system, so faultily constructed, useless and inadequate, never has nor could control flood waters when built on the banks of the river. The river bed and artificial diking basin is inadequate, and the river naturally forces its way through the dikes here and there, inundating the lowlands, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars loss, that could be averted if an artificial channel or channels were provided to carry flood waters from mountains to sea. As to the scientific solution of this disturbing menace, ever present, hundreds of theories are advanced, any one of which might be the right one. Yet it is naturally an engineering problem, and only along correct scientific lines could be successfully solved. If

the writer had his way, the Skagit River would be directed from mountain to sea, through a natural channel with sufficient fall for a swift current that would keep the basin free of all accumulations of sand and drift or other arresting material. The present windtag channel of the river with insufficient fall to carry flood water, sand and drift to the sea must be abandoned. A new widened channel should be provided with adequate basin capacity to carry off flood waters. Doubtless a diked in basin a mile wide could function, safeguarding the delta region when flood waters pour to the sea. A bird's eye view of the lowlands from Burlington heights Tuesday noon presented a masterful panorama of the low lands. A subversion of the existing flood conditions of the lowlands from Blanchard to Stanwood and from the foothills west to the sea, evidenced "*honors were even*" in the widespread overflow of the lowland region. Why these flood waters should have been permitted to inundate the lowland region for years when intelligent engineering skill could remove the menace is incomprehensible. The immense loss of property, demoralization of business, prostration of industry, paralysis of transportation, destruction of homes, and sometimes loss of life, because human genius has so conspicuously failed to grasp resourcefully the huge flood problem with the constructive vision of an engineer, those huge flood problems that should have been solved a decade ago.

1921 December Flood

Monday night, December 12, the dikes east and southeast of Burlington broke. Tuesday morning at six o'clock the flood water covered Fairhaven Avenue, and in part the residence districts of the city. At this time the entire

¹ This is a misstatement. That was the date of the newspaper article. The flood happened on December 30, 1917.

lowlands lying east, west, south and in part northwest of Burlington were inundated. The depth of water is on relative, the lamentable fact being that the area of low lands covered with water was wide-spread. That certain spots escaped water, neither lessons the flood evil nor removes its threatening menace as the destruction wrought during the last three recurring flood periods of 1909, 1917 and 1921 encompass a wide area of lowlands, some districts suffering greater damages than others, the river in its flood course to the sea, evidently changing or seeking an outlet wherever river dikes could first be swept away.

The flood waters on Fairhaven avenue had disappeared Wednesday morning. The east Fairhaven district suffered loss in property as it was directly in the path of two currents caused when the river dikes gave way east and southeast of Burlington. Could a dike have been built on the slough south of Burlington paralleling the town from east to west the flood waters could have been controlled and the town safe-guarded from flood waters.

Flood Upturns Houses

It is almost marvelous no loss of life resulted during the flood. W.H. Walker, whose residence was situated on the south side of East Fairhaven, was one of the heaviest losers in the flooded district. His dwelling was struck by flood waters from the east and southeast at about five o'clock Tuesday morning, the force of the pressure of the water turning the structure on its side, dividing it in two parts. Mr. Walker was in the house at the time. The force of the concussion turned his bed over, throwing him in about three feet of water. Finally he pulled himself into a safe place, and called for help. No boat was available. Finally a boat was gotten from Sedro-Woolley. Three men—Jon Bratton, F.M. and O.B. Elliott, bringing the boat from Sedro-Woolley on a truck to Fairhaven avenue, and pulling the boat from there, wading at times in two feet of water, to the scene of the disaster, when Mr. Walker was rescued, Dr. W.L. Jackson and Luther Jackson, assisting in taking the old gentleman to a place of safety. The men who brought the boat to the scene of

the disaster did not have rubber boots, the ice cool water through which they were compelled to wade be numbing their legs, which required hours to restore them which required hours of constant massage to restore them to normal condition.

Not only was Mr. Walker's dwelling wrecked, but the lots are covered with sand. The Lane dwelling, and the Carlson cottage were partially destroyed. A portion of the Carlson cottage was completely carried away by the flood. In the business district basements were filled with water and here and there business men suffered loss of merchandise. South of Burlington, the farming district lying between Burlington and the Skagit River was swept by the flood waters when the dike broke on the Varney, now Davis farm. The dwelling, barn, garage and sheds on the Davis farm were almost completely demolished and carried away by the flood. Mr. and Mrs. Davis and family were in the house when it was unmoored by the flood, finally being recovered by a boat by Mr. Shoemaker.

The damage to the Great Northern and interurban right-of-ways was not nearly as great as that caused by the flood of 1918², yet the main line of the Great Northern will not be repaired until late next week. The main line of the interurban and the Sedro-Woolley branch are in operation and the Great Northern Sedro-Woolley Rockport branch of the Great Northern will be in operation by Saturday.

Mails are arriving and departing via Bellingham and the Northern Pacific railway from Sedro-Woolley. Burlington has not been isolated, insofar as transportation and mails are concerned, the first mail following Tuesday's flood arriving via Bellingham Tuesday evening. Build a slough dike south of Burlington and it could escape river floods.

Individual losses in homes, country and town have been quite serious. The greater flood inconvenience occurred at Conway, Milltown, Stanwood and LaConner. While flood damages in Burlington have been large, the flood waters disappeared from the principal business and residence streets within 12 hours following the overflow.

² Should be flood of 1917.

In the Skagit delta flood no human lives were lost, although considerable quantities of hay, grain, and potatoes were lost on the flats and south of Mt. Vernon in the Conway-Stanwood regions.

Flood incidents of human interest in almost countless number could be told if space permitted. A pig in a pen floated from the Pete Moe farm operated by Mr. Parkey, to the Chas. Johnson farm, where the pen lodged in a fence corner, the pig alive and hungry and was fed until rescued. The loft of a barn filled with straw floated from the Varney farm to the interurban trestle, where it lodged in the drift, the straw being dry, and none the worse from its flood cruise. Horses and cattle left in the Davis barn on the Varney farm got themselves safely to a dry plot of ground.

Whenever the water broke through the dike huge quantities of sand were carried by the current and distributed on the land. Back water usually deposits silt which is an excellent fertilizer. The flood is an incident of history. River control methods to avert recurring flood disaster is the acute problem confronting the citizens of the county. Will it be idle, meaningless talk again, while the people are concerned or constructive governmental state and county action to avoid another recurring and perhaps more disastrous flood in a few years?

It is not too late yet to do your Christmas shopping.