

# Destructive '50 Flood Long To Be Remembered

## The News-Review

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### Rehabilitation Job Launched In Wake Of Extensive Damage To Douglas County Localities

By LEROY B. INMAN

Douglas county residents will long remember the dates of Oct. 29 and 30, 1950.

On those dates a gigantic flash flood—one of the greatest and by far the most destructive of all times—swept through the central portion of the county ravaging the lowlands along the North and South Umpqua rivers and their tributaries.

Four days of torrential rains loosened millions of tons of water upon Southern Oregon, swelling its rivers and streams to almost unbelievable proportions, inundating highways, flooding homes and farm lands, and washing out bridges.

Only one other flood—in 1861—produced greater torrents gushing down the South Umpqua and its major tributaries—Cov creek, Myrtle creek, Deer creek and others too numerous to mention. The North Umpqua was less seriously affected, but Calapooia creek flooded Sutherlin to one and one-half foot depth in its main street.

No official records exist, but unofficial information gathered by County Surveyor Ben E. Irving reveals the flood of '50 surpassed by one and one-half feet high waters of 1927 and the early 1890's, but shy of the 1861 deluge. That flood washed out Scottsburg.

#### Destruction Wide spread

Destruction, however, was far more widespread. Population increases, double 1927's, have brought new residential sections, new industries, more roads and bridges, improved farm lands and other developments, many of which were in the flood's wake.

The flood of '50 was conspicuous not only for the great height to which it rose and its destructiveness, but the suddenness with which it struck. Few people realized upon retiring Saturday night or early Sunday that within 24 hours a flood of such tremendous proportions would strike.

On the previous Monday, Forest service surveys showed the South Umpqua at the north Winston bridge at the 4.25-foot level, discharging only 400 cubic feet per second. After a mild rise, the water started coming up at a foot-an-hour rate, when runoff of torrential rains from Thursday on began. The river rose to 32.4-foot level, discharging 80,000 cubic feet per second. The North Umpqua at the Winchester dam rose from 6.8 feet to 16.5, and water discharge increased from 12,700 to 56,000 cubic feet per second.

#### Storm Moved Northward

The weather bureau reports the storm originated due west in the Pacific. Northern California had been lashed by winds and rain, and the storm moved northward. An all time low barometric pressure of 28.44 inches was recorded at 5:30 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 26, and that night winds and rain raked the area. Part of the roof of Days Creek school's new gym blew off, causing \$4000 damage. Roseburg, fairly well protected had 30 m.p.h. wind velocity that night. Medford had gusts up to 60 miles. Coastal areas were strafed. The low barometric pressure brought a series of three successive storms each accompanied by heavy rainfall. A fourth Monday fizzled at sea.

Approximately 6.6 inches of rain fell from the morning of Oct. 27 through Oct. 29, according to official Roseburg weather bureau records. Medford had 6.3; Eugene, Calif., nine inches, Eugene six, with lesser rainfall further north. Grants Pass area, which has no official station, was probably hardest hit.

#### Streets Flooded

On Thursday, Oct. 26, when the storm developed, Roseburg city street department employees were kept busy opening sewers. Crews worked alternately Thursday night through Sunday. A serious surface water runoff problem occurred at the Rose hotel, Roseburg hotel and New Service laundry. Water entered basements of many buildings. Sewers couldn't handle the surplus, said City Manager M. W. Slankard.

By 11 p.m. Saturday city officials became aware that a serious flood was a distinct possibility. Slankard ordered a watch at the sewage plant and corporation garage.

At 7 a.m. Sunday, all city personnel had been alerted. By 8 a.m. city crews began moving equipment from the sewage disposal plant and city garage. Between 8 and 9:30 a.m. the South Umpqua rose 22 inches at the disposal plant. The dike was opened to relieve water pressure, but swirling waters broke out about 14 feet of the dike. Shortly after noon there were 14 feet of water over the disposal plant and one and one-half feet over the dike.

#### State Police Alerted

Meanwhile, state police and the sheriff's office were alerted by numerous calls on the rising water.

State Police Sgt. Holly Holcomb Saturday night, driving in blinding rain, raced flood waters and skirted slides, which later closed the highway, coming from Coquille to Roseburg. First flood reports reached state police about midnight Saturday, and by mor-

ning an officer was continuously kept busy taking telephone calls. At daybreak attention was turned to evacuating residents in threatened areas. First affected was the Dillard district and that north of Winston immediately south of the steel bridge, where water was rising into homes.

#### Highways Blocked

The highway to Myrtle Creek and areas south and at Sutherlin were blocked by water. A road block was put up at the North Dillard wooden bridge, which engineers feared might go out as water rose above it.

With telephone communications extremely difficult, contact with the outside world was not eased until ham radio operators went into action.

In Roseburg evacuation was started along Deer Creek, which rose a total of 20 feet in about as many hours, flooding homes to a maximum 42 inches and putting three feet of water over the Jackson street triangle.

#### Red Cross Alerted

Mayor Albert G. Fiegel, on duty early, alerted Mrs. Mildred Herman, Red Cross executive secretary, at 10 a.m. Fiegel worked through Sunday, aiding evacuees and offering his transfer trucks to remove furniture.

Mrs. Herman, who worked through the day and night, summoned Don Reed, Douglas county chapter chairman, Dr. E. J. Wainwright, county health director and Red Cross blood division chairman, and Mrs. Marjorie Warson, Red Cross field director at the Veterans hospital. Vera McClintock Jones was on the job early. Mrs. Arthur Clark and Miss Helen Casey came to register evacuees. Mrs. Bernice Smith of the home nursing service, set up a schedule of nurses, and canteen workers, Mrs. Flossie Virden, Mrs. Roy Bellows and Mrs. Zella Green also responded.

Almost immediately evacuees, overflowing Evergreen Grange hall, began coming into the armory. All were registered and placed in private homes where possible. Many people called offering to take in evacuees.

#### Reluctant To Leave Homes

State police said evacuation of threatened families in some cases was not easy. While most people readily responded, others left their homes reluctantly. About 15 families had to be ordered out. Water was three feet deep many places before evacuees could be removed, and boats had to be used frequently.

Cooperation appeared the keynote in the emergency operation. State and city police reported workers responded readily, efficiently and willingly to orders. State police organized rescue parties then moved on to other locations.

Roseburg city officials about 10 a.m. became concerned about the Oak Street bridge. The swinging bridge was a fair specimen washed out and some of it became wrapped around the center anchor pier, causing debris to pile up.

#### Destruction Spectacular

Destruction of the swinging bridge was spectacular. Water kept rising beneath it. A dozen interested spectators were on the east approach, when suddenly the bridge began to weave and twist. The spectators fled to safety, just in time to see the entire structure, including the approaches, swing into the current. The west pier later was shattered.

The bridge was erected at a cost of \$3500 after a similar structure at the location was taken out by the 1927 flood. City Manager Slankard estimates it will cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 to replace. It was owned jointly by the county and city.

Officials considered blasting the debris at the Oak street bridge pier to remove the strain. This was never done. The bridge, closed at 2:20 p.m. Sunday, was opened at 4 p.m. and closed again at 7:30 for the night, as water rose within two feet of the deck.

City Recorder Winston Gilchrist stayed on duty until midnight and was relieved by Slankard. Most calls were from citizens whose cars stalled in flooded streets. Warning lights were put up where possible.

#### Many Work Tirelessly

While it is not possible to list individuals who participated, hundreds of volunteers were on the job. City police and police reserves under assistant Chief Al Hughes, city and volunteer firemen under Chief William E. Mills, street department crews, Sheriff's reserves, national guardmen and many others worked long hours. Many individuals brought boats. In fact more boats than needed were available.

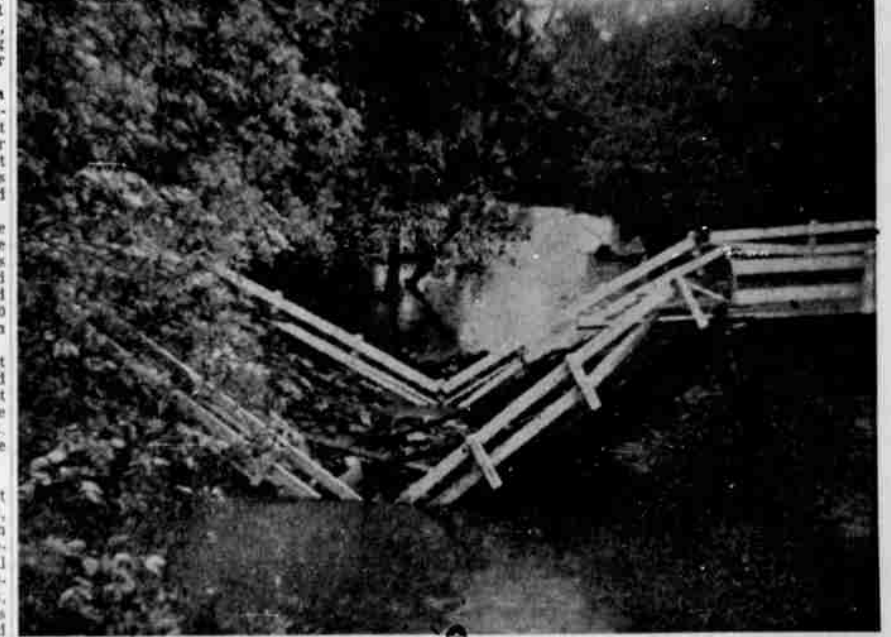
Continued on Page 4-F



**CLOVERDALE PARK FLOODED**—Water gushing down the canyon flooded Cloverdale, as shown in these pictures furnished by Ketell Realty Co., project promoters. Robert Boyer and Mel Gregory, top, removed debris from gutters. They worked 26 hours without rest. Many lawns and gardens in the area were damaged by the Saturday and Sunday surface water runoffs. Water, however was reported in only one house, at an eight-inch depth. Second from top picture shows flood water on Alameda street, and water backing up from a sewer drain on Alameda is shown third from top. The lower picture shows a small dam off Alameda, which broke during the flood. The dam was built to divert water from the surrounding hills into sewer drains.



**FLOOD SCENES FROM MYRTLE CREEK**—Top picture shows Highway 99 just south of Myrtle Creek. Center picture shows a view of the Weaver addition just across the bridge south of Myrtle Creek. The houses were under three to four feet of water. Bottom picture shows the Firmco Plywood mill at Myrtle Creek during the height of the flood. (Picture by Ada's Photo Studio, Myrtle Creek.)



**BRIDGE DESTROYED**—This bridge over Deer creek in Roseburg leading to the City Auto court was badly damaged by flood waters Sunday, Oct. 29. Three cabins of the court, which is just off No. Stephen's street, were destroyed by water and eight others damaged. (Picture by Luther Daugherty.)