

FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY

COMMEMORATION EDITION

Heppner Gazette Times

JUNE 14, 1903

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Heppner, Oregon, Thursday, June 11, 1953

Heppner . . . Before



THIS WAS HEPPIER before the flood came to wipe out a big part of the town of about 1400 population. The exact date when this photograph was taken is not known, except that it was several years prior to 1903. In the center background is the old Heppner

school, which sat well up on what is now known as hospital hill. The white building in the left foreground was then the Catholic church. It still stands, and has since been remodeled and is now the Heppner American Legion hall.

And After . . .



WHEN THE WATER HAD TAKEN ITS TOLL this was the way the south end of the town looked. This picture was taken from approximately the same position on cemetery hill as the above photo. It was in this upper section, where the valley is very narrow, that the water hit first. The torrent came into Heppner

from Balm fork which enters the Willow creek canyon only about five or six blocks up the creek from the lower right corner of this picture. As can be seen, this section was swept clean of buildings and trees.

A Collection Of Stories and Pictures of the Great Flood of June 14, 1903

A PREFACE--

Why There Is Not Just ONE Story Of The Heppner Flood

By Robert Penland

These are stories of the Heppner flood.

They are not THE story of the disaster which took more than 250 lives, because there is no one story. They are stories told by persons still living who retell the horror and the tragedy of that Sunday afternoon, June 14, 1903, as they saw it happen and as, 50 years later, they remember it.

Some of their accounts may conflict in parts with some of the others, but it must be remembered that the persons who are now telling of the happenings on that fateful day, each saw and felt the terror of that great wall of water from a little different location, or under slightly different circumstances. It must be remembered too, that time has a way of playing tricks on memories. Each recount is as true as the teller's memory can make it, and there has been no attempt to make a "feature story" out of the individual accounts. They have been written just as they were told to us.

The persons who were asked to give their accounts were not selected because they remembered any more about the flood than do a good many other persons still living both here and elsewhere, but, in most cases, their stories had not been told

before as public record. Those others too, who have vivid memories of the happenings on that Sunday, and for many days afterward, have just as real a story to tell as do the ones who here give theirs but it is understandably impossible to give them all. In major points they would be in complete agreement, but, just as in the ones selected, different events, different names and other happenings would be remembered by one that were forgotten or not seen by the others. That is why we say there is no ONE story of the Heppner flood.

Even in pictures, there is more than just one story.

Many of the old photographs used in this printed account of the tragedy are pictures that are well known to many, yet there are others which not too many persons have seen, and still others which have been seen in the past, but forgotten. No doubt, many old albums and trunks and dresser drawers hold still many other pictures that could help to recall the disaster. The pictures used here will bring back many memories to those who witnessed the flood—memories quite a few would much rather forget, for there are those still living who lost members of their family to the waters.

This recount of events published here, on the

50th anniversary of the event which took the greatest loss of life of any single tragic happening in the state of Oregon, has not been prepared with any idea of celebration—far from it. It is, as we feel it should be, published to commemorate the tragedy and the 251 persons who, according to the best available information, were buried on Heppner's Cemetery Hill in the days that followed. Many of those who were buried were unidentified and even the published lists of the dead and missing recorded just, "—Banks and Wife," "Three Japanese," "Seven Chinese," "Small Boy," "20 Babies and Strangers not identified."

The purpose of this combination of stories is to record for the future some of the personal tragedies and memories of those who remember them. In another 50 years there will be no one left to give eyewitness accounts and it is for these remembrances that this edition is published.

No, there is no one story of the Heppner flood . . . there are many. We here bring a few of them, that those who did not witness it may have a better understanding of the tragedy that took an even greater percentage of a town's population than did the other great flood in America's history, the Johnstown.