

"Hail As Large As Quail's Eggs" Fell on Heppner That Sunday-

Sand Hollow Man Arrives In Town As Flood Hits

O. A. DEVIN'S EXPERIENCE DURING THE FLOOD

"I was driving a team and wagon with my sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Mack Smith, into town from the family home at Sand Hollow that day," O. A. Devin recalled in telling of his experiences during the flood of 1903. "The Smiths were planning to leave the next day for Montana, but because of the flood they never did move from Heppner."

"As we approached town we could see a queer cloud raising in the southwest. It was angry looking, like a waterspout cloud, but we didn't think too much of it. Mack and I left my sister at George Alken's place in the lower part of town and had unloaded the household goods at the depot when the storm struck. In the midst of the thunder and lightning, the hail, as large as quail's eggs, struck something fierce."

"Mack and I saw we couldn't make it to the livery stable, but we managed to get the team and wagon over the hill across from the depot where we anchored them to Joe Kline's new fence."

"Then Joe Kline, who ran the blacksmith shop, Mack and I tried to cross the bridge where Willow and Hinton Creek join below town. Joe just made it across before the bridge washed out. I saw a woman bob up and disappear at the junction of the creeks. Next a horse. This was also the spot where a lot of houses fell to pieces."

"When the water came, it surged down with a high crest, like a dam busting. If it had spread out, it would probably have been about six feet deep. It even hit high on the bluff where the school now stands."

"By this time a drift of mud and debris, quite wide and possibly 15 or 18 feet high had piled up near us. Ed Rood was stranded on it and when Mack and I ran to his rescue he kept crying, 'Save my wife! Save my wife!'"

"We could hear her hollow from somewhere inside the drift, but we couldn't locate her so we took Rood, who was badly hurt, to the depot and left him in a railroad coach to wait for help. It took a crew of men three days to move that drift and in it they found Mrs. Rood's body."

"After leaving Rood, Mack and I were joined by Nick Willingham and a couple of other fellows. Just then we saw a young fellow named George Hamilton being washed into a coal bunker. Hamilton was just coming to when we grabbed him and he said the last he remembered was having a wire wrapped around his hand, apparently drawing him into the water. At the same time we saw Dave Pressley ride into the water with his horse and save a woman on the other side of the creek."

"I knew there were a lot of people being drowned and tried to do all I could to help. Hamilton wasn't hurt bad, so he, Willingham, Mack and I crossed Hinton creek at K street by holding on to each other and using a long pole to brace ourselves against the current. We had decided if the water knocked one of us down, the others were to let go so we wouldn't all be dragged in. The water struck our necks, but we made it across and took Hamilton over to some of his relatives."

"We stayed up all night, patrolling and roaming around. When I went back to Aikens where my sister was, Mrs. D. O. Justus and son Nels had come to town from their place up Hinton creek looking for her other boy, Ralph, who was visiting over Sunday with the J. J. Roberts boy. The Roberts lived where the old county sheds are and Mrs. Justus knew her boy must have drowned. She and Nels had started for town in their buggy, but had to leave it."



ONE OF THE BEST GENERAL VIEWS of the great destruction caused by the wall of water, is shown in this old photograph. The white building on the left with the steeple is the Methodist church which still stands in the same location. To its left, in front of the barn and leaning against the angled telephone pole that

has what appears to be a television aerial on top, is the remains of the same house that is shown closeup in another picture in this section. The row of poplar trees marks the approximate location of the channel of Willow creek. The photographer was looking north when this picture was taken.

GREAT RAINFALL BLAMED ON LIGHTNING FLASH

GRAPHIC STORY OF HORROR

Survivor Gives Details of the Disaster

(This reprint is from a special account sent to the Spokane Spokesman-Review from Echo, Oregon on June 15, 1903.)

N. T. Tooker, of the Fairbanks-Morse Company, Portland, who was at Heppner when the awful disaster happened last evening by the bursting of an immense cloud, arrived here this afternoon, being the first to bring out the news. He was there when the disaster came, and remained until 9 o'clock this morning. He gives a graphic description of the terrible affair. He said the rushing torrent came at 5:30 last evening when the most of the inhabitants were at their evening meal. All were taken so suddenly that nothing could be done to save those who were caught in

and finish the trip on horseback over the hills, getting in about three o'clock in the morning.

"But young Ralph had got in a row with the Roberts boy and went over to the home of his uncle, S. P. Devin, across town. If it hadn't been for that he would probably have perished, as the Roberts' house was swept away and the family all drowned."

"The next day it was my job to pack bodies up and down from the improvised morgue over Mike Roberts' saloon, now Humphrey's Drug building. We also had to pack all the water up and down that was used for washing the bodies. It was hard to tell who anyone was and a few were buried unknown. If relatives were around, they put burial clothes on the dead, otherwise we just had to put them in caskets as they were and haul them up to the cemetery. Jim Yeager was the undertaker and after they ran out of caskets, he and his son, O. M. Yeager, made caskets from floor-boards."

"On Monday we were pretty short of help with only eight or a dozen working in the morgue and not too many to dig the dead out of the drifts. We layed the bodies all around the walls of the hall until we could get at them. I kept track until packed up 148 bodies and then I lost count."

"By Wednesday we had help from everywhere bringing grub of all kinds, clothing, teams and money. The flood marked up the Palace hotel some, but people were fed there the first couple of days. By Wednesday they had set tables outdoors to feed people. We were surely glad to see those folks. Believe me, it's certainly great to have help when you need it."

About the town clock Mr. Devin said, "I've heard there was some controversy about the town clock. Well, I head it strike every hour that night and it sure sounded mournful. I wouldn't want to see anything like that flood again."

the rushing water. Homes, stores and all buildings in the principal portion of the town were torn loose and driven onward, one jam causing the water to pile into another, and then sweep away again, causing more buildings to go.

"A low estimate places the dead at 200," said Mr. Tooker. "The town has a population of about 1500, but this morning only about one-half of the people of the town could be located. We do not know where they have gone, unless they have gone down the stream. They may have gone to the hills, but this is doubtful. The whole affair was one horrible sickening scene with death and destruction being spread on every side. From the time the flood came until the flood went into the regular channel of the creek flowing through town, it was about two hours."

"It was about 5 o'clock when the storm started to gather to the west of the city. It was a small dark cloud at first but it rapidly grew worse, accompanied by a heavy wind and vicious lightning that caused the water to fall in such an immense body. It struck fairly in the canyon of Willow Creek, six miles above town. There was no warning until the mighty wall of water had reached the town. As it came rushing down the creek bed it tore everything before it, consisting of trees, large boulders, sand and earth. When it reached town the water was piled over 15 feet high as a perpendicular wall, splashing, foaming, leaping and creating a mighty roaring, rushing sound. People did not have time to get from their buildings. Those who were on the streets shouted warning to the people as they did not dare to turn back or they too, would have been swept away."

"Fathers left wives and children to perish, as they had not a moment to spare in some cases. Brothers returned to save members of their families, but it was too late, and they were carried to their death while returning. Those who had reached the banks in safety immediately formed themselves into small rescuing parties and work was at once started in saving those that could be reached. Ropes were the only means that we had. It was useless to attempt to use other means. Those who were in midstream could easily be seen. Their pitiful cries for help could be heard, but nothing could be done."

"We could only stand," said Mr. Tooker, "and see them go to their death. The rescuing work was still going on when I came away at 9 o'clock this morning. When I was leaving 50 bodies had been placed in the Heppner Bank, where doors had been thrown open, and was used as the morgue. We placed a guard over the bank all night."

"It is estimated that the damage done to property alone was \$500,000. Some of the brick and stone buildings were not torn away, but there were some of them moved from their foundations. . . . When merchants opened for business this morning they sent word to the relief committee to come and take what goods were wanted. People were coming in from all directions to the assistance of the suffering and dead; they could not come by rail for nine miles of the track below town was washed away. All wire communications were put out of business."

The dead are being buried as rapidly as they can be identified. They are simply wrapped in clean sheets, placed in a rough pine box and carried away to the burying ground."



BOARDS AND WRECKAGE SCATTERED EVERYWHERE. This cut, very similar to another one in this section, shows the piles of rubble that were left after the waters had taken the lives of at least 251 of the residents of Heppner. It is thought that this picture was taken looking north on north Gale street which probably was marked by the row of telephone poles, though here obliterated with wreckage and houses. The top of the steeple of the Methodist church is shown sticking up above the other buildings between the first two poles. It is thought the house in the left foreground is still standing, but just where and to whom it belongs, is indefinite.

Survivor Tells of Finding Horse Buried in Mud Up to Its Saddle

Flood Experiences of Sadie Sigsbee

An appointment for a portrait probably saved Mrs. Sadie Sigsbee's life.

"That Sunday afternoon in June I started uptown to have my picture taken at Bert Sigsbee's studio, located on the second floor of a building where the Chevrolet garage now stands," Mrs. Sigsbee recalled.

Accompanying her was the 4½ year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. F. Hynd, at whose home Mrs. Sigsbee, then Sadie McCarty, was living while learning the dress-making trade. The Hynd home was located on land between the junction of Willow and Hinton creeks, which at that time was further downstream than where they now meet.

About the time they reached the Zinter house, Mr. Hynd met them and decided to take his little girl home with him because of the intense heat, a circumstance which later proved fatal for her.

"It began to rain while I was at the studio," Mrs. Sigsbee said, "but we thought nothing of it until we heard people screaming. Looking out the window we saw what looked like the whole town floating downstream in the rush

of water and people running for the hill behind the bank."

Wading through water to their knees, they joined the rest of the people on the hill. Then Mr. Sigsbee left to see how the Hynd family and home were faring as Mrs. Hynd was his sister. He brought back Mr. Hynd, and the sad news that was added to the tragic total of lost lives.

Surprised by the sudden rush of water, Mr. and Mrs. Hynd hurried to the second story landing of their home with their little girl and their 18 month old baby boy. Just as they reached the top the house split asunder and Mr. Hynd was left alone floating on the landing while his family were swept away from him.

Floating precariously down the creek in the flood water, the landing eased over to the bank and a man standing along the side reached out to grab Mr. Hynd, stepping on the piece of floating stair as he did so. In an instant the landing slipped over, throwing Mr. Hynd to safety on the bank and hurling the rescuer down into the muddy current to his death. As Mrs. Sigsbee remembers, the rescuer was Mr. Lipsett.

A lot of people stayed in the studio that night, Mrs. Sigsbee

said. Later in the evening Dr. Kistner came up and asked me to take care of a child in the Minor home. In the night a false alarm spread that another flood was coming and many people ran to the hills again. The next day I stayed at the studio with Mr. Hynd who was delirious from the shock of losing his family.

"I'll never forget the great piles of hail, ice, dirt barbed wire and lumber which the men had to chop in two to recover bodies," Mrs. Sigsbee said. "Many people were crying and I recall seeing Mr. Keithley walking up and down the street saying 'I can't find my wife. I can't find my wife.'"

Many stories were told after the flood, Mrs. Sigsbee said. Among them was one of the Dan Stalter family, of which only the father and the small daughter survived. Mr. Stalter had come from Bavaria and had a wife and six children. When the flood struck their house it was completely wrecked and all the family were thrown into the raging flood water.

Somehow Mr. Stalter found himself floating in a trough and thinking that all his family were drowned decided to make no effort to save himself but go down with the rest. Then he felt the cold wet hands and arms of his little daughter clutching him around the neck and he made it to safety with her.

Another story concerned Mrs. Pauline Quaid who set great store by her fine saddle horse. After the flood she offered a reward to anyone who would find her horse, dead or alive. It happened one day that some men saw a saddle partially embedded in some dirt and tried to lift it out. Underneath they found the horse buried in the mud. They received the reward.

Still another was of old John Smith who had just moved to town. He was thrown into the tide, and all the guests were water above town and stayed above the current until he had reached the grove of poplar trees

LIFE LOSS 300

Vast Deluge Falls on Heppner, Or.

CAUSE: CLOUDBURST

Ruin and Death in Resistless Cataclysm

NO WARNING TO FATED TOWN

Gigantic Wall of Water Moves Down Willow Creek

BUILDINGS GO. MANY PERISH

Rare Deeds of Bravery Result in Rescue of Drowning Persons—Sad and Terrible Close to Sultry Summer Day.

From the Morning Oregonian, Tuesday, June 16, 1903.

By A. Crofton

IONE, Or., June 15—(Staff Correspondence)—A cloud which burst on the hills a mile south of Heppner about 5:30 o'clock Sunday afternoon let loose a hungry flood of water, which swept down the hillside in a wall 30 feet high and 200 yards wide. Reaching the bottom of the canyon, the liquid avalanche reared its mighty front over the doomed town, and carried to destruction nearly every building and human being that lay in its path. Leaving a waste of desolation to mark its path. The destroying torrent raced down the narrow gorge of Willow Creek, inundating as it reached them, the settlements of Lexington, Ione and Douglas, though lessening in fury and volume as it travelled down the valley. But it left nearly 300 dead, drowned like rats in a trap. The suddenness of the catastrophe gave the victims no warning, overwhelming them for the main part as they sat within their homes.

Immediately after the flood had wiped the major portion of Heppner out of existence, swift curriers on horseback sped to warn the residents of the valley toward the Columbia of the coming peril. Leslie Matlock, son of an ex-Sheriff of Morrow county, rode a wild ride for 18 miles ahead of the raging waters. His horse dropped dead, but he secured another, and again another, covering the 65 miles to Arlington (This part of story later changed—ed.) in seven hours. To this Paul Revere of Oregon is undoubtedly due the fact that the ranchers of the Willow Creek country below Heppner lost so little stock and property.

David McAtee, a business man of Heppner, whose residence is on a bench above Heppner, was an eye witness of the disaster. In company with Frank Spaulding, he left Heppner about 10:30 o'clock last night on horseback, arriving at Arlington this morning at 5:30 o'clock.

Mr. McAtee's Story

"On Sunday afternoon," said Mr. McAtee, "there had been a pretty severe rain storm accompanied with much wind and lightning. I was standing in front of the house, and noticed that a cloud of remarkable denseness shrouded the top of the hill on the east side of the canyon. I turned away for a moment, when a roar caused me to look again at the hill. I saw a wall of water whose height I would be afraid to gauge, rushing down the mountain, carrying immense trees and timbers on its crest, and tearing the very rocks from their foundations. The torrent struck the upper part of the town first. The residence of Thomas Howard was the first to fall, and his entire family was drowned. In the Krug home also every person was drowned, as was the case in the Hale and Saling residences. All of these houses were about four or five blocks above the business center. The Palace hotel was the first building to stem the tide, and all the guests were saved; but houses below the Palace Hotel were thrown out into the street, overturned and were wrecked. . . ."



MAIN STREET LOOKING SOUTHEAST toward the Palace Hotel shows how buildings and wreckage washed in to completely block the street and obliterate any sign that it ever had been the main thoroughfare. The sack in the foreground (probably of feed) had no doubt been fished out of the mud and laid on the boards to dry.



CASE APARTMENT BUILDING is in the background in this picture taken from approximately where the Morrow county creamery now stands. Nearly everything between this building and the creek, about two blocks, was washed away.

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