

A Centennial Year Historical Feature —

56 Years Ago Next Sunday-- The Heppner Flood

As a part of the Gazette-Times delving into the past for Centennial year historical features, we this week are running this page of pictures of the Heppner flood of June 14, 1903. Next Sunday will be the 56th anniversary of that great disaster which claimed the lives of 251 persons. All of these photos, and many others, appeared in the special

50th anniversary Commemoration edition of the Gazette-Times published in 1953. They depict the consequences of Heppner's greatest, and by far the best known, historical event which claimed more lives than any other disaster to ever occur in Oregon.



THIS WAS HEPPNER 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.



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.



WORKERS AND TEAMS GATHERING DEBRIS are shown in this old picture. The two story white house on the extreme left is still standing on the corner of Jones and Water street and until a few years ago was occupied by Mr and Mrs O M Yeager. The low buildings in the left-center, partially hidden by trees are

warehouses which were located along the railroad tracks. The force of the water uprooted nearly all trees in its path and where the current was the greatest, washed away much of the soil. This picture looks northwest with the road down the creek running off behind the houses on the left.

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. 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.



WRECKAGE AROUND THE METHODIST CHURCH is shown in this old panoramic photograph which was taken from about the corner of Gale and Church streets looking east up Hinton creek. The remains of the house in the foreground in front of the church is the same one that is shown in another picture taken from a different direction. Some stories tell that this house washed in from its pre-flood location on Main street, but the exact site where it stood before the flood could not definitely be established. The scattered debris shows the height of the water in this section, a full two blocks above the creek.



PROBABLY THE BEST-KNOWN PICTURE of the Heppner flood is this photo of the T W Ayers house which stood on Chase street a few lots south of the corner of May street. This picture has been used many times by newspapers and magazines to illustrate articles on the flood. What not too many persons, except those who lived here prior to 1903, know is that the upper story of this house, minus the cupola, and considerably remodeled, still stands on Chase street and has been sheltering families for most of the 50 years since the flood.



BOARDS AND WRECKAGE SCATTERED EVERYWHERE. This cut 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.



LOOKING ACROSS WILLOW CREEK at the business section of Heppner from the east hill after the great flood of June 14, 1903 had taken its toll of lives and property. The bent and broken trees and bare earth tell a vivid story of the force of the water. The large building in about the center of the picture is what is now known as the Case Apartment building on the corner of Main and Center streets. It was known then as the Fair Building. Many of the houses and much of the debris came from above (to the left) of this picture, which looks west down Willow creek valley toward Lexington and Ione.