

# You May Not Remember 1903

## June 14, 1903 . . .

# Heppner



# Gazette.

TWENTIETH YEAR

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## DAYS OF SORROW IN HEPPNER

### Awful Destruction of Life and Property Caused by Cloudburst.

### 141 BODIES HAVE BEEN RECOVERED

### The Dead and Missing Number About 250 ---2000 Men Now Engaged in Relief Work Here.

Without a second's warning, a leaping, foaming wall of water, 40 feet in height, struck Heppner at about 5 o'clock Sunday afternoon, sweeping everything before it and leaving only death and destruction in its wake.

Nothing in the history of the Western country can compare with the awful disaster, and it can only be realized by eye witnesses.

In the middle of the afternoon dark clouds commenced to appear in the south and a short time before the flood a heavy rain fall commenced with an electrical storm.

The rainfall was not heavy enough here to cause any alarm, and as the rain came down thick and fast, the people were pleased to see a good soaking rain which was needed to help out the crops.

Owing to the roar of thunder and the noise caused by the heavy rainfall, the roar of the awful torrent was not heard, and a great many people knew nothing of it until their houses commenced to move.

Even the people on Main street and through the business portion were not aware of anything until the overflow of the channel commenced to come down the street and move some of the smaller wooden business buildings.

There was a wild rush for the hills amid scenes that are indescribable.

Words cannot express the horror, the awful destruction. Entirely helpless, from the hillsides, the survivors watched the terrible waters take their course. To attempt to battle the great waves meant only suicide without being able to accomplish anything.

The cloudburst covered a large territory, the main portion striking about eight miles above Heppner on Balm Fork, a prong of Willow creek.

For miles all the draws and little creeks leading to the Willow creek valley were flooded and must have reached the main stream about the same time.

The first warning that the people in the business portion had was when the large two story residence building of T. W. Ayers left its foundation and swung around into May street and crashed into and lodged on some wooden buildings just back of the Palace hotel.

Mr. Ayers was at the power house and his family was at home, when the building started. They ran up stairs and were rescued when the building stopped by Mr.

Ayers, Frank Roberts and several others. The family came down on a ladder and were taken out uninjured.

By this time the terrors of the flood could be realized. In the channel of the creek the wall of water was at least 40 feet deep and the crest of the stream seemed to be at least ten feet higher than the overflow on the sides. Dark and muddy, lashing like a storm at sea, houses were picked up like feathers. Up the buildings would go, spinning around like tops, crashing to pieces like they were made of glue.

It is certainly wonderful that so many people escaped. It was only a matter of luck in getting onto drift that went to shore.

The terrible scenes as viewed from the hill tops can be compared to a horrible night mare. Clinging to drift were the unfortunate victims, up and down in the unequal battle where they were swallowed up like rats in a cage. Poplar trees, over two feet in diameter were snapped off like cornstalks.

Many were the thrilling and hair breath escapes.

Phil Cohn, whose family was out of town, was at home and asleep when the flood struck his house, he stayed with the building until it went to pieces and for a mile he clung to wreckage, going under a half dozen times or more, and finally was able to crawl out more dead than alive in W. O. Minor's alfalfa field.

Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Conser escaped almost miraculously. When the water struck the house, Dr. McSwords, J. L. Ayers, and a Japanese servant made a rush from the building and were all lost. Mr. and Mrs. Conser stayed with the building. They ran up stairs and the lower part of the structure was soon carried away. Standing in water up to their necks, after all hopes had vanished, the upper part of the building they were lodged against another building, and Mr. Conser kicked out a window and both were saved.

W. O. Minor's family had a thrilling experience. They ran to the upper story of their home and the building danced on the waves like a stick of cordwood until all the lower part was gone. The upper story was smashed to pieces and all but the room in which Mrs. Minor and daughter were in when the wreck finally lodged near the M. E. church. They were taken out through a window and saved.

Julius Keithley, 70 years of age, stayed with his house until everything was gone but the roof. He rode the current for almost two miles. He saved the life of Mrs. Ayers, Jr., by pulling him

onto the roof and they floated to shore.

Dan Stalter, who lost his wife and six children, escaped with one of his children by getting into a dry goods box that rode the waves and fortunately washed to the shore.

The water was at its height for only about an hour, and while the waters were receding, the survivors were organizing and search was immediately commenced for the missing.

The waiting room of the First National bank and Roberts' hall were transformed into receptacles for the dead and when the searchers were forced to quit by darkness, many bodies were recovered. At the first approach of daylight the entire town was out. Nobody slept. All were anxious to again commence the search that has been going on ever since.

Before the rushing torrent had reached the depot Leslie Matlock and Bruce Kelly two expert horsemen and old range riders appeared.

"May God, Lexington and Ione, can we beat the flood," were the words of Matlock waving a wire clipper in his hand.

Not a soul thought it could be done. Leslie Matlock and Bruce Kelly were out of hearing, and two horses and two horses tails that stuck straight out were soon out of sight. Over the hills and rocks, through barbed wire fences on they went in their wild ride for life. Twice Matlock's horse fell, the last time on the rider's leg; but undaunted he leaped into the saddle and was away. For nine miles to Lexington it was neck and neck and as the little town was reached, Matlock's horse dropped, sacrificed for human life. He secured a fresh horse and striking the road they took even chances with the flood. From Lexington the valley widens and the fall decreases, and with the advantage of the road, the swift running horses soon distanced the flood. They beat it an hour, to Ione.

The people were just assembling for church. The whole town was alarmed and there was a wild panic in a rush for the hills, but the people were saved. Leslie Matlock and Bruce Kelly undoubtedly saved dozens of lives.

At Lexington and Ione no casualties are reported. Heppner was a city of beautiful homes and the main residence portion was located on the banks of Willow creek for a distance of about two miles. Within an hour from the time the water struck all that was left of this beautiful residence portion were hundreds of piles of wreckage and death and destruction on every hand.

From the best information available at this time, the dead and missing, and for the missing all hopes have been abandoned, will not be far from 250 people.

While only about 150 bodies have been recovered, there are many that never will be found. Already bodies have been found 10 miles away and it is thought that many have been carried as far as the Columbia river, a distance of 45 miles.

About 141 residence buildings were wrecked and carried away. With a great many of these buildings not a board remains to indicate that they had ever been built. In the city alone the property loss will probably reach \$500,000, while along Willow creek to the Columbia river, the loss will foot up

many thousands more.

Many ranches including buildings and crops have been ruined. The loss to the business portion while not to be compared with the residence portion will foot up thousands of dollars.

A portion of the east side of Main street was flooded and the buildings were lifted from their foundations to the street almost blockading the thoroughfare from travel.

The town is now well organized for the dispatch of the immense amount of work.

Public meetings were held Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and different committees were appointed to take charge.

Mayor Frank Gilliam, Geo. Conser and E. M. Shutt comprise the executive committee with office at C. E. Woodson's law office, and they are doing grand work.

J. A. Woolery, of Ione, is a great worker, in fact, there are hundreds who should be mentioned.

The work of clearing out the debris, and the search for the missing is now progressing in a most satisfactory manner. The workers are appointed in squads and the work is systematic.

There are now 2000 men and hundreds of teams employed.

The survivors and sufferers of the awful disaster feel thankful and grateful for the quick and willing response at the call for aid from the people of the state of Oregon. Workmen and supplies are coming in from many different places.

Already \$10,065 have been pledged, the city of Portland heading the list with \$8,000.

Several towns that were going to celebrate the Fourth of July will turn over the fund for our relief, Pendleton being among the list, but what these amounts will aggregate cannot yet be ascertained.

The town is now in a deplorable condition, debris, slime and mud is piled up in great quantities, and it must be cleared away or the health of the people will be in great danger. The homeless and orphan children are being taken care of as well as possible under the existing conditions.

Heppner's greatest need now is money. The people of the town and surrounding country are worn out under the awful strain and we need money to pay laborers to continue the work.

The Light & Water company is doing good work and the city is pretty well supplied with water.

#### Bodies Recovered.

- Mrs. Mabel Andrews.
- Cecil Ashbaugh.
- Mrs. Ed Ashbaugh.
- Ed Ashbaugh's infant.
- Gladys Ashbaugh.
- Erma Ashbaugh.
- Nora Adkins.
- Moses Ashbaugh's baby.
- Wm Ayers' child.
- Vastie Andrews.
- Wm Ayers' boy.
- Leon Banks.
- Mrs. Leon Banks.
- Mrs. R Beard.
- Wilbur Beard.
- Baby.
- Baby.
- Chinaman.
- Chinaman.

- Mrs. Ada Curtis.
- Chinaman.
- Chinaman.
- Chinaman.
- J. H. . . .
- Carl Denis.
- Chinaman.
- Mrs. Dawson.
- Mrs. Percy Dawson.
- Percy Dawson's boy.
- Percy Dawson.
- J. R. Dawson.
- Lloyd . . .
- Bianche Estes.
- Mrs. Wm Estes.
- Maud Elliott.
- Florence French.
- Nora Floreon.
- Farmer.
- Bertha Fristoe.
- A. M. G. . .
- A. C. Giger.
- Mrs. Lillie Hamilton.
- Harry Hamby.
- J. L. Hockett.
- Hazel Haynes.
- Mrs. Banson Hart.
- Mrs. Hanby.
- R. F. Hynd's little girl.
- Bert Hynd.
- Mrs. Robert Hynd.
- Mabel Howard.
- Mary Howard.
- Mrs. M. B. Haines.
- J. J. Harris.
- Nella . . .
- Mrs. Thos Howard.
- Frank Harryman.
- T. B. Harryman.
- J. L. Hockett's child.
- J. L. Hockett's child.
- Jas Jones.
- Two Pearl Jones' children.
- Mrs. Pearl Jones.
- Pearl Jones.
- Amanda Jones.
- Mrs. Jas Jones.
- Zella Jenkins.
- Jap.
- Mrs. Jesse Kirk.
- Keithley's grandson.
- Mrs. Maud Keithley.
- Mrs. Hattie Keithley.
- Fred Krug boy.
- Geo. Krug.
- Fred Krug's girl.
- Mrs. Krug.
- Fred Krug.
- Mrs. J. M. Kernan.
- J. M. Kernan.
- W. W. Lipsett.
- Mrs. W. W. Lipsett.
- Pres Loopy.
- Jas Long.
- Mrs. Jas Long.
- Clara Long.
- Jas Long's girl.
- Maud Liffler.
- Mabel . . .
- Mrs. S. M. Morgan.
- Willford McBride.
- Mr. McBride.
- Anna McBride.
- Alma McBride.
- Dr. P. B. McSwords.
- Zed . . . McDowell.
- J. W. Matlock.
- Robert Morgan.
- Mrs. Thos Matlock.
- Frank Oxley.
- Mrs. H. Padbury.
- J. J. Roberts.
- Ora Roberts.
- Mrs. Jas Roberts.
- Ed Rood's girl.
- Mrs. Ed Rood.
- Mrs. C. E. Redfield.
- Amy Stalter.
- Robert Stalter.
- Bonnie Stalter.



MAY STREET was a river at this time, owing to the heavy rain falling over used car lots of Heppner. This view, taken in the darkness.



WATER INUNDATED the Heppner swimming pool, causing extensive damage by filling the pool with silt. Photo taken in the darkness.



ONCE BEAUTIFUL green fairway of the Heppner Creek country club became a chaotic scene in Monday night's storm. Arrow points to the club house.