

THE COURIER-TIMES

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Emergency Aid Given

Flood Victims

Residents 'Mop Up'; Flood Loss
Set at Two Million Dollars

By HAL ZIMMERMAN

Emergency assistance today was being given flood victims of Hamilton and the up-river district whose homes and household belongings were damaged or destroyed in one of the worst floods in Skagit county history. Hamilton residents were shoveling silt, mud and sand from their homes, and were trying to salvage damaged household goods and merchandise in their places of business.

The Red Cross, swamped with requests for aid, are helping only those in most urgent need, but all persons who have had losses are requested to come to the Mt. Vernon office and register or write the office their needs. Mrs. Clio Baldrige, executive secretary, reported that the office was full all day Wednesday trying to handle the requests.

The flood has now receded and left behind it the stories of heroic incidents which prevented loss of a single human life and saved other thousands of dollars of property.

Ranked as the worst since 1921, this week's flood caused an estimated \$2 million loss in property, land, homes, household goods, clothing and food, the highest loss of any flood in Skagit county history.

Sedro-Woolley residents assert that the floods of 1932, 1821 and 1909 and 1897 were worse for this city, but for up-river residents, this week's ranked with the 1909 and 1921 disasters.

Hamilton, floodswept community of 290 residents, is now cleaning up. Mud is everywhere. It may be weeks, and even months before some of the damaged buildings can be repaired, and the blanket of silt and debris cleared. Thirty-five houses sustained flood damage, the Red Cross said.

Some families lost all their possessions including their clothing. Two families in Rockport were luckily saved, one after standing in waist high water all night and another woman and three-year-old son were clutching the rafters of their small frame house which had washed part way down stream.

There were heroes, such as Dewey Smith, the "Paul Revere" of Hamilton who from 2 a.m. Sunday until day break, roused residents of Hamilton and told them to pack up and leave because the flood was coming. Frank Jacobin awoke Smith. There were others, such as the men who braved swift waters in light boats and in amphibious ducks to rescue marooned families, even many hours after dark. The dike workers on the lower Skagit did a tremendous job.

There were humorous sidelights, such as the pig jumping out of the boat, and its owner grabbing it by the tail and dragging it and the boat through the water.

Two other boats, taking persons out of Hamilton, were chained together. Each passed on opposite sides of a post, and occupants of one of the boats were flipped into the water. Although humorous to those who watched the incident, the accident resulted in one man losing his outboard motor in the water and thoroughly soaking his rifle.

But there was tragedy to those who lost their household goods, whose places of business have been almost ruined.

Friends and neighbors have come to the aid of many and the Red Cross is meeting all emergency requests for those who need assistance. An initial allocation of \$5,000 has been received, and after the immediate needs are met the Red Cross will begin its rehabilitation program, which means it will bring the families back to the standard of living they had before the flood.

Hamilton, Rockport and farmers in the Utopia and Lyman-Hamilton district suffered most loss and damage from the flood waters.

A total of ten head of livestock were lost near Hamilton and eight

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lies in lower parts of town did not leave and stayed with friends or relatives who have homes on higher ground and others came to Lyman or Sedro-Woolley. Many remained in their houses and watched the water rise.

In some cases when it reached the first floor they went upstairs to the second floor. Residents of the smaller homes evacuated. Policeman Maurice Davis of Sedro-Woolley, obtained several hundred homes for evacuees but none were needed.

Most Sedro-Woolley residents were slow in learning that the flood was coming. Sunday afternoon the word began to get around, and residents drove up to above Lyman and found water blocking traffic near the McDougle place and at the Vik farms. Below Sedro-Woolley the river continued to rise and hundreds of cars drove to the bridge to see if the river would cross the new Day Creek road. Water rose to within inches of the new road, but did not flood it.

In the afternoon the water spread out in the low area north of the disposal grounds and by evening crossed the lower extension of what would be Township street. By nightfall water covered the southern extension of Third street halting traffic to Clear Lake.

The Nookachamps also backed up, inundating all the flat, low country in its vicinity. By Sunday night many communities were isolated, including parts of the Sterling district. The water rose steadily, as the rains continued to fall, and reached the southern edge of town.

The water rose along both sides of lower Third street (highway 1-A) and came to within a few feet of the Union Oil bulk station and drove farmers south of town from their homes.

Norman Hanson put his herd of about 30 head of cattle in the upstairs of his barn.

Local residents who have seen earlier floods, frequently commented that this one was not as bad as those of earlier days.

Seattle City Light asserted that Ross Dam played an important role in preventing a more disastrous flood by holding back water from Wednesday, Nov. 23, some four days before the flood. Apparently the rumor that City Light opened 15 gates at one of the dams on Sunday was erroneous.

Sunday's and Monday's flood had remarkable similarity to the 1909 disaster which occurred almost on the exactly the same days, and in the same way. This week's flood followed a heavy downpour of rain last weekend and a warm Chinook wind which melted snow in the hills and brought down a deluge into the main stream of the Skagit river.

The 1909 flood started after rains and a Chinook wind on Sunday and Monday, November 28 and 29, 1909, according to a copy of the Herald-Recorder, Skagit county's official newspaper of that day, which was printed at Hamilton.

By contrast however, the earlier

flood gave farmers and merchants more advance warning and they moved their stock to high ground and merchants raised goods in their stores.

Except for the work of several Hamilton residents who woke their neighbors townspeople, the swiftly moving flood Sunday would have caught residents even more unprepared.

Most Hamilton residents who evacuated, left town early Sunday morning before the main up-river flood was flooded. Several farm families stayed at their homes to care for their cattle. Later several of them were rescued by boat or amphibious duck.

Adrian Youngman's "duck" worked in the Lyman-Hamilton area almost all day Sunday, bringing out a "boat full" of residents. Floyd Paulkner drove the "duck" all day at Hamilton. Barb wire fences proved the biggest hindrance to the amphibious vehicles, and the Youngsman duck was hung up for a time Sunday afternoon. Wally Tresner, one of the local pilots who flew over the flooded area, dropped messages to stranded farmers, and also pinpointed a message to the crowd on the highway from where rescuing operations started. Tresner's note read "Duck is stuck, I will drive down and show location. Help is urgent."

Ed Wolfe, Roy Wolfe, and several other men manned boats in the area. Amphibious ducks also came from Mr. Soules, the Coast Guard and Bellingham.

State Patrolmen Jim Fitzpatrick and Ron Kelly helped bring out residents all day.

Dr. Harold Hopke's "duck" was called into service in the afternoon, and although stalled for while on the highway bridge, later made possible the rescuing of the Snell family. The rescue work proved a harrowing experience for all concerned. LeRoy Hilde and Jenneth Rowland operated the duck part of the time, and later Dr. Hopke took over the controls. Dr. B. W. Richardson and Tresner, who had taken to a small boat with a light motor, assisted the "duck" whenever the bigger vessel was stranded on some object.

The Youngsman "duck" was later called into service about midnight. Youngsman, Andy Alaways and members of the Clear Lake fire department evacuated Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Edmundson and their granddaughter from their marooned farm home near the Nookachamps creek. Mr. Edmundson, who recently suffered a stroke, was taken to Rowley hospital in Mt. Vernon, apparently none the worse for the exciting ride aboard the "duck."

A report that a local physician delivered a baby during the flood at Hamilton was unfounded.

Simon Kosanke, who has a house nearest the Skagit river bridge north of the river, lost much of his wood, and planks in the barn were torn up. His cow stood in water all night. Water flooded the Kosanke basement, as it did the Ralph Peterson basement and John Lentz basement in the same neighborhood.

Andrew Hanson had water on the main floor of his tiny house a short distance north of Kosanke's, but he stayed in the house and

moved belongings up as high as possible.

The Ray Peterson residence just east of Township street near the disposal grounds also had water in the basement.