

Skagit County Times

NOVEMBER 19, 1896

THE GREAT FLOOD

THE SKAGIT ON A BIG TEAR

The Skagit Valley From The Baker Valley To The LaConner Flats Washed By The Ruinous Flood—Stock And Improvements Carried Away

On Wednesday of last week, the wind began to blow from southeast and, before evening had developed into a chinook gale. Unfortunately for the river bottom settlers of the Skagit valley, the warm wind continued until about 4 p.m. Sunday. On Friday the Skagit began to rise quite rapidly and continued rising at an average rate of three inches an hour until Sunday morning when it began to abate. In the afternoon of that day, the river had risen until all previous highwater marks at Sedro was one foot seven inches under water. The whole valley east of Sedro was a floating wilderness. Hamilton was totally inundated; one brick building having caved in and several frame ones torn from their foundations. The county bridges recently constructed were destroyed and the improved roads that had become the pride of the upper valley became an easy prey to the devastating waters.

Lower Sedro suffered heavily. A large number of cattle and small stock perished and buildings ruthlessly torn from their foundations were cast hap-hazard amid the heaps of debris. Mortimer Cook's store that has weathered the floods and storms of fifteen years, rose with the eddying waters

and turned half way round before lodging against some trees and stumps.

Fruit Vale and Sterling, lying between Sedro-Woolley and Burlington, were completely inundated. Two barns stored with hay and feed were wrenched from their foundations and rushed down with the torrent, until striking the Great Northern railway bridge at Burlington, they were shattered and their contents, strewn upon the waters, wended their hurried way oceanward. The large orchards of this District were badly damaged by the logs, and stumps that passed over them, bending and breaking the trees like pipe-stems.

South Burlington sustained great damage. Houses and barns were undermined and toppled to the ground and the winter's supply which they contained scattered on the tide. The fencing of years yielded to the flood and the clearings that represented the toil of a decade were covered with the debris of the surrounding forest.

At Avon the dikes gave way in three places and the unrestrained torrent rushed pell-mell through street and meadow, orchard and garden, tearing and washing until the oldest inhabitants would have to

summons imagination to aid him in recognizing some of the old land marks.

West Mount Vernon is next in line of progress and received no favor from the impartial flood. The water, rising from one to two feet above the first floor of the dwellings, swept fences and everything movable before it.

Among the miracles of the age was the ability of the residents of Mount Vernon proper to keep the dikes in shape to restrain the freshet from sweeping through the streets of the city. By heroic effort all day Saturday and the following night the main dike was strongly re-enforced by three temporary ones, which action alone saved the city as the old one repeatedly gave way.

Here we must stop, for aside from the meager reports of the general desolation wrought in Skagit City, Fir, Stanwood and the Olympia Marsh, we know nothing authentic as to the extent of losses of life or property. But by the slender reports in we are satisfied that in comparison with former floods, last week's freshet will live in the minds of Skagit Valley residents for many decades.

The railroads were among the heavy losers by the freshet. The Great Northern track from the Burlington limits to the bridge across the Skagit was floated from its bed and the fill badly washed out. The bridge was pretty severely shaken but by the adding of a few new piles and the re-ballasting of the pier it will be rendered safe for traffic. At least one-half of the Anacortes & Hamilton line is honeycombed and totally unfitted for travel. Unless a big force is put on for repair work, it will be several weeks before any trains can pass over this line. The Seattle and International sustained the least damage, owing to the river bottoms being mostly spanned by trestle work. Through traffic was resumed on this line, Tuesday.

There had been a heavy fall of snow in the mountains at the head of the valley and the strong chinook wind coming before this snow had become packed and frozen caused a great thaw, thus supplying an unusual volume of tributary water to the Skagit. To this fact is undoubtedly due the recent high freshet.

THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUAL LOSSES HAVE BEEN REPORTED.

LYMAN

Morris Duffy lost twelve head of cattle and had his property and fences badly damaged.

Tom Conway lost one horse and is supposed to have lost several head of cattle.

G.G. Arnold lost one cow, five calves and fourteen stands of bees.

F.B. Cooper lost one ox.

P. Gibbins lost one and a half million feet of logs, and his skid roads were badly washed out.

Alex Ross lost one hog. His reported loss of sixty head of cattle was a mistake

TINGLEY

Walter Williams lost 17 cows, 15 pigs, one horse, and had his house so badly wrecked that it will take about ten days to put it in repair.

John McCarty, lost one horse, three hogs and most of his crop.

James Jameson lost one steer.

The school house in District No. 61 was thrown on its side and the roof carried off.

SEDRO

Thos. Caskey lost one calf and most of his hay. His property and fences are

damaged so seriously as to leave no chance for a crop next year.

P.R. Barrett lost most of this year's crop and all of his fencing.

M. Cook's store building was moved from its foundations out to the road and the hay stored in the warehouse was badly damaged.

Eight head of cattle that wee out at pasture on Barne's ranch, were drowned.

Donnelly Bros. Lost eight or ten hogs and, it is also believed, two heifers.

James McDonald lost three calves and several hogs.

Joe Jordan lost one hog.

John Huff, who had some horses at pasture on Ivarson's farm reports two drowned.

Geo. E. Jarvis lost a valuable two-year old Jersey bull.

STERLING

James Ritchford and family, who have been residing in the one story cottage on the Ball homestead, were awakened on Saturday night by the roar of the waters as the freshet swept over the farm. After considerable shouting and firing of pistols a rescuing party removed them to a place of safety.

Al Kimsey lost four or five head of cattle.

Wm. Kimsey lost five head of cattle and some hay.

John Albertson, who had his hay, vegetables, and cattle stored in barns, on the opposite bank from Sterling, lost al but one or two cattle.

Frank Brosseau lost two head of cattle and had considerable damage done his farm.

Joseph DeBiase lost five hives of bees. His farm was also damaged.

Simon Petticore lost thirteen hogs and fifteen hives of bees.

James Hewitt lost potatoes, fruits and vegetables, fruit trees, fences, and had a beautiful garden sadly despoiled.

A.H. Linstad had his barn undermined. It now projects several feet over the river bank.

J.C. Richards' property was slightly damaged.

John Dailey's fruit trees and property were considerably damaged.

Sterling roads are all pretty badly hone-combed but may be put in repair at a cost of about \$125.

Taylor McRae's property recently purchased from James McLellan was considerable damaged and the fences torn away.

In the year 1878 Joseph Hart, our well known fellow citizen, came to Puget Sound and two years latter came to the Skagit valley, just prior to the great flood of 1880. Since the flood of that year there have been three freshets that have equaled it in height, and the one we chronicle this week surpassed it by eighteen inches.

In speaking of the floods and their causes, Mr. Hart said: "At the time of my coming to the valley there had been no freshets of note for many years, and the one that came in 1880 was a damper to the enthusiasm of the dwellers on the marsh lands; but, as several years rolled by without a repetition of the catastrophe and a system of dikes was inaugurated, contentment banished fear. Shortly after the memorable high water of that year, I had a talk with an old Indian and his squaw, who used to live on Skiyou Island but have since died of small-pox. These worthies took me to a tree near by and directed my attention to a water mark at least six feet higher than the highest point reached by the recent freshet and said that when they were children the great flood

swept down the valley carrying death and destruction everywhere. He said: 'The lodges of my people were carried with their canoes and winters food out to the great waters, and they were left to suffer the horrors of starvation and death from exposure to the inclement elements. The snows of winter fell to an unusual depth and the animals upon which we were wont to subsist, greatly reduced in numbers by drowning and driven into the mountain fastnesses by the raging torrent, were hard to get and very poor. The fish we had prepared for winter use were destroyed by the angry waters and we were made to suffer the wrath of the Great Spirit.' "

Continuing Mr. Hart said: "Judging from the apparent age of the Indians at that time I should place the time of that greatest of the great freshets at about the beginning of the present century, and was caused according to the story of these Indians, by heavy snows coming early in the fall, which were immediately succeeded by a very warm chinook wind which blew for many days. As to this being the only and real cause of the unprecedented high water, however, I have my doubts. Our fellow townsman, Mr. H.L. Devin, was some years ago engaged in surveying in the upper valley in the vicinity of Baker Lake. Being detained over night in an Indian camp, he was told the history of a great flood. They said that about 60 years ago a great slide had choked up the narrow outlet of the Baker Valley and that the water accumulated in the basin thus formed until the whole valley was an immense lake, full 80 feet deep. By this time the imprisoned waters had burst through the dam and in a few hours this great volume of water was precipitated into the Skagit flooding the whole valley. The water marks still plainly visible high up the sides of the Baker Valley and the great variation in those upon the trees as you come down the Skagit would indicate that

this was the real cause of that terrible disaster.