

MOUNT VERNON ARGUS.

December 3, 1909

SKAGIT DELTA IS FLOODED

Skagit Breaks All Former High Water Records

THREE DAYS CHINOOK STORM

Dikes Crumble Before Torrents of Rushing Water and the Valley of the Skagit is Inundated – Property Damaged and Stock Lost

It was an almost unbroken expanse of angry rushing water from Sauk to the sea. That a part of Mt. Vernon was one of the lone isles rising defiantly above the encroaching water lines of the mighty Skagit, seems almost like a miracle. However, natural causes and the foresightedness of property owners in building a deep and broad dike to protect the east side business and residential districts against just such an uncommon devastating flood as swept over the flats last Monday and Tuesday, prevented widespread destruction of business and residential property on the east side. When the water had risen to a point within a foot or so from the top of the dike just south of town on the east side, the river on the west side broke through the dike at a point between the Henry McLean and Young properties. Within a brief time the river poured through West Mt. Vernon and spread over the flats. A few hours before the river had broken through the dike at Kimble's bend, carrying away about three hundred feet of dike.

Soon thereafter the report was received that the river had broken through at Sterling's bend, and that Burlington was flooded, and the Olympia marsh, just north of that city, submerged. Those timely

breaks at the points above mentioned, although deplorable and keenly to be regretted, came at a most fortunate and critical moment to save on the east side a break at a weak point in the dike at the south end. Since Monday, or the following day, from three o'clock the river had been rising steadily at the rate of six inches an hour. Since Friday last a stiff wind from the south and southwest had prevailed. Unless the wind abated or shifted, either to the east or north to influence a change in the temperature, a rapid rise of the river was inevitable. On Saturday night the river gradually began to rise. The stiff chinook breeze continued unabated until Monday noon. At six o'clock Monday night the river had risen to a point fully as high if not a little in excess of the high water point of the preceding Tuesday. At that time the river was within two and a half or three feet from the top of the dike. The outlook for a widespread flood on the flats was indeed extremely threatening. Old settlers who had many times passed through flood experiences, were apprehensive of severe consequences resulting from the heavy sou'easter of the few days preceding. The ominous outlook foretold a night of anxiety and strenuous labor. Weak places in the

dike were discovered between the big condenser and the Siwash mill, and at a number of places south of town. Volunteers were at work reinforcing the weak spots with sacks of sand, hay, brush, etc. In response, however, to the tremendous volume of water that had been diverted into other channels at points above and below on the river, the water in the main channel of the river gradually began to recede at about eight o'clock Tuesday morning and the danger of a break on the east side was postponed if not entirely averted. By this time the workmen at the Siwash mill had strengthened the dike, and the danger of a break at that point was, as it afterwards proved to be, entirely removed.

At ten o'clock Tuesday morning the west side was under two or three feet of water, and people who live in one story cottages were all safely domiciled with their neighbors who live in two story houses. A number of people were inconvenienced and temporarily embarrassed by being caught in flooded houses. All these were removed before harm befell them.

The recital of the story of the flood at the north is a pitiful tale of a deluge overall the district from Rockport to Burlington. Burlington had hoped to escape the flood. Its hopes were cruelly shattered, when the dike broke at Sterling bend and a mountain of water came rushing down the Skagit valley and quickly inundated them. The fact that Burlington is by no means immune from the ravages of flood was demonstrated with crushing truth when the waters of the Skagit rolled over that ambitious and growing town last Tuesday.

The entire portion of the residential and part of the business district was flooded at Sedro-Woolley. Clear Lake and the country surrounding it was overflowed. Nearly all the country between here and Riverside was under water. The boom and several sections of logs belonging to the

English Lumber Company was carried down the river from the booming grounds at Riverside. Monday afternoon the boom and a number of sections of logs were swept away from the booming grounds at the Siwash mill.

From Mt. Vernon south to Stanwood the country was inundated. In the entire district south of Mt. Vernon the only spot of any extent that was protected against an overflow is reported to have been on the island between the north and the south fork of the river at Fir. The citizens of that district a year or so ago had a disastrous experience with high water and an inadequate dike to protect them. After the flood the district expended \$15,000 to build a more substantial system of dikes. While the large expenditure imposed a heavy burden on the taxpayers it proved to be one of the best investments they ever made. The extraordinary flood of last Monday and Tuesday ought to be a lesson to the districts in the county that have inadequate dikes, and in consequence of such illpreparedness have suffered heavy losses to property if not life. And who would go through another night of such terrible suspense, unutterable mental torture, worry and apprehension for all the property in the Skagit valley, when such an awful experience could be avoided by so simple a remedy as an efficient system of dikes. Men who worked like beavers until midnight to save the west side dike said that they would have succeeded had the dike only been a foot higher. If it cost the west side property owners \$10,000 to build a system of dikes adequate to protect them against high water it would be the most judicious investment they ever made.

The train service on the Great Northern railway was completely suspended on Tuesday and Wednesday. A part of the road bed to the south was under water, and some of the trestles near Skagit City were carried out. At Conway and Milltown the

road bed is submerged. A big jam at the Riverside bridge threatened that structure and use of it is extremely dangerous. Approaches to the Great Northern bridge at Sedro-Woolley were carried away. North of Burlington the high water made traffic impossible. Various reports of the magnitude of the flood on the Olympia marsh have been received. That district is peculiarly immune from the visitation of a flood. The point of danger is at Sterling bend. Although the safeguard of a huge restraining wall had been built at that point, it proved inadequate to turn the unusual volume of water that demanded an outlet, and that gave way and a mighty volume of water poured through over the flats into Burlington. An unverified statement comes from the north that the water was several feet in depth on the Olympia marsh. Quite a number of the business structures at Burlington were in water to a depth of three or four feet. The fact that many of the farmers discounted the possibilities of a flood is responsible for losses of stock and personal inconveniences, if not losses to human life. Had the west side dike been a few feet higher the overflow on the Swinomish flats would not have occurred. This is equally true of the dike at Kimball's bend. This is a strategic point. The bend at this point is a sharp curve in the river, where naturally the pressure of the current is greater than at any other point. During a freshet the force is many times greater. A deep and broad wall probably with a cement base is an absolute necessity at this point. The destruction alone from the break at Kimble's bend and from the overflow of the country to the south was doubtless of a magnitude sufficient to build an adequate restraining wall from Conway to Sterling bend.

The supreme child-like complacency and bland security of the newcomer in extremely dangerous situations during the

progress of the flood furnished a number of ludicrous incidents to relieve an otherwise critical condition. A worthy young couple who recently came here from the unpoetic commonwealth of Pennsylvania, were peacefully slumbering at the midnight hour long after the cock had thrice crowed to warn them of the impending danger. Friends solicitous of the welfare of the couple, knew of their danger, and rowed in a boat to the front door of their home to rescue them at least from a cold water bath. The couple so unmindful of the high water mark at the point of their habitation were soon awakened and taken to a place of safety. When the rescuing party reached the house the water had reached the floor and before the couple could dress was several inches high.

The heroic perseverance of a number of workers on the dike just south of town, who labored unceasingly all of Monday night and during the hours of the early morning following, undoubtedly saved the south end on the east side from an overflow.

It will probably be a week or ten days before train service on the Great Northern is restored. Between this city and Burlington several hundred feet of track has been washed out. In innumerable other places the track has been undermined and will need to be reballasted before it can be used again. North of Burlington there are reported to be many washouts of more or less severity. South of this city the road bed is said to be in a most deplorable condition. Several hundred feet of track has been washed out, bridges weakened, trestles twisted or carried away, and the general efficiency of the entire road bed between here and Everett has been impaired and will nearly all require rebedding before it would be safe to use it again. A gentleman who had reviewed the acute demoralized condition of the Great Northern's road bed between the points mentioned believes that

it will be physically impossible to restore train service in less than then days and probably not before two weeks.

The steamer Gleaner left this port last Wednesday morning with sixty or seventy passengers, and the United States mails. She returned with a full cargo of freight, the mails from the south and east, and a large number of passengers. The value of the river service under existing helpless conditions of other transportation out lets was again demonstrated, and eloquently attests Mt. Vernon's superior situation as a trade center, as all other towns of the county are practically inaccessible at the present moment. The Gleaner took all of the passengers to Seattle last Wednesday morning from the belated southbound passenger train which has been storm bound here since last Monday.

The report was brought to town Wednesday that the north fork bridge south of town had been partially washed out; two of the approaches carried away, and the steel draw was in a perilous condition and in danger of being washed out at any moment. Later reports from the south end are to the effect that the dikes protecting the delta between the north and the south forks of the Skagit had been broken and part of the district flooded. The north fork bridge is a fine structure, and is one of the county's modern draw-bridges. Should the draw be saved the partial destruction of this bridge will aggregate a probable loss of at least \$10,000 or \$15,000.

Reports of the loss of stock are so conflicting, therefore, unreliable, as the reports received relative there to are largely from indirect sources, which the informant had received second handed, so that statements as to losses given at this time are subject to changes. W. H. Thompson, the Riverside stock dealer, is reported to have lost 17 or 18 hogs; Nat Moore, the west side farmer, was reported to have lost two head

of stock and as the report was denied and could not be verified, it may be inauthentic.

Jim Norton, who lives southeast of Burlington, is reported to have lost 25 head of stock; John Pearson, just north of town, lost four cows; A. J. Johnson, west of the city, is reported to have lost 29 head of stock and a span of mules; another report is of the effect that Mr. Johnson lost only 11 head. Oscar Kamp, west of the city, is reported to have lost some stock.

The Carnation, the Pacific Coast Condensed Milk Company's gasoline stern wheeler, made a trip to Conway last Wednesday morning, and returned before noon with a load of milk. Travel between this city and the south end with teams is impossible, and it is not expected that the flood will subside so that the roads can be used again until next week.