

# THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1921

## SKAGIT RIVER FLOODS VALLEY WHEN DIKES GO MUCH DAMAGE TO FARMS AND SOME STOCK LOST

### DIKES GAVE WAY EARLY TUESDAY AT 24 FT 10 INCHES

Once more after 4 years of somewhat peaceful action the Skagit River late Monday night and early Tuesday morning, broke its bounds and inundated a large part of its fertile valley, with a heavy loss to the farmers, an estimate of which is impossible at this time. No fatalities have been reported but some very narrow escapes from the flood waters occurred.

Families are going back home, and today the valley is righting and straightening houses and barns and scrubbing the mud from the floors of the homes. Cattle and chickens are being returned from the higher ground where they were taken Monday. The Great Northern Railroad Company is at work repairing its tracks and the Pacific Northwest Traction Company ran its first car over the line last night from Bellingham after a bridge just north of town had been straighten. Mt. Vernon has been without mail except as it could be brought in by boat for the past three days. Some telephone lines are down but the damage is not bad, it is stated.

With the first breaking of the dike, Monday night, the water was gradually receded from the valley, although one can stand on the hill, by the hospital, and look for miles and miles north and south over nothing but water. Tuesday and yesterday, one could see row boats plowing up and down the Pacific Highway north of this city as families were being moved to houses with two stories or to those on higher ground. From the bridge to the Standard Oil plant on North 4<sup>th</sup> street with a level stretch of water ranging in depth from 2 to 10 feet. It is possible to take a boat

the length of the highway over fences and small trees.

The home of W.J. Henry furnished refuge for several families who yesterday were going back in boats to their dwellings to start the work of cleaning up. Mr. Henry's barn was also the place of safety for much livestock of the neighborhood.

### River reaches 24 feet.

Three days of heavy rains and warm rains beginning their work Friday, melted the snows in the upper Skagit region and as a result, the Skagit River began its rise with startling rapidity, reaching a point Sunday night which caused alarm to be spread over the valley and the residents of the lower lands prepared to move. All livestock was taken to higher ground and everything that was liable to be damaged by water was moved.

The river continued to rise until it reached a mark of 24 feet 10 inches, or two inches below that set in 1909. This was late Monday night. Then came reports of a break in the dike in Burlington and soon after the dike at Conway south of here broke. Both these town were flooded. About 4:30 Tuesday morning, the dike near Charles Wiles place, a short distance west from Riverside Bridge and on the south bank of the river went through. Within a few hours the flats between the bridge and Mt. Vernon were covered with several feet of water. Other breaks occurred at intervals south of Mt. Vernon at Pritchard's, two below the Sheriffs place and two on the north fork. With the breaking of the dikes the

river began to drop slightly. About noon Tuesday the dike near the Clear Lake Lumber Company's wood yard north of town was washed out and the water in the Riverside District began to recede to the river. Today the Pacific Highway, north of town, is passable only in spots. South of town the water is still very high over the payment as it had been backing this way from Conway.

W.E. Harbert reported the loss of 13 head of cattle and 3 head of horses which were drowned near Skyiou when the river first began to rise.

### **Family Saved; House Goes**

One of the near casualties was that by the Lee Davis family when their house near the interurban bridge over the Skagit between Mt. Vernon and Burlington was broken into about noon Tuesday. One part was swept away while Mr., and Mrs. Davis and the two children sought safety in the upstairs of the remaining portion which tottered in the water. They were rescued in boats before it fell. A telephone call to Sheriff George Reay told of the family's plight and urged him to send help from Mt. Vernon. A boat could not be found here, so the Sheriff with two deputies, Charles Woodward and Al Sollenthin, and John Downs, drove to J.E. Perin's farm northwest of town where a rowboat was secured. Sheriff Reay and Mr. Downs crossed the Skagit at the interurban bridge but the family had been taken to safety before they reached the home.

The Great Northern reports that about 2,000 feet of track washed out north of the Riverside bridge. This will necessitate about two weeks of work to replace it was stated. The steamer Harvester arrived here from Seattle Tuesday with mail and newspapers, the first that had reached here from the south for several days, showing that in times such as this the old river boat is the towns best friend.

About 20 homes inside the dike in West Mount Vernon suffered the most of any

in the City. Each of these had water several inches deep on the first floor early Monday night. The dikes along the west side were patrolled vigialantly and the flood was kept in its bounds.

Much heroic work was done the length of the river who toiled all Monday and Tuesday night stopping each seepage or break. Time after time they were forced to give up and let the waters through when it was impossible to keep up with the rising flood. The battle against the break at Riverside was most heroic and it was a wholly exhausted group of men who left that point after the hopeless battle. Tuesday the aid of the schools here was enlisted and the larger boys were dispatched to West Mt. Vernon to help fill the weakened spots in the river bank.

### **Drove Into Deep Water**

J. O. Whitmarsh bought 4,000 sacks and sent them to the workers at Riverside Monday. W. F. Deighton gave a load of sacks which were hurried to the bridge just before the break occurred at the Wiles farm.

When a man said to be a Mr. Mitchell living near Burlington, drove his horse and light wagon into high water over the pavement just north of the Standard Oil company plant Tuesday afternoon, everyone expected to see both horse and man go under, but the animal held its course and swam to the higher portion of the pavement. In this boat was a nephew who he was to meet with the horse and wagon and not thinking the water was so high he started to drive to the railroad crossing. The horse waded out until the wagon was nearly submerged and when he found that is was impossible to turn back Mr. Mitchell kept the animal going straight ahead until he swam through the deepest part hauling the wagon after him. Mr. Mitchell came back in the boat with his nephew and the horse and wagon were taken back by the way of the railroad.

Word reached here yesterday that the

dikes along the LaConner flats had washed out and these lowlands were flooded with the water reaching LaConner. Some dikes along the saltwater area also went out. The large warehouse of Mrs. William Bell, near Whitney, was reported to have been washed into a slough with 2,000 sacks of oats. The water is several feet deep in Conway and Milltown south of here, and the residents of Conway used the Great Northern depot as a sanctuary during Tuesday night as it is on one of the highest spots in the town. Folks brought food from the nearby stores. Reports from Edison state that town was underwater Tuesday night, but the situation was improving. The dike was blown in several places to relieve the flood. The water was 6 or 8 inches higher than it was in 1917. In some of the houses in the Samish flats water was 6 or 7 feet and the occupants were forced to move to the second story.

### **City Water Plant Impaired**

With the high water in Mt. Vernon came the clogging of the intake pipe of the Home Water Ice companies water plant and the shutting down of this plant. The city's water was being pumped from the well southeast of town. A small pump was kept going nearly all of Monday night to keep the seepage water out of the plant on First Street while the men installed an auxiliary pump. Some excitement was caused by the seepage water coming under the dike near Milwaukee street Monday night but the sacks of sand and dirt were piled on this spot and it gave no further trouble. People were routed from their beds about 12 pm Monday night by a general alarm caused by a report that the Skagit was breaking through along the Great Northern and Interurban tracks near the Clear Lake lumber yard. An examination showed that the water was creeping up slowly at this point but that it would have to rise at least two feet more to go over the tracks and down First

Street. **Pioneers recall that only once have the flood waters of the Skagit reached the downtown streets of Mt. Vernon and this was in 1897.** Other floods have occurred in 1906, 1909, 1911, and January, 1918.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a mistake. It should be December 1917.