

THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS

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COMMISSIONERS DEFEND FLOOD COORDINATION

Blackstone Says No Coordination During Flood

Skagit county commissioners yesterday defended the coordination of the February flood against charges by Fred Blackstone Jr., Mount Vernon real estate man. Blackstone, whose new home was nearly flooded, complained to the commissioners recently, and released the following statement to The Argus—

"There was no coordination to speak of, at the county level. This was through no fault of the hastily appointed coordinator (Engineer Harold Strombom) but due to the failure of one non-technical individual being given the authority and responsibility, a reasonable length of time before a coordinating set-up was needed. (signed) Fred Blackstone Jr."

1950 GROUP ACTED

The coordinating set-up was formed in January 1950, with Engineer Hugo Thiret as coordinator, and nine county men to head various functions, as reported in The Argus of Oct. 12, 1950 the commissioners said. This group never held a meeting in the 14 months of its existence, and at the time of the recent flood, Hugo Thiret aided but did not act as coordinator; A. B. Wiseman found it necessary to appoint Strombom to do the work. Thus Strombom had no time to prepare his organization.

Blackstone, when interviewed, would not allow himself to be quoted further, but was outspoken in his desire for the commissioners to act decisively.

STROMBOM PRAISES WORKER

Strombom yesterday had nothing but praise for the county and city employes, and the volunteers who accomplished so much during the flood and claimed that he did coordinate labor, equipment, supplies, the Red Cross, the sheriff's office and others as best he could. He admitted that labor was wasted and that the coordination was far from perfect, but said that everyone did the best he could.

Sheriff Harold Hinshaw disclosed that a meeting would be held Friday night of all county police activities for "suggestions and improvements" of the organizations. His groups would work for both disaster control and civil defense, in line with state policy. Strombom said that he would attend the meeting.

NO ONE RESPONSIBLE

Consensus of opinion around the court house was that no one individual or office was entirely responsible for flood control or coordination, but that the dike districts are supposed to take care of all dikes, including strengthening during high waters.

Strombom pointed out that the warning by radio of the flood crest of 28 feet, nearly 24 hours in advance, but that some farmers and dike districts did not heed the warning.

Engineer Walberg In Washington, DC For Two Weeks

Representing Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, Skagit County Engineer H. A. Walberg is in Washington, D. C. for two weeks as one of the twelve-man Board of Consultants of the Bureau of Public Roads, a federal organization.

Walberg has been to the nation's capital about half a dozen times, the engineer's office reported this morning. Assistant Engineer Harold Strombom is in charge until his return, about March 15.

NEW DIKE LEVY BILL AWAITS SIGNATURE

The bill empowering diking districts to levy assessments on the basis of regular property valuations awaits signature of the governor at Olympia. The measure, sponsored by Reps. Grant C. Sisson and James T. Ovenell, (both R, Skagit county), passed the senate this week by a 37-2 vote.

Sisson wired The Argus this afternoon saying the bill probably would be signed Friday.

To answer technical objections, the two representatives were called to the senate several times and the day of final passage, Sisson spoke to a bloc of senators in a group. He said diking districts at present were meeting expenses under an 1895 law assessing property on an acreage instead of a valuation basis. The result has been that valuable buildings, occupying small land areas, had been paying much less than farms embracing many acres.