

The Burlington Journal

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 1918

MID-WINTER FLOOD GREATEST IN MEMORY OF OLDEST INHABITANT

Valley Dikes Break in Dozen Places—Skagit Inundates Lowlands—No Lives Lost—Only Few Head of Stock Drowned – Considerable Property Damaged—River Channel and Dikes Inadequate to Carry Away Surplus Water—Spillways Needed to Relieve River Channel During Flood Periods—Railroad and Interurban Communications Restored From North—Delayed Mails Received Today

One of the worst and doubtless most destructive floods known in the Skagit delta occurred last Saturday night, the river dikes giving way in sight of more places, the overflowing water covering the entire delta from Mt. Vernon to LaConner and south from Mt. Vernon to Conway, the island delta west of Fir escaping flood waters. The McLean highway district west of Mt. Vernon was not flooded. The district north of Mt. Vernon to the bridge was practically inundated, and all the territory north of the river almost to Burlington and west to the LaConner flats was covered with water. The heavy southerly gales which prevailed uninterrupted for 96 hours melted the snow in the mountains bringing down a torrential body of water that the banks of the Skagit River could not contain and a mighty sea of water spread over the lowlands, causing here and there destruction to property and the loss of quite a few head of stock.

Practically the entire line of the coast division of the Great Northern railway from Mt. Vernon to Burlington, was undermined, and in some places carried away from the road bed. The aggregate losses were not so serious; it was the individual losses that were in some instances crushing while others were from a humanitarian point of view actually pitiful. The tragical results were caused by the failure of a crude, imperfect, ununiform diking system that never has nor never will retain the torrents of water when a Chinook zephyr loosens the flood gates of the Cascades. From five o'clock Saturday

night, when the river was bank full, it steadily rose a foot an hour until midnight. The water then had reached the top practically of all the dikes, and a break was inevitable somewhere or the mighty volume of water was certain to pour over the dikes, causing doubtless even greater damage in loss of property and loss of life than resulted through breaks in the dikes. At about midnight the expected break in the dike came. In fact there were at least ten serious washouts. Four occurred in the Riverside bend, three across the river in the Avon district, at North Riverside, one at Freeman's old place on the Baker River logging railway right-of-way, southeast of Burlington, one south of Mt. Vernon, and another at the Clear Lake wood yards, north of Mt. Vernon. These artificial spillways naturally afforded an immediate outlet for the surplus water to pour through, and the river immediately began to fall, and all danger from further flood damages was past. The district north and south of the Great Northern Riverside bridge, the interurban and the Pacific highway bridge, the LaConner delta, the backwaters covering portions of the territory northwest of Burlington as far as Edison was quite seriously stricken by flood damages and inundation from backwater. A few homes, barns and outbuildings in the path of the break were swept away, a number of cattle and hogs and a few horses drowned, and general inconvenience, interruptions of traffic, business and losses to farmers in destruction of fences, washouts, loss of vegetables, hay, other personal property and large quantities of milk that could not be gotten

to market. If the destruction of property could have been avoided, the personal inconvenience, temporary cessation of business and interruption of traffic would have been fully compensated by the inestimable enrichment of the soil for a number of years to come by the silt distribution over the tillable lands of the Skagit Delta.

The control of the Skagit River during flood periods is a serious engineering problem, a huge task, however that is possible, and one that should attract the immediate attention of every civic community from Sauk to the sea. Building a series of ununiform dikes to protect districts here and there through the lowlands utterly fails as a solution, meaning only future disaster when the river runs riot during flood periods. During flood periods when the river reaches the point that dikes are not adequate to control it, it overflows its banks unless other artificial means are provided to carry off the surplus water. Government engineers, who have studied Skagit river flood problems with the view of affording relief to districts subject to overflow, declare that concrete spillways should be built to take care of the surplus water. Improvements of this character should be maintained by the government, state and county. The plan has proved successful in the Mississippi valley and in other districts where flood problems are far more difficult to control than in the valley of the Skagit. The question is not confined to protecting a few valley towns from floods, the devastation wrought throughout the farming districts of the delta each recurring flood, and the losses consequent to traffic and business generally mounts into the millions and is of magnitude sufficient to justify the thoughtful consideration of nation, state and county, to work out a permanent solution of so great a public problem. Because Mt. Vernon's big dikes kept it dry, or Burlington is so fortunately situated that it does not require a system of dikes to protect it from floods is mighty poor consolation to the people of the delta districts threatened with overflow and devastation every recurring flood, and certainly affords a huge problem no community nor individual in the Skagit valley is not deeply interested in from a humanitarian as well as a material point of view, to find a solution everybody must grapple the

problem with a high degree of intelligence, right, and commanding engineering skill, or the valley in a few years will again be paralyzed by another visitation of flood disaster, maybe far greater than the one that overwhelmed us last Saturday.

While our sympathy goes out to those who were flood sufferers, the spirit of many of these sufferers, is suggested by the hope, courage and good cheer of one of the prosperous farmers of North Riverside district and his wife who, when they were able to return to their home when the river had subsided, after taking a survey of their personal losses, which were great said, we couldn't leave Skagit Co. whatever misfortune might befall us, and we have the consolation to know that taking into consideration what we have suffered, we then are far better off than we came here; our land is made righter by the flood deposits, and so both these good people with courage and hope turned to the task of rehabilitating the farm. You cannot crush people like these, whatever misfortune might befall them.

The task after all of the restoration of the valley to normal conditions is not a difficult one. To more adequately prepare for these emergencies in the future is the real condition; however, that neither community nor individual should lose sight of until the task before them shall have become fully achieved.