

The Burlington Journal

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Burlington Escapes Flood Which Takes Big Toll In Skagit County And State

Break in Railroad Fill Saves Flood In Streets

Efforts of Volunteers Keep Dikes In Town Solid

While many parts of Skagit County and Western Washington suffered heavy damages from flood waters last Saturday, Sunday and Monday¹, Burlington, on three sides, emerged practically untouched and losses in the immediate adjacent country were comparatively light.

West Conway, Skagit City and up-river communities suffered most from rising waters of the Skagit River, which flooded an extensive countryside for the first time in ten years. The great power dams in Baker river and the Upper Skagit and rather elaborate diking systems in the lower valley, proved only partial protection from a mighty river filled to overflowing, after two days of warm Chinook winds had melted snow in the mountains.

WIND MELTS SNOW

Burlington's fortunate escape from begin inundated was believed due mostly to heroic efforts of fire department members and many other volunteer workers who kept the dike solid in town and to the northeast. Anxiety was felt for a few hours following the break in the dike south of town Sunday noon, but was dispelled

when the Great Northern railway fill gave way, allowing the water to sweep over the fields to the West and Southwest.

Strong Chinook winds of Thursday and Friday filled the Skagit to the top of its banks, and Saturday water began overflowing and covering the land up to the dikes. Shortly after midnight Saturday water had risen to a height of less than two feet from the top of the dike east of Burlington.

Crews of workers kept busy all night applying several thousands of sandbags to stop minor leaks which might easily become dangerous.

MOST WATER

Sunday morning, with water backed up from the Burlington dikes to Clear Lake, a distance of between six and seven miles, the situation became dangerous. The dike was becoming soft in many places and the water continued to rise gradually. Old-timers expressed the belief that there was more water back of the dikes than in any previous flood.

A screaming fire siren at 12:10 Sunday noon announced to Burlington that a dike had been broken. Water came crashing through in torrents at the LeMar place, nearly a mile south of Burlington. Scores of people rushed there, but could

¹ February 27, 28, & 29th

do nothing but watch fascinated while the water covered the fields. Farmers in their vicinity hurriedly moved their families and livestock, and no lives were lost.

The flood, temporarily checked by the railroad fill and quickly filling to a depth of three and four feet the fields near the break in the dike, rushed north, emptied into the sloughs, and backed up into Burlington. The sloughs began filling up and the veterans of former floods said that if the pressure were not relieved the sloughs would overflow and flood Burlington streets.

G. N. FILL BREAKS

A few minutes after the river broke through the dike, water began to seep through the base of the G. N. fill a mile south of the depot and by three o'clock broke through, lessening the flow into the Burlington sloughs, but sweeping the fields westward.

The Pacific highway was crossed and blocked to traffic by four o'clock, and the flood swept on. By Sunday evening it had flooded farms and roads in the Avon district and north across the flats to the Olympia Marsh vicinity.

Burlington was in a state of tense excitement all day, with hundreds of visitors from neighboring towns touring the vicinity to see the flood from the many vantage points.

GARAGE FLOATS OFF

From the G. N. trestle south of the city limits, scores of people saw a large garage owned by Bob Kane ripped loose from its foundations, lifted out and floated away on the crest of the torrent. In a few moments the building crashed to pieces and a minute or two later the debris floated under the feet of the spectators into Varney slough. Other buildings held fast.

Charlie Brown moved his flock of sheep to higher ground across the slough when the dike broke, but was enabled to return them by 6:30 that evening when the waters had subsided somewhat.

By ten o'clock, reports of an eight-foot drop in the river at Lyman and a ten-inch drop at Mount Vernon, reached Burlington. The Nookachamps and Samish rivers were also dropping. Stages were making the trip from Bellingham that evening, but the road was impassable south.

FARMS SUBMERGED

A large acreage in the Edison and Allen districts was still under much water late Monday, from an overflow of the Samish river.

The water level at the dike east of Burlington was down 54 inches Monday morning, and by ten o'clock cars were getting through water on the blacktop road to Bay View. Traffic began making use of the highway between Burlington and Mount Vernon by three o'clock.

The south end of the slough bridge on Skagit Street was partially washed out, as was the east end of the wooden bridge across Varney slough south of town.

Mails from the South reached Burlington via the N. P. lines in Sedro-Woolley, the Great Northern trains switching here to their own northbound tracks. A big extra gang employed by the railroad had 600 feet of trestle in the break south of town, repaired Wednesday noon, when the first train came north.