

MOUNT VERNON DAILY HERALD

THOUSANDS OF ACRES FLOODED IN RICH VALLEY

The worst Skagit river flood since 1921 inundated thousands of acres of rich Skagit valley farm lands over the weekend and left two county towns, Stanwood and Hamilton, standing in water ranging up to six feet deep.

A break in the dike below Conway sent a raging river of muddy water through that town and spreading north over the flats on both sides of the Great Northern railroad tracks and Highway 99 to a point about a mile and a half south of the Mount Vernon city limits.

Fir Island Flooded

Water from the Conway break spread over an estimated 4,480 acres, to a depth ranging from a few inches to several feet.

Although the Fir Island dike did not break, water seeped through and spilled over to flood the western half of the island, one of the richest farm areas in the state. Approximately 2,460 acres were under water today, and it was in this area that a great number of the cattle could not be rescued in time. Damage to berry and seed crops are considered the most serious.

The delta area west of Brown's slough was flooded today by a smaller break or leak in the dike, with some 700 acres of farm land affected.

Volunteers Active

Hundreds of volunteer workers have worked in shifts up to 24 hours and longer on the dikes, at the sand pits, driving trucks and feeding and caring for the dike workers and evacuees.

Highway 99 was closed to traffic yesterday afternoon and was under water for four and a half miles today.

A rapid drop in the river, which was down to 22.9 at 1 o'clock, or within the normal banks, brought an end to the spreading flood south of town and greatly reduced the pressure on the soggy dikes. The river had dropped almost to the bottom of the dike break by noon.

Crested at 28.2

The river reached a crest at 28.2 at 5 a.m. yesterday and held very near to that mark for several hours, before feeling the effect of cooler weather on the upper Skagit.

Traffic to the upper valley, cut off Friday by flooding at Hamilton, could be reached today by a circuitous route over a logging road, but slides above Concrete cut the road at Sauk and Faber. The Concrete ferry, cut adrift early yesterday, came to rest apparently unharmed on a sand bank about a half mile downstream.

Hamilton residents evacuated without incident but some chose

Thousands Of Acres

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to remain on the second floor of their homes. Eight families were taken out of the flooded Nookachamps valley Saturday by civilian "ducks."

The river broke through the railroad embankment east of Burlington, which acts as a dike, and tore through the Dollar road, cutting the PUD 14-inch main serving Burlington. The Burlington system was tied into the Mount Vernon line, and the heavy demand, including service to two Mount Vernon industries normally drawing their own water from the river — PictSweet and Darigold — dropped the pressure to the point where some areas west of town had no water for a time yesterday afternoon.

Hamilton's and Lyman's water supplies were declared unsafe to drink without boiling and the same advice was given to persons using well water in the flooded areas by the county medical officer, Dr. W. L. Jackson.

One of the most serious threats to the dike was in the river bend area, west of the Riverside bridge, where leaks and boils in the road which parallels the dike caused concern throughout Saturday night and Sunday. Volunteer workers placed truckload after truckload of sandbags on the road and dikeside and brought the situation into control by late last night.

Across the river, from the bridge to the Avon vicinity, the dike held but showed the same tendency toward seepage, with water bubbling up in the road and adjoining fields until stopped by the sandbag treatment.

West Mount Vernon got a scare yesterday afternoon when a series of soft spots developed in the dike and road west of the Stevens Construction Company plant and hundreds of sacks of sand relieved the situation there. A large spot at the sewage plant was also corrected.

About 30 houses outside the dike in West Mount Vernon were flooded, with water well above the floors in many of them. Houseboat residents spurned offers of evacuation, however, and life went on as usual, with the "house" at a level quite a few feet above normal.

A portion of the drawrest on the West Side bridge across the Skagit was swept away, and there were times at the crest of the flood when the bridge was felt to sway noticeably, but held fast. The new riprapping on the dike in downtown Mount Vernon came through with flying colors, and the higher level of the dike was credited with preventing serious flooding of business buildings along the riverfront.

At its highest point, the river rose over the new road along the river and the parking area and reached Main Street, where a sandbag parapet held it back. Many merchants in the downtown district had taken the precaution to move goods a foot or more above the floor.

Working out of the Elks Club in Mount Vernon, the Conway fire hall (until that was flooded), the McLean Road fire hall and the Burlington fire hall, workers and trucks of sandbags were dispatched to critical points. Sandbags for the Mount Vernon area were filled first at the Be-Bo plant and later, when the dike in that area appeared soft, at Second and Snoqualmie. Sandbags for the area west of Mount Vernon were filled at a pit on Pleasant Ridge and the trucks worked out of the McLean Road fire hall, going to points along the dike from the North Fork bridge to the Riverside bridge.

Sound trucks were donated for the work.

Round-the-clock service was maintained at the co-ordinator's office in the court house, with Harold Strombom as co-ordinator; the American Red Cross office, which handled housing and feeding of evacuees and arranged for meals for service men called into the area; the Elks Club, which served coffee and sandwiches to volunteer workers assembling and sent out from there; the Legion hall, which sent out trucks of sandwiches and food to dike workers in the Mount Vernon area; the Burlington fire hall, where Mr. and Mrs. DeAtley were in charge of feeding the crews; the Conway school and Mount Vernon YMCA evacuation centers; the Mount Vernon fire and police departments and the sheriff's office.

Calls for help in evacuating people and livestock were channeled through the sheriff's office and the state patrol handled traffic which was unusually heavy because of the great number of sightseers.

The Big Lake fire department served as a standby for the Clear Lake department, busy with rescue work in the Nookachamps area.

About 140 Navy men from the Whidbey base came in late Saturday night and stayed until Sunday night, when two contingents of National Guardsmen, from Everett and Bellingham, came in to work on strengthening the dikes. The Red Cross arranged and paid for feeding of the servicemen at the President Hotel Sunday morning and noon and this morning. The servicemen made their headquarters at the Legion hall.

National Guard units which came in shortly before midnight last night were Batteries L and M, and Headquarters Company, Third Battalion of the 161st Infantry, Everett, commanded by Lt. Col. Donald M. Rigby; and Batteries C and D of the 240th Field Artillery, Bellingham, totaling 130 men and 12 officers in

the two groups.

The Red Cross also drew from its supply of blankets and cots to set up the evacuation centers and aid evacuated families.

Robert Colton of the Red Cross area office, came into the flood area Saturday and is continuing to assist in directing the evacuation and rehabilitation program which is the Red Cross responsibility.

Job printing with the union label at the Daily Herald.