



Smithburg as it appeared before the flood.

The Great Flood of 1950

Imagine waking up to airplanes flying overhead, the stench of oil, mud, gas, fish and stormwater filling your nostrils, train tracks ripped from their rail bed, cars overturned and strewn about like toys, houses washed from their foundations, twisted metal and splintered remains of homes lying everywhere, and a thick coat of mud covering everything in sight. But even worse than that, imagine the sounds of a grieving community as they learn that 19 of their neighbors had been swallowed-up by the Middle Island Creek during the night and that three others had perished due to circumstances surrounding the flood. This was the scene that Doddridge Countians awoke to on June 25, 1950. This was the reality of the Great Flood of 1950.

Calm Before the Storm

Saturday, June 24, 1950 was a gorgeous hot summer day. That morning the old Doddridge County 4-H grounds had been auctioned off on the court house steps, a softball game was being planned for the next day at the ballpark near the Smithburg Golf Club, and a birthday party was to take place that evening at the Bailey house in Smithburg. Conversation was no doubt about the United States' impending participation in the escalating Korean conflict. But for now, all was right in Doddridge County. Until about 6:30, when the rain began to fall.



Smithburg as it appeared before the flood.

By 8 p.m. the swollen Middle Island Creek had already overflowed its banks, and by 10 p.m. telephone service and electricity were lost. Residents in Smithburg and surrounding communities were gathering on the second floor of their homes or fleeing to the relative safety of the surrounding hills to get away from the rapidly rising water. By midnight several families were trapped in their homes and forced to seek refuge on their roofs. The churning Middle Island Creek was ramping up for the biggest natural disaster Doddridge County had ever seen.

Volunteers Sound the Alarm

On Saturday evening Gib Davis and a few friends, including Jim Chapman, left to go fishing. When it started raining really hard they returned to Smithburg, tied their boat up at Bob Holton's store and went home. By the time they got to Gib's house, the water was knee deep in the valley. Gib, his wife and their son Boze, along with their friends, left the house to go to Holton's Store, but the water was coming up so quickly that they feared they would not be safe there. Gib, his wife and Boze went back to their house where they started piling some of their belongings up on chairs. They then left the house to go to higher ground. The water was now waist deep.

At about 10 p.m. Gib Davis and Jim Chapman knocked on the door at Bill Cooper's house and told Bill that he needed to get his family out of the house. Bill said that he, his wife Veve and his five children, Phil, Roger "Jake," Karen, Linda and Nelda, were busy moving furniture to safety and that they would go ahead and ride the storm out at home. Then Gib, Boze and Jim Chapman went to the Vanscoy house and helped Clifford Vanscoy get his parents across the road to Ed Tate's house.

After William and Louella Gay Vanscoy were taken to safety, the three men moved on to the the Bailey house, where fifteen people had gathered. Clive and Mildred Bailey and their son Charles lived there. Charles was home from WVU for the summer. Clive and Mildred's daughter, Catherine, was there with her husband Kenneth Simms and their children, Linda and Charlotte. Samuel and Audra Loraine McKinney with their children, Naomi, Samuel, Margie Sue and Jo Ann were there because they thought they would be safe in the large two-story Bailey home. Bill and Minnie Rothwell had gone there for the same reason.



Bill Rothwell. Perished in the flood.



Audra McKinney with three of her children. All perished in the flood.

Sam McKinney, thinking his family was safe at the Bailey house, went back out into the torrential rain to warn neighbors of the rising water.

Shortly after Sam McKinney left his family at the Bailey house, the water continued to rise so quickly that the house was soon enveloped in water. Sam couldn't swim, so Gib Davis, Gerald Chedester and Jim Chapman took Bill Rothwell's aluminum boat to the Bailey house to rescue the occupants. However, the boat capsized before they could reach them. Gerald and Jim made it to safety, and Gib swam towards the Bailey house. After much effort he was able to enter the house through the kitchen door. The water was waist-deep in the house.

Through a window in the Bailey home, Gib Davis watched his own house rise off its foundation and float downstream. Then he watched the Vanscoy house (childhood home of U.S. Senator Matthew M. Neely) float by. Next, the house he was in rose off its foundation, made a quarter turn and lodged against a cement garage which was built against the hill. That was when Gib saw the Cooper house floating right toward him. Fortunately the current altered its course and the two houses did not collide. As the Cooper house floated by, Gib could see those inside trying to knock weather boarding out of the gable end.

The house Gib was in, the Bailey house, once again started drifting downstream. Below the Smithton Depot, the house hit a giant elm tree and rested there for a short time. The jolt caused Charles Bailey to fall into the churning water. Charles, who was able to dog paddle just enough to stay afloat, washed up against the railroad bridge, where he was pinned in the debris until almost noon the next day.

Gib Davis then decided it was time to leave the house, so he took his clothes off so they wouldn't get caught on anything and jumped into the raging Middle Island Creek. Swimming as fast as he could in the swift current, he slowly made progress toward the shore, but when he felt his fingers brush something, he latched onto it. It turned out to be a boxcar that had stalled as soon as it exited the railroad tunnel just west of the depot. When he climbed the ladder to the top of the train, only 18 inches of the boxcar remained above water. He walked along the tops of the boxcars until he got to the engine, which was almost to the depot. There was no water in the cab, so he crawled near the boiler and spent the rest of the night there. In the morning, his son Boze threw a rope out to him and he swam to shore.

Fate of the Cooper and Bailey Houses

Both the Bailey house and Cooper house suffered the same fate. The houses were smashed to bits when they collided with the railroad bridge. Those inside the houses were either fatally injured by the impact or they drowned. Charles Bailey was the only person who made it out of the Bailey house alive and Phil Cooper was the only one who made it out of the Cooper house alive.

The following passage, written by Jim Chapman, recounts how he helplessly watched the Cooper house float down the Middle Island Creek:

"I was standing on Hillside Ave. directly behind the current Smithburg Greenhouse when the poor Coopers were pounding the sheeting planks to get out on the roof. There I stood, a near world class swimmer, a tough, Doddridge County High School ex-football player and couldn't give one ounce of help to the poor desperate neighbors. The house swung to the north and got relatively close to the train just east of the tunnel. This is where Phil threw their dog off. Phil said later that he thought of throwing [his brother] Jake off (Jake was an excellent swimmer.) but decided not to in that he felt that if Jake didn't make it, he, Phil, would always blame himself. --- When the house hit the bridge, back down under they went, Phil being the sole survivor. -- About 3:30 am, Boze and I walked through the Smithburg Cut and down the hill on the Avondale side and were able to see that someone was sitting on a drift pile, caught by the wire cables of the suspension bridge at the mouth of Jockey Camp Run. We yelled and above the cacophony were able to ascertain that it was Phil. We then went back to Smithburg to get whatever it would take to get him off. By the time we got back to Phil, Mr. Paul Cumpston who lived near by had gotten him off and had provided dry clothes and hot drinks."



Phil Cooper's high school photo.



Phil Cooper clinging to cable bridge. Only survivor of Cooper family.



Where Cooper house once stood.

Reading the first-hand accounts of what happened, I don't think we can completely comprehend the carnage and terror these people experienced. Men like Gib and Boze Davis, Jim Chapman, Gerald Chedester and Sam McKinney truly became heroes when they braved torrential rain and raging floodwater to help save their neighbors. When faced with such dangerous conditions most people, rather than risking their lives to help others, would have simply fled for the hills.

The reason Smithburg was so devastated by this sudden cloudburst was because the entire community lies in one of the narrowest valleys along the path of the Middle Island Creek. An unprecedented amount of water was very quickly forced through this narrow valley. The water was not only deep, but extremely violent. Locals said it sounded like all hell had broken loose.

Other Deaths Besides Drowning

Floodwater was not the only cause of death that night. Abraham and Icy Williams were at home in their bed on Rock Run when they were overcome by toxic fumes. The tremendous force of the water caused many gas and oil wells to break open, sending massive amounts of gas and oil into the floodwater. Abraham and Icy were found the next morning lying in bed, still holding each other in their arms.

Hugh Waldo of Greenwood, although he did not drown, is considered to be a victim of the flood. According to newspaper accounts, he died of a heart attack while trying to get his truck out of the path of rising water. His death record states that he died from cardiac degeneration resulting from overexertion.

Other Communities Affected

Although Smithburg was hardest hit by the floodwater, other communities in Doddridge County also experienced a huge amount of destruction.

At Deep Valley Oliver Doak (who had just gotten home from the hospital that Monday), his wife Ada, and Arthur White were rescued from the second story of the Doak home. Oliver had been recovering from a heart attack and was in bed on the first floor of their home because the doctor had told him not to climb stairs. Despite his wife's frantic



Abraham and Icy Williams. Perished in the flood.

requests to move to the second floor, he waited until the water was under his bed before finally going upstairs. When the water was three steps from the second floor Ada decided to call her neighbors, Paul and Virginia McCutchan. After talking to the McCutchans, the Doaks exited the house through a loft window and climbed onto the roof. Paul McCutchan and Dick Wade, who was visiting at the time, made a log raft and rescued Mr. and Mrs. Doak from their roof.

In West Union rescue workers found seventy-year-old Cora Hutson clinging to a chandelier. She said she had been in that position for eight hours.

Blandville Flooded, But Church Spared

George E. Bland described what happened during the flood in Blandville:

"It rained, it poured, lightning flashed and thunder roared; the creek rose and things began to happen.

"Gladys and I had gone to bed, and all of a sudden we heard someone calling, 'Help! Help!' Glen Lamb and his family lived in a small house in the bottom below the Church in Blandville. The creek had risen until the water was up to the mattress in Glen's bedroom.

"Glen and his family were on the porch calling for help. The water was probably up to their knees and out across the bottom, the water was about four feet deep and running swiftly.

"Clifford Ross and I got in my pickup truck, drove out and parked so the lights would shine out across the bottom to the house. We waded out (the water was up to my shoulders) and helped the family to safety. Gladys and I provided a place for the family to stay and furnished what clothing and food we could until other arrangements could be made. The house, with all the family's belongings, washed away within minutes after the family was rescued.

"My mother, Mrs. Julia Bland, lived in the old home place, a big two-story house. When she saw the water rising, she went upstairs, thinking she would be safe. It wasn't long until the water was within 9" of the ceiling in the first story. My brother, Arthur, and brother-in-law, Ray Gabbert, put a ladder up to a window in the back of the house, and mother climbed to safety. She was seventy-seven years old at the time. She stayed with Arthur and his family until the mess was cleaned up.

"Gladys and I owned the little Country Store at the time of the flood and Gladys was Postmaster. The post office was within the store building. We salvaged what we could from the post office and it wasn't long until the building was floating downstream like a big house boat! It went downstream to just below the new Country Store, crossed over two rows of trees, and settled down in the bottom, practically unharmed, on land owned by Millard Maxwell.

"After a while we salvaged what we could from within the building, then had the building torn down. Part of the lumber was used to build a new post office. The post office was in operation on our back porch until the new building was finished.

"Now the Church. All buildings below the road washed away except our little country Church. Not to be! It withstood all pressure and would not move. A miracle we think! The water rose to the top of the windows, all glass was broken out and the pews were standing on end! Next was the clean-up, and it wasn't long until the Church was ready for services again."

(Explanatory Note: To help piece together the events of that night and the succeeding days, I will be quoting directly from a compilation of old newspaper articles, publications and oral histories. This was a major national news event that received extensive coverage in the press. I will also be paraphrasing at times. A bibliography will be provided at the end of the article. Direct quotes will be italicized. I am using this format to tell the story in the words of those who survived this hellish flood and those who reported the destruction it left behind.)

Rescue and Recovery

"Most of the missing at Smithburg lived in a row of seven framed houses situated 20 feet from the creek. 'It came at us like a tidal wave,' one resident reported. Residents of another 15 homes escaped before they were swept away."

State Police Capt. Edward Everett Stout directed rescue operations at Smithburg. Search efforts were suspended during the night when a freak fog settled over the entire disaster area. He said, *"Finding the bodies is going to be tough. They may be down all the way to the Ohio River by now."*

"Mopping up operations were being directed by Capt. Stout and Rex Underwood, West Union Fire Chief."

"Lack of telephone and telegraph communications hampered efforts to gather a complete list of the missing. Stout said the victims recovered after the search resumed at dawn were Naomi McKinney, 12, Linnie McKinney, 8, Samuel McKinney, 9, Clive Bailey, R.W. [Bill] Rothwell, and an unidentified man."

"The National Guard assigned a detachment from Parkersburg to aid the State Police. Civil Air Patrol planes carried emergency workers into isolated communities to set up shelter stations."

"Men went to work in the night on the job of taking the [covered] bridge apart. Dynamite was used to blast the sturdy timbers. The bridge is damming the stream there and creating a large body of backwater which is a handicap to the stream search."



Covered Bridge as it appeared before the flood.



Covered Bridge lodged against cement bridge, beside where NAPA is now.



A different view of Covered Bridge lodged against cement bridge.



Crew demolishing Covered Bridge.

First-Hand Accounts

"The Bailey home was directly in the path of the flood. Sheriff Paul B. Davis said the house was carried nearly two miles downstream. The only known survivor of the family is Charles Bailey, a son, who is in a West Union hospital, with a fractured leg, cuts and bruises."

"Max Barker, a fireman at Salem, said, 'Middle Island came up seven and a half feet in less than five minutes here. It must have been hell at Smithburg.'"

"Other refugees sought safety in trees. Grover Koontz, husband of a flood victim [in Berea, Ritchie County], said he sat in a tree all night thinking he was alone. When dawn came he found 15-year-old James Prunty had been keeping him company."

"At West Union some 30 houses were swept from their foundations and carried downstream. They slammed against a covered bridge, which buckled under the impact and was carried along with the houses. The tangled mass of wreckage piled up against a highway bridge further downstream."

"Five persons were stranded on the roof of their home at West Union and there were no boats available to rescue them. They waved their arms at a pilot flying over the flood area to signal that they were stranded."

Thurman Hoskinson, a taxi cab driver, was driving along Route 18 one mile from West Union that night. Upon seeing a wall of water roaring towards him, he jumped from the taxi and sought refuge on a nearby hill. Water was already waist-high when he abandoned his taxi.

Earl Percy, of New Milton, and two sisters who were visiting him from Florida, went to the roof of his two-story home and tied their bodies together with torn sheets in case they were washed away in the flood. They were rescued after the water receded.

"The Baltimore & Ohio main line tracks between Clarksburg and Parkersburg were washed out in several places, tunnels were blocked, houses were thrown on the right of way and bridges were ruined...."

"Mrs. Jenny Moore and Mrs. Una Burch were trapped in the two-story Moore home Sunday morning. Romeo and Dairwood Gatrell and Homer Duty laid a plank walk over a cellar house and an outbuilding onto the roof of the home and chopped a hole through into the bedroom. Both ladies were standing in water up to their armpits, even though they were standing on top of pillows piled on the bed. After they had been rescued, they told the men that they had been ready to give up."

"One impoverished householder was able to manage a quip today in the face of the costly flood which swept Central West Virginia. Mrs. George Whitehill, whose home and roadside tavern were swept away in the swirling waters, estimated her loss at \$17,000. All she had left was a pet racoon and seven hound dogs. "If that 'coon bites me again," she said, "he's going, too."



Debris lodged against the Neely Bridge in West Union.



Houses and debris lodged against the Neely Bridge in West Union.



Cheuvront Ave. in West Union.



Ad that appeared in The West Union Herald.

"According to one newspaper report the day after the flood, 7 and one-half inches of rain fell in two hours. The rain which began at approximately 6:00 pm on the sultry Saturday evening was accompanied by such brilliant and sustained lightning, one witness recalled horrific scenes as being 'vividly lit throughout the long night.'..."

"Lifelong Smithburg resident Darrell Moore [son of Harley Z. Moore and Thelma Aletha Davis] recalled how the lightning illuminated the scene of people climbing the hillside calling out to their families and praying."

"Train 94, which hauls livestock and perishable merchandise, still is stalled at Smithburg [June 29th]."

"From a partial check in Doddridge County, the worst devastated, a total of 78 homes were known to have been completely destroyed and hundreds of others damaged. A partial report showed eight steel bridges on secondary roads to have been destroyed."

"The State Road Commission at Avondale, one mile from West Union on Route 50, reported that all roads surrounding West Union were closed and that water stood three and one-half feet in the road at Avondale.."

"Health Department workers inoculated residents of flood-ravaged Smithburg and West Union against typhoid and tetanus Wednesday in determined efforts to prevent outbreak of disease. To date there have been no reports of illness in the wake of a flash flood..."

"Meanwhile, area Disaster Director Robert Pierpoint of the Red Cross said at least 1,000 families in a 10-county area were temporarily or permanently homeless."

"Pierpoint reported that 1,200 persons were being fed in Red Cross centers in Ritchie, Lewis, Doddridge and Tyler counties...."

"Although no accurate measurement record of the water depth is available, photographs at the junction of Old Rt. 50 and Neely Avenue in West Union show the cresting at approximately one foot under the town's lone traffic light."



Mrs. Brannon's home.



Sam McKinney

Sam McKinney Watches His Family Perish

The following account from Sam McKinney appeared in the June 27, 1950 issue of The Morning Herald, Hagerstown (MD):

"(Editor's Note: Samuel Dail McKinney, 38-year-old Columbian Carbon Company employee, stood helplessly on high ground early Sunday as a flash flood swept his wife and four children to their deaths at Smithburg.)

MAN SEES WIFE AND CHILDREN CARRIED TO DEATH BY FLOOD, Stood by Helplessly

I saw my wife and four children carried away to their deaths by the flood and there wasn't anything we could do.

When the water first began to rise, I was in a boat with several others helping to get people to high ground. Those with me included my father-in-law, R. W. Rothwell.

Then we went to the Rothwell house where my wife and children were visiting. I told Mrs. McKinney to take our four youngsters ranging in age from two to 11 and Mrs. Rothwell and walk along the railroad track to the home of a friend on high ground.

They left with Mr. Rothwell and instead went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clive Bailey, I guess to help the Baileys out a bit. We stayed at the Rothwell house to move furniture until the water began pouring in over the window sills.

Moving on to the Bailey home then, where 15 people had gathered, we decided to go to higher ground to leave some of the men so we could empty the Bailey house in about two trips.

I couldn't swim, so I was one of those who stayed on the ground. It was pitch dark, and the rain which started about 6 o'clock Saturday night kept coming down like it was being poured from buckets.

Three men, two of them excellent swimmers, went back with the boat to the Bailey house, but they couldn't get all the way there in the current. One, Gib Davis, either jumped or fell out of the boat and got hold of a grapevine. Then he pulled himself up to the house.

The other two drifted downstream with the boat until it lodged on the roof of the garage building, and later escaped from there.

The Bailey house was one of eight lying between Middle Island Creek and the railroad track. All eight were swept away.



Flood Aftermath in West Union

I was on the high ground with the others when the Bailey house went. And there wasn't anything we could do."



Flood Aftermath in West Union



Body being recovered.



Body being recovered.

Through The Eyes of an Eight-Year-Old

The following first-hand account of the flood was written by Sandra Sue Bonnell Blind in 1992:

THE FLASH FLOOD OF 1950 As seen through the eyes of an 8 year old

I'm 50 years old now but that night of terror is still with me.

My sister Rita and I were sitting at the front door watching the rain come down so hard that it would splash across the porch. (Rocks really, because Dad had tamped in rocks for a new porch. We were going to have a new cement porch.)

Mom had us go to bed. In the meantime mom and dad were keeping an eye on the creek behind our home. I remember them telling me that as they looked toward the old Cottrill Hole, water was starting to roll in like ocean waves.

Next I remember it was like a madhouse. Mom and dad were putting what they could up high. My brother Kenneth "Pink" came in and helped Dad carry his guns up on the hill. Didn't get anything else.... we had to get out!

Dad yelled at Uncle Bill, who lived beside us, and told him to get out, it was too dangerous.

We went to Uncle Russell's, another brother of Dad's. There wasn't any electricity. We sat in the dark except for some candles. It was very terrifying.

Everyone on Monkey Row (called that because all were family from Rock Run to Radi Friend's) took shelter there.

We weren't there very long when someone said, "Get out now or we'll all drown!"

As I was following between Mom and Dad to go back to our truck, I fell off the wooden walkway. I remember feeling my Father's big hand come out and pull me back up. The water was already coming over the walkway.

Next we went to the top of the hill (Blockhouse) where we sat in the truck all night. Dad wasn't in the truck much. He was out checking on the water.

As we sat in the truck you could smell gas, hear houses tearing apart. The noise was so loud! It was so dark! Oh so dark. Mom cried. I cried too. What were we to do?

We didn't know just how bad things were until the next morning. Mom, my sister and I stayed at Jack Squires' home until Dad came.

Later that day we came back to the place we have lived. We just stood there. No home, no grass, just mud and debris!, bent pipes sticking out of the ground.



Stalled train that Gib Davis slept in. In front of Smithton Depot.



Smithburg Church



Bob Holton's Store in Smithburg.

1950 Flood | dchg

Water was still on Route 50 just past where we lived. It was so muddy and trash still floating down its pathway. The smell of death was still lingering. I could feel tears coming down my cheek.

Dad and my brother helped us climb up the hill to the house my older brother Ray had started building. Ray was living in Ohio then.

Water was pouring off the hillside, flowing over the surface like one giant waterfall. After getting up to the house, we had to set up camp.

Dad and Kenneth helped get Mr. and Mrs. Williams out from their home on Rock Run. They died from the gas because Dad said they were still in bed with their arms over each other.

How sad the day was turning out. They were such nice people. Had to use a boat to get them out since water was still across Route 50 and Rock Run. I watched from the house on the hill as they brought them out.

As the water came in their home, it floated their bodies. As it went down, they were still on their bed as if still sleep.

Mom, dad and my brother Kenneth "Pink" slept on the floor. My sister and I slept in a bed I think. Mom and Dad were up all night with us. Later I was told I screamed in my sleep.

My brother "Ray" had trouble getting through, but he got here. He didn't know what to expect. He came in the house going from room to room with a flashlight, checking to see if we were all alive. After that he cried.

The next day helicopters came over and dropped small loaves of bread (2" sq x 5" long) down to us. Material goods came in also, cots, clothes, etc. Dad built a fire outside so we could eat. We drank the water coming off the hill.

Dad, Kenneth and Ray found our home, what was left of it, on the Railroad just before getting to West Union.

They got Dad's gun cabinet out, along with some other things. Today I have the gun cabinet. We were told someone went and stole some of our things, Dad's bear rug for one thing. Dad was told who took it, but he couldn't prove it.

It is sad enough to lose, but to have someone steal from you, it hurts. The bear rug wasn't taken too far... we know who has it. This happened just before the National Guard was called in.

For months later, every time it would start to rain, I would pack up my things and set them by the front door, getting ready to leave.

There is so much more I could tell. About my sister Leona trying to get us.

My brother Kenneth "Pink" risking his life to make sure that not just us, but others, were safe.

My Grandmother and Grandfather's fight to get Mrs. Cupp on safe ground.

Yes, we all have memories of that awful night. As I read this to my Mother Eunice Bonnell, now 86 years, she said, "I agree!"

She also said, "It would be nice if we didn't have to know of such stories."

Sandra Sue Blind,
Daughter of John M. Bonnell (deceased) and Eunice M. Cottrill Bonnell

A Portion of a Letter from Paul M. Ireland:

The following is a portion of a letter written by Paul M. Ireland from West Union. He witnessed the destruction of the iconic Covered Bridge

"After some time we heard very considerable breaking of timbers down by the concrete bridge, and presently saw from the bulk and some reflection lit thereon that was old man "Covered Bridge" himself. With all the noise, however, it did not fully collapse: but riding high at the far end where we could not be sure it was the bridge, while the other end next to us seemed to rest on considerable debris and to float with its roof well above the concrete side structure.

"Presently came a dwelling, later another, and another and another. I believe five in all eased down against that old bridge, refused to stop but, collapsing, breaking and sinking, continued the journey in many small and some large pieces.

"Day was breaking at or soon after four o'clock A.M. but before we could see with much distinctness, we noted that dwelling house over beyond us on Route 18 reeled and swung into the stream, and passed from sight. Still the water climbed, on and on until about 9 A.M. ...

"Today a bunch of convicts, under armed guard, have been working at removing the debris and the covered bridge from above the concrete bridge. Tonight others in uniform, probably army men with truck and crane. And these convicts really worked. No shirts, back brown as brown shoes, needing only the polish. No leaning on the shovel there."

Picking Up the Debris

The following article appeared in the [Beckley Post Herald](#) on June 27, 1950:

"A hot sun gave a steam-bath atmosphere to the Smithburg-West Union area today as it beat down on the flood-soaked ground.

It gave a bright sheen to the green countryside, above the mud-marked level of early Sunday's flash flood. Beneath it, residents of the area labored to clean out their homes, or to pick up scattered belongings washed away by the high waters.

A doll carriage here, a stove there, were scattered among the broken remnants of homes or deposited on the banks.

Eight houses sitting together in a lowland area of Smithburg along Middle Island Creek were washed nearly two miles downstream. Their wreckage lay shattered today against a railroad bridge near West Union.

Master Sgt. C. B. Grant directed the activities of 20 National Guardsmen from Parkersburg who made a systematic search along the creek for additional bodies.

He said he was told the houses shattered as they hit the trestle, and parts of them were washed, room by room, over the top of the bridge.

A dresser from someone's bedroom rested today squarely atop the bridge, on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's mainline track.

Recognizable remnants of three buildings were piled up along one side of the bridge, while flotsam accumulated around its piers.

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Jars of home-canned fruit and vegetables, pride of the housewives' pantries, were scattered around.

A B. & O. eastbound freight remained where it was stalled by the rising flood early Sunday.

Residents said that at the flood's height, only about two feet of the boxcars were out of the water, and the train crew was perched on top of the locomotive.

Grass and other debris hung from power lines which normally are 20 to 30 feet above the water. A mass of grass and weeds was perched atop a road sign.

Trees and shrubs, bent by the water, were used by some householders as means of drying blankets and sheets. Furniture and mattresses throughout the area were spread out on the ground to dry.

Hundreds of sightseers visited the area, complicating the flow of trucks carrying repairmen and equipment.

But despite the damage it had caused, the receding waters held no terror for a group of boys seen near the edge of town. They were wading into the water as though nothing had happened."



Smithburg Bridge



Foundation of Covered Bridge after the bridge washed downstream

Final Thoughts

"As though nothing had happened." That image of a group of boys wading playfully in the same water that had recently been the instrument of horrific death and destruction illustrates the adage that life must go on. Perhaps it was the tough-mindedness of that generation, which had endured the hardships of the Great Depression and World War II, that enabled them to deal with the tragedy with such resiliency. The remaining survivors of the 1950 Flood become fewer with each passing year. If you are acquainted with one of them, ask them to tell you about it. It was a major event in Doddridge County's history, an event that demonstrated both the fragility of life and the strength of our character, and it will hopefully remain embedded in our collective memories as the story is passed down to future generations.



Smithton Depot as it appears today.

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Plaque with flood victims names. Located beside Smithton Depot.