

# THE SAFETY NEWS

## FOURTH DISTRICT

CLARKSBURG, W.VA.

JULY 1950.

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### THE FLOOD OF '50

Saturday, June 24, 1950, was a beautiful hot summer day in Doddridge County, West Virginia. Every citizen went about his usual routine throughout the day -- working in his garden, odd jobs about his home, fixing up around the barn, tending to stock, etc. That evening as they were preparing dinner, dark clouds started to form in the west but who was going to let a rain stop them from their "Saturday night".

About seven o'clock it started raining. Within a few minutes it was raining very hard, not a spring shower or a summer rain, but a cloud burst. At eight o'clock the small streams were running full. Nine o'clock small streams were out of their banks and flooding low ground. The fast current was destroying gardens and washing away small buildings. Livestock was being driven to the hills.

Ten o'clock the rain was still pouring from the heavy black clouds. The gas and electric supply had been cut, telephone communication had been discontinued, homes were flooded, every one was working frantically but by this time it was necessary for each to run in order to protect his own life. Some of the smaller homes close to the small feeding streams were washed from their foundations. Many heroic deeds were being performed at this hour. Deeds that will never be forgotten by a survivor and may never be known by anyone other than those involved. Many sections of U.S. Route 50 are under water now at Sherwood and Morgansville. Buckeye Run looks like a mighty river. The steel bridge over England Run collapsed. Toms Fork bridge on W. Va. Route 18 gave way to the pressure and washed about 1/2 mile down stream. The steel bridge over Greenbrier near Long Run washed from its piers, the steel bent and twisted, the concrete floor broken in bits. The bridge on Secondary Road 40 near Blandville left its stone abutments and turned upside down about 400 feet away. Many of the small wooden bridges serving hundreds of people in the communities had been washed from their piers, never to be found. Homes and outbuildings, barns, farm implements, cars and trucks were being flooded or washed away all along the upper reaches of the head waters of Middle Island creek.

In the east end of Smithburg came Buckeye Run, with all of its feeder streams from the east and northeastern sections of Doddridge county. Here too, is Meathouse Fork with all the drainage from the southcentral and southeastern sections of the county, to join together forming the "longest creek in the world".

Middle Island creek, long known for its many fabulous fish stories, now is turning into an enraged giant yellow serpent. The muddy water was pouring into the creek bed far beyond the capacity of the stream.

Eleven o'clock Middle Island creek was a raging torrent rising seventeen inches a minute, delivering death and destruction to everything in its path. So fast was the rise, a Baltimore and Ohio railroad freight train was caught at Smithburg unable to continue its run. With very few exceptions from Smithburg through Avondale past Rock Run to West Union, happy homes were damaged beyond repair or completely washed away. In this area many lives were lost.

In West Union there is a basin where the onrushing torrents of Middle Island creek converged with the uncontrolled ravishing water from Doe Run. Here in the low basin, a beautiful residential section of the peaceful town of West Union, the rushing torrents raised the level of Middle Island creek from a low water mark of six feet to 57 feet. The property destruction is beyond description. The beautiful, well kept happy homes in this area are a mass of rubble and debris. In West Union the "Old Covered Bridge" a land mark which has withstood the elements for 102 years was not able to stand the terrific pounding of this long to be remembered flood.

At two o'clock Sunday morning, June 25, 1950, the rain had slackened. The creek had reached its crest but the long hours of vigilance from this hour until daylight seemed like a never ending eternity. Rain fell intermittently until noon but the water was slowly receding into the stream channels. It was late afternoon on Sunday before many of the flood victims were able to get back to their homes or where their homes were.

A heart rendering sight it was to see these people standing looking at what was home, their earthly possessions, thinking of the loss of life to their relatives, friends and neighbors, wondering where to start to rehabilitate themselves. They were bewildered, the shock was there, reaction had not yet set in.

Monday proved to be commencement day. The long slow process of cleaning mud, drying clothes, homes and household furnishings began. The backbreaking work of long hours of toil, cleaning, drying, and rebuilding, covering the scars of the worst disaster this area has ever had, had begun.

Following are the State Road employees who were damaged by the flood:

James Cottrill, Rock Run, one foot of water in house.

Abe Williams, Rock Run, Deceased.

Thomas Cottrill, Rock Run, home washed away.

Clarence Davis, Smithburg, home washed away.

George Dosch, West Union, total destruction to house, four feet of water on second floor.

Dernyce Somerville, West Union, total destruction to home and cottage.

Harrison Jenkins, Doe Run, two feet of water in house.

Walter Jenkins, Doe Run, two feet of water in house.

Nathan Ferguson, Central Station, two feet of water in house, outbuildings washed away.

Perry Cottrill, U.S. Route 50, East of West Union, home washed away.

Campbell Cupp, U.S. Route 50, East of West Union, four feet of water in house.

Lester Grimm, Summers, three feet of water in house.

Bernard Smith, Avondale, home washed away.

Arden Rollins, U.S. Route 50, East of Smithburg, water on first floor.

John Cumpston, Jockeycamp Run, building new home which was washed away, water in house in which he was living.

Mell Swisher, Morgansville, eight feet of water in house.

Stokes Hurst, Sugarcamp, five feet of water in house.

Kara Kesling, New Milton, four feet of water on second floor, house moved from foundation.

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~~INDEPENDENCE DAY~~ August 1, 1950 - Be sure to vote.

See to it that your family, friends, relatives and neighbors go to the polls.