

## One school jeopardized by rampaging river



This is how Marlinton appeared early Tuesday afternoon. Water remained deep in the streets, although it had receded nearly 6 feet from its high point. With the water flowing freely through the

streets it's hard to distinguish what bodies of water are where, but the Greenbrier River is to the left

Photo by Doug Chadwick

By Joann P. Rhody  
Staff Writer

Sand bags ready, Greenbrier County's superintendent of schools spent Tuesday morning and worried all afternoon. Early in the day water rose within 4 or 5 feet of the brand new \$30,000 facility.

"We checked the 100-year flood (level), and built above the flood stage," Gordon Hanson said. "A few employees manned the county's only school jeopardized by high water but no schools in Greenbrier were in session Tuesday, according to the superintendent."

There also was no school in flood-prone Pocahontas but other districts, including Raleigh, Wyoming and Fayette, operated normally.

Hanson said he authorized Pocahontas County emergency officials to use Greenbrier Elementary school as a temporary shelter. Sixty persons from a Marlinton residential home were to be transported to the Fairlea high school, he said.

Meanwhile, Greenbrier's emergency services director, Ben Gee, transported blankets and cots to the high school from the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine and even drove a truck from Roncovette area continued all day.

In mid-afternoon, some Pocahontas residents still remained trapped on roofs, according to Hanson's information. Telephone lines to Marlinton were out of service and power failures plagued vast sections of the Greenbrier Valley.

Meanwhile schools dismissed in

Summers County at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to elementary supervisor Larry Deeds. High water at Bellepoint along W.Va. 3 and 4 caused about the Greenbrier River led to the early dismissal, he said. School buildings were not in jeopardy.

In Monroe, surface water burst a hole in an exterior wall of the Gap Mills consolidated school, causing it to be closed Tuesday, said Monroe Superintendent Bob Via.

He said a power blackout caused by Roncovette's flooding affected not only Gap Mills but also the Union school. Via said the two were reported "they made it fine. They didn't have any lights but they were comfortable," the Monroe superintendent said.

Via said all Monroe County schools, including Gap Mills, would be open today, if West Virginia Power Co. was able to repair the Roncovette substation and restore service throughout the area. In the alternative, he said, the Union and Gap Mills schools would be closed while the rest of the county held school.

Uncertainties about how high the Greenbrier River would rise prevented officials in Greenbrier and Summers from predicting whether schools would be open.

Hanson said he was told it would be difficult for him to open any facilities in the eastern part of Greenbrier County, where Roncovette, Renick and Ward experienced flooding. As for the river area, he said, "We probably can't get the students out of there."

Marlinton resident William Merchant made his escape from the second story of his home via ladder early Tuesday morning (photo left). Later in the day, unidentified rescuers helped some Marlinton residents on Eighth Street.

Photo by Doug Chadwick



Rescuers from Wild Water Unlimited in Fayette County traveled to Pocahontas County to lend what assistance they could to flood victims. Photo by Doug Chadwick



Marlinton resident William Merchant made his escape from the second story of his home via ladder early Tuesday morning (photo left). Later in the day, unidentified rescuers helped some Marlinton residents on Eighth Street.

Photo by Doug Chadwick

## Rescuers flock to Marlinton in wake of devastating flood

By John Blankenship  
Staff Writer

Flood waters receded in Marlinton Tuesday after an estimated 800 people were evacuated from their homes.

There were reports of lives being lost. Rescuers reported seeing bodies of those who were trapped in their dwellings when the Greenbrier River rose rapidly in the pre-dawn hours. Four deaths in the county were confirmed last Tuesday.

Local Timney of the Richwood Fire Department and volunteers from several other fire area departments arrived in Marlinton early Tuesday, but they were unable to cross a bridge in the city because of floodwaters cresting about 6 feet.

"The water was so high it was over the bridge, and it wasn't safe to cross it," Timney said. "The whole town was flooded."

Volunteers and men aided in rescue efforts on both sides of the river after the flood waters had receded.

A woman reportedly was found in her home at Buckeye, where she had been stranded all night. She was a diabetic and was in shock, according to Timney. The woman was taken to a temporary first aid station on higher ground near Buckeye and later was transported to a hospital in Lewisburg, the fireman said.

Earlier, the muddy Greenbrier had deposited tons of dirt and debris in the town's business district. "Water was at the tops of the doors in downtown," Chadwick recalled of the flood. "People in boats were pulling people of buildings."

Several patients from the Marlinton hospital were transferred to Humana Hospital according to the nursing supervisor there.

Timney described the flood-ravaged scene this way:

"Cars were on top of trucks. Cars were everywhere when the water went down. A house was up against a bridge. It was a complete disaster."

Timney said one of Richwood's fire trucks remained on stand-by at the Marlinton firehouse where all of the city's firefighting equipment was damaged by the flood.

Emergency generators powered Marlinton city hall Tuesday night. The city was without power, telephones and drinking water. Five bussloads of people were transported to shelters late Tuesday evening.

Free-lance photographer Doug Chadwick of Hillsboro reported about 30 National Guard vehicles, carrying water and generators, were headed to Marlinton Tuesday evening. Dump trucks were sent in by the guard to help in clean-up efforts which are expected to be completed by Friday.

Earlier, the muddy Greenbrier had deposited tons of dirt and debris in the town's business district.

"Water was at the tops of the doors in downtown," Chadwick recalled of the flood. "People in boats were pulling people of buildings."

Chadwick said some of the victims were snatched from buildings already swept off their foundations.

"One man was sitting on a piano playing music because the water couldn't get down to Marlinton to report on the flood," Chadwick said.

This flooding is said to be the worst of the century in the area. One 77-year-old man in Marlinton told rescuer Tom Dragan of Fayette County the flood is the worst he's seen in his life.

"But," Dragan said, "the man told me he's willing to go back and start all over again."



This Chevrolet Monte Carlo was one of the flood victims of heavy rains in Lewis County. Traffic on both lanes of Interstate 79 just south of Jane Lew near Clarksburg was rerouted for most of the day. In the north central part of the state, 500 residents of Granville, near Morgantown, were evacuated as the result of days-long rain. Staff photo by John C. Dean