



The 1935 flood left a man stranded inside the St. Francis Power Plant. Carl Stone thought the man, at 60 years, was too old to try to hold on to a rope and get to dry land so Mr. Stone went by the rope, then brought the man safely back. Right photo, David Floyd, with the National Weather Service, Goodland, and Gary Rogers, emergency manager, right, hang the first 'High Water Mark' sign in Kansas showing where the water came to on the power plant.



Flood of 1935 remembered 75 years later

May 31 marks the 75th anniversary of the Great Flood on the Republican River, which killed 113 and causes millions of dollars in losses.

On that day in 1935, National Weather Service records show, as much as 24 inches of rain fell over some parts of eastern Colorado, western Kansas and southern Nebraska. Few events have shaped the land and the history of our area as the flood of 1935.

The country was in the throes of the Great Depression when the year began. Dust storms raged through the plains, adding to the problems of those already doing without as they attempted to survive along the river. However, in late May, the rains returned.

On the night of May 30, 1935, one storm system was over Nebraska while another was over southern Colorado. The systems merged over northeast Colorado,

between where the Republican and Arickaree rivers meet, and just before the Republican crosses the state line into Kansas.

The storm positioned itself an area already saturated from previous rains, causing the worst flood in the area's recorded history. Then the heavy rain moved east overnight, following the Republican River drainage.

The storm persisted until June 2, dropping an additional 2 to 7

inches of rain over the basin. This additional rainfall meant the flood crest traveling down the river encountered high waters from tributaries in southwestern Nebraska and northwestern Kansas.

Witnesses reported a wall of water surging east out of Colorado. The force lifted homes and barns from their foundations and twisted railroad tracks as if they were toys. All down the Republican valley, residents recorded tragic stories.

There were remarkable similarities in the way lives were lost, and in the heroic efforts friends and neighbors made to save others. Although warnings had gotten to some of the area, many residents would not leave their homes, believing that after living in the valley for 50 years, the flood would never reach them.

To commemorate this event, the National Weather Service in Goodland, Kansas has created a webpage

that features stories and pictures about the flood. The office is also giving a series of programs about the flood along the Republican River Valley. The website is www.crh.noaa.gov/gld/?n=1935flood

Programs are scheduled for several cities along the Republican in the next few weeks. If you are interested in scheduling a program in your area, please contact Joy Hayden at the National Weather Service office at (785) 899-7119.



THERE WERE TWO of these bridges but the other was washed away in the flood. Years later, when putting in pilings for a bridge, parts of the bridge was found buried 40 feet beneath the sand.

Photo courtesy of the Cheyenne County Museum

Rescuing the Mace family

After being imprisoned in the attic of their house almost 12 hours while the water poured thru the lower floor window, Mr. and Mrs. Art Mace and four children, Roby, Dolores, Grace and Alberta were rescued at noon last Friday by a group of 10 men and boys strung out on a rope, and went through three quarters of a mile of water, a quarter mile of it a swirling and treacherous current waist deep to get the Mace family out.

The men and boys on the first rope to go out included Ack Reinhold, Junior Burke, Wilfred

Burnham, John Allen, Al Burke, Maynard Cutshall, Alva Juhl, Bill Newman, Vic Walker and Harold Kelley. A second group of men went out on a rope to aid the first in getting to shore with the family.

Dolorus, 13-year-old daughter, and a freshman at the high school, was in bed ill with rheumatism when the waters began entering the house. Not wishing to move her until conditions demanded, the water was about knee high in the house when the family moved to the attic. Mr. Mace carried an axe with him upstairs, chopped a hole in the

roof and climbed out there to be in a position to summon aid. But others who were sure they were in the house foresaw the family's plight.

Maynard Cutshall and Al Burke carried Dolorus the entire distance to dry land. The second group waded into the water to protect the first line, whose line by that time was badly swayed down the current. It was a happy but exhausted group of men and boys when all were once more safe on firm and dry footing.

Taken from the June 6, 1935 *Saint Francis Herald*

Family left stranded after flood sweeps away house

Leone Krien was only 14 when the flood of 1935 swept away the home where she, her mother, sister and brother lived 10 miles southwest of St. Francis.

Mother, Amelia (Bethke) Wiecek Conner had been up most of the

night keeping an eye on the river. The rain just kept falling and she could see the river creeping into the yard. It was still dark when she woke Leone, older brother Ralph and younger sister Viola.

"She thought we needed to get to higher ground but when we got to the road west of the house, it was already covered with water," she said.

On the south side of the river, they could see the neighbors watching but they were unable to help because of the waves and swift-running water.

A neighbor, Mr. Harris, who lived on the north side of the river, had also been watching the rising water and had come down to check on them. He threw a rope as far as he could and Ralph waded into the water to retrieve the end. He quickly brought it back to the edge of the water, then grabbed his mother's hand, she took Viola's hand and Leone brought up the rear.

"We could reach the bottom but the water was cold and dirty," she said. "The water was so swift, it made it hard to keep our footing and our feet would go out from under us some of the time. We would have never

made it on our own."

On the other side of the road, they watched their sod home break up room by room. Then the barn, which housed some baby calves which her mother was raising, went down the river shortly followed by the windmill.

"We were pretty quiet as we watched -- we were just glad we got out okay," Leone said.

They had gotten out with their lives but had lost everything else including furniture, pictures and a small herd of cattle.

"We didn't even have a change of clothes," she said.

They spent the next three days with Mr. Harris and his family until the river went down and Leone's older brother Henry was able to reach them. He took them back to St. Francis where they stayed with Henry and his family until they could rent a house.

Their lives had changed. "Mama got work where she could and us girls soon went back to school," she said.

Even though it has been 75 years ago since the flood, Leone remembers it well. She said they didn't even go back to where the house had stood because there was nothing left.

St. Francis woman well remembers the 1935 flood

By Betty Harrison Miller

I was 11 in 1935, the year the worst flood that the community of South Fork on the South Fork of the Republican River had ever experienced in the lifetime of anyone living then. There were stories supposed to be from the Indians that there had been a flood of that magnitude at least 100 years earlier and that they had predicted the same to happen in another 100 years.

We had had a lot of rain that spring. My mother woke up at 4 o'clock in the morning and wondered what the awful stench she was smelling and what the roar was. There is a stench to a flood that is unlike any other thing you have ever smelled. It was hard to believe there could be such a roar, but there was. She got up and dressed and went outside. I do not know how she realized that the river was flooding, but she got us all up and dressed. As soon as it was light enough to see, we could hardly believe our eyes. The placid South Fork was out all over the bottom land. That river bisected our farm west to east. It was a raging, rolling torrent.

Our farmstead was definitely higher than the river bed and there was a second "raise" around 9 o'clock that brought the water to within 19 feet of our back door. We were concerned that it might get into the house, but it did not. It did get into a smaller house that was situated a little lower and to the east of our home. It got up to the corral edge but did not get into the barn.

I was horribly fascinated at the amount of water that was sweeping downstream so fast, the waves looked so high to me. I stood and watched as the giant cottonwood trees along the riverbank went down and rolled over with the roots, still full of mud, straight up in the air, and then went rolling over and over as the wind blows a thistle along. I saw spans of bridges, roof tops of chicken houses with chickens still on top going by. All kinds of boards and pieces of buildings. I could not believe this was the peaceful river we kids played in in the summertime and skated on in the wintertime. We felt so helpless.

The word got out that my mother had perished in the flood, we never did find out how that story got started.

After the water had gone down, my dad and brother went into a



AT THE SATURDAY meeting, Betty Harrison Miller told about some of her experiences in the flood. A complete account, taken from the National Weather Service site, is printed

field that had flooded and buried dead animals whose bodies had backwashed into the field.

My job that summer was to herd the cattle - all fences from way up in Colorado to way down in Nebraska had been washed out. No farmer had time to replace them, they had to get the crops planted. I was allowed to ride a horse and my instructions were to keep the cattle out of the river, if possible, on account of quicksand. In case they did get into the river, I was to watch and see where they went and follow where they were not in the quicksand. Definitely not my idea of a fun summer.

There was a rural telephone line at that time, I do not know how it was powered. We had a wall telephone and everybody had their own ring, which consisted of a series of long and/or short rings. The men would get together in the early spring and repair any damages to the line. We couldn't go anywhere but we could talk to neighbors.

My dad would take his truck once a week and go to town, driving into pastures and fields when

he came to washed out roads or bridges. Neighbor ladies would call their grocery list to us and Dad would get to the north side of the river at St. Francis. Someone there would take him to town, as he had to leave his truck there. He would shop for everybody and make the trip back home where folks came to pick up what they had ordered. It was an all day trip, all bridges were washed completely or partly away. The bridge a mile east of our place was only a skeleton.

That summer, the folks who lived on the south side of the river would drive to the river, wade across and folks on the north side would meet them there and take them to Sunday school and church or any other gatherings.

Our neighbor found a dead body on her property after the water had gone down and it had dried out enough that she could explore. I decided right then that I didn't want to go on the bottom land if I didn't have to.

It was an experience I will never forget, nor ever forget that Mother Nature still rules and she can be kind of hard on us sometimes.

Next week, look for more on the 1935 flood as it travels north to McCook.

Some of the information was taken from the 1935 Republican River Flood book published by the Cheyenne County Museum