

The Skagit rampage of 1909

Since floods are in style this winter, had not popular by any means, this report by the Skagit County Times dated Dec. 2, 1909, tells of another time when we had too much water.

When the chinook began which swooped in along the Western Washington coast country last Thursday the attention of everyone in this section was attracted to the Skagit River. Everyone seemed to realize that all other things depended upon the behavior of that waterway.

Everybody anticipated the worst, and up to this writing no one has complained of being disappointed, and old-timers agree that there has been no high water period to equal it since 1897. This last is the second rise of the river within a period of about two weeks, the first being not nearly so great in volume of water or extent of damage.

Throughout the past five weeks there has not, all told, been two days of sunshine, and the clouds meant rain, rain, rain, in the valley and on the flats either all of every day or at some period each day. When it rained on the lower levels it snowed on the hills, and it piled up high and stayed until the 36 hours of warm winds of last week poured it down upon us through the river bed and over the lowlands in an avalanche of raging water.

The first breath of warm wind ought to be sufficient warning to the initiated in face of known existing conditions in the hills, but it is feared that it will again be disastrously proven that there are many who trusted more to their faith than to the efficacy of timely flight.

Along with the rest of the section of the country drained by the lower Skagit, Sedro-Woolley was unfortunate, though in most ways to a greatly less extent than many places both above and below along the river and subject to its caprices. Though the rise of water had been coming steadily for a day or two it was not until Monday that those

whose wisdom had come of experience began to keep tab on the river's wild doings.

"It was then that the knowing ones began to realize that '97 had a rival on its way. All day the water, the raging torrent surged upward at the rate of 12 to 14 inches an hour. To add to the miserable uncertainty of whatever might yet be in store rain fell continuously while the weather continued mild.

"The first, and perhaps greatest, misfortune to the city as a whole, came Monday when the Water Company's pipe line suspended across the river above town was broken down and washed away. On Tuesday this misfortune was supplemented by the washing out of the water pipes at the south end of Township Street, a point between the city and the company's pumping stations.

"This obiterated all resources for a water supply so far as the water works was concerned until Wednesday evening when water was supplied from the Vencer Plant.

"The flood from the river's overflow continued to encroach upon the city all of Monday and the earlier part of Monday night at the rate of about eight to nine inches an hour. Tuesday morning there was noticeable abatement in the rise and by one o'clock of that day the water was about at a stand.

"In that part of town east of Fourth Street to, and in places, slightly beyond Township, and south from Bennell Street several blocks, the water covered streets and lots from a depth of a few inches to two or more feet, the wooden sidewalks and crossings being afloat, over which hundreds of people walked and viewed the flood.

"Tuesday morning word went about that a log jam had formed against the N.P. (at Sedro-Woolley) bridge across the Skagit. Color was given to the report by the company sending out a

fiscar load of men to the bridge. The bridge is apparently yet intact, and damage to it, if any, will have to be determined when the waters have receded sufficiently.

"Last week we reported the further washing away of the county road at Sterling Bend and of the G.N. having to move its tracks back several feet from the river bank on account of the close wash of the water.

"As this last rise overtopped the one of a week or so ago, it can not now be said what the later results to the county road has been, but the G.N. tracks from about Sterling on to and in Burlington are almost entirely off the grade and the grade covered with logs and stumps singly and in drifts.

"The water in this city entered, but few residences, all of them being in the southwest of town, and but little injury resulted in that way. The Third Street bridge across the slough just beyond Jameson Avenue is washed from the pilings and is virtually a wreck, and the trestle out near the Vencer plant on the G.N. spur was sprung considerably out of line from the weight of drifts against it.

"The water at the Vencer plant flowed through the drying sheds and other buildings to a considerable depth and over the spur tracks from a point about 200 yards north of the plant to its terminal in the plant yards. A singular fact at this place, in connection with the flood, is that in the northwest part of town, where in the rainy season water covers a great deal of the ground there is little or no surface water at present.

"This may be due to the river overflow and wash through sloughs between this city and Burlington. The waters have been receding rapidly here since late Tuesday afternoon, and compared with other points, west and southwest from Van Horn to Sedro-Woolley have fared remarkably well.

"From eastward up the valley as far as Sauk there is no work except of



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disaster Sauk overflowed. At Van Horn the dry kiln of the mill was washed off its foundation and moved about 200 feet. The earth under the G.N. tracks along the bluffs beyond Baker (Concrete) is washed completely out.

"There is no semblance of a railroad between Minkler and Hamilton, while it is reported that the station building at Hamilton now stands on the opposite side of the track from where it formerly stood. Between here (Sedro-Woolley) and Hamilton the G.N. tracks are mostly off the grade and in many places leaning upon adjoining fences.

FLOOD NOTES

(same paper and date)

"The river cut a channel from a point just west of the N.P. bridge through the John Smith ranch and woods to the southwest, through which it flowed into the old channel again below the Sterling Bend.

"The house of William Miller, which faced west before the flood, is now fronting east and is on a neighbor's land across the road. Mr. Miller's ranch is between here and Burlington, and he is one of the oldest residents of the county. His orchard and ranch are masses of debris.

"Row boats have been busy since Tuesday rescuing people from the flats west of Burlington.