



RAIN, RAIN, AND STILL MORE RAIN

“I have seen Vermont at its worst but I have also seen Vermonters at their best,” reported Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover who had been sent to Vermont by President Coolidge to survey the damage created by the state’s greatest natural disaster - the flood of 1927. Despite the hardships and losses suffered by Vermonters, they banded together to rebuild their state after floodwaters had **altered** its entire appearance.

The early fall of 1927 was mild. The harvest had been plentiful and the fall foliage was unusually brilliant. October was twice as wet as usual. By the end of the month the earth had become so **saturated** with water that new rainfall could not be absorbed and ran off to fill lakes and streams which began to rise in their banks. No one seemed concerned or foresaw what lay ahead.

November brought still more rain to Vermont. Approximately nine inches or one quarter of Vermont’s annual rainfall fell from the evening of November 2 to noon on November 4. A **severe** southern storm had moved north from the Gulf of Mexico. It was met by another storm moving east from the Great Lakes. The two joined over our Green Mountain state. The resulting **deluge** destroyed homes and property and took the lives of eighty-four persons, including Vermont’s Lieutenant Governor Jackson who was drowned when stepping from his disabled car.

The billions of gallons of water that fell during the forty hour downpour transformed Vermont’s landscape. Main streets of towns filled with water and valleys became raging rivers. Water eighteen feet deep was reported in Waterbury’s streets. By the afternoon of November 3, rivers and streams had begun to rise at an alarming rate. The Winooski River was gaining an average of three feet per hour, while other rivers were rising at even greater speeds.

Schools and offices closed. Merchants began hauling their goods up from basement storage areas to the safety of dry first floors. No one guessed that these too would soon be under water. Farmers herded what livestock they could to higher ground. Gas and water mains broke, and on the evening of the third electricity and phones went out.



Vermonters living in low areas became **frantic**. In the darkness, families huddled in the top floors of their homes. Some waited on roof tops for neighbors to rescue them by boat. Others **fashioned** their own rafts out of wreckage that floated by or that they could **salvage** from their own homes. A few desperate persons attempted to swim across the rushing waters to higher land on the other side.

The currents were strong and the waters were filled with **debris**. Dams let go and bridges were ripped off their foundations as were barns and houses. Persons who **ventured** out into the choppy waters were often overturned or drowned. Many sat and watched in despair as they saw the farms and land that they had worked for a lifetime get eaten by the flood waters. Years of work was undone in just two days' time.

There are many tragic stories of property and life loss as a result of the flood. One such account is that of the May family of Bolton. In the early hours of the morning of the fourth their home was

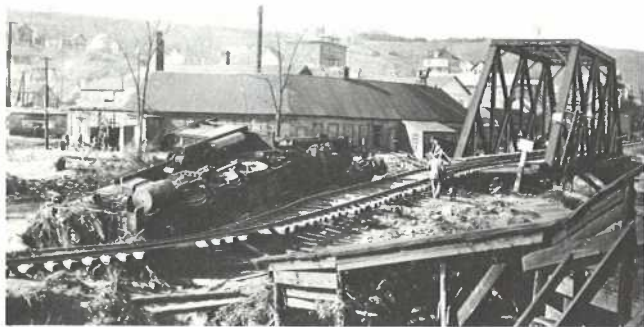
lifted from its foundation and carried downriver. It floated close by a neighbor's house whose occupants sat at an upstairs window viewing the rising waters and destruction in horror. As the May's home slipped by, John May lifted his lantern and shouted goodbye to his neighbors. Moments later their home with Mr. May, his wife and four children inside, crashed into the railroad bridge that had been wrecked by the flood and lay in the river. Not long after another home followed the same route. It too was destroyed.

Finally on the afternoon of November 4 the rains ceased and the waters began to **subside**. Thousands



East State Street Montpelier

of homes and half of Vermont's covered bridges were destroyed. Bridges and railroad lines had been equally hard hit. A thick, muddy slime coated everything that the waters had touched. Gravel, sand, uprooted trees, and rubble from destroyed structures lay across what was once fertile land. Great quantities of top soil had been washed away.



As the waters receded the cleanup began. Vermonters worked long and hard to rebuild their communities. Those whose houses were left standing took other less fortunate families into their homes. Food and clothing were shared with those who were without. The strength of their spirits was **admirable** in light of what they had to go through. With the passage of time, coupled with much hard work, Vermont has again become the beautiful state that it once was before that historic November in 1927.



There are many horrifying stories about the Vermont flood. There are also many accounts of happenings that occurred as a result of the high waters. One family remembered hearing their first floor furniture bumping the ceiling as they slept on the second story. Another person woke in the night to the sound of rushing water and stepped into a foot or more of water as he got out of bed. Others told tales of discovering fish or livestock, some still alive, that had been washed into their homes. Still another account described a barn that was swept off its foundation and was carried downstream to land in the exact spot where another barn had stood only hours before.

What stories do you know about the flood? See if you can find some high-water marks in your community or nearby. Your local historical society or library may be able to help you.



VOCABULARY

altered - changed

saturated - unable to hold or contain more of a substance

severe - harsh, violent

deluge - a great flood or downpour

frantic - desperate, panicked

fashioned - the way in which something is formed

salvage - to save damaged or discarded materials for further use

debris - the remains of something broken or destroyed

venture - a dangerous undertaking

subside - to sink to a lower level

admirable - deserving respect