

Johnny: “How high’s the water, Mama?” June: “Four feet high and risin’!”

BY LOYCE MARTINAZZI

No doubt about it, there is something both exciting and terrifying about a flood.

Some 15,000 years ago, during the warming of the last ice age, an ice dam broke in Montana sending huge amounts of rushing water down to the Willamette Valley, and carrying with it topsoil and erratic rocks from as far away as Canada. Topsoil was scoured from Eastern Washington and landed up here in the Willamette Valley.

Almost every culture tells of a mighty ancient flood that scoured the land, flushing out the bad while saving the good. There is a theory that the story of Noah and his ark was actually true. PBS has reported, and prominent Geologist Scott Burns concurred that compelling geological evidence shows the rising Mediterranean Sea pushed a channel through what is now the Bosphorus, submerging the original shoreline of the Black Sea in a deluge flowing at 200 times greater than the volume of Niagara Falls and extending out for 100,000 square miles.

Less voluminous than the Mediterranean Sea, the not very mighty Tualatin River is yet capable of overflowing her banks and sending her flood waters into inconvenient places. The flood of 1937 was remembered by old timers as being a real doozy! Any man that had a rowboat would paddle around to see if his neighbors needed groceries or medical assistance. The old 1900 schoolhouse still held classes for the middle and upper grades, but the new grade school was not yet finished so first and second grade students had classes at the old city hall. My sister Joanne remembered traveling to first grade in a rowboat. She was both frightened and excited. She remembered seeing a goat stranded on a bit of high ground. Her classmates called it “Billy the Buck.”

A Biblical 40 years later, in 1977, the Tualatin overflowed again, and despite sand bagging by local volunteers, the water created havoc. Yvonne Addington, city manager at the time, called in Governor Tom McCall to observe the damage.

There have been recent articles about Tualatin’s floods, centered on the massive 1996 flood. The Grange hall had four feet of water in the basement, ruining the hot water heater, furnace and the oven of the 1946 Wolfe stove. As we washed the dishware in cold bleach water from a hose outside, a City Councilman came by, telling us it was not the City Council’s fault. He did not stay and help clean up, as he had to make the announcement to other businesses who were struggling with the aftermath of the big flood. However, many other folks stepped up to bat and several service groups did come in to help clean and re-paint the basement walls.

Who knows when another combination of rain and warm weather that melts snow will send another deluge our way? The current scientific theory is that melting ice caused the ancient Biblical floods as well as the Missourian floods that carved out the Willamette Valley. Let’s hope that global warming doesn’t send another giant deluge to our city. Best be prepared, everyone!



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Boones Ferry Road looking east during the 1937 flood.



Slim and Laura Kamp operated the feed store. Shown here is their truck delivering a load of hay and grain to a stranded farmer. Driver may be Laura Kamp.



Flooded onion field around 1900. Bridge across Meridian Road, now 65th Avenue. Photo may be Fred Fredericks and family who lived down Nyberg Lane.



Smith-Boone house on Tualatin Road during a flood in the 1970s. John Jesse Boone and his wife Malinda Smith Boone were the first owners.



PGE crew headed out to repair downed wires during 1955 flood.



Men in rowboats rescued stranded people and delivered children to school during the 1937 flood.



The Sweek barn during the 1937 flood was located close to where the WES station is currently.



Tualatin Road along the railroad tract was flooded in 1955.