

FLOOD OF 1891

Following is an account of the August 27, 1891 Flood which appeared in the Troy Record on January 8, 1946, which I got from the Troy Public Library.

FLASHBACKS TO YESTERYEAR

CREEKS WERE SWOLLEN TO RIVER SIZE WHEN CLOUDBURST OF 1891 SWEEPED OVER RENSSELAER COUNTY FARMLANDS by Herbert A. Calkins

"Nothing like it had ever been seen by the people before and awe stricken they looked and questioned what the outcome would be" (Troy Times, Aug. 28, 1891)

A "cloudburst" had struck Sand Lake and the adjacent area, Aug. 27, 1891, and its like was not destined until 44 years later when the whole Eastern area was swept by a part of a tropical hurricane, Sept. 21, 1938.

The disaster of 1891 in Rensselaer County occurred only three years after the Johnstown, Pa., flood in the Conemaugh Valley. The Troy Times in referring to the flood here declared, "The people not contemplating such a sudden calamity were appalled at the sudden rise of the water. They feared that the Conemaugh horror was about to be repeated here".

There had been heavy rains just previous to Aug. 27, 1891 and the streams in the county were high. That afternoon a particularly heavy rain storm, characterized by the newspaper as a "cloudburst" occurred in the easterly section of the county. For about an hour, the newspaper stated, the rain descended in most copious quantities. It seemed that the bottom must have gone out of a great lake and its contents precipitated to the earth.

Swollen to River Size

It was about 5:30 P.M., that the Wynantskill, swollen to the dimensions of a river roared down from the eastern hill. "Several of the banks of Glass Lake disappeared", the Troy Times said. "Water began steadily creeping towards Glass Lake village. It entered the cellar of the hotel of Cris Crape and penetrated to the first floor. People in the hotel ascended to the upper story. The general store of Huntley and Olmstead was undermined and the building collapsed.

Eight bridges were washed away, seven of them above West Sand Lake and one below. At Averill Park two bridges across Kane's pond were washed away, another near Pierce Kane's Mill. The dam at Andrew B. Knowlson's mill was swept away and the bulkhead

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and dam at A. D. McConihe's factory destroyed.

At West Sand Lake the dam at McLaren's Mill was washed out and the dwelling house of George Lamphere was carried away and broken into splinters.

At West Sand Lake near the grist mill on the main highway a gully 100 feet wide and from 30 to 50 feet deep was gouged out and the bridge just below Milo Hastings' grist mill "went down the Wynantskill".

Warning Received

"At 8 o'clock last night", the Troy Times said, a telephone message was received at Wynantskill that the cloudburst had occurred in Sand Lake and that the Wynantskill, made mad with a volume of water, was rushing towards the village. Several men immediately mounted horses and proceeded to the farm houses on the banks of the creek and gave the alarm.

Among the families saved by this method was that of Nelson Barringer. Cattle in the barn were released and driven to the hills and the family followed. The house was surrounded by the water through which the Barringers waded to safety.

The Poestenkill and all of the other smaller streams were also in flood. At Poestenkill, the newspaper states, a tragedy occurred. Several persons were standing on a bridge watching the flood waters when the bridge was swept away and four persons were carried down stream.

Found In Tree

They were William McChesney, William Castler, Mrs. Garrett Ives and Robert Morrison. McChesney was drowned but the others were saved. "Castler" the paper states, "was taken down the Poestenkill about a mile and the next morning was found in the top of a tree where he had passed the night."

Petersburg and Berlin were also victims of the flood. At Berlin the house of Edgar Reynolds was partially wrecked and a grist mill was destroyed. It looked for a time, The Troy Times said, as if the horrors of Johnstown were to be repeated.

A man named Green drove too near the torrent and barely escaped with his life as both of his horses and his wagon were swept away. Mrs. Thomas Taylor was drowned in her home in sight of her husband. Her two children were saved. James Smith, another Berlin resident, was drowned getting out of his barn.

That storm was to stand for many years in the annals of Rensselaer County as one of the most disastrous that ever occurred here. There are old time residents who can still remember "the time the cloudburst struck Sand Lake."

Copied April 19, 1984 by
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