

Edmonton's Danger by Flood

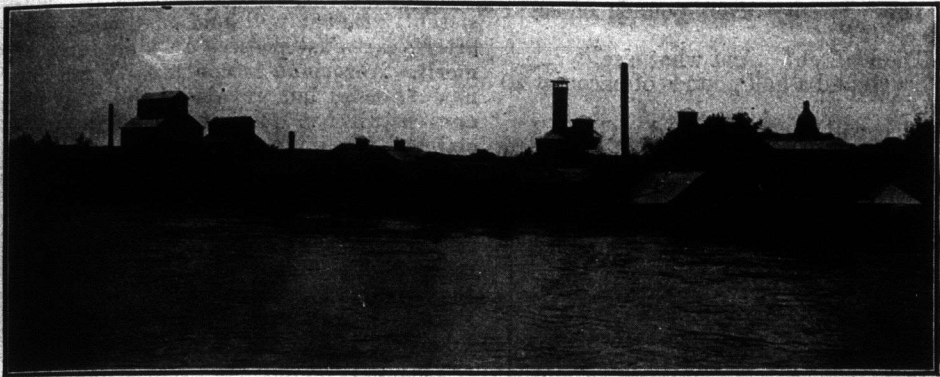
June 28th, 1915

Written for The Western Home Monthly, by Francis J. Dickie

"MY God, Edmonton, look out; the river's up twenty feet and still jumping." White-faced and shaken the telephone operator at Rocky Mountain House far up toward the head waters of the North Saskatchewan River, hung up the receiver after having sent this warning to the City of Edmonton, on Sunday night, June 27th.

and pallid, scared women, stunned into numbed silence by the horror of the lashing waters, that in many cases had robbed them of home and all but the clothes on their backs.

In these districts, one of the chief things of note, was the absence of men from the homes affected, which is explained by the fact that a very large number of the fami-



At Edmonton during June 28th and 29th, the North Saskatchewan river rose forty-two feet in two thirds as many hours, inundated residential and milling districts and land left dry even by the famous flood of 1898.

And, at Edmonton, in the next thirty hours, the Saskatchewan, which flows almost through the heart of the city, rose forty two feet; caused a million dollars damage; made homeless two thousand people; swept to total destruction a hundred homes, ranging from one room shack to many storied building; inundated land dry even through the famous flood of 1898; plunged the city in darkness and cut off all water supply by flooding the power house, unfortunately situated in the heart of the flooded area.

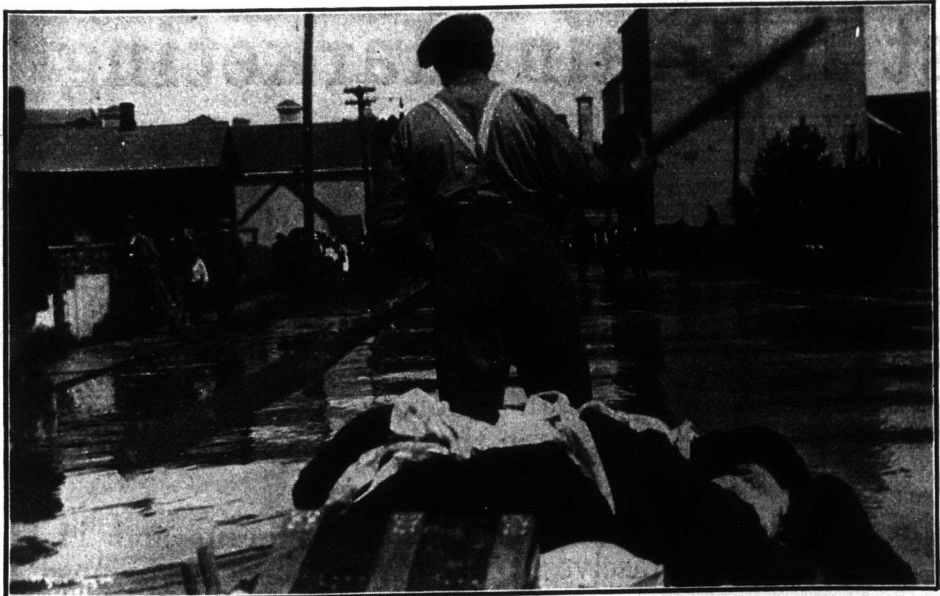
At first the water rose slowly—six inches to the hour—and people residing in the flats district of the city, a considerable area some two miles square, did not anticipate any danger. But with the passing hours the waters rose faster, a foot an hour, then a foot and a half till the river became no longer a river but a great lake like surface, spreading farther and farther, licking away houses, barns, saw mills, and covering areas dry even through the great flood of 1898.

lies living in this district are those of soldiers now at the front. Nearly all were penniless, and without men folks, home or food, were twice pitiful.

But the more fortunate ones in the city were quick to respond. Owners of empty houses, mortgage companies with buildings at their disposal threw them open to the flood victims. Subscription lists were placed in all the banks and prominent business places, and places for the collecting of clothes and provisions were opened in various down-town offices.

When the water rose too high for horses to move to the rescue, boats were substituted and all day and far into the night, they plied here and there in the flood area, carrying great loads of effects and landing them on the higher banks above the river. Here many people camped out all night.

At ten o'clock Monday night the city power house was flooded too badly to enable the firemen to work in the boiler rooms and the city was plunged in darkness and the water supply shut off, leaving



In a few hours, what with the rising water, Edmonton, new metropolis of the north, took on suddenly a strangely Venetian air. Men hastily loaded their lightest and most movable goods into boats, and pushed sturdily down stream where a few hours ago had been a street.

While not the principal residential district of the city, the flats were thickly dotted with cosy residences, small cottages and modest homes of frame, the dwellings of workmen, mill employees and day laborers, rather than the homes of the very rich. To save the people and their belongings here, the city departments, headed by the mayor, the superintendent of public works, the chiefs of police and fire brigades, had a big task upon their hands. Earlier in the day of Monday, June 28th, long lines of vans, express carts, wagons and motor cars, which were placed at the city's disposal by various companies, sloshed through the rising water with pitiful loads of hastily gathered furniture, and their owners, for the most part crying children

the whole town without fire protection, though, fortunately, none occurred. Perhaps of all the desperate struggles of various crowds of men during the three strenuous days while the water rose, these of the city power house crew fought the most fiercely and the longest. Situated in the heart of the flooded area, the power house was one of the first buildings to be invaded by the rising water. But the men worked on amidst it. Up until ten o'clock fire engines and auxiliary pumps took the water out of the power house as fast as they could work and stemmed the tide enough to keep the engine rooms from being flooded till that time. Then the water made on the pumps and the city was plunged in darkness. - At the pump house,

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62

which operated the entire city's waterworks system, the men worked in water up to their arm pits and the big fly wheel revolved deep in it, sending a continual spray of water upon the men around. This plant was also forced to close at 11.30 and the city was without water until Tuesday.

And the river, rushing along a turbid flood, with a speed of fifteen miles an hour, carried on its bosom great barns, in some of them the stock still alive; houses, great and small, while, floating in the wake of these came household goods, bedding, clothes and all the varied articles and treasures from a hundred homes, now forever useless. Too, all the debris of rotting trees, long snagged logs that gathers upon the banks of a river, now danced along in the heaving flood. Toward the close of Monday afternoon the water, which in ordinary times was some thirty five feet below, crept up to the floor of the Low Level Bridge. Under this sturdy old landmark, long a connecting link between the south and north sides of the city, all this debris, and even the floating buildings had swept through, but with the water reaching the traffic floor, there piled up against the side of the bridge, thousands of tons of logs and drift wood. Houses and barns, rushed on the fast running stream, came crashing into the bridge with terrific sound of rending, splitting wood.

Robbed of a passage way these partly demolished buildings piled up adding thousands of tons of weight and surface resistance for the water to play upon and further weaken the structure. Then the Canadian Northern Railway rushed to aid the flood fighters. A thirty car train of box cars heavily loaded with gravel was drawn onto the bridge and stretched over the entire length of the bridge. The train was split in two with an engine with steam up at either end, so, if the bridge did go, in spite of the added weight, some of the cars at least could be drawn to safety. But the bridge held and late Tuesday afternoon, the train was removed.

Yet, though the waters had risen to a height unprecedented in the history of the country, though the river had done a million dollars worth of damage to property and made over two thousand people homeless, not one life was lost, and, with the exception of a man who was marooned for about twelve hours upon the top of a road grader, where he was forced to climb when the rapidly rising waters cut him off from nearby dwellings, no one was very seriously in danger. This in itself makes some record for so large a flood.

At five o'clock on the evening of Tuesday, June 29th, the electric lights were once more turned on and on Wednesday



Disbelieving people who doubted that the water would rise to their residences waited too long and in many cases were taken off in boats.