

Former O'Neillites Flood Evacuees

Mrs. O'Donnell Tells About Salina Tragedy

(Editor's note: The following story of the worst flood in Kansas history was written in letter form to O'Neill and Emmet relatives by Mrs. Edward L. O'Donnell, the former Helen Biglin. Mrs. O'Donnell, her husband and her aged mother, Mrs. P. J. Biglin, were evacuated from their home by police-manned motor boat when flood water from the Saline river was lapping at their doorstep.)

By MRS. EDWARD L. O'DONNELL
Salina, Kansas,
July 22, 1951.

This is the story of the flood. It may not be the story but it is my story.

Tuesday, July 9, Ed left at 5:45 so I went down to the 6:30 mass. It happened that there wasn't any, and Mary Carlin was there so I asked her to come home for breakfast, which she did. It was raining and very overcast. It was a dreary day in Salina. Everyone seemed to have the feeling of impending tragedy, everyone was

restless, and couldn't settle themselves to their work. Mary went home at 9, and returned again that morning. Joan, a friend of mine from the southeast, drove over and stayed till noon. Dorothy called and said she did not know what to do with herself. Still the rain continued, the river was 2 feet below flood stage, everyone was low. Mary called at 4 for me to come down to her house, and I did, and we made plans to all have a bridge game the following day.

It poured all night and on Wednesday morning the river was up to flood stage. The morning broadcast told us all to get ready that the flood would be the worst Salina had ever witnessed.

I called Ed at Ellis, a distance of 125 miles, to tell what was about to happen. That was at 8:15. He told me that he could not get in and for me to get the car out, and get the things out of the basement as best I could if I could get help. I immediately checked with the neighbors, and took my car to a high spot about a block from here. All this time they were already preparing. I it was pouring rain and you had to wear galoshes. Then I went across to where our yard boy lives to see if he could help me. He was not at home, but they sent me help. I never knew who it was. It was so hard to get help as everyone on this side had their own things to take care of. The east side became a beehive of activity. It was a fight against time and the elements to save what we could.

All this time the police cars were going through the street with loud speakers telling us to get things out of the basement and the cars to higher ground.

When I got up that morning there was water in the south end of our block, and when we finished the basement, the water was in front of our house. I watched what our neighbors were doing and did likewise.

I went out and pulled all the onions, beets and carrots, picked the beans, and dug the potatoes, in ankle deep muck. Then I picked all my roses and flowers, that the neighbors did not do, but I could hardly stand to see everything go. At 1 o'clock I was ready—still the rain continued.

Ed arrived about 1:30. They had listened to the 10 o'clock broadcast, and it was so bad they thought they had better try to come. They had to drive miles west of Salina in water to the running board. I was glad to see him. It was such a relief. He then got busy and got up a few more things, that we did not see in the excitement. Pete waded out and bought supplies for us, as I did not have the time or car to go earlier. All afternoon the rise was slow, just a creeping of water. At dinner time I went out and pulled enough sweet corn for a meal. It was not quite mature and Ed said I was silly, as it would never get above the ears, but I did not want to have it said that we had never tasted the corn.

All evening till midnight we went with flashlights and watched it rise to the step up to our yard from the walk. We listened to the city manager at 1 in the morning and he said it had risen in the south part of town 2 feet in 25 minutes, so we knew it would be fast. We then went to bed till 4. At 4 we looked out, the lights were on in the houses

and people on the porches. The water was almost to the porch, with a strong current in the street. Ed said we had to get up and get the things up in the house—it was a bleak morning, just before dawn, pouring rain, and nothing but black water around. At 5 the basement started to fill, it was cold in the house. We had to put on jackets, and the sound of water pouring into the basement was no comfort.

We put everything we could on tables and beds, but cans of fruit under various things, took up the rugs, took out all the bottom drawers, stacked clothes on the beds. My mouth and throat dried up so I could hardly talk. All this time the radio was broadcasting what was happening. It was sickening to see it coming up the porch steps—one by one.

We called the police to be taken out about 7, and they said they would come. At 8 the radio said they had damaged so many boats through the night there was only one boat for the east side and anyone on that side who wanted to get out would have to get out on their own power.

Then we knelt down and said the rosary, and Ed got up as white as a sheet, and said "Now whatever happens is God's will and we will have to accept it."

We put mother back to bed and reconciled ourselves to stay in the house. We could talk to our neighbors on the north from our porch, and they said they would come. Soon we saw more boats running on Iron and Stapler, but none of them would come down Connecticut, as the current was so swift.

We would all call, but with the motorboat noise they did not seem to hear. When it came over the last step on the porch, I called again, and told the police the phones were all out but ours, and that there had never been a boat on this street, so they said they would come. They did—at about 10:45 a.m. It was a small boat with an outboard motor. We got mother in first, and then we got in. Still pouring rain. They pulled right up to the porch and Mr. Phillips came over in waist deep water and helped hold the boat till we got in.

When we got up to Iron the current was terrific, and the fact we had to turn west on Iron was tragic. He took the boat clear to the northeast corner of the intersection, and then turned it so he could get across the current. It was all the boat could do to cross it. That happened at every intersection. On Kansas intersection it was over our heads, and I breathed happily when we passed that. We went about a mile. Sue and Mary were on their porch and saw us, and waved.

At the Iron avenue bridge, hundreds of people had gathered to help. Men waded out to the boats and held them and carried the women in to the bridge. There, countless trucks were lined up to take the people to Memorial hall and various places.

Dorothy Rogers, a girl with whom I had played cards a few times had called on Wednesday morning wanting me to come with mother to their house, but we thought we could stay. The city did not urge people to evacuate early as there is the problem of housing the masses and feeding them, so they just bring them out in boats.

We looked like rats coming out of holes, everyone on this side. We then stood up in a truck and they took us to our friends. I forgot to mention that on the boat trip the boat started to fill with water, which of course scared me more.

On Saturday we got the word about Pat's death, and we knew we had to try and get over here for clothes. We tried from 9 till 2:30 and finally they got us in a big grain bin hauled by a tractor, and we came within 3 blocks of the house and the fellow said he could not make it farther. He was going back, and I was ready to go, but a road maintainer came along at that time hauling a rack and we transferred. I had to step cross from the top of the grain bin into the cab of the maintainer. I was the only lady on the trip. Then we got within 2 blocks of home and waded in hip deep to get clothes.

The maintainer said they would pick up again, but it took up too long so we missed our "bus" back. We stood on the corner of Iron and Missouri, east of here, and later a maintainer came hauling a big high bin. I had learned to climb up one of those things, so was utterly dismayed when the driver got out in thigh deep water, and hauled down a big step ladder so you could climb up in that. There

were many women and children in this bin. They took us clear to Marymount before turning around, and we came back on Ash. On all these streets basement wall after basement wall was gone, and at one house the water was half way up on the big picture window. That was on the street just south of our house.

We saw it all that trip and when we got back to Rogers, Bert had been with us, we were sick, it was just a pitiful sight to see all the homes wrecked.

It was generally known that they were letting water out of Kanopolis all this time. They had to, so consequently it kept us flooded for 11 days. Sunday mother and I went to the hotel when Ed went to Nebraska, and on Tuesday we went to Eileen's and Pete's, Ed's assistant, by way of cab and an old high bus they had discarded. Each day Eileen and I waded over here, it took about an hour, in about 2 feet of water. Thursday night they closed the Iron avenue bridge again, so when the fellows got in they had to wade clear from town to Pete's house at 11 at night.

Friday we came home. Mother had to wade a block and a half in to the house. You couldn't move, in the house, everything piled up, but we were glad to be home. The water lacked about 7 inches of getting in.

Now a few highlights of the flood. There is a red davenport and chair out in our alley that just floated in. Mr. Phillip's bee hives, 7 of them, floated away. They stayed in their home. Mrs. Phillips said she went out in a boat in 1941, and she said she would never go out in a boat again. They had a little upstairs they could go to. It got over the kitchen sink in a house a block south of us.

Much criticism about the dam. They advertised boat races the Fourth of July and that the dam was full. It was a great resort and the boat races were a great attraction. Then the rains came and they were caught with a dam full of water. Finally Saturday they closed them pretty well down and the water drained off the east side in 12 hours. People were furious. Sue had to go to work in a boat all last week, as they just held the water steady. Now the river is down to 15 plus feet, and today they are opening the gates again, everyone is jittery on this side. It has rained the last 2 nights.

Yesterday morning, Sunday, we sighted dry land at 5 a.m. You would think it was Columbus discovering America. We had water in front of our house for 12 days.

Today they are pumping the basements, and all the curbs are full of debris, the 900 and 1000 block were the worst. They kept them barricaded all the time, the water stayed 3 feet there after the crest had passed. That is where Sue and Mary live. The neighbors moved in with them. Water got in every house in that block except Sue's and one other.

Incidentally every living plant is gone around the house. It got away over the ears of corn in the back garden. Now there is nothing but a black mass of rotting vegetation, and the whole east side really smells. In spite of all, we were the least hard hit of all Kansas, and we are grateful. We have one white petunia left, that was in a flower pot with 2 geraniums. We thought we had the best garden in Salina, but now I will have lots of leisure moments, that were spent in the garden, Ed and I toured the garden at least twice a day. It will be weeks till we can step in it. — Written by Mrs. Ed L. O'Donnell, nee Helen Biglin.

PAGE NEWS

The BMJ Stitches 4 - H club held a regular meeting July 10 at the home of Maxine Park. They distributed added material which had just been received to the members and discussed a demonstration which 2 members will have ready for the next meeting. Mrs. Park served a lunch. The next meeting will be at the home of Mrs. William Fink.

Mrs. Albert Anthony, of Bloomfield, spent from Saturday until Monday visiting her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Otto Matschullat, and her brother, Dale Matschullat, and wife. Mr. Anthony left Saturday by airplane from Minneapolis, Minn., for Greenland, where he has a government job.

H. L. Banta spent Thursday and Friday in Omaha.

Mrs. Hester Edmisten and Mrs. Edgar Wood spent Saturday evening with Mrs. N. D. Ickes. Pvt. Thane French has completed his 16 weeks of basic training at Ft. Ord, Calif., and is spending his 10-day furlough at Lambert, Minn., with his wife and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford French. He is being sent to Ft. Hulabird, Baltimore, Md., for highly specialized mechanical school. Clifford French and family were former residents of this community.

Mr. and Mrs. Leo Tomjack went to Ewing Sunday to serve as god-

parents at the baptism of Mary Kathryn Burke, baby daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Burke. The services took place at St. Peter's Catholic church in Ewing.

Charles Cole and family and Herman Harkze, of Star, returned Sunday after a 2-week vacation in Oregon, California, and Washington.

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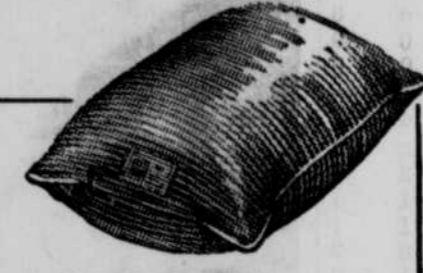
McDonald's dependable MONEY BAK brand! No finer type 128 made! 81x108...

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42x36 Cases .. 47c

Here, homemakers, is a wonderful sheet buy! Made by a famous maker to our rigid standards, they're smooth-finish, full-bleached. Firm weave promises long wear. Wide, even hems. Come right away for yours!

Sale! PEPPERELL Red Label sheets, 81x99 2.47
72x99 2.27 8-x108 2.67 42x36 Cases 53c

Sale! DONCREST service muslin sheets, 72-108 2.77
81x108 2.97 42x36 pillow cases 57c



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Heavy quality pillow ticking, ACA herringbone weave in blue and white stripes. Featherproof. At only, yard 77c

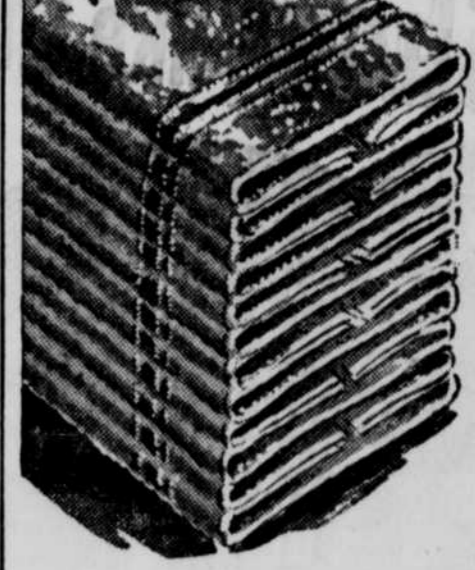
Pepperell pillow tubing, full-bleached, no side seams. Yard 77c

36-inch outing flannel, super quality, colors and white. Yard 33c

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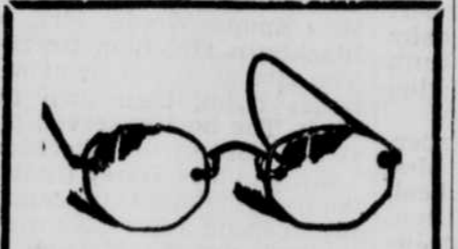
Phone 173 O'Neill

O'NEILL NEWS

Mr. and Mrs. Earl Wrede and daughter, Helen, of Branson, Mo., left Thursday, July 26, after a visit with Mrs. Emma Lawrence, Mrs. Addie L. Wrede, Mrs. Henry Martin and son, Allen, and the Clarence Wrede families.

Mr. and Mrs. Alan Van Vleck and family spent Sunday at Lake Andes, S. D.

A picnic for the Holt county conservation service families was held Sunday at Hidden Paradise park in Long Pine.



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