

THE PACOLET FLOOD OF JUNE 6th, 1903.

For a number of days preceding the disaster there had been unusual rainfall. Shortly after midnight on the night of June 5-6 a terrific downpour deluged the whole Piedmont region, and on the upper waters of the Pacolet must have amounted to a cloudburst; for reliable men who were in the storm where it was not at its worst testify that the waters fell in a mass in which drops were not distinguishable. The huge volume was greater than the narrow valley of the Pacolet could carry off. The watchman at Clifton No. 3, the mill highest up stream on the Pacolet, says that at 4 o'clock on the fatal morning of June 6, the water was 20 feet above normal, and at 4:30 the destruction of the mill was begun by a large tree plunging through the roof of the boiler room. Towards 6 o'clock the chimney of No. 3 fell with a crash towards the western shore, just after the dam had broken, and almost immediately the body of the

great mill, embracing four-fifths of a plant worth upwards of \$500,000, sank into the water.

At the lower end of Converse, as the village at Clifton No. 3 is called, stood a number of houses upon a flat plane of an elevation of from six to twenty feet above the river. Sixteen of these were swept away and ten of their occupants were drowned and one killed by exhaustion and exposure. The river turns sharply to the left at this point, presenting in its narrow course, between precipitous banks one of the grandest stretches of scenery to be viewed in South Carolina. So violent was the rush of water through this narrow defile that some fifteen feet of mingled earth and rock was washed away on the left bank and some forty feet on the right bank, against whose almost perpendicular side over a hundred feet in height the main fury of the flood rushed point blank.

The mass of water rushing against this high hill, on which stands the Methodist church, could not escape at once through the passage of about 200 feet in width, and surged backwards so furiously on the right bank as to wash down large trees and leave them heading directly up stream.

The greatest displays of force were the tearing away of the hillsides at this point and the marvelous power of transporting machinery from Clifton No. 3. For weeks after the flood there might have been observed on the right bank about a hundred yards above the dam at No. 1 a card machine weighing 7,000 pounds which had been swept three-quarters of a mile down stream. Two others are known to have passed over the dam at No. 1, and one reached a point far below the dam at No. 2, having traveled about two and a half miles. These huge machines must have floated upon the floor of the mill as upon a raft. Out of 194 of them in No. 3, only six have been discovered. The loss from this item alone exceeded \$180,000.

At Clifton No. 1 the broad, long river front on the right bank, formerly one of the most beautiful and populous sections of the town, was left strewn with the remnants of hideous ruin; but no lives were lost.

At Clifton No. 2 a large number of houses were built upon a beautiful plane on the right bank from ten to fifteen feet above the water and seventy-five yards in width. 400 yards lower down on the opposite side was another level plane, half encircled by a sharp curve of the stream, where lay the section of the town known as Santuc. From these two flat places 60 houses were swept, and here occurred the great bulk of the fatalities, the drowned reaching the number of fifty. Here occurred some of the most pathetic scenes and some of the most thrilling escapes. Julius A. Biggerstaff, who loved Lola Hall, the daughter of his next neighbor above, had called upon his sweetheart Friday night; they were to be married, it is said, on Sunday morning. But before Saturday's sun had fairly risen Biggerstaff and all six members of the Hall family had been swept into eternity. Here Mrs. Emory was washed ashore

with a child of three years and another a few months old, all three of them almost stripped of clothing by the fury of the waters, while the husband perished. Here, too, Rev. W. J. Snyder, P. C. Hundley and Will Wilkins effected the most dramatic rescue during the disaster in saving, by means of two cotton bales lashed together and moored to a rope, Mrs. Landrum Williams, her two children and Mr. Hickman Stribling from a tree in which they had remained eight and a half hours, after having floated or swam to its branches. Here, too, lived B. S. Johnson, who escaped from the raging flood after having been borne for several miles upon its bosom, but whose wife and five children were drowned. It was his little boy who floated on a piece of timber eight miles to Pacolet and disappeared in the waves fifteen feet high plunging over the dam and shoals. Nor can we forget the pathetic case of Samuel Swearingen and his bride at Clifton No. 3, whom the onlookers from the bank saw sink in each others arms.

At Clifton No. 2 the operatives, thinking the river would soon fall, were working as usual in their places; the authorities marched them out before the disaster to the building, having almost to drive some to safety. The upper end riverside projections of this mill and of No. 1 were butted off, the shafting throughout was sprung and the first and second floors were covered with trash, trees, mud and sand.

At Pacolet the great double mill Nos. 1 and 2, 600 feet in length, was more nearly completely demolished even than Clifton No. 3; for more of its foundation was carried off and only a mere cottage sized remnant of the slasher and cloth rooms, based well upon the high bank, was left standing. No 1 went down about 8 in the morning and No. 2 about an hour later, in full view of

the whole mill population, whom the rising waters had prevented from beginning work. At Pacolet No. 3, the new five story mill half mile below the engine, boiler and picker rooms were wrecked and almost completely swept away; the upper corner of the main building next to the river was carried away and the first floor was filled with sand twelve to fifteen feet in depth. The river filled its bed below the dam with huge rocks torn from their primeval resting places along its sides and changed its course so as to wash directly against the foundation of the mill. One of the first tasks after the flood subsided was to excavate the old channel and turn the river back into it.

The Presbyterian church located just below Pacolet Nos. 1 and 2 and on the opposite or Eastern side, in that most fatal of situations a flat place circled by a sharp bend of the river opposite a precipice, was lifted bodily from its foundations and set down wrenched but entire 35 miles down the stream. No residence was destroyed at Pacolet and only one life was lost, that of a negro man who ventured too far in attemptidg to save cotton bales.

The water at Pacolet was twenty feet higher than ever before recorded.

On June 5th, Clifton stock was selling at from \$175 to \$180 and Pacolet could not be bought for less than \$190. A month after the unparralleled disaster, Clifton was at par and Pacolet about \$110.

Only one wagon bridge was left over either Pacolet or its tributary Lawson's Fork, that being a private one on Dr. Boyd's plantation 'hree miles above the city of Spartanburg. Railway and mail communication were completely cut off by the destruction of trestles and high bridges. The steel bridge 150 feet long and wrighing 2,509,956 pounds over Lawson's Fork a mile from Spartanburg was washed from its piers and carried 150 yards down the current, having been forced from its piers, 80 feet above low water presumably by the pressure of the rapid mass of water rushing against the houses and dabris banked upon its upper side. Every line of cmmunication by rail between up country and low country and every route from the North to the South through the Piedmont belt was broken on the morning of June 6, except that over the bridge of the Columbia, Newberry and Laurens Railroad over the Congaree two miles above Columbia; and on June the 8th, this gave way. The Southern Railway completed a trestle across the great chasm at Lawson's Fork in a little over seventy hours and resumed its train service over the stream at a quarter past three o'clock Tuesday afternoon the 9th. The trolley from Spartanburg to Clifton crossed Lawson's Fork on a new trestle June 12.

Sunday afternoon, the day after the flood, a full mass meeting was held in

the opera house in Spartanburg and a subscription of \$3,355 was raised in a few minutes, which was later increased to \$26,000. Hundreds if not thousands of dollars worth of food and clothing was collected by the wagons sent through town by the relief committee. The whole State and many friends beyond rallied to the occasion and supplied an amount greater than was needed. No more admirable traits were called out by the terrible crisis than the dauntless courage, the sane optimism and the splendid faith exhibited by mill authorities and citizens. And no better proof could be given of the stamina of the expanding industries of the Piedmont section the fact that not an operative of the 2,000 thrown out of work needed to remain idle longer than was required to place himself in any one of the score or more of factories which sought his labor. And no higher tribute is needed to their law abiding, steady character than the good order prevailing throughout the villages between the disaster and migration to other mills, which in a few weeks left the populous hills of Pacolet and Clifton almost deserted.

The following is the list of dead, numbering 66. The Mr. Grier mentioned died from twelve hours of exhaustion and exposure in a tree which saved him from drowning:

At Clifton No. 2, No. 53: Julius A. Biggerstaff; Augustus Calvert, his wife and two children, Felix and Lou; Bud Emory; Mrs. J. R. Finley; Joel H. Hall, his wife, mother, and Ella, Jimmie and Lola, his children, and five other children; Mrs. Henderson; Mrs. B. S. Johnson and her five children; Oliver Johnson; Roscoe Johnson; the Louin family of eleven; Mrs. Massey and four children; Ed. Robbs; Mrs. Robbs and two children; Genoble Sims; Novie D. Sims; Landrum Waddell; Martha Waddell; Dock Williams; Mrs. Jane William's baby.

At Clifton No. 3, 12: Miss Fleetia Gosa; Mr. Grier; Mrs. Henson; Miss Maggie Kirby; Mrs. William Kirby; Garland Long and wife; Mrs. John Owens and child; Roy Owens; Samuel Swearingen and his bride; William Wood.

At Pacolet, one, Quay Worthy, colored.

The total loss of property, as nearly as can be estimated, aggregated \$3,800,000.

Loss to Spartanburg County in bridges alone was \$50,000.

The following is the report of the Central Relief Committee:

Mr. R. H. F. Chapman, Chairman Central Relief Committee; Dear Sir: I hereby submit my report as treasurer of your relief committee:

RECEIPTS.

Subscriptions from out of town	\$21,454.98	Relief committee at Mary Louise mill	500.00
Subscriptions from Spartanburg	4,543.29	Orders for household goods, sent operatives who moved away	100.00
Total	\$25,998.27	Burial of dead (balance)	3,022.68

DISBURSEMENTS

Relief committee at Clifton	\$10,500.00	Sufferers at Upper Pacolet Valley	46.00
Relief committee at Pacolet	2,890.00	Postage	7,406.24
Relief committee at Glendale	1,000.00	Livery	14.00
Relief committee at Finger-ville	500.00	Printing, etc.	13.00
Relief committee at Whit-		Total	6.35
			\$25,998.27

Respectfully submitted,
E. S. Tennent, Treasurer.

The auditing committee have examined the books and vouchers of the treasurer of the relief committee and hereby certify they are correct.

W. E. Burnett,
A. L. White,
Jno. A. Law,
Committee.

From:

1904 Spartanburg Almanac, compiled by J.A. Gamewell and D.D. Wallace, W.F. Barnes, Spartanburg 1904, pp. 7-15.