

Flood of '35 Not Washed From Memory

BY STEPHEN BUTTRY
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

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REPORT

Franklin, Neb. — Six decades later, Eva McNiff remembers exactly when the wall of water swept through her family's southern

Nebraska farm.

"Eleven o'clock (in the morning) on June 1st," she said without hesitation. "How well I remember."

Word of a disastrous flood upstream on the Republican River had reached Franklin, and Eva Bach, 24 and engaged at the time, and her mother, Mary, were moving belongings upstairs at their farmhouse south of Franklin. Miss Bach's fiance, Tom McNiff, and her father, Theodore, were out trying to get the cattle and hogs to safety.

Then it happened.

"The water came down in just a wall 12 to 14 feet deep," Mrs. McNiff recalled. "On top of that were horses, chicken houses, sheds, big cottonwood trees . . . It just came down the valley just like a big tidal wave."

The wall, moving at speeds reported by the U.S. Geological Survey as ranging from 2.7 mph to 10.7 mph, rolled across southern Nebraska 60 years ago on May 31 and June 1, filling the Republican River valley with water, mud, devastation and death.

From Parks, a southwestern Nebraska town that practically disappeared and never recovered, to Hardy, more than 200 miles downstream in south-central Nebraska, the wall brought a disaster that is unmatched in the state's history. About 100 Nebraskans died. Many of the bodies were never found.

The decades since have thinned the ranks of survivors, but they have not dimmed the memories of those remaining.

Miss Bach and her mother crawled



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SAD REMEMBRANCE: Elaine Blank of Benkelman, Neb., recalls the victims of 1935 flooding, who are listed on a Dundy County monument. The flood of May 31, 1935, was followed by a lesser one on June 16 that claimed two more lives.

onto the roof of their porch to wait for help. They waited until nearly night-fall, when a motorboat rescued them. From the roof, they watched other houses washing past, fearing that theirs might be the next to give out, wondering what had become of the men they loved. (They had taken refuge in a barn loft.)

"We didn't know they were safe and they didn't know we were safe," Mrs. McNiff said. "I was praying and crying. I tell you. We were scared we were going to go."

Just upstream from the house, the Bachs' concrete-block chicken house absorbed the impact of the onrushing

current. "I think that was all that saved the house," Mrs. McNiff said.

In the ultimate illustration of the extremes of Nebraska weather, the flood interrupted the peak of the Dust Bowl. In the same photo album where Mrs. McNiff keeps her pictures of the flood is a photograph of black dust clouds billowing into the Nebraska sky. The date is March 26, 1935, barely two months before the flood.

"The dust storms just blackened the sky. It would just get like night," Mrs. McNiff said. "It would just get like the world was going to end in the daytime." The Bachs couldn't plant crops

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