

Souvenir Flood Edition of The Benkelman Post and News-Chronicle Combining Flood News From Regular Issues of June 7-14-21, 1935.

# Raging Torrents Sweep Down Without Warning, and Trapped While They Sleep

## Death List Mounts to 168 in Valley With Many Still Unaccounted For

- Know Dead In Local Area**  
James Robbin Pettit, 82.  
Mama Lammann Pettit, 84.  
Edward Walter Pettit, 81.  
Albert Pettit, 13.  
James Pettit, 11.  
Loretta Alice Pettit, 9.  
Lo Pettit, 8.  
Adolph Thomas Pettit, 4.  
Mrs. Burke, 4.  
Mrs. Harvey Barnhart, 43.  
Mrs. Charles Harding, Hain, Colo., 43.  
Ora Davis, 50.
- Missing and almost certain lost:**  
Johnnie Calhoun, 74.  
M. B. D'aylor, 48.  
Mrs. B. D'aylor, 43.  
E. J. D'aylor, 41.  
Merna Taylor, 15.  
E. J. Courtright, 15.

Continued to rise gradually from that time until it almost reached the railroad tracks at the depot and extended across the North Fork, South Fork and the Timberlake almost to the J. T. O'Brien farm house nearly five miles distant. It was a vast sea of water which it raised two and in some places bounded as debris, fences, telephone poles, stumps and uprooted trees seemed to fly with each other in addition to the banks that remained in shambles of dirty, yellow water which seemed to have a stronger resemblance to a sort of yellow dirt than it had to water. Panic stricken people watched the waves sweep down the side of the valley and leaped. Thousands of people were apparently crowded in the woods. Some of them looked like people on footbridges and even on rafts and some of them were Mr. and Mrs. Pringle at Parks were aware that there were three people going toward the North Fork on a raft at a building and then as they watched, it struck a tree or deep current and capsized. Later the craft was seen but no one was riding in it. There were dozens of cases like this.

## Aged couple ride House Roof Eight Miles to Safety

### Land on Island South of Benkelman and Are Rescued At Near Noon Saturday

When J. A. McDonald and his family were watching the progress of the flood early Friday morning, they discovered a raft and woman coming down stream on a sort of board platform. They were moving very slowly in the very center of the current and their raft hit the island east of the McDonald farm where water had been dumped for several days. The raft hit the island squarely and inserted there for a minute or two, but was safe. They were rescued from the island about noon Saturday and taken to the McDonald farm where they remained until the first of the week when they were able to reach the home of their son in the Hackberry district. They are Mrs. Frank Ferguson and had been living on the old Charles Wilson farm, the house being located near the South Fork bridge at the Merkin and Cass crossing. Mr. Ferguson said that he rode the roof of the flood raft only a few minutes before it was overturned. He said that he and his wife were trapped, he raised a window and he had no time to do so as the building began to sink and finally collapsed. He and Mrs. Ferguson climbed to the roof of the building and reached the chimney when it sunk down and divided the roof. He took some things to make a hand hold about the center of the roof. He made a firm grip on the boards supporting it. Then they settled down and waited for the best. And the best certainly came to them because they were rescued by a man who had been in the very center of the churning, foaming sea. The man threatened to strike debris that were able to cling on until their almost miraculous safe journey came to an end on the island. It is about eight miles south of the Merkin-Cass bridge to the island in question and Mr. Ferguson said that he believed that it took about three or thirty minutes to make the trip which gives one some idea of the speed of the flood. Mr. Ferguson said he is 63 and Mrs. Ferguson is 60. They were celebrating their birthday anniversary and he said it was without doubt the most wonderful birthday anniversary he ever had. Likewise he felt that it gave him a chance to thank God for what he had never felt before. Despite the fact that he was harvesting grapes and other crops, he said that he was not regretful or sorry that he was not in the field. Mr. Ferguson did not seem greatly affected or shocked by the flood. He said it did not seem to have a marked effect on his physical condition.

# TRAPPED IN ATTIC OF HOUSE FAMILY OF EIGHT DROWN AS BUILDING SINKS INTO HOLE

## Local Men Had Discovered Their Plight Friday Morning and Were Almost Ready to Attempt Rescue When Flood's Second Crest Hit.

### FUNERAL HELD MONDAY AT THE LYRIC BUILDING

When all reports are compiled and the real facts known, we believe that the Benkelman community will have suffered a greater death toll than any section in the entire flood area and one of the saddest and most pitiful of all will be the tragedy of the passing of Mr. and Mrs. James Robbin Pettit and their six children who were trapped in the attic of a small house on the river bottom on the Casser farm and who went to their death, the eight as one, without the least shade of a chance to save their lives. And there was heroism there too, and plenty of it, because Mr. Pettit and his eldest son, Arthur, were almost certain that doubt had a good chance to leave the family and perhaps get to high land before the flood reached its crest. When Helme Freeman and Arthur Shaver were on the river bottom, Mr. Pettit said he didn't want to leave his family—that they were so badly frightened that they would not be able to get out when the water was but a few feet above the ground. But if the waves were so high that he feared that most of the younger children at least would drown, he said that he had been in the attic all night and that it was only three feet high and that they were badly cramped and very uncomfortable. The fact that they were both wet and hungry added greatly to their discomfort.

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Estimates of possible loss of life in Dundey county alone will reach fifteen hundred, it is believed. It is even more difficult to estimate the destruction in hands five stock than the floods caused. Amidst all of the uncertainty and the fact that things are said that is that Nebraska has never known a scale never before.

Heavy rains downpours and cloudbursts last Thursday night and Friday morning united in bringing about the destruction of all Republican valley history and was in the destruction of life and property on a scale never before equalled in Southwestern Nebraska.

At noon the flood waters began to recede and hope was felt that the flood was past, but in less than an hour, the second crest was upon us and the water rose to a new high. And still new territory was engulfed and with new hazards created. At four o'clock the water again began to recede and continued until at five o'clock it was possible to get on the bridges on the North Fork south of Benkelman where volunteers began their laborious work of stretching a cable from the bank to what remained of the bridge in order to make it possible to row a boat across the channel and bring about the safe rescue of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Higley, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Woods and Mrs. George and Mr. and Mrs. Ollie Adkinson and families who had been trapped in the Woods, Higley and Campbell farm dwellings between the two rivers during all of the flood period. Searches were also soon conveyed across and down the river bottom. Searches for lost bodies that has continued ever since and volunteers have been greatly handicapped by hundreds of tons of debris, washed loose from the banks and trees uprooted and scattered and down other deterring influences.

For the second time since May 31st, the great and destructive flood valley last Sunday night and in the Benkelman section carried two more lives into the grave. The victims so far as we have been able to learn, Mrs. Harold McGee and her daughter Betty June were its only victims in the valley.

Stands, moreover, extremely warm and shortly after noon clouds were to gather and continued to deepen until the skies were completely black and it was readily apparent that we were in for another terrific storm at least. The wind was blowing in different sections of the county at least. The fact that Benkelman was not effected until after six o'clock was a steady, consistent rain which lasted until midnight. The government rain gauge here recorded the amount of one inch and a quarter. The flood waters had already begun to rise and the water in St. Francis where a cloud burst was reported. It rained heavily all the way from St. Francis to Benkelman and on the divide sections on either side which tilted the crops and trees which were driven into the South Fork by the heavy rain. The water was rising rapidly and became the raging, wild stream that had so much to do in marking the Benkelman flood of May 31st, at

the greatest and most destructive in all Republican valley history. The first crest reached the Benkelman shortly after seven o'clock and the water was rising rapidly in the flood area, following all the newly laid water channels and sweeping all the newly covered lands. The water was two feet above the ground and was doing everything that had been done in the Burlington's efforts to save anything from service but adding to their trouble in forcing them to build a temporary road bed further up using part of the highway. At Haigler it was the first one to be rebuilt in the county, many a mile away. Several hundred yards of the railroad fill at the Parks bridge, and in other ways the water was kept on the road. The road in Dundey county is added to the damage to lands as they had already been in badly torn by flood waters. Many a road has been rapidly cut from further damage. At McKim the light plant was put out of commission temporarily, but it is now again in operation. The South Fork was at its full height, word was received in Benkelman of heavy rain at Haigler, and the water was rising rapidly in the Wray and Park bridge and the North Fork to flood stage and warbling was sent out to abandon the low

lands. At Parks the entire population again evacuated their homes and the Benkelman, folks carrying bundles of clothing and driving their live stock were continually moving to safer territory until every home on the low land was abandoned. The Martin train was carried on all the way down the river bottom and hundreds of men and dozens of local men stayed on the job until they were certain that no person was left on the low land. The fact that the danger of further loss of life from the flood was so great that the Park crest reached Benkelman at seven o'clock and covered much of the territory that had been covered in the May 31st flood but not nearly so deep. Many were the dead and victims. The fact that there were no obstructions in the way of the flood and that there were no obstructions in the water's course to hold it back, helped much in the further damage. The waters began to recede in the morning but were still receding ever since. Sunday's flood pushing the combined tide of the flood of May 31st but it was that perhaps the highest water the valley had seen in many years with one of the exceptions of the disastrous flood of May 1934.

At near four o'clock Saturday afternoon Henry Adams, Dewey Cordeiro, Jim Pettit and other boys from the south side to river the South Fork. It was a successful trip. They came to the bridge and hundreds of people were on the boat and this was the first word brought from the South side. They were two of the o'clock bridge which Mantilla Meador had washed a night in low water. (Continued on page 4)

# Flood Waters Sweep Second Time Sunday Night Cloud Burst on South Fork and Torrential Rains West Bring Rivers to Flood Stage

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The weather cleared Monday and Benkelman was left on the road, with good and growing crops. The precipitation Sunday varied from one to two inches in some sections. Considerable snow, however, but it is now again in operation. The South Fork was at its full height, word was received in Benkelman of heavy rain at Haigler, and the water was rising rapidly in the Wray and Park bridge and the North Fork to flood stage and warbling was sent out to abandon the low

of the Pettit family being marooned, but Pringle had sent his men down to the house earlier in the morning to look out if they were there. The water was rising rapidly and they did not quite get to the house. They slipped several times and not being able to get a response, concluded that the family was dead because of the fact that they were lodged in the attic, it was impossible to hear or be heard at any distance.

Funeral services were held at the Lyric building by Rev. Frank Woodward Monday afternoon, at the conclusion of which the eight children were all loaded into J. M. DeWester's large truck and taken to the Benkelman cemetery for burial. It was one of those pitiful, sorrowful occasions that because of the fact that they were good people, they lived impressions that will burn lives. Both Mr. and Mrs. Pettit were raised here and their children were born here. A large family, the middle of the country's greatest depression had tried their very best to make their home a happy home. Their children were well nurtured and had had their share of the good things of life. Their minutes of their lives when the father's sin had not have any family, they are so afraid.

Earl Duvall whose body was recovered on the south side of the river Sunday night, was found in a very peculiar manner. He had lived for some time in a camp at the Earnest feed store in the middle of the country. The greatest depression had tried their very best to make their home a happy home. Their children were well nurtured and had had their share of the good things of life. Their minutes of their lives when the father's sin had not have any family, they are so afraid.

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# RECONSTRUCTION WORK NOW UNDER WAY OVER THE COUNTY BRIDGE EAST OF TOWN IN AMONG FIRST PROJECTS

## Construction of Temporary Bridges East of Town in Among First Projects

Reconstruction activity got under way pretty generally throughout the week but up until this time most co-ordinating of all courses of a temporary bridge, especially the more essential tendency between the county bridge, with the bridge east of town. The work on the North Fork bridge got under way Monday with William Rogers in charge for the electric power and water plant in charge. Fred Yurman, who has in light here, is in charge of the work. Mr. Roach and his brother Charles of Haldie were one time among the best known bridge firms in this end of the state and as contractors built many of the county bridges in this and adjoining counties, and Willis' knowledge of bridge building came in mightily handy at this time when there are few available bridge firms in the state. It is a well known fact that it is necessary to put the piling down thru the sand and gravel to a depth that is effective and will eventually get results. Because of the threatened flood waters on Tuesday night and the consequent rise in the water level on Wednesday, work on the bridge was suspended entirely. In fact the river across so rapidly flooded that the equipment was removed from the bridge at about two o'clock. Work was resumed as soon as the water lowered enough to permit it. After the North Fork is repaired, it will be several days work on the South Fork bridge before traffic can be resumed on a large part of the route. It is necessary before the path between the two bridges is repaired to a certain degree of satisfaction.

On Monday a wagon and team plowed the Willard Rogers road and connected the two bridges and both rivers were forced across the bridge. The road across one river to the other, and at the North Fork a large truck and team passed the Benkelman loaded with lumber. On Wednesday the trucks of the Parks and Atkinson highway bridges which is necessary before traffic can be resumed. The work on these bridges are in line for consideration of the state, and it is hoped that the entire flood district.

# HYDER SEES TERRIFIC FLOODS HAVE SWIFT VALLEY BEFORE

## Former Benkelman Citizen Bases Conclusion On His Past Observations

John Bauer this week received a letter from our old townman E. B. Stover at Lincoln in which he attempted to describe the anxiety of both flood victims interested in Dunday county when the report came over the air that practically every town in Dunday county had been swept from the map in the flood waters and that the report applied to practically every town in the valley. "I was so glad to see many on the higher lands. He picked up one radio report after another that there were 12 dead at Benkelman, 23 at St. Francis, 8 dead and 23 missing at Haldie, etc. "It was a pretty good enough," wrote Mr. Stover, "but it is a pretty thankful thing to hear of it. I certainly hope that time will not divide a more gruesome story of present conditions. I have seen Stover begin writing in his usual clear and sane and sane way. I believe the flood and its work will verify what he says. I have seen Stover begin writing that I was doing missionary work in furnishing the water to the people of the Dunday county history in digging wells that the original water supply at Max was about fifteen feet below the present surface and that the second established soil surface was at least twice the street grade, indicating that such floods have not occurred at least twice since your great Grandfather lived in a town. I am hoping that you folks will not be troubled further this year."

# THREE RESCUED WITH A TEAM AND WAGON

Mr. and Mrs. John Peterson and Mrs. Mary Rogers were at the Rogers farm Thursday night when Mr. Peterson rose in the morning, he discovered the house completely surrounded by water. A few minutes

# CITY WATER GIVEN A GOOD BILL OF HEALTH

A sample of water from the Benkelman water works was analyzed free from contaminating bacteria and given approval as safe for human consumption by the health laboratory at Lincoln. Samples were forwarded there for the purpose of having a clean bill of health. The report was not received until this week. The Benkelman water works is one of the best in the flood level. Samples will be forwarded to the health laboratory for analysis. Up until this week there has been no reports of typhoid disease.

This side of Blue Point and the road crosses the railroad track twice in a distance of one hundred yards. That was the only way possible for the railroad to get their trains moving and at the same time not interfere seriously with highway traffic. The construction of the road is being completed and heavy construction machinery is being used. The water portion of re-establishing train service over the main line has been accomplished, and the construction of the bridge will be directed in building a bridge at the same time. The work will take the railroad over higher land in the hills for a distance of perhaps one mile. The work is now low and in constant danger of floods. It is hoped that the work on the main line will be completed in a few days. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

# EMERGENCY OCC CAMP TO HELD IN REHABILITATION WORK HERE

## Eighty CCC Boys and Officers Establish Camp in City. Will Work Entire Area

Colonel S. Sutherland, of the 17th Central Postal Directory, recently visited the Nebraska Civilian Conservation Corps camp at Benkelman. The District CCC Adjutant arrived in Benkelman Tuesday to make preparations for the coming of the 80 boys and officers of the 17th Central Postal Directory. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

# A THOUSAND PEOPLE AWAIT FOR SWIMMERS

During the Saturday following the flood, hundreds of Kansas people came to the beach at Benkelman to watch the work on the South Fork and watched the crowds scattered along the North Fork banks near Benkelman. They had no idea of what had happened, who was lost or what was going on. Some of them had relatives living on the river banks and had been told that the water was rising and some of them were almost hysterical. In a few instances it was only by the aid of the National Guard that some of the crowd heads that were being thrown into the water were saved from drowning. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

# POST'S FLOOD EDITION IS SENT TO EVERY STATE IN THE UNION

## 850 Extra Copies Plus Scriber's Resent Posts Go to All States

Although 850 additional Posts were printed to take care of the anticipated demand for the Flood Edition, the work was greatly underestimated and our supply of extra copies was exhausted very early. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

# RAILROAD TRACKS ALMOST REPAIRED

## Burlington Plans Return to Main Line Schedule by First of the Week

Reconstruction work in Dunday county got under way Monday night, although the work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

# COMMISSION FIRM AIDS WITH CHECK FOR RELIEF

The Dunday County Red Cross strengthened to the amount of \$25 this week. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

# LOCAL MEN NAMED IN FLOOD RELIEF WORK

At a meeting of representatives from counties in the flood area at McCook last Thursday, the following were named in connection with the relief work.

# QUICK SANDS MENACE WORK OF SEARCHERS

One of the most dangerous features that confronted searchers for missing bodies along the river valley last week was the quick sand menace which formed in holes where trees had been uprooted. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

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# TYPHOID INOCULATION CARRIED ON UNDER RED CROSS DIRECTION

## WAS FIRST IN HISTORY. Schedule Is Announced For Various Towns in County Flood District

The Red Cross is carrying on a typhoid inoculation program for flood victims in Dunday county. The work on the main line will be completed in a few days.

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