

# THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later



Photo Courtesy Shenandoah Valley-Herald

A playground at Strasburg was littered with shrubs and trees after the flood waters receded in 1985.

## THE FLOOD IN SHENANDOAH COUNTY

# River 'Came Up Real Fast,' Hit Farmers Hard

By **STEVE SCHNEIDER**  
News-Record Staff Writer

New Market Town Councilman Donald Thompson says the North Fork of the Shenandoah River "came up real fast" during the flood of 1985.

He also remembers helicopters hovering overhead, searching for people who may have been swept away in Shenandoah County.

But officials reported fatalities were minimal. Robert Wischer Jr., 40, of Maurertown died when his canoe capsized while he was ferrying sheep stranded in a flooded field across the North Fork.

Damage in the county was mostly caused from runoff from Rockingham County's small streams, according to then-County Administrator John D. Cutlip. The downpour brought Woodstock

4.83 inches of rain, compared to 11.64 inches just across Massanutten in Luray.

According to Cutlip, farmers were hit hard by the disaster. Several farms reported severe losses of livestock. Topsoil also washed down the river with parts of houses and barns.

Still, Cutlip has said flooding from local streams was slight, with most of it confined to the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. This fact connects with a recollection Thompson offered.

He says the combination of rain and wind and flowing water forced some people to spend the night in trees. In one instance, Thompson said folks who went to rescue people stranded in trees found themselves clinging to branches overnight.

The flood also caused problems for a farming family who owned more than

165 acres along the North Fork.

Wilma Hughes said "lots of debris came floating down from the farm above us." Garbage and water invaded the gestation room the family built to raise its hogs, leaving behind a "shoulder high" mound of junk, she said. About 100 baby pigs died, though the mothers survived because "they were able to stick their snorts above water."

At one point, Hughes said she went to look for her husband and one of her children because they did not return from what was supposed to be a quick round of chores. A specific fear: they might have been poisoned because they went to an area with water and manure. Those ingredients weren't threatening individually, but she said they could have combined to cause a dangerous gas.

When normal weather returned, Hughes said the family replaced miles of

fencing and a mailbox that were destroyed, though she doesn't think they had an insurance policy to pay for problems caused by flooding.

In the Mount Jackson area, damage was sparse, with Mayor Dewey W. Jordan saying a few roads were washed out and water rushed to land near the old mill on Mill Creek.

He said the road at the edge of the old Quicksburg bridge near U.S. 11 was washed out and the telephone company found a large hole while trying to get wires across the area.

To deal with future problems, Jordan said rules governing development in the 100-year flood plain were revised. He said the flood plain ordinance calls for stringent measures if damage occurs to buildings or homes within the flood plain, requiring flood-proofing through reinforced foundations, walls and floors.

By **STEVE SCHNEIDER**  
News-Record Staff Writer

## Farm Took Beating From Flood

The Johnston family in Meems Bottom sold their farm a few years after the flood of 1985, though the decision was not based on the consequences of the flood.

Still, Malinda Johnston says the raging waters imposed a financial cost by destroying various facets of the farm operation.

One serious blow was the loss of topsoil, which Johnston said was rich in nutrients. The loss meant the Johnston's had to purchase more fertilizer than normal, though she doesn't have access to the records she kept a

decade ago.

They also had to spend time plowing the remaining earth to get past the rocks that made it more difficult to farm, Johnston said.

While no livestock perished, crops disappeared. And that imposed a cost because the Johnston's used the crops to feed their cattle. To continue feeding them, Johnston said the family had to spend money on feed that they didn't anticipate purchasing before the flood.

The flood also destroyed miles of fence along the 1,000-acre farm, though she said the family decided to only replace portions that were used to fence in cattle.

The family also rented bulldozers to get rid of the debris, which consisted of broken fences, crops and fallen trees, Johnston said.

And, she added, like many farm families of that era, they did not have flood insurance, which meant the family had to foot the entire cost of the rebuilding effort.

On the positive side, Johnston said farmers are now required to buy flood insurance.

Johnston now works as a teacher at Peter Muhlenberg Middle School in Woodstock. Her husband Terry maintains grounds at the Shenandoah Valley Golf Course in Front Royal.

## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

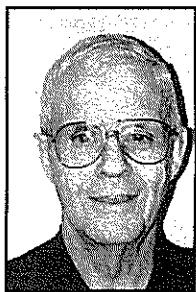
# Rescue Try Ends With Volunteers Needing Help

By **STEVE SCHNEIDER**  
News-Record Staff Writer

Jokingly, Wendle J. Greene says he wishes he had followed one of his partners from the Mount Jackson Rescue Squad downstream during the flood of 1985.

That's because the colleague, Jack Sperry, got to go home during an aborted mission to rescue two firemen.

The incident happened when Greene, Sperry and J. Kelly Stauff were sent out to help the firemen, who aborted their mission to rescue people riding around recklessly during the flood, Greene said.



**Greene**

According to Stauff, the mission was equally dangerous for the rescue squad members. In fact, he remembers clinging to a telephone pole when he went to help the firefighters. Before the night ended on Nov. 5, he also needed to be rescued.

Stauff, a life member of the Mount Jackson Rescue Squad, recalls arriving west of New Market on Va. 617.

Realizing it was "now or never" for the firefighters, Stauff said he joined with Greene and Sperry and "piled into a little boat that hit a fence" that was under water. The accident damaged the propeller, causing the boat to drift.

The men got the engine started again, Stauff said, but the current was too strong and slammed the boat into a tree.

That's when Sperry was swept about a mile down river, before getting out of the storm and eventually going home.

However, Greene and Stauff rescued themselves from the rushing waters by spending the night in two trees.

Stauff says he saved himself by standing on his right foot all night in the fork at the top of the tree.

He said helicopters swirled overhead, though they could not rescue him because of the density of the brush.

Stauff, an insurance agent, was finally rescued about 8 a.m. the next day. But he says he "definitely stayed wide awake all night, watching all this foolishness."

An example of the so-called foolishness: the water currents were so strong,

they moved buildings and homes, said Stauff, who also remembered it was very cold the night he was trapped in a tree.

In fact, it was so cold that Stauff was treated at Shenandoah Memorial Hospital for hypothermia.

Meanwhile, Greene recounts a similar experience. He says he lodged himself in a nearby tree. However, he prefers talking about another aspect of the potentially deadly incident.

Greene says he is thankful that Shenandoah County Sheriff Marshall A. Robinson rushed to the scene and remained over night when he was informed about what happened.

When Greene was finally rescued about 8 a.m. on Election Day, he said Robinson gave him the day off from his job as a Sheriff's Department deputy.

But before Greene could go home, rest and vote, he was taken to Shenandoah County Memorial Hospital, where doctors heated him up with coffee and chicken soup.

While he is grateful the doctors took care of him, Greene adds he didn't appreciate being billed \$1.50 for a cup of coffee.

## Flood Memories



*I retired in July and was in Hawaii as a retirement present when the flood hit. We got a call and learned that about 5 1/2 feet of water went in our house. It was all new carpet. Some of the possessions floated into corners here and there. We also lost all the personal possessions that can't be replaced. We lost our family photos, paintings and books, things that were dear to us and he hoped to pass on. We weren't able to move back into the home until mid-February. Until then we rented a house in Woodstock.*

Pat O'Meara, Deer Rapids subdivision

*The Shenandoah River went right wild. There was lots of debris and people had to clean up their farms. Some folks also lost cattle. Hay went up and down streams and some homes were lost. There wasn't much wind but the rain was constant. It seemed like it was coming down for a week but it was only three or four days. Still, I kept on working, just the same. I tried to stay dry and I milked my cows under a roof, so the rain didn't affect that. When I had to go outside, I wore a raincoat.*

Bill Zirkle, dairy farmer north of New Market

*I'll never forget it. The water reached 28 feet in the back yard. We live at the bend of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River and the area was just a sea of mud and water. Houses floated by. But we were lucky. We bought an old house that made it. We even put up seven families for one night. None of us could get out because a low-water bridge was flooded and a swinging bridge disappeared. We were stranded, but we were all right because we were on high ground.*

Reginald "Jeff" Jeffery, Deer Rapids subdivision

*The recreational subdivisions were hardest hit. Some of them were Deer Rapids, Black Bear Crossing and Leisure Point. The damage to homes there was overwhelming. Adding to the tragedy was the fact that some folks in those subdivisions were out of town during the flood and couldn't be reached. They came home to a big surprise. Some of their homes were in mud and their automobiles were destroyed.*

E.M. "Ned" Conklin, retired Shenandoah County agricultural extension agent

*It was bad. We didn't lose any buildings or livestock, but I'll tell you this: Our house sat on a bluff and for three days I watched bales of hay wash down like marshmallows bopping around on the water. We were told to get groceries on Monday about 9 a.m., but by noon, we couldn't get out. It just came so fast. The scary thought I had was what would happen if there was a fire. The trucks couldn't get in. The water kept coming, strong and deadly. Every phone pole washed out on U.S. Route 11 in the area. I watched the water go by. I couldn't do much else.*

Sue Kincaid, who lived at Mount Airy farm near Meems Bottom during the flood of 1985



# THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

## THE FLOOD IN PENDLETON

# Communities Devastated By '85 Flood

By JOAN ASHLEY  
Special Correspondent

FRANKLIN, W.Va. — Hurricane Juan dropped more than 11 inches of rain over a five-day period in early November drenching Pendleton County's already saturated farmland and overflowing drainage ditches.

The excess water turned trickling runs and quiet rivers into brutal torrents which killed 16 people and left hundreds homeless in a wake of devastation and destruction across the county.

Communities situated in valleys, cut long ago by the rivers, were particularly hard hit. Riverton, a community of approximately 150 residents on the banks of the North Fork River, lost eight homes to the raging waters with practically every building extensively damaged. The Smoke Hole area was almost gutted by the savage waters which swept away houses and roads leaving behind sheer cliffs.

Two mobile home parks, and four trailer camps along the South Branch of the Potomac near Franklin were destroyed.

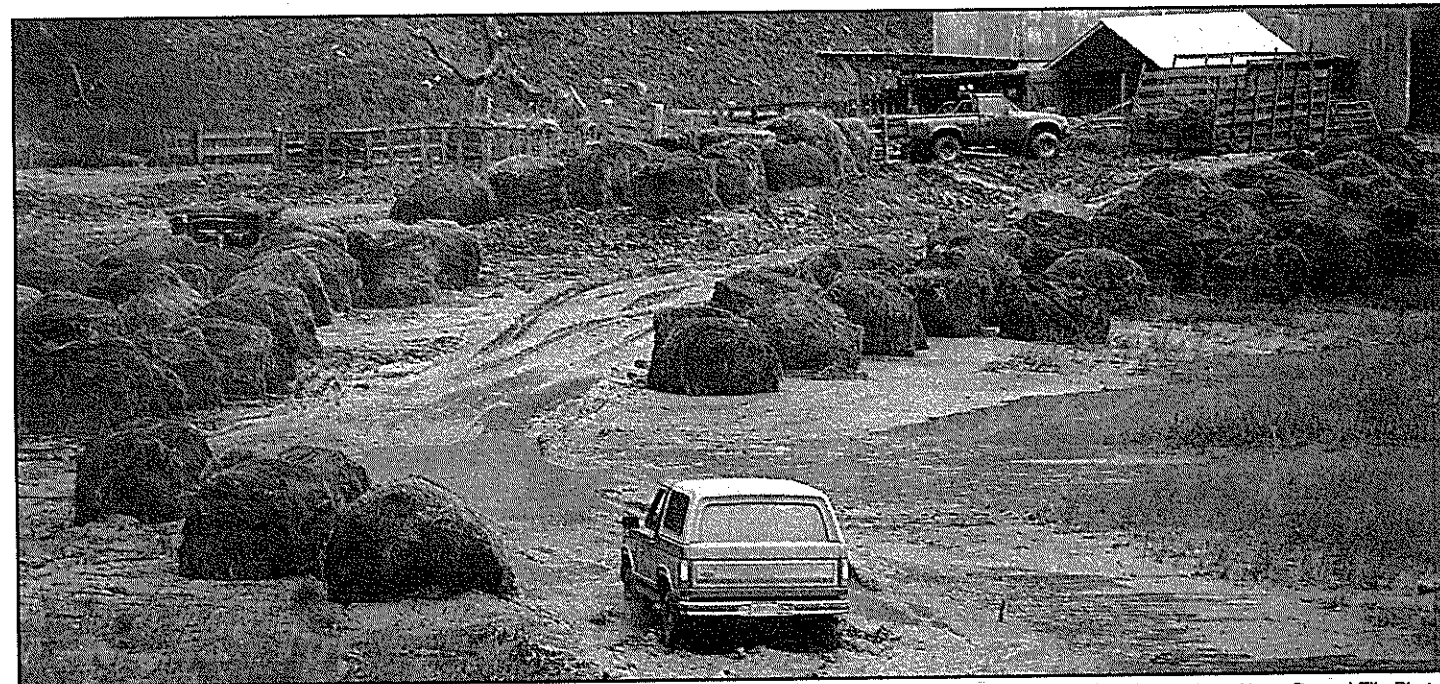
Tom Firor, who assisted the American Red Cross in assessing damages in the county, said the flood destroyed 58 single family homes and 130 trailer homes. An additional 86 single family homes and 59 trailers sustained major damage and 214 single family homes and three trailers received minor damages. Also 39 business establishments, 18 public buildings, 60 private bridges and culverts, 206 outbuildings, 51 barns and 204 recreational trailers were damaged and destroyed.

Thousands of acres of rich topsoil were washed away from fertile bottom land leaving a moonscapelike area of rock piles, boulders and sand. Farm machinery; odd parts of buildings; mobile homes; dead cattle, sheep, hogs and poultry littered the entire length of the county leaving a nightmarish dump.

Farm damage was estimated by 1985 Soil Conservationist Al Stewart at \$175 million with farmland alone reaching approximately \$100 million. Stewart said 30 to 50 percent of the county's farms suffered damage and as many as a million head of poultry had been killed either by drowning, by suffocation because of electric outages which stopped ventilation fans or from starvation because feed could not be delivered due to road washouts.

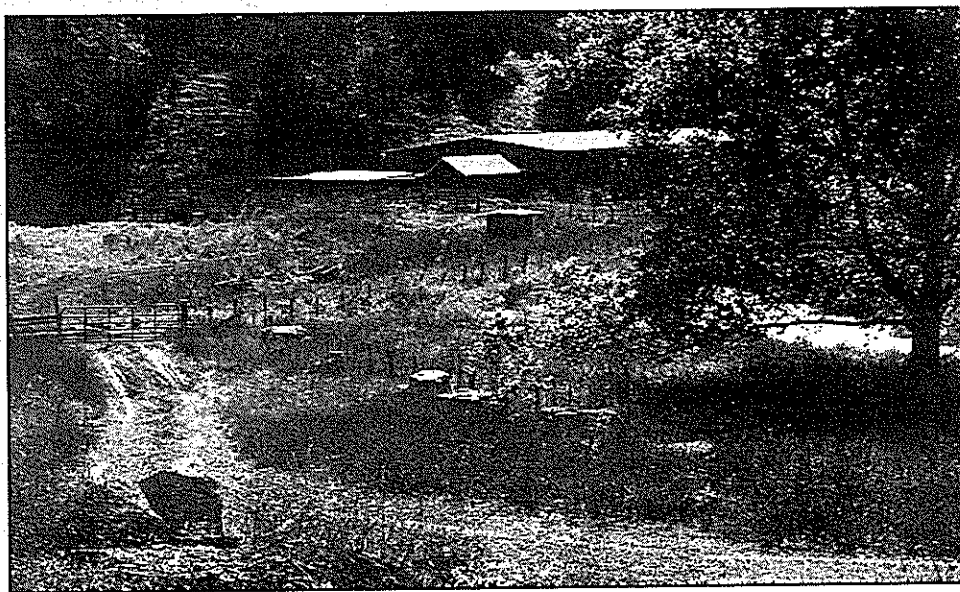
One of the earliest major tasks was burying dead animals to avoid further contamination of water supplies and the creation of other health hazards. The National Guard, the Soil Conservation Service, the Sugar Grove Navy base and health department personnel cooperated in the work.

The county was isolated for three days with bridges washed out and massive slices of highway gone or covered with huge heaps of rock and timber-filled debris.



News-Record File Photo

The muddy road among soggy hay bales (top photo) on the Jack Wilkins farm was the only entrance into Circleville while a new road was being built. The farm road today (lower photo) is less traveled.



News-Record Photo by Allen Litten

bris. Despite having survived floods for 45 years, a swinging bridge spanning the South Branch River south of Franklin was swept away.

Otis Harper Jr., who was county road maintenance supervisor in 1985, said 18 bridges on primary and secondary roads were washed out. Hundreds of rock slides blocked roads. Miles of hardtop, road beds and the entire substructure for roads were destroyed. He estimated road damages at \$54 million.

Most roads were reopened or rerouted in some fashion by Nov. 21.

Electricity was nonexistent with the loss of more than 300 electric utility poles. Trees and debris held down lines. Power was restored in Franklin 10 days later and at Upper Tract within two weeks.

Telephone service was interrupted with the loss of 150 telephone poles and the destruction of 25,000 to 30,000 feet of cable and eight remote subscribers switching systems.

Water supplies throughout the county

were destroyed or were unfit for drinking due to pollution by the flood and dead animals. The spring, which watered Franklin since the 1930s, was filled with rock and gravel and much of the water line washed out.

Volunteers and the town maintenance crew worked over the weekend to lay 5,000 feet of water line while residents hauled water in buckets from Fred Mullenax's spring until the system was back in operation 10 days later.

The water system at Circleville was ruined, and several thousand feet of water line washed out in the Upper Tract system. People in the entire county had to boil their water before using it.

Food, drinking water and clothing came in by the tractor-trailer loads from neighboring areas, such as Highland and Rockingham counties, and were distributed from the Community Building and a bubble building located behind Franklin High School. Vepco tanker trucks assisted the Franklin Fire Department in

hauling water from Monterey and pumping it into the town water system.

The Salvation Army Disaster Relief personnel aided in distributing clothing, food and essential provisions for flood victims. The unit provided 135,000 meals the first Wednesday through Saturday in the Franklin, Seneca, Petersburg and Moorefield areas.

More than 65 tons of hay in 12 trailer loads was donated by Shenandoah Valley farmers to help feed stock. Farmers lost not only farm buildings but 3,675 tons of hay, 5,436 tons of silage, 54,490 bushels of corn and 151 acres of fall seeded crops.

Nine people died on the South Branch or its tributaries and seven died on the North Fork of the South Branch or its tributaries. Two dog teams brought by volunteers from Gaithersburg, Md., helped sniff out bodies in the effort to find missing flood victims.

The Pendleton County schools reopened December 3.



## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

By **JOAN ASHLEY**  
Special Correspondent

### Arrow Helped Restore Power To Part Of County

Ron Kirk shot an arrow and where it landed it helped Monongahela Power restore electrical power.

"I attached the line from my fishing rod to the arrow and shot it across to the people over at Priest Mill. They caught the line. We attached a rope to the end and then an electric wire to the rope, so the people could pull it across," Kirk said.

At the height of the flood, Kirk, Mike Steele and Jim Underwood, part of a local cave rescue group, attempted to rescue people trapped in a hunting camp/trailer court near Ruddle.

"We started out in a canoe from Ruddle about 7 p.m., but the water got so swift, we got out and waded chest-deep using the canoe as a buffer for the porch roofs, propane cylinders, dead animals and other debris rushing down the river. We didn't want to get

nailed," Kirk said.

"We worked our way down along the road holding onto tree branches. We



**Kirk**

got there about 10 p.m. Everything was dark and quiet. We shot a powerful light over the area, but no one was there. They had all been carried away by the water ... three people died there," he said.

"We'd lost the canoe by that time, so we crawled up over the bank and walked back through the woods to Ruddle."

Kirk delivered the first generator and load of emergency supplies to Circleville School by going cross country on the make-shift road carved over the mountain by the Army's Special Forces from Kirkwood. He also delivered a

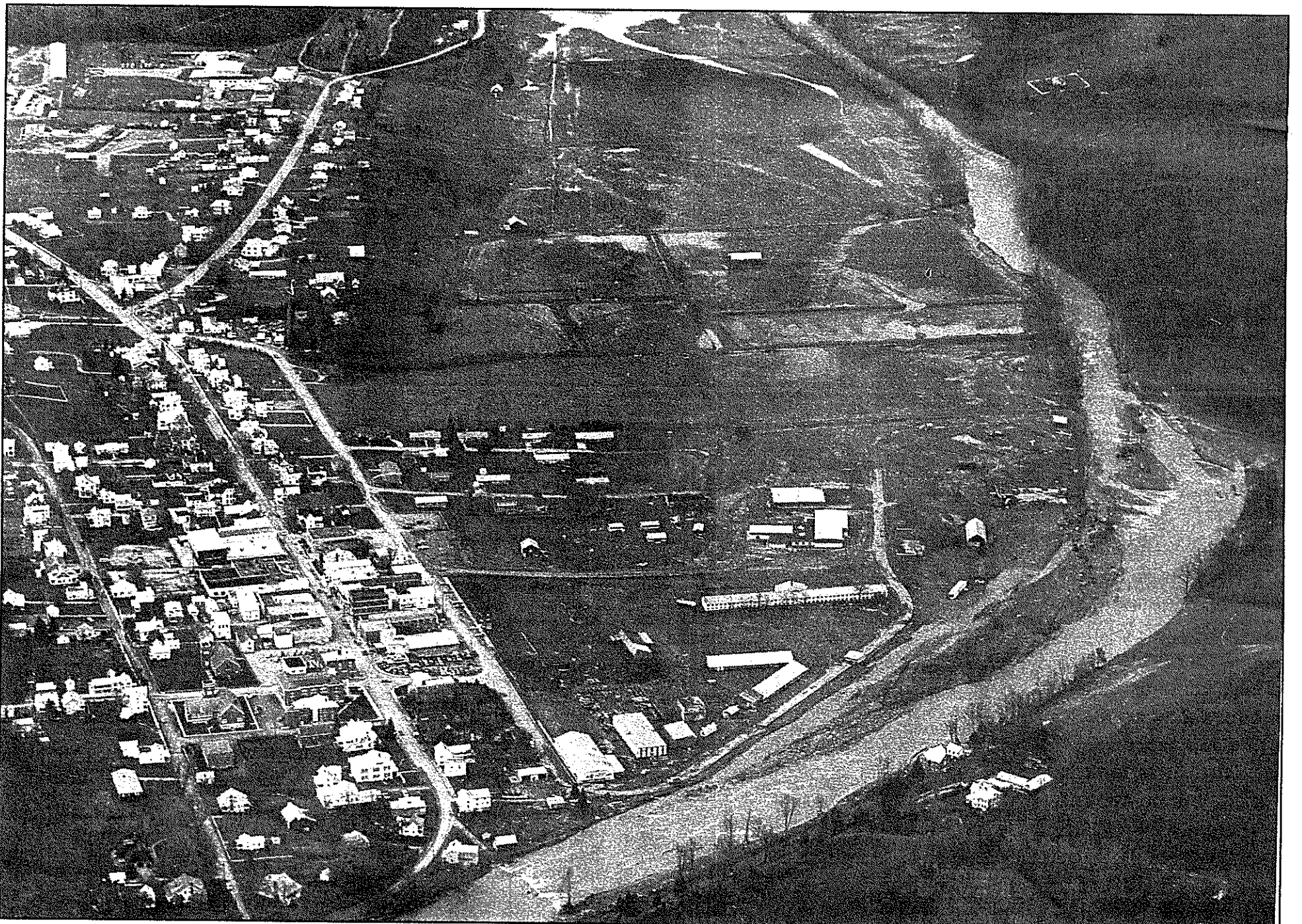
load of food and water to the Seneca Rocks school.

As accomplished divers, Kirk and Jim Brown were asked by the state police to search an undercut in the river where a missing woman's body was thought to be held down in the underwater current.

"We used scuba gear. The water was muddy ... so murky you couldn't see more than a few inches in front of your face. Somehow I got above Jim, and my hand dropped down in front of his mask — it scared him nearly to death," Kirk said with a laugh.

"It was a bad time for Pendleton County, but it was also good, because it was one time you saw people work together with no animosity. Things had to get done, and they got done," Kirk said.

"Now you can't tell it ever happened," Sites said. "It took about four years, but things look back to normal."



News-Record File Photo

From the air, the landscape at Franklin, W.Va., still showed signs of flooding several days after the river crested.



# THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

## Community Pulled Together After Destruction

By **JOAN ASHLEY**  
Special Correspondent

Bobby Jack Sites, owner of Trout Rock Trailer Court four miles south of Franklin, was stranded in Harrisonburg when the flood occurred.

His son crossed Shenandoah Mountain in a four-wheel-drive truck over an old dirt trail and brought Sites back with a load of supplies after dark.

"We went down to look at the trailer park, and it was eerie ... everything was black. Everything was gone. There were no lives lost, but a lot of trailers washed away, and we never did find them.

Others were totally demolished ... wrapped around trees and such," Sites recalls.

"There was so much going on you didn't have time to brood or think. Everybody had troubles. ... We just started working from day to day. It pulled the community together helping each other," Sites said.

Several trailers caught on the bridges in Franklin forming impromptu dams with the backed-up water causing more extensive flooding and washing out the bridge approaches.

When the water receded, people could not cross the river to reach the town for supplies.



Sites



News-Record File Photo

Silos at this farm near Ruddle, W.Va., were toppled by flood.

## Damage

Continued from Page 2

lion in Virginia and \$200 million in West Virginia. Repairs for roads and bridges in western Virginia would cost more than \$21 million.

Rockingham County got soaked with \$28 million in damage to homes, businesses and farms. Six bridges were destroyed; 35 others received major damage.

Total damage in Augusta County was estimated to be \$13.6 million.

Estimates in Page County hit \$2.37 million, excluding ruined roads and bridges. There was approximately \$2.6 million in damage to public and private property in Shenandoah County. By one account, \$2.3 million of that was not covered by insurance.

Moving west, it got worse. Losses totaled \$56.4 million in Hardy County,

\$71.71 million in Pendleton County and \$94.2 million in Grant County.

As the waters drew back, mud covered the land as though it had been spread with a spatula. It filled schools, businesses and homes. It poured through windows and open doors, filling living rooms and board rooms.

Everywhere, there were downed power lines, homes on their sides, collapsed buildings, uprooted trees. It would be a long time before everything was set right again.

A year after the disaster, residents of some of the hardest-hit areas still hadn't recovered. Those who lost loved ones hurt the longest. But they persevered.

"People bore the storm," recalled Moorefield, W.Va., resident Phyllis Sherman. "And when it was all over, without hesitation, they looked around at the destruction and said, 'OK, let's clean it up.'"

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## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

### THE FLOOD IN HARDY COUNTY

# 'We Were Back To The Basics Of Life Almost'

By **DEREK BARR**  
News-Record Staff Writer

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — A hard rain still brings sweaty, worried brows in Hardy County, W.Va., and eyes glance nervously at rivers and streams. Ten years have not erased the memory of the most widespread devastation the area has ever known, the Flood of 1985.

The five deaths and millions of dollars in damage will not be forgotten. The roar of the rampaging South Branch of the Potomac River and the South Fork of the South Branch that buried Moorefield's downtown in four feet of water will not be forgotten.

The flood of Nov. 4 and 5, 1985, is mentioned in terms reserved for only the most incredible displays of nature's power.

"Everything is either before the flood or after the flood. . . . I'm amazed at how much it still comes up in conversation," said the Rev. Bruce Macbeth of the Moorefield Presbyterian Church.

"I'm convinced it will take an entire generation to get over the fear of this flood. . . . They still talk about it and they refer to it as 'The Flood,'" said Larry Kuykendall, Moorefield's mayor at the time.

The flood swept through Hardy County after several days of nonstop rain in early November. Some areas recorded up to eight inches in less than 24 hours on Nov. 4, and almost 20 inches were recorded over two weeks.

Five people died from flood-related causes, including one man, James O. Flinn of Moorefield, who suffered a heart attack. Noble "Curly" Gano and Carlos Milam, both of Beckley, died when their hunting camp was washed away by the South Fork, and Rob Roy Watkins and Virginia L. Watkins, of Fisher, drowned in the South Branch.

When the waters had receded, Hardy County had suffered \$56.4 million in damage, according to a Federal Emergency Management Administration report. That figure encompasses \$12.99 million in agricultural damage and \$10.5 million damage to highways, the FEMA report indicated. The familiar Petersburg Gap bridge at the border of Grant County, W.Va., was washed away.

More than 600 homes were destroyed, 22 condemned and 40 received major damage. Five businesses were condemned and 70 received major damage.

Kuykendall said shell-shocked residents had to adapt without any amenities. "We were back to the basics of life almost — food, water, shelter," he said.

The Moorefield Church of the Brethren was used as a shelter for displaced residents because both schools were flooded, and some 17,000 meals were served at the church in the weeks after the flood, he said.

The sewer plant suffered major damage, and without water to even flush toilets, let alone to drink, another vital development was to set up 17 portable toilets in the town. The first water trucked into Moorefield came from Winchester, Kuykendall said.



News-Record File Photo



## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

# Community Pulled Together To Reopen School

By DEREK BARR

News-Record Staff Writer

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — After a few months as Moorefield Elementary School principal, Peggy Hawse was faced with what will probably be her most difficult administrative function ever: rebuilding a school ravaged by the Flood of 1985.

Hawse transferred to Moorefield in the fall of 1985 after serving four years as principal of Wardensville Elementary. She was given little time to adjust before dealing with disaster.



Hawse

"I really didn't think we'd ever have school in this building again," she said, remembering her first sight of the school after the waters of the South Branch of the Potomac River and the South Fork of the South Branch had receded.

On Nov. 4, 1985, school was dismissed early to allow students living in threatened areas to go home. No one expected the school itself, and Moorefield's downtown, to be buried in 4-5 feet of water.

"I never thought the river would actually touch the building," Hawse said.

The elementary school was initially going to be used as a shelter, but soon the school had water lapping at its doorstep.

Hawse was first able to see the school Nov. 6. It was a "muddy mess," with muck everywhere and a color television and trailer's oil tank having smashed through the front glass doors.

File cabinets were strewn throughout the school. After recovering from the initial shock, Hawse began preparations for the cleanup.

Volunteers came from all over. Mud was taken out in wheelbarrows and then bulldozed away to keep it from sliding back in. Crowbars were used to pry books, swollen by the water, from desks. Cattle sprayers were necessary to clean the mud from the desks, as ordinary water hoses weren't powerful enough,



News-Record File Photo

Books and materials that could not be salvaged after the flood were piled up in front of Moorefield Elementary School.

she said.

After 2½ weeks the building was clean, but government bureaucracy was holding up purchase orders. The school survived on contributions of supplies and money from November to April 1986, having to start from scratch with textbooks, files, everything, she said.

The school had no phones, no intercom, not even a copier at first.

"I remember when a box of chalk arrived ... Everybody dived for it," she said.

Hawse started an Adopt-a-Classroom program, in which teachers were set up with various contributors so each one could request most-needed items. More

than 300 contributors — other schools, businesses and individuals — put the school back on its feet, she said.

The school had a half-day session before Thanksgiving to let students know things would go on.

"We wanted to let the children know that there was a stabilizing force," Hawse said.

Six students were left fatherless by the flood. The school suffered about \$1.6 million damage, she said.

Even when full-day sessions resumed after Thanksgiving, the school's kitchen facilities were unavailable. So the children were served peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in their rooms, and when

some stoves were procured, soup was provided in plastic foam containers. Cold bologna and cheese sandwiches became a delicacy.

"But we survived. Of course we survived," Hawse said.

In 1989-90, the school was named a West Virginia Exemplary School, and it received an Outstanding Business/School Partnership award in 1993 and an Exemplary School in the Arts award in 1994. Hawse has received numerous individual honors for her performance.

But the flood has left its mark. "The emotional turmoil that we all went through was just unbelievable," she said.

## Basics

Continued from Page 32

Macbeth, the only minister of a Moorefield church in 1985 who still presides at that church, concentrated on distributing supplies, particularly donated food and clothing, he said.

Even though the Presbyterian Church's Fellowship Hall was under 4 feet of water, repairs were secondary to the greater need of the community.

Volunteers from the maintenance department of West Virginia University built racks, shelves were donated, and a virtual grocery and clothing store was opened in a nearby building. People could simply walk in and pick food from

the shelves, he said.

The store was open every day through February 1986 and finally closed at the end of May, Macbeth said.

The recovery effort was headed by Charles L. Silliman of Moorefield. With the Salvation Army, American Red Cross and other relief agencies and volunteers pouring in, and with supplies being sent from all over the country, someone had to coordinate the activities and ensure that everyone who needed help was receiving it, he said. Silliman said it was easy to give everyone something to do.

"With such a calamity, any help was useful," he said.

Communications were at a premium, as the county had no two-way radios; ham radio operators were an asset, he said. Silliman arranged for nightly meetings in the Town Hall among all the town leaders. The mayor's office, police, sheriff and fire departments, emergency personnel, coroner and even school officials were present, he said.

"It was important that everybody knew what the others were doing," he said. The sessions let each organization know what the others needed and led to the early resolution of numerous potential problems, he said.

Moorefield cleaned itself and rebuilt. Kuykendall said he occasionally had to

butt heads with Washington, D.C., bureaucracy, but that West Virginia Democratic Sen. Robert Byrd was a big help in securing funding. He and Macbeth also praised Harrisonburg-area Mennonites for rebuilding dozens of homes in the county.

"The last to leave were probably the Mennonites. They were in it for the long haul," Kuykendall said.

Most buildings were back after about a year, but loan requests and other paper work continued for four to five years after the flood, Kuykendall said.

"It was far worse than anything we had anticipated, expected or had ever seen before," he said.

## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

### Farm Tractor Plowed Through Deep Waters

By **DEREK BARR**  
News-Record Staff Writer

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — Roger L. Pratt borrowed a large farm tractor from Hester Industries Inc. to rescue a neighbor when waters began rising on Nov. 4, 1985. Then he just kept rescuing.

Pratt would take stranded people to town offices, then he'd hear of more residents in danger.

"You know, they called you and you can't say you're not coming," he said.

The rising water could have easily upset the tractor, and the river was splashing on top of the hood, but the vehicle kept going.

"We got along real well until the water got about 8 feet deep ... I could reach out and touch the water ... We never did see the front wheels, and it was a pretty big tractor," he said.

**Pratt**

There wasn't room for many people on the tractor at one time, but Pratt was able to take about 25-30 citizens to safety, and he went nonstop for about 34 hours. The danger and devastation of the floodwaters didn't enter his mind.

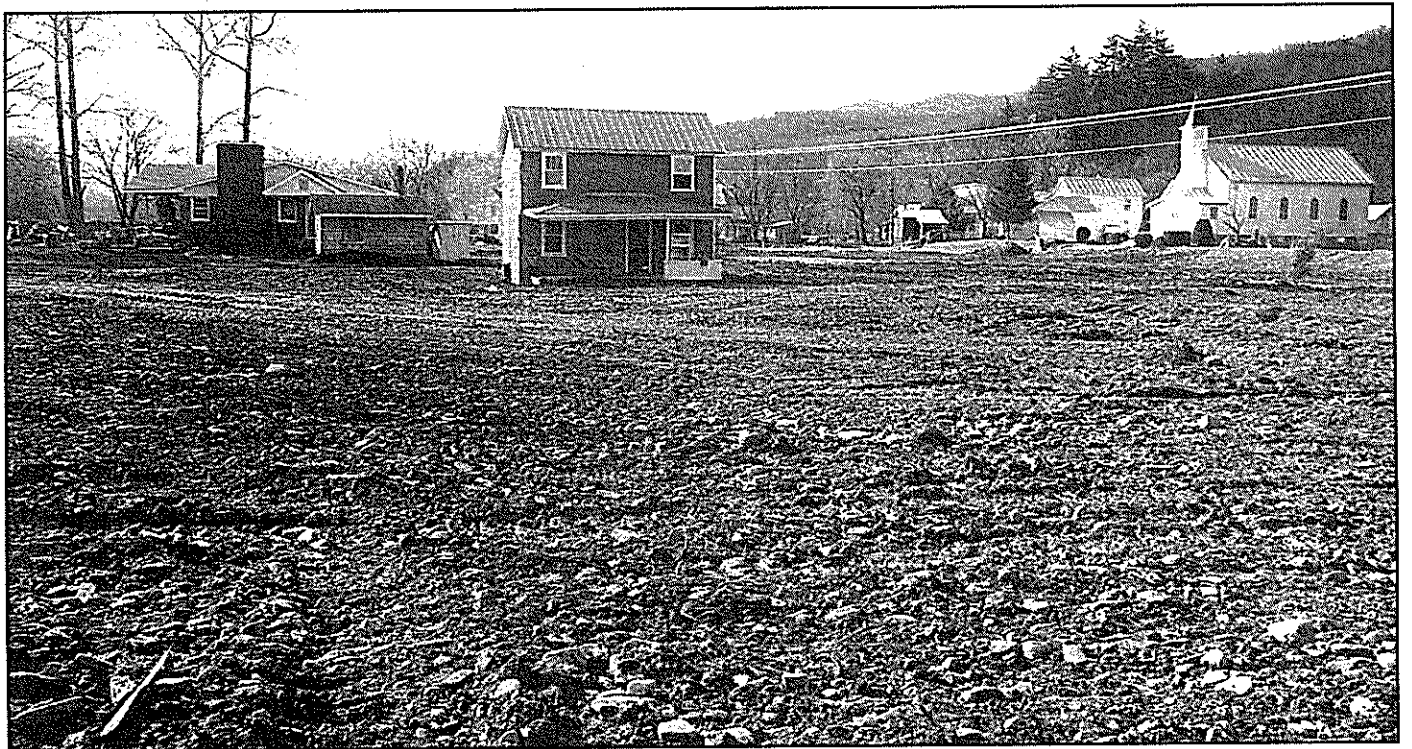
"I really didn't think about it, I was just trying to help those people," he said.

He saved one woman who had to climb from a second-story window onto the tractor.

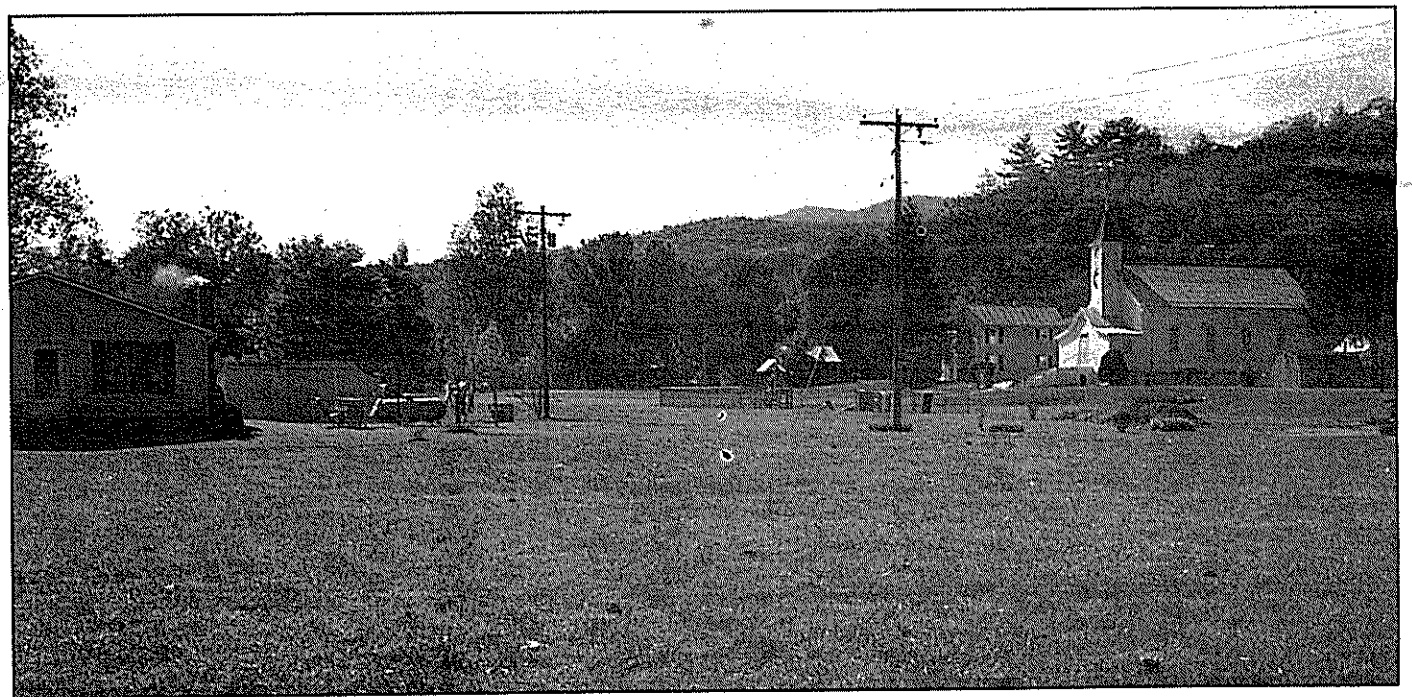
"She came out of her upstairs window and she hugged me, and I thought she was gonna choke me," Pratt said, laughing.

In the darkness, Pratt could not see the extent of the damage to Moorefield. But the next day it became clearer.

"Nobody ever thought this was going to happen ... It was starting to dawn on me then. It was kind of surprising what I did. But I'd do it again," he said.



News-Record File Photo



News-Record Photo by Allen Litten

The flood left this area in Riverton, W.Va., looking like a dry river, but the area has been resodded.

### Borrowed Trucks Ferried Out Endangered Residents

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — Gerald Sherman, first assistant fire chief for the Moorefield Volunteer Fire Co., regards the South Branch of the Potomac River and the South Fork of the South Branch with the respect due a worthy adversary. The Flood of 1985, in which Sherman helped the rescue effort, elicited his respect.

As the lower elevations of Moorefield became threatened by rising water on Nov. 4, 1985, Sherman spent the night on tractors and trucks picking up stranded residents. "We went back all kinds of places that we really shouldn't have been," he said.

Volunteers drove equipment from several different businesses, and Sherman spent much of the evening on a log loader with a sheet of plywood to carry peo-

ple, about 15-20 people a trip.

"We had them any place you could ride on that thing," he said.



**Sherman**

too late," he said.

The darkness amplified the problems. Rescuers couldn't see where they were going and the road was covered by

water. It was impossible to tell whether the street had been torn up, and the roar of the river dominated all sounds. Many residents wouldn't leave at first, thinking they could ride out the flood. That was frustrating to rescuers and made the last few trips more dangerous as more and more people finally decided to evacuate.

"They just waited until it was almost

water. It was impossible to tell whether the street had been torn up, and the roar of the river dominated all sounds.

In some areas, such as the South Fork area just outside Moorefield, the rushing current almost tipped over emergency vehicles.

"When it comes to a vehicle or a life, we don't care about the vehicle," he said.

Several rescue personnel lost property of their own because they spent their time helping others. The water rose so quick that there was no time to save their own things, he said.

The next morning, firefighters spotted smoke but had no way to reach the fire. They finally hitched a ride on a helicopter and brought along a portable pump.

"We had plenty of water there," Sherman said.



# THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

## Fast-Rising Water Trapped Family In Shop

By DEREK BARR  
News-Record Staff Writer

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — Shelly Hartman never thought she'd be trapped upstairs in a relative's shop when the Flood of 1985 hit Moorefield. Yet there she was, relying on an old heater for warmth and watching other stranded residents atop a roof across the street as the water rushed by below.

"It's funny how you happen to be in a situation," she said.



Hartman

Hartman was in Sherman's Machine Shop helping relatives move equipment to higher ground. But chest-high water soon proved the effort futile.

Hartman and the other occupants went upstairs as water filled the lower rooms, having only flashlights for illumination and a radio to receive updates. They tried to leave, holding hands in the swift current, but Hartman's inability to swim

made escape an impossibility, she said.

Across the street, Evans Motel, which had consisted of two sections perpendicular to each other, became one long, straight entity. The river actually pushed one section 90 degrees until it was parallel with the current, Hartman said.

In the shop, Hartman listened as logs and other debris flashing downstream slammed into the building.

"We wondered if it would stand," she said.

The next morning at about 7 a.m., a log loader with lift attachment trudged through the water. Hartman and the others climbed through a second-story window into the lift, completely surrounded by water.

"I was afraid to look down," she said.

Ten years later, Hartman is still stunned to think about the flood.

"It's still hard to believe," she said.

## Stranded Dogs Got Helping Hand

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — Charles L. Silliman, Hardy County's director of emergency services, remembers standing on his front porch in Moorefield, trying to reach a stranded dog as the South Branch of the Potomac River swallowed his front yard.



Silliman

Silliman's home became a makeshift dog haven during the disaster. The local dog pound had been emptied before the waters rose, and most of the dogs were set free to take their chances along with everyone else.

Silliman said his first canine visitor was a large dog. He spotted the animal struggling in the water amid dangerous, floating logs and other jetsam, and finally the dog was able to reach Silliman's front porch.

Some time later, Silliman saw some strange creature clinging to floating debris. He thought it might be a rat, but after closer observation he realized it was a small dog.

Silliman tried to lean from a column over the water to reach the animal, but it was just too far.

"I said, 'Well, you're in God's hands now,'" he said.

Almost on cue, the river brought the dog's life raft a bit nearer, and Silliman brought him to dry land, he said.

When the waters receded, the big dog went his way, but the small dog's owners learned of their pet's survival and retrieved him from the Sillimans.

Silliman said the flood is still fresh in county residents' memories.

"If there's a good rain, they'll stay on top of it and some will say, 'It's not going to be like before, is it?'" he said.

## Minister Found Several Ways To Help

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — The Rev. Bruce Macbeth, minister of Moorefield Presbyterian Church, realized that some of his parishioners may not have fled their homes when the South Branch of the Potomac River and the South Fork of the South Branch were quickly burying Moorefield on Nov. 4, 1985.



Macbeth

water buried the basement.

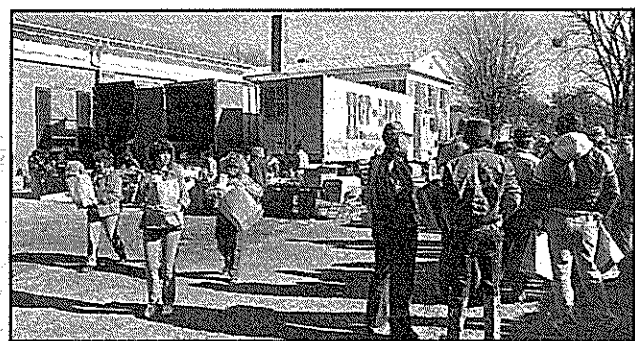
"I finally went out and the water was slopping in the vehicle . . . I thought it wasn't a safe place to be," he said.

Macbeth's home was spared the flood waters, but several youths spent the night with the Macbeths, sitting on

While driving his sport utility vehicle to pick up an elderly woman and her daughter, Macbeth traveled through water that was trying to claim the vehicle as its own.

"I could feel the car lift up a couple of times," he said. The family was eventually taken to safety.

Macbeth also saw the water rising on the church, and he stayed as long as he could in the building before the danger became too great. The electricity was still working even as



News-Record File Photo

### Church was food distribution center.

the roof of the home listening to radio reports and watching the water inch its way to his front yard before cresting.

In the subsequent struggle to recover, Macbeth helped coordinate distribution of food and other supplies. He said everybody worked together in the effort.

"It was the overwhelming generosity of people," he said.

## Home Was Ringside Seat For Flood

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — Helen Southerly stayed in her upstairs Water Street Drive apartment in Moorefield even as the South Branch of the Potomac River turned the road into a river in November 1985.

The water rose some 15 feet above the road, but Southerly luckily lived on a small hill. Still, the downstairs part of her house was buried in 5 feet of water, and in the dark, the roar of the water and debris rushing past was frightening.

"I don't have any idea what was going on outside, but I could hear the

furniture being turned over downstairs," she said.

The radio was the only way to tell how bad Moorefield was being hit, she said, but she could see vehicles floating around outside her window.

Several gas tanks sped by in the swift current, spewing their contents and making "whooshing" noises. Water Street was a raging torrent.

"It was going through there like wild, you couldn't tell what was going by," she said.

A walnut tree in a neighbor's yard was buried in the water. "In no time it was up over the top of that tree," she said.

Southerly said she never really thought of the danger, but she would not stay put again.

"I wasn't scared at the time but I'll never do it again," she said.

## Mayor Warned Town Residents

MOOREFIELD, W.Va. — Larry Kuykendall, Moorefield mayor in November 1985, was driving his pickup truck in rising water to warn residents to leave the town. Even in early afternoon, it was obvious that Moorefield was going to see something it had never seen before.

"We knew we were in for some major damage," he said.



Kuykendall

After removing the dogs from the local pound, Kuykendall was concentrating on telling people of the real danger they were facing. He had delivered a tape to the local radio station pleading with people to find higher ground, but not

everyone was getting the message. "There were problems with people not

leaving. It was frustrating. I was fighting with the human factor. I was fighting something you can't conquer," Kuykendall said.

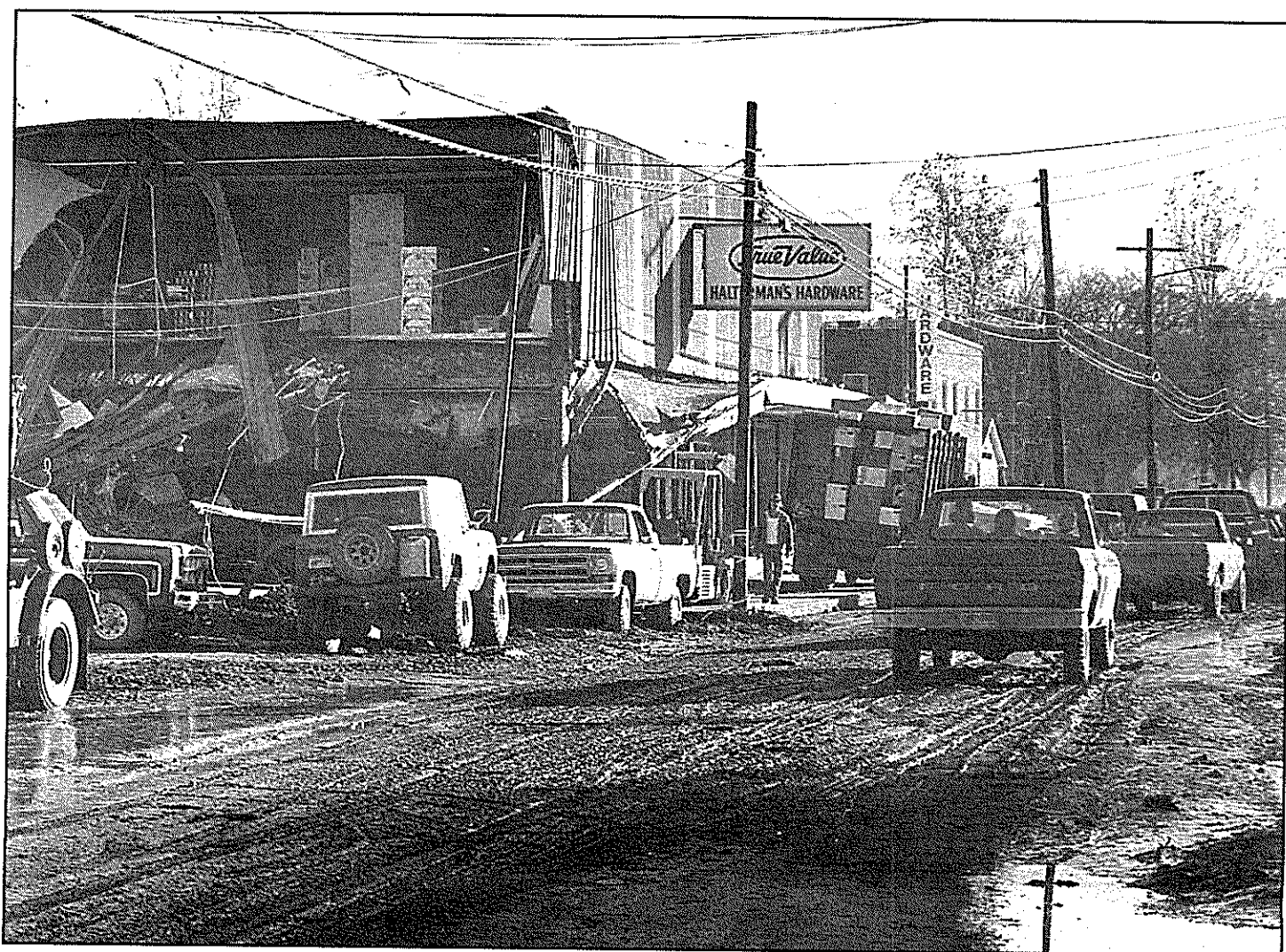
Most residents judged catastrophe in terms of the 1949 flood and didn't think anything could approach that level, he said. Of course, the '85 flood far surpassed 1949's damage.

Kuykendall's pickup almost stalled and tottered a bit in the current during one trip. Water completely obscured the road, and the fast current was ripping up pavement and gouging huge gullies in the ground, but he luckily kept to safe ground and drove through the danger, he said.

Kuykendall said those who didn't see the magnitude of the flood could never really realize the damage.

"Without seeing film footage, there is no possible way to convince people how bad it was," he said.

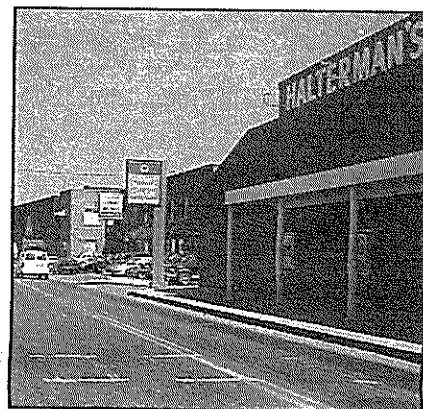
## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later



News-Record File Photo

November 1985 flood inflicted heavy damage on Grant County businesses, including Halterman's Hardware (pictured here just after the flood and in 1995).

When the flood waters receded they left a thick layer of mud in the buildings and on heavily damaged roads in the area.



News-Record Photo by Allen Litten

### THE FLOOD IN GRANT COUNTY

# 'It Was Just Like A Big Ocean Wave'

By **DEREK BARR**  
News-Record Staff Writer

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Residents of Grant County learned quickly in November 1985 that banding together is the best way to heal emotional wounds.

Ten years after creeks became streams, streams became rivers and the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River became a deadly force, engulfing everything in its path, the healing continues.

It was a flood that killed 12 people and decimated Grant County on Nov. 4-5, 1985. But to those who experienced it, dates aren't necessary. The Flood of '85 is redundant; simply say The Flood, and there's instant recognition.

"When it broke loose, it was just a wave coming down through here about two feet high . . . It was just like a big ocean wave," said Paul Eskridge, owner of Sites Restaurant in Petersburg. Eskridge still displays a marker signifying the 8-foot-4-inch high-water mark left by the flood.

The flood caused 12 deaths in Grant County — James Edward Kile of Cabins; Margaret L. Painter of Crystal Springs; Ronald Lewis Gatto of Monongahela, Pa.; Thomas Hyatt of North Charlerio, Pa.; Thomas Joe Clower of Romney; Maurice R. Funk of Baker; twin brothers

Larry G. Regester and Jerry Lynn Regester, both of Moorefield; brothers Richard A. Schell and Kenneth Lee Schell, both of Petersburg; Harry L. Harper of Hendricks; and Stelman Wade Harper of Parsons.

The county suffered \$94.2 million in damage. Agricultural damage accounted for \$7.5 million, and damage to highways was \$8.7 million, according to a Federal Emergency Management Administration report. A staggering 1,475 homes were destroyed, 225 received major damage and 150 minor damage, and 65 businesses suffered major damage.

Shelters were established at the high school in Petersburg, thankfully spared the brunt of the flood. But several businesses in the downtown district were gutted.

"We probably had about 10 feet of water at about 30 mph going through the building," said Keith Wolfe, owner of Petersburg Motor Car Co.

When the extent of the devastation was first realized, residents drew together like never before, Wolfe said.

Eskridge said people realized that despair would not solve anything. A side building to his restaurant was destroyed, with the roof resting across the street, having slammed into Petersburg

Motor Car Co.

"I yelled over at Keith, 'Keith, that's my roof sitting there, but you can have it,'" Eskridge said, laughing. "This one man came by then and said 'How can you laugh?' and I said 'Well, there's no use to cry about it.'"

"It was bad, but it brought the people closer together," he said.

Kathy Kimble, owner of the Ben Franklin store, said people supported each other.

"The thing that made it bearable, and I've said this from day one, is that everyone was in the same situation," she said.

Wolfe said the outpouring of support from relief groups and the generosity of volunteers made the recovery much easier. The Salvation Army ran a meal wagon down the street at lunchtime, and volunteer workers would grab a quick bite and keep on working, he said.

Harrisonburg-area Mennonites rebuilt homes for months after the flood, Eskridge said.

Grant Memorial Hospital in Petersburg treated a few flood-related victims in the aftermath, but most of its response was adjustment to residual problems, such as lack of water, said administrator Robert L. Harman. For three or four days afterward, the hospital worked with other groups getting supplies and blankets, he said.

The high school was the communication center, but basically everyone pooled their resources, Harman said.

"It was a very unified effort, not just this community but regionally and statewide," he said.



**Harman**

Street to remember flood victims and celebrate the recovery.

"I think they were showing their appreciation to God, that He was showing them the way to get back," Eskridge said.

Everyone agreed that the flood is still a vivid memory.

"For adults, I don't think anybody can forget that quickly how much devastation there was. I've lived here all my life and I've never seen anything to equal it," Harman said.

"The people that went through it, it's like last week," Wolfe said.

Lives went on and repairs were made. Most of the businesses reopened at their original locations and are still operating today. Eskridge said he recalls an Easter Sunday march in 1986, when members of Petersburg churches walked down Main



## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

# Couple Clung To Tree As House Washed Away

By DEREK BARR  
News-Record Staff Writer

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — It's not amazing to Darwin and Phyllis Michael that they spent the night of Nov. 4, 1985, clinging to life and a lone tree as their home washed away in an incredible flood. They are more impressed with the countless friends who helped them rebuild their Grant County dwelling.

The North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River and the South Branch itself decimated Grant County during the flood. No story is more compelling or terrifying than the Michaels' ordeal, but they do not seek or expect praise or admiration for their courage.

When floodwaters began rising outside Petersburg, Michael was helping a neighbor evacuate her home. When Michael returned to his own house about 6 p.m., water was beginning to cross his yard, even though the building sat 27 feet above and 300 feet away from the river, he said.

In seemingly no time, water had surrounded the house. Their dog, Vickie, a Labrador/German shepherd mix, was terrified, so the Michaels let him in.

The water kept coming. The couple gradually retreated before the river's onslaught, as the water climbed the front steps to the door, then began covering the first floor. The Michaels went to the second floor, then to a back bedroom when the water still chased them.

Soon Michael, his wife and their dog were sitting on the bed with floodwaters all around them. Then their home, which they'd lived in only nine years, began to lose its battle.

"The house began to shake and break apart," he said.

A bedroom window opened and more



News-Record File Photo

Shortly after 1985 flood, Darwin Michael stands in field where his home stood.

water came in. Mrs. Michael made the decision to stay with the house rather than trying for the window, because only more river awaited them outside, she said.

But the bed was beginning to float, and the couple had no higher place to go.

"Then, the entire room opened up," leading to a crack in the ceiling, Michael said.

They used the opportunity to climb into the small attic through the opening, having only a flashlight to guide them.

"I just gripped it like death," Mrs. Michael said of the flashlight.

Soon they were sitting among the attic timbers with their feet dangling in the still-rising water, Michael said.

Michael noticed the roof insulation bobbing up and down, and when he peeled it away, the dog Vickie, whom they'd lost sight of, scrambled into the attic with them.

Then the house disintegrated.

"The whole end of the house fell," he said.

Clinging to the roof, man, woman and dog were swept downstream.

"We just floated down the river like in a boat," Michael said.

The roof debris wrapped around a walnut tree, virtually the only thing remaining above water level, and the two used the roof rafters to reach the one limb strong enough to hold them. The dog also tried to survive, clutching a log lodged against the tree, he said.

"I just kept thinking, 'It has to go down, it has to go down,'" Michael said. "Instead it came up."

The remaining roof shattered, and the Michaels saw their automobiles heading downstream in the torrent. Michael managed to hold onto the dog for about two hours, but then she washed away, he said.

At 4 a.m. Nov. 5, several hours after the waters began rising, the rain stopped and the moon appeared, casting a glow over the area. Michael saw the dog alive, holding onto some nearby debris.

At 8 a.m., a friend spotted them and returned with help. Using a canoe, the rescuers were able to get the Michaels from the tree, with some frightening moments along the way.

One rescuer jumped from the canoe and tried to wade to the Michaels. But the rushing current had gouged huge furrows in the ground, he said.

"He took one step and disappeared," Michael said. The man surfaced, sputtering, and returned to the canoe.

But the Michaels, and their dog, survived. Their home didn't.

"The house was just totally destroyed — gone. Not even a toothbrush," he said.

The Michaels were suffering from hypothermia, and Michael had cut his foot badly. But they came through with no lasting injuries, and with help from the Mennonite Disaster Service, their house has been rebuilt almost exactly as before, he said.

This time, it was built a mile away on a hill.

## Speed Of Approaching Flood Waters Surprised Petersburg Restaurateurs

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Paul Eskridge was using sandbags to try to stifle the encroaching water in his Sites Restaurant in Petersburg at 6:20 p.m. Nov. 4, 1985. He had heard that trailers, logs and other debris had clogged floodwaters upstream of the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River.

Then the river broke loose.



Eskridge

"It was just like a big ocean wave," he said.

A relative, who was helping the sandbagging effort, could actually see the floodwaters begin rising dramatically, Eskridge said.

"He said, 'Oh my God, here it comes,'" Eskridge said.

In the few minutes it took to abandon the restaurant and jump into a truck outside, the water had risen over the truck's headlights. It happened so fast that Eskridge didn't have time to grab his cash register, which was recovered after the flood, he said.

Dollene K.E. Wilson, Eskridge's daughter and assistant manager of the restaurant, said she is still struck sometimes by the astonishing speed with which the waters engulfed the town's business district.

"I almost lost my whole family," she said.

## Call To Evacuate Area Began Storekeeper's Flight For Life

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Kathy Kimble and others were moving items from lower shelves in her Ben Franklin store in Petersburg on Nov. 4, 1985. As the water rose rapidly, Kimble never thought about her life being in danger until a rescue worker told them they absolutely had to leave, she said.



Kimble

Only then did she realize how much the water had risen in a short time. Everyone piled into a truck and drove off as the water threatened to sweep the vehicle off the road.

Up the hill, with the truck still riding in water, they encountered a red traffic signal, even as debris slammed into a nearby bridge and they felt the shuddering.

"We stopped for the stoplight!" Kimble remembered in disbelief.

Then she knew she had to get out of the

vehicle.

"I said, 'I'm not dying in this pickup,'" she said.

They all made it to safety, but the situation had become life-threatening so fast that Kimble had left her pocketbook and safe back in the store.

"We were able to get out, I consider, with just our lives," she said.

After the flood, as Petersburg was trying to emerge from mud and muck, Kimble and her daughter saw a hand sticking out of the debris. They screamed and fled, but the hand turned out to be part of a mannequin from another store, she said.

"They were always looking for bodies. That was the worst part of it," she said. The flood claimed 12 lives in Grant County.

The Flood of 1985 was supposedly a 500-year flood, but that time frame doesn't satisfy Kimble.

"And if I live to be 500, I wouldn't want to see it again," she said.

## THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

### Rescuers Felt 'Helpless' Against Huge Disaster

*Darkness Hampered Evacuation Efforts*

By **DEREK BARR**  
News-Record Staff Writer

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Buddy Kesner and other members of the Petersburg Volunteer Fire Co. tried to rescue as many people as they could during the Flood of 1985. But too many people needed help.

"It was a time that you felt helpless. There were so many people you couldn't get to," Kesner said of the flood that killed 12 people in Grant County on Nov. 4 and 5, 1985.



The fire siren began screaming continuously at 4 p.m. Nov. 4, and firefighters used any vehicles available to warn people to evacuate.

The fire house was inundated, but most of the equipment had been moved. They operated from a parking lot using radios for communication. Still, the darkness and lack of electricity and telephones made things frantic.

#### Kesner

"It was just chaos," said Kesner, who has 40 years experience in the fire company. Because so many firefighters had to save their own families, that further reduced those in the overall rescue effort.

"We were caught short-handed. It was a nightmare really ... The river was making so much sound that you couldn't hear," he said.

Rescue personnel spent the night picking up people hanging onto anything to survive. Firefighters drove trucks as far into the water as possible, then waded, using ropes at times, to reach residents.

"It was an experience you'll never forget," he said.

When the waters receded, Petersburg was a different town.

"We didn't know how bad it was really until the next day ... When daylight came, it just looked like the place had been bombed," he said.

With the immediate danger passed, Kesner and others began pumping one basement after another, "for the ones who had a house left."

The '85 catastrophe completely erased the awe Grant County residents had for the 1949 flood, Kesner said.

"They've forgotten about the '49 flood now, because it was a baby one," he said.

Kesner said he believes another flood equal to 1985's magnitude is possible.

"We're here in the little valley. I feel these mountains protect us from hurricanes and tornadoes, but Old Man River is going to find his source," he said.



News-Record File Photo

Mobile Home crashed into Moorefield home and was in turn crushed by the force of the flood water which deposited a fuel tank and other debris in the street.

National guardsman saws up tree limbs among the debris in Petersburg's business district just after the 1985 flood.

News-Record File Photo



### Flood Rescuers Could Only Wait Through Night

*Lights Were Only Comfort They Could Offer Stranded Flood Victim Until Daybreak*

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Petersburg Volunteer Fire Co. member Johnny W. Helmick remembers sitting by the fire truck with lights flashing during the 1985 flood, listening to Bill Painter screaming but having no way to help him.

"We could hear him hollering. Of course we couldn't do anything till daylight ... And the water was so swift we couldn't get to him in the dark," Helmick said.

Painter clung to a tree all night surrounded by rushing flood waters from the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River in the Cabins area of Grant County.

Firefighters heard him yelling but could not see him in the dark.

The only help they could give was to let the emergency lights spin, hoping he would realize they would get to him as soon as possible, Helmick said.

Painter survived, but his wife Margaret and nine others in the immediate Cabins area perished in the flood.

The next day, a helicopter with a rope ladder was finally able to rescue Painter, Helmick said.

"They plucked him right out of the treetop," he said.

Rescuers saved an elderly woman

who had not left her Petersburg home. The fire truck was backed in, and firefighters waded through the water and carried her out, he said.

Helmick had been working in Moorefield, W.Va., that day, and barely made it back to Grant County through the Petersburg Gap area ahead of rising waters.

"I just got home and that was it," he said.

Helmick said the flood is not something that can be easily forgotten.

"I don't think anybody had any idea it would get that high ... For a lot of people, I don't think they'll ever forget it," he said.



# THE FLOOD: Ten Years Later

## Eight Feet of Water Left Eight Inches Of Mud In W.Va. Restaurant

By **DEREK BARR**  
News-Record Staff Writer

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Sandbagging couldn't keep the relentless river from flooding Paul Eskridge's Sites Restaurant on Nov. 4, 1985. The water reached 8 feet, 4 inches and left about eight inches of mud on everything.

Tables and chairs from the restaurant were found a mile away. A huge log had lodged in the building and had to be sawed into pieces for removal. A 20-by-70-foot side building was completely washed away.

A 15-foot hole full of water had formed next to the restaurant, and the kitchen's big sinks were packed with mud.

Family, employees and strangers all pitched in the cleanup effort. Eskridge said the employees were practically as eager to resume work as he was.

"I mean to tell you they were wanting to get back," he said.

The restaurant reopened on Jan. 10, two months and six days after the flood. The damage was estimated at \$140,000.

Eskridge said anyone not in the flood could never understand what it was like.

"I think it's hard for some of the local people to believe," he said.

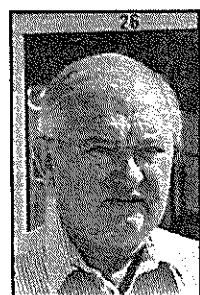


News-Record File Photo

## Flood 'Took Everything' At Car Dealership

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — New cars in the showroom of Keith Wolfe's Petersburg Motor Car Co. floated to the ceiling and came back to earth during the Nov. 4, 1985, flood, some so laden with mud that their tires burst.

"It took everything," Wolfe said, but he added that the vehicles were insured.



Wolfe

A three-ton safe was pushed through a wall and landed face-down. It had to be cut open. The irony was that so many people had lost vehicles that they immediately looked to the car dealership, Wolfe said.

"People really needed automobiles at that time," he said.

Using everybody he could hire to get things back in shape and with the help of several volunteers, the dealership was able to hold its Christmas party in the building on Dec. 12. Wolfe said the recovery was swift.

"It was an unbelievably short time for that amount of damage," he said.

The tragedy of the 12 lives lost in Grant County lingers, and the flood gives county residents a unique empathy for subsequent flood victims, such as in the Midwest, Wolfe said.

"You have to go through it to know what it's like," he said.

But the Grant County community pulled together and formed lasting relationships.

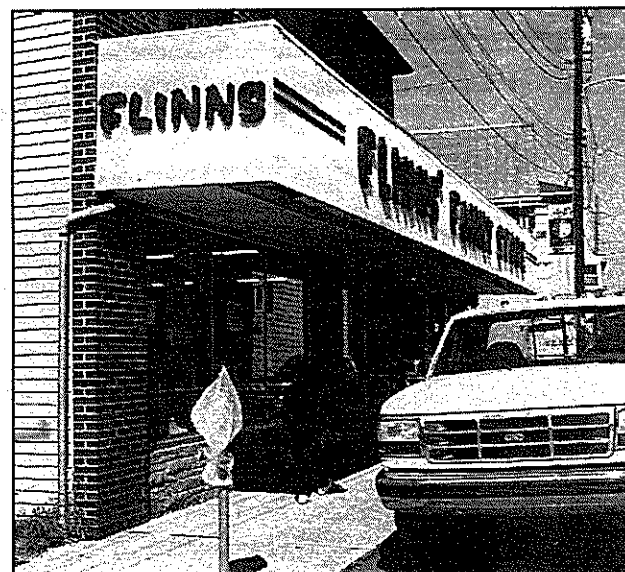
"People worked together and they're still working together," he said.

Although the business bounced back from more than \$150,000 damage, Wolfe said he would not have such resiliency with another tragedy like the '85 flood.

"I'd just walk out, period," he said.

Flinns Family Store was one of many in downtown Petersburg, W.Va., that required heavy equipment (top photo) to move mud and debris away from the building.

Flinns store as it looks in 1995.



News-Record Photo by Allen Litten

## Flood's Fury Destroyed Christmas Merchandise

PETERSBURG, W.Va. — Kathy Kimble's efforts to move merchandise to higher shelves in her Ben Franklin store were utterly useless on Nov. 4, 1985. Floodwaters reached almost 10 feet through the building, rushing with incredible force.

"Everything was destroyed. We weren't able to save anything . . . It was just like a child taking his hand and sweeping everything out of a playhouse," she said. The recovery began immediately, but finding heavy equipment to push away debris was difficult. Everyone else had the same need, said Kimble, who had only owned the store since 1981.

Three months passed before Ben Franklin was back in business. All of her employees helped clean the building, but all-new fixtures and merchandise had to be ordered. The store had received a load of Christmas items just before the flood hit, and they were all destroyed. The powerful current slammed mercilessly through the structure.

"It was terrible, the things that were going through there. It's hard to believe the fury," she said. The flood caused more than \$400,000 damage.



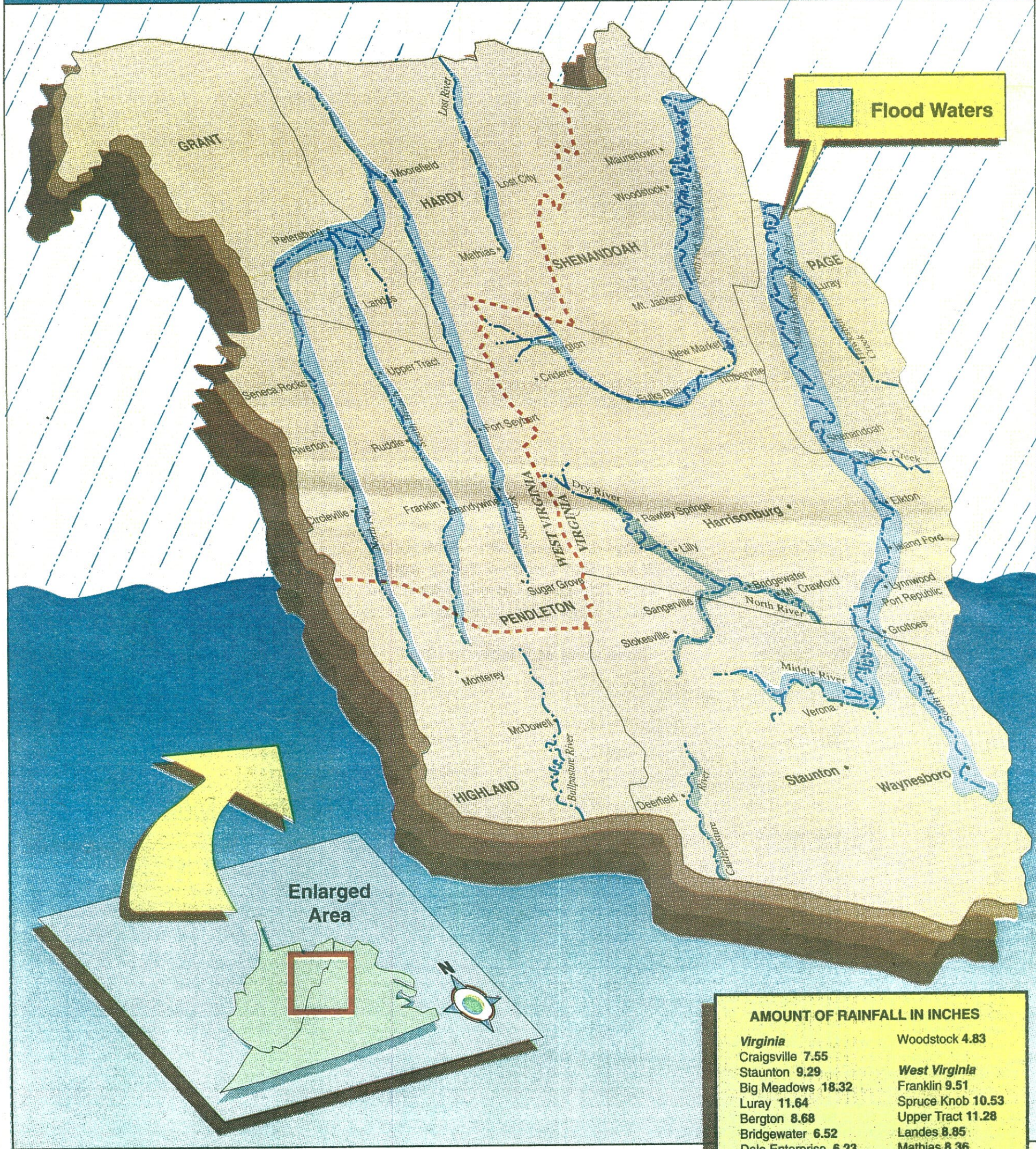
Ben Franklin Store in 1985.

Two employees spent days using blow-dryers on paper work caught in the flood, Kimble said. Strangers would appear, work all day and then disappear, with Kimble never seeing them again.

Kimble said she prefers not to remember the flood. "When it was over, I just didn't want to think about it anymore," she said.



# Map of 1985 Flood Waters



AMOUNT OF RAINFALL IN INCHES	
<b>Virginia</b>	Woodstock 4.83
Craigsville 7.55	
Staunton 9.29	<b>West Virginia</b>
Big Meadows 18.32	Franklin 9.51
Luray 11.64	Spruce Knob 10.53
Bergton 8.68	Upper Tract 11.28
Bridgewater 6.52	Landes 8.85
Dale Enterprise 6.23	Mathias 8.36
Timberville 4.59	Moorefield 4.43