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## Chapter VI

### TALES OF FLOODS AND DISASTERS

The Kansas River basin is one of the most fertile and productive regions of our country. The heart of the grain belt is located in this area. And it is also a region known for extensive vegetable growing and livestock raising. The great basin and its tributaries drain over 60,000 square miles. Sixteen per cent of this land is in Colorado, 28 per cent in Nebraska and 56 per cent in Kansas.<sup>1</sup>

Tuttle Creek Lake History - <http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/tuttlecreek/history.htm>

Brief History of Kansas Water Planning

[http://www.kwo.org/Reports/KWOFactSheets/No\\_24\\_Brief\\_History\\_KS\\_Water\\_Planning\\_.pdf](http://www.kwo.org/Reports/KWOFactSheets/No_24_Brief_History_KS_Water_Planning_.pdf)

Flood Photos - <http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/projects/7levees/flood-photos.htm>

Kansas Timeline - <http://www.ukans.edu/heritage/owk/128/lineoftime.html>

The major river of the basin is the Kaw or Kansas River. The Kaw is formed in Geary County near Junction City by the union of the Republic and Smoky Hill rivers. From this origin, the Kaw flows 169 winding miles or approximately 135 miles in a straight line to its mouth on the Missouri River at Kansas City. The Kaw River drains 5,554 square miles of territory. The Blue River, the largest tributary, drains 9,600 square miles in east central Nebraska and Kansas. Another large branch, the Republic River, drains 25,000 miles in western Kansas, western Nebraska and eastern Colorado. Finally, the Smoky Hill River, with its tributaries the Solomon and Saline rivers, drains another 20,000 square miles of central and western Kansas.<sup>2</sup>

The Kaw (Kansas) River - [http://www.ku.edu/heritage/for\\_nancy/kaw-cam.html](http://www.ku.edu/heritage/for_nancy/kaw-cam.html)

The Blue River - <http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/projects/blueriver/history.htm>

The Solomon River - <http://www.glenelder.com/lakehistory.htm>

The Saline River - [http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1935/35\\_2\\_root.htm](http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1935/35_2_root.htm)

The Smoky Hill River - [http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1935/35\\_1\\_root.htm](http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1935/35_1_root.htm)

The Missouri River - [http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1933/33\\_1\\_root.htm](http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1933/33_1_root.htm)

Much of the lowlands of these river valleys is susceptible to periodic floods. Generally, the rivers reach what is considered flood stage about every two years. Before the numerous flood control projects were completed, the flood of severe proportions occurred about every five years.<sup>3</sup> The metropolitan Kansas City area is particularly vulnerable to floods. Large areas of both cities are situated in the lowlands of the Kaw and Missouri rivers. A heavy concentration of manufacturing and wholesale interests, stockyards, meat packing plants, mills, factories, and railroad yards begin in the Argentine vicinity and continue up both banks of the Kaw to its mouth. Then it follows the west bank of the Missouri River and spreads out upon the level lands northeast of downtown Kansas City, Missouri. This area received the full fury of the great flood of July, 1951.

Outstanding floods took place in Kansas prior to 1951. There were reports of heavy flooding along the Kaw in 1826, 1844, 1858, 1867, 1877, 1903, and 1935. Lesser floods of some importance occurred in 1904, 1908, 1909, 1915, 1927, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945 and 1947.<sup>4</sup>

Floods - <http://www.kclibrary.org/resources/sc/subject.cfm?SubjectID=1032>

Kansas Historical Quarterly - <http://www.kshs.org/publicat/khq/khqlist.htm>

USGS – Kansas Big Water - <http://ks.water.usgs.gov/Kansas/pubs/presentations/flood.1951.pdf>

Many meteorologists believe that the flood of 1844 may have been the greatest flood of all, even surpassing that of 1951. Unfortunately, few accounts of the flood survive. Kansas and much of Missouri was

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth S. Davis, River on the Rampage (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1953), pp. 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>3</sup> Kansas Board of Engineers Report of the Board, Report on Flood Protection in the Kansas River Basin for the Kansas Industrial Development Commission (Topeka, KS: State Printing Office, 1957), p. 15

<sup>4</sup> Davis, River on the Rampage, p. 134

inhabited by only traders and Indians at that time. A known act is that the flood of 1844 was caused by extensive and prolonged rains over a wide area. Early accounts told of up to twenty-seven inches of rain falling in parts of Kansas during May and June of that year. The Reverend Jonathan Meeker, a missionary, mentions in his diary almost continuous rainfall from May 7 through June 10.<sup>5</sup>

A meteorologist, Mr. S. D. Flora, made a thorough study of this flood. Mr. Flora was the head of the US Weather Bureau in Topeka from 1917-1949. His findings indicated that from Manhattan to below Lawrence, the flood of 1844 was as much as five to six and a half feet higher than the flood levels reached by the flood of 1951. However, Mr. Flora points out that "a small difference in the distribution of the heavy rains from July 10 through July 12, 1951 and their continuation for one day longer would in all probability have produced a flood equal to that of 1844."<sup>6</sup>

1903, 1951 and 1993 floods in Kansas –

[http://ks.water.usgs.gov/Kansas/waterwatch/03\\_and\\_93\\_floods/galleria.html](http://ks.water.usgs.gov/Kansas/waterwatch/03_and_93_floods/galleria.html)

No known high water marks of the 1844 flood are left in the Argentine or of Kansas City, Kansas area. But prior to 1920, there was a definite high water mark out in the stone of one of the piers of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway bridge across the Missouri River in Kansas City, Missouri. This water mark was estimated at thirty-eight feet by Army Engineers. By comparison the crest of 1951 flood on the Missouri River at Kansas City was thirty-six feet from five to seven A.M. July 14.<sup>7</sup>

Until 1951, the flood of 1903 was the greatest flood officially recorded along the Kansas River Valley. This flood was the result of a great storm front that dumped over seventeen inches of rain in parts of Kansas. Over two-thirds of the state received between eight to seventeen inches of rain. This rainfall exceeded the normal precipitation for the month by about eight inches in some areas.<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, just two years earlier, at about the same time of year, the Kansas plains and much of the Southwest had suffered through a severe corn and grass failure. Sufficient rains failed to come all summer. Ninety days of drought afflicted the Great Plains. Panicky farmers hurried their cattle to market. The rains came just in time and were adequate enough to insure only a sub-par yield for the year. Many agricultural experts believed it would take years for the area to recover. In 1902, however, the farm belt responded with a banner harvest. The spring rains came at the proper time and in sufficient quantities.<sup>9</sup>

Kansas were not so fortunate in the spring of 1903. Heavy rainfall began in western Kansas during the first part of May. In the central and eastern parts of Kansas, the rainfall was far heavier. More rainfall fell in ten days than some locales received in almost a year.<sup>10</sup>

By May 26, the Kaw River had overflowed her banks above Lawrence. Downstream at Kansas City the waters continued to rise. On June 1, a stage of thirty-five feet above the low level mark and fourteen above what was considered the danger level was reached. The last twenty-four hours showed an enormous rise of 7.6 feet on the gauge. This was within a few feet above the estimated mark of the 1844 flood.<sup>11</sup>

Little damage occurred in the Missouri River Valley above Kansas City. But the valley of the Kaw was devastated. Damage in the valley was estimated at over \$10,000,000.<sup>12</sup> The greater Kansas City area suffered an additional \$22,000,000 worth of damage.<sup>13</sup>

The flood came to Kansas City, Kansas, Friday, May 30. Dwellers in the Armourdale section and in the town of Argentine began to leave their homes. By Saturday, one story buildings were submerged. During Sunday, the Kaw ignored a usually winding channel and rushed directly across the west bottoms into Kansas

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<sup>5</sup> US Dept of the Interior, Water Resources Div, Geological Water Supply Survey Paper, Kansas-Missouri Floods of July, 1951 (US Dept of the Interior, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1952), p. 224

<sup>6</sup> S.D. Flora, "The Great Flood of 1844 Along the Kansas and Marais des Cygnes Rivers," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XX (May, 1952), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 80

<sup>8</sup> Phil E. Chappell, "Floods in the Missouri River," Kansas Historical Quarterly, X (1907-08), 560.

<sup>9</sup> "The Kansas City Flood Edition," The New Empire Magazine for the Homeseeker and Investor, June, 1903, p. 19

<sup>10</sup> Chappell, "Floods in the Missouri River," p. 560

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 561

<sup>13</sup> Rufus Terral, The Missouri Valley, Land of Drought, Flood and Promise (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 88

City, Missouri. Many people were forced to remain where the floods had overtaken them. Some people lodged in trees and on telephone poles from Sunday afternoon until late on Monday.

Stockyards, industries, warehouses, packing plants, and everything else in the lowlands between the two rivers were flooded by up to ten feet of water. City water works were cut off as were gas and electricity over much of the two cities.

The railroad yards were particularly hard hit. At 12 A.M. water began to pour into the Santa Fe Roundhouse in the Argentine Yards. Officials frantically had employees erect sandbags, but to no avail.<sup>14</sup> Disaster also struck at the main depot. Several feet of water slammed into Union Depot in Kansas City, Missouri. No trains were running from both cities for many days. Eight thousand freight cars were submerged.<sup>15</sup>

Water ran ten feet deep in some areas of Argentine. Many streets were blocked by wreckage piled twenty to thirty feet high. Many homes in the Argentine and Armourdale area were washed off their foundations and turned upon their sides or roofs. Sofas and chairs were sticking out of windows. The corners were torn out of many brick and wood frame buildings by smaller houses washing against them. In some areas, whole blocks were washed away. Near 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Kansas Avenue, a wagon was hurled against a house with such force that the end of the house was splintered off and left the wagon clinging in the wreckage. Another home was suspended between two houses by telephone wires. One man returned home to find a dead horse in his parlor.<sup>16</sup>

Many people lost all or most of their belongings in the flood's wake. Merchants saw most of their merchandise ruined. What was left, they tried to unload at any price, which was tellingly reported in one West Bottoms sign: "A \$600 piano for \$.10."<sup>17</sup>

Many years later, one woman wrote an account in part of which she viewed a result of the flood on the basis of her moral assessment. At the time of the flood she lived on Cheyenne Street near 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Armourdale. She recalled that...

.... Several days before the flood struck, all saloons threw their doors open wide to the public with everything they had in stock free as they had nowhere to move it to and didn't want it wasted. The town drunks almost drowned themselves literally, taking advantages of the chance of a lifetime. After getting soused to the gunwales, they would wander off to lie down somewhere in weeds or the gutter to sleep it off. Some had to be rescued to keep from drowning, and no doubt some actually did drown, but were no great loss to the community or their long suffering families either.<sup>18</sup>

For all the suffering, the death toll was relatively light. The loss of life totaled only fifteen in both cities.<sup>19</sup> However, of a total population in Kansas City, Kansas of 60,000, over 20,000 people were forced to leave their homes.<sup>20</sup>

When the waters receded, the cleanup work was staggering. Four feet of solid mud covered much of Argentine and Armourdale. Some two story buildings had as much as four inches of mud upstairs.<sup>21</sup>

In 1903, Argentine had a population of more than 6,500 people. One-third of them lived in the hills while the rest lived in the Kaw River bottoms.<sup>22</sup> Twenty-five hundred of the town's dwellers were forced to flee their homes.<sup>23</sup> From Spear Avenue to the bluffs in the east, the Kaw River was one mile

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<sup>14</sup> Kansas City Star, May 29, 1903, p. 1

<sup>15</sup> Davis, River on the Rampage, p. 134

<sup>16</sup> "The Kansas City Flood Edition," The New Empire Magazine, p. 17

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>18</sup> Freida Merle Graybill Imes, "The Flood of 1903" (unpublished paper found in the Kansas Collection of the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library, 1972), p. 11

<sup>19</sup> "The Kansas City Flood Edition," The New Empire Magazine, p. 5

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 18

<sup>21</sup> Freida Merle Graybill Imes, "The Flood of 1903," p. 26

<sup>22</sup> Kansas City Star, May 30, 1903, p. 1

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., June 1, 1903, p. 1

wide. Except for a road winding through the hills to the Rosedale community, Argentine was almost completely isolated.<sup>24</sup>

The high Missouri River had acted as a dam and backed the Kaw up to Muncie, Kansas. Nineteen bridges over the Kaw River were washed out. The only bridge that was left standing was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Viaduct Bridge. The local superintendent of the railroad, in an effort to weigh down the structure, loaded the bridge with every locomotive it would hold and anchored others to the bridge's support beams. Forty-four locomotives were used. Yet, he nearly lost his job since the value of the locomotives was greater than that of the bridge.<sup>25</sup> His courage, however, provided the only link across the flooded river for many days. Soldiers and engineers from Fort Leavenworth eventually built pontoon bridges at all points where the original bridges stood. Planks were nailed over boats. Some of these planks were only twenty feet wide, with no railings and only one foot above the water level.<sup>26</sup>

The Fort Leavenworth soldiers also performed other duties. They worked in rescue and cleanup operations. Soldiers also protected property against looters. Stationed at intervals, they were under orders to shoot anyone failing to obey orders to halt or to show passes.<sup>27</sup>

As soon as the water levels receded, cleanup operations began in the two Kansas Cities. Large amounts of money, food and clothing were donated to flood relief funds. Despite heavy financial losses, the communities made a fairly rapid recovery. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the town of Argentine. Even before the flood, the community was laboring under great difficulties and possessed little genuine optimism for the future. The community was in a near financial depression and the city treasury was depleted. The silver smelter, by far the town's largest employer, had closed in 1901. Many men were at least temporarily out of work. The Structural Steel Company of Howard Fitch and O. C. Smith was not yet in existence and would not be established in Argentine until 1907. The flood could not have come at a less opportune time. To make matters worse, flood relief for this area was almost non-existent for some time. Donations were divided totally among the stricken communities of Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. The independent town of Argentine was unintentionally ignored. Dr. D. E. Clopper, Argentine's mayor, pleaded for urgent relief. He said:

. . . Argentine is not in a position to refuse any contribution, however small. We were not in the best of shape before the flood and now our situation is serious. More than 3,000 of our people, out of a population of 7,000, are homeless. The 4,000 who were not driven from their homes are caring for their fellow citizens and for nearly 1,000 Armourdale refugees as well. Proportionally our burden is heavier than that of any other city in the flooded district.

The flood came as the last incident in a long chapter of calamities. Our troubles started with a railroad strike in 1894. In the bank failure of 1896, the city lost \$22,000. The Treasurer of the city ran away with \$18,000 in 1897. The smelter closed down in 1901 and a payroll of \$20,000 a month ceased. The smallpox epidemic of 1902-03 cost the city \$5,000.

There are as many people in Argentine now as in former years. Those who were thrown out of employment found work in Kansas City, Missouri and in the packing houses of Armourdale. Many of these may be idle for some time and they must be cared for.

Further than that, the flood has left the sewers clogged, the streets in the flooded district impassable, the sidewalks washed away and the water works plant badly damaged. We will need money to make absolutely necessary public improvements and the city hasn't any money.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., May 30, 1903, pg. 2

<sup>25</sup> Joseph H. McDowell, Building a City, A Detailed History of Kansas City, Kansas (Kansas City, KS: The Kansas City Kansan Press, 1962), p. 19

<sup>26</sup> Freida Merle Graybill Imes, "The Flood of 1903," p. 28

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>28</sup> Kansas City Star, June 7, 1903, p. 7

A group of prominent Argentine citizens also issued a plea which was printed in the Kansas City Star. They said:

Four thousand of our people are made homeless by this awful flood and with an additional 1,200 from Armourdale which we have cared for without any assistance except for a few provisions and clothes from Rosedale and Kansas City, Missouri and a small donation of \$69 in cash paid by citizens from \$1 on up. The point we wish to make clear is this: We have 4,000 sufferers and the city is composed entirely of poor men, and with a depleted city treasury, and the streets and alleys covered with a slime from one to three feet deep, and sewers all clogged, we must have assistance in a financial way to put our city in a sanitary condition or abandon it all together.<sup>29</sup>

The appeals were successful. Employees of the Kansas City Star made an immediate \$200 contribution.<sup>30</sup> Money, food and clothing soon arrived in Argentine. The Argentine community made a slow recovery.

Nature dealt the small city another severe blow one year later. In July heavy rains again fell in the Kansas River watershed. The Kaw Valley experienced another flood. This flood was not nearly as severe. The Kaw River at Kansas City crested 27.5 feet compared to the 35 feet of the flood the preceding year.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, parts of Lawrence and North Topeka were flooded. In Argentine and the Armourdale and West Bottoms of Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri, the same area overflowed in 1903 was again covered by water ranging in depth from one to ten feet.<sup>32</sup> Two-thirds of Armourdale and one-third of Argentine were flooded. Five thousand people abandoned their homes.<sup>33</sup>

In Argentine, the Kaw began raising rapidly around midnight, July 6. By noon of the next day, the lowlands of Argentine were flooded.<sup>34</sup> The Santa Fe Railroad Depot was surrounded by water. The railroad yards and the roundhouses were under water. All of North Argentine was also flooded.

For two days, the waters continued to rise. By July 8, 1904, Argentinians were homeless. On that Friday morning, the business district along Spear and Strong Avenues was under as much as eight feet of water. Water extended as far west as Adams Avenue approximately a quarter of a mile away. The community was again almost isolated. The only means of communication with the city was by one telephone wire of the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company. Just two miles to the west, the town of Turner, with its 800 inhabitants, was a virtual island in a sea.<sup>35</sup>

The waters quickly subsided. Damages were light in comparison with the 1903 catastrophe. Within a short time, the city was back to normal.

But for two consecutive years, the metropolitan Kansas City area had been devastated. Concerned citizens felt the need for the building of a protective dike system. In 1905, the Kaw Valley Commercial Club urged the Kansas legislature to establish a drainage system.<sup>36</sup> Public support seemed to back this movement. Flood control plans were proposed. Soon, however, the cost of the plans began to worry many citizens. Endless legislative debates eliminated a chance for any immediate action. Plans were rejected and the public apparently grew disinterested. The issue of flood control was forgotten.

An old Czech proverb says, "Misfortunes always come in by a door that has been left open for them." Yet another flood struck the Kaw Valley in the late spring and early summer of 1908. This deluge was unusual in that veteran observers of the river did not expect a major flood. Heavy rains had fallen in May and early June, but apparently not enough to constitute a serious threat. Even T. B. Jennings, US Weather Observer in Topeka, emphasized that the valley was in no danger of high water.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kansas City Star, June 8, 1903, p. 2

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> The reader should bear in mind that the water level is designated in the number of feet that the river is above what is considered the normal low level mark. For instance, the reading of the 1903 flood was 35 feet above this mark.

<sup>32</sup> Chappell, "Floods in the Missouri River," p. 562.

<sup>33</sup> Kansas City Star, July 8, 1904, p. 1

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, July 6, 1904, p. 1

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, July 8, 1904, p. 6

<sup>36</sup> Chappel, "Floods in the Missouri River," p. 561

<sup>37</sup> Kansas City Times, June 6, 1908, p. 1

The flood of 1908 was an oddity in another aspect. This flood reached a crest and receded. Just when the peril seemed over and the harm done, heavy rains fell upstream. The Kansas River once again steadily rose and was to reach an even higher crest.

The initial flood crest reached Kansas City by June 8.<sup>38</sup> Armourdale and North Argentine were deserted. Anticipating a disaster equal to those of past years, the inhabitants of the lowlands of Armourdale and Argentine evacuated their dwellings. Fortunately, unlike the rapidity of past floods, the Kaw River rose slowly. Residents had ample time to carry out much of their valuables. Wagon load after wagon load was piled high with goods. Merchants of endangered sections were able to remove or give away much of their merchandise. One hundred Santa Fe employees erected sandbags in the railroad yards. Two hundred box cars were sent to safety in Ottawa.<sup>39</sup>

Some parts of Kansas were to receive more rainfall than prior to the great flood of 1903. By June 10, the Kaw had crested at Kansas City. Most of the railroad boarding houses in Argentine were flooded. The parts of Argentine between 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Manville Avenue and between Metropolitan and Strong Avenue were under water.<sup>40</sup>

The Kaw River slowly began to fall. The crest of the flood was 28.5 feet, which was reached Thursday night, June 11. By ten o'clock on Friday, the river had fallen over three feet to a 25.2 reading.<sup>41</sup> Some people began to move back to their homes. Plans were drawn for the cleanup operations.

Suddenly, as swiftly as the river fell, it rose again. Heavy rains began falling throughout Kansas. Swollen tributaries dumped their waters into the Kaw. The river again flooded parts of Topeka and Lawrence. Worried citizens downstream again left their homes. Cleanup operations were terminated.

Heavy rains fell from June 13 through July 15. A new flood rocked Argentine and Armourdale, as the river again spilled her banks. The new crest was even higher. At 2:00 a.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, the Kaw River reached a new crest of 29.7 feet. This mark was more than a foot higher than the high water mark of June 11. Thus, the flood of 1908 was actually two floods, with the second one occurring only about a month after the first. The author was unable to find any property damage estimates for 1908. The total damage was far less than May of 1903 and the flood of July of 1904.

This flood, in terms of flood crest, achieved third place, ranking behind the floods of 1844 and 1903. By comparison, the crest of the destructive 1904 flood was a foot and a half lower.

This time Kansas Citizens had learned a hard lesson. In 1910, the Kaw Valley Drainage District was formed and began operations. Bonds amounting to \$1,750,000 were passed for flood control. By 1911, protective dikes were built from the mouth of the Kaw River to Turner, Kansas.

One man was perhaps as influential as any other person in getting major flood control measures adopted. His name was Willard J. Breidenthal, a resident of Kansas City, Kansas. He was a banker and was prominent in civic affairs for many years.<sup>42</sup>

This man acquired an interest in flood control at an early age. He was a witness to the 1903 and subsequent floods. In fact, the high waters of the 1903 flood prevented him from keeping a date with the young woman who later became his wife.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1930's, Breidenthal became the chairman of the Greater Kansas City Flood Protection and Planning Committee. This was about the same time that the National Resources Board was organized by President Roosevelt. Breidenthal and his committee went to this organization for financial support. The President's Board promised to ensure Federal backing if the local interests came up with a flood control plan.<sup>44</sup>

Breidenthal and his associates enlisted the support of Frederick H. Fowler and associates of California. This was an engineering firm noted for its water control projects. The firm was paid \$50,000 to draw up a flood control plan. In 1934, the engineers presented a report that was endorsed by Army Engineers and the National Resources Board. The flood control plan for the Missouri River Valley was submitted to the US Congress.<sup>45</sup> In 1935 and 1936 the first flood control legislation was passed. By the end of 1939, work was

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<sup>38</sup> Kansas City Star, June 8, 1908, p. 1

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, June 10, 1908, p. 6

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, June 13, 1908, p. 1

<sup>42</sup> McDowell, Building a City, A Detailed History of Kansas City, Kansas, p. 19

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

begun on the Fort Peck Dam on the upper reaches of the Missouri River.<sup>46</sup> Other projects were soon under construction. World War II came, these projects were developed in an orderly manner.

Fort Peck Dam: <http://www.fortpeckdam.com/>

Fort Peck Project History: <http://www.usbr.gov/dataweb/html/fortpeck.html>

Fort Peck Dam: <http://www.walleyesunlimited.com/adopt-fish/fortpeckdam.html>

Missouri River Headwaters (Jefferson, Madison, Gallitan): <http://www.ohwy.com/mt/m/missourr.htm>

The outbreak of war forced the suspension of construction. Thus, the years 1942-45 were a period of inactivity in so far as flood control works were concerned. Heavy flooding happened in the Missouri River basin during the war. Limited maintenance and major flood damage resulted in the loss of a large amount of the flood control works then completed. Severe floods occurred from 1942 through 1945 and in 1947. The 1943 flood caused an estimated \$65,000,000 worth of damage. An even more damaging flood of 1947 caused over \$111,000,000 damage.<sup>47</sup>

The Missouri River Ecosystem: <http://books.nap.edu/books/0309083141/html/11.html#pagetop>

The cry again rose for protection against destructive floods. Fifty-five million dollars were spent during 1945 for levees on the Missouri River and her tributaries.<sup>48</sup> This was hardly an adequate beginning. In 1943, however, Lieutenant General Lewis Pick of the Army Corps of Engineers formulated an extensive flood control plan for the Missouri River basin and submitted it to Congress. About the same time, W. G. Sloan, head of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, also submitted a plan to Congress. Congress debated the Sloan and Pick plans. Both proposals deserved merit. Finally Congress decided to combine both plans into one. The subsequent Pick-Sloan Plan was to entail a massive system of levees and flood control dams.

Lieutenant General Lewis A. Pick: [http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/history/vignettes/vignette\\_11.htm](http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/history/vignettes/vignette_11.htm)

Army Corps of Engineers: <http://www.usace.army.mil/>

Bureau of Reclamation: <http://www.usbr.gov/main/>

Funds were appropriated and by 1948 numerous dams and reservoirs were under construction. One such reservoir was Kanopolis Lake. This lake is located on the Smoky Hill River approximately thirty miles southwest of Salina, Kansas. Kanopolis was the first of the Kansas River Basin lakes. It was completed in 1948 at a cost of about \$12,000,000.<sup>49</sup>

Lakes and Reservoirs in Kansas: <http://ks.water.usgs.gov/Kansas/waterdata/climate/reservoir.html>

Such an endeavor was a step in the right direction. Unfortunately several factors were to retard the development of the flood control systems. Our nation's political situation intensified and federal monies designated for the Pick-Sloan Plan began to be diverted to other government agencies. Defense appropriations again took a huge bite out of the federal budget.

Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program: <http://www.usbr.gov/dataweb/html/psmbp.html>

Other factors had an effect on the Pick-Sloan Program. Local interest groups began to fight against flood control measures. Farmers, whose lands were to be flooded, organized powerful lobbies to represent their interests in Congress. Particularly stiff opposition was encountered in the Manhattan, Kansas area. This was the site of the proposed Tuttle Creek Dam, which was to be built on the Big Blue River, a tributary of the Kaw. The little Swedish community of Mariadahl, twenty miles north of Manhattan, lay in the path of the proposed lake.<sup>50</sup> Resistance was encountered from these residents as well as from other farmers up and down the valley.

Their cause had some merit at that time as there was a controversy over the building of the big dams as opposed to soil conservation practices and smaller dams. Big dam advocates claimed that only the building of large reservoirs could prevent the flooding of the major tributaries.

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<sup>46</sup> Davis, River on the Rampage, p. 134

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 135

<sup>49</sup> US Army Corps of Engineers, Report of the Corps, Kansas Water Resource Development (Dallas, Texas: US Army Corps of Engineers, Southwestern Division, 1971), p. 28

<sup>50</sup> Davis, River on the Rampage, p. 168

On the other hand, small dam advocates claimed that a cheaper and better system could be built by using little dams and modern techniques of soil and water conservation. Perhaps Elmer T. Peterson, then the Associate Editor of the Daily Oklahoman-Oklahoma Times, summed up this point of view best:

. . . Take the Army Engineers stubborn determination to build a great dam at Tuttle Creek on the Blue River of Kansas to help protect Manhattan, Topeka and Kansas City. This flood protection would itself flood 55,000 acres of fertile farmland along with several beautiful villages. Permanently lost would be an area which produces more than \$6,000,000 worth of crops a year.<sup>51</sup>

The heated controversy was to reach the United States Congress. After a series of debates, Congress decided to temporarily shelve several reservoir projects, one of which was the Tuttle Creek Dam. Small dam advocates had won the first round. But they would lose the fight, for the Kansas River Alley was about to be dealt a devastating blow by a great flood.

Tuttle Creek Dam History: <http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/tuttlecreek/history.htm>

KCStar article: [http://www.kcstar.com/item/pages/story\\_local/3accf509.907,.html](http://www.kcstar.com/item/pages/story_local/3accf509.907,.html)

The Kansas and Missouri River flood of July, 1951, is considered the greatest flood and perhaps the greatest natural disaster in our nation's history. Damages compiled by the Army Corps of Engineers totaled over \$870,000,000 along the river basins of the Kaw, Missouri, Marais des Cygnes, and Osage. Red Cross statistics showed that nineteen people lost their lives.<sup>52</sup> Heavy flooding occurred throughout the Mississippi River basin during that month of July. Total flood damages came to 41 killed; 350,000 left homeless and an estimated \$2,500,000,000 property damage.<sup>53</sup>

The reader can comprehend the magnitude of this calamity by a comparison with other disasters in our country's past. For instance, the San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire took hundreds of lives yet resulted in only \$500,000,000 damage. The New York City fire of 1835 caused \$20,000,000. The more famous Chicago fire of 1871 destroyed 18,000 buildings and caused \$196,000,000 damage.<sup>54</sup> Finally, on April 16, 1947, an explosion and fire in Texas City, Texas killed 575, injured 3,000 and did \$125,000,000 property damage.<sup>55</sup>

The July, 1951, flood also dwarfs other great floods of our country. The Johnstown, Pennsylvania, flood is one of the most famous. In 1889, spring rains caused the Conemaugh Lake Reservoir to collapse. Over 2,500 people drowned, yet the flood damage was not that extensive.<sup>56</sup> In 1913, the Ohio and Indiana floods killed 732. Missouri River flood damages totaled \$270,000,000 in 1927. Floods and high winds in New England, in 1938, resulted in a toll of 553 dead and missing. Property damage was approximately \$500,000,000.<sup>57</sup>

But enough said for other disasters. The remainder of this chapter will deal with the flood of 1951, which was the greatest disaster to strike the Argentine community, and the resulting flood control projects that were built.

The spring of 1950 was dry in Kansas and throughout the Southwest. On May 5, reminiscent of the Dust Bowl of the 1930's, a dust storm struck Manhattan.<sup>58</sup> Inhabitants of the Great Plains region were fearful of a drought. Fortunately, a drought did not occur that year. Rains came almost at the right time and Kansas again had a bumper crop.

Rather than dry, as the year before, the spring of 1951 was a period of above normal precipitation for Kansas. During May and June, heavy rainfall occurred throughout the state. Normally, the city of Manhattan averages thirty inches of rainfall annually, but this time twenty-one to thirty-eight inches of rain fell during May

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<sup>51</sup> Elmer T. Peterson, "Big Dam Foolishness," The Readers Digest, July, 1952, pp. 63-66

<sup>52</sup> United States Department of the Interior, Water Resources Division, Geological Water Supply Survey Paper, Kansas-Missouri Floods of July 1951 (US Dept of the Interior, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1952), p. 1

<sup>53</sup> "Accidents and Disasters," The New World Family Encyclopedia, 1954, I, 39

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 38

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>56</sup> Hewitt, From Earthquake, Fire and Flood (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 172

<sup>57</sup> "Accidents and Disasters," The New World Family Encyclopedia, p. 39

<sup>58</sup> David, River on the Rampage, p. 19

and June over most of east and central Kansas. The Kaw River, by June 29, was ten and a half feet above flood stage at Manhattan.<sup>59</sup>

The Arkansas River, between Syracuse and Garden City, spilled over her banks following an intense storm on May 15. A cloud burst on May 22 caused the Bg Creek to flood forty-four blocks of Hays. Three people drowned.<sup>60</sup>

Almost every river and stream in Kansas reached flood stage. The June 21 flood on the Delaware River exceeded the height of any previously known flood. Near record flows occurred in Nebraska on the Big Blue River during June. Manhattan and Lawrence were partially flooded during June. The small towns of Solomon, Culver, Tescott, Shady Bend, and Beverly were damaged. Thousands of dollars worth of crops were destroyed.<sup>61</sup>

Flood waters receded during the first week of July as only slight to moderate rains fell. The Kaw River and her tributaries returned to their banks.

On July 9, the rains again fell in torrents over most of the state. On that day, some areas received as much as seven inches of rain.<sup>62</sup> Calculations by the US Weather Bureau showed that at least 16,000 square miles of the Kaw River basin received more than six inches of rain from July 5 through July 13, with amounts as high as 15.5 inches in places.<sup>63</sup> Making the situation worse was the fact that the month of June was the wettest month on record in Kansas. Missouri received only slightly less rain than Kansas. With the exception of one twenty-four hour period on July 2, rains fell in Missouri every day from June 1 through July 13.<sup>64</sup> Much of Kansas also received rainfall of varying amounts on almost forty consecutive days.

The Kansas River again left her banks on July 11, and spread out from bluff to bluff. Fort Riley and Manhattan were the first major urban centers to be flooded. At Manhattan, the main business district and 1,600 homes were under water.<sup>65</sup> At Topeka, 24,000 people evacuated their homes. The industrial districts and railroad yards were especially hard hit. The levees at Lawrence gave away and 1,700 inhabitants were evacuated.<sup>66</sup>

Every city in the Solomon and Saline River Valleys was flooded. Along the Neosho River Basin, severe floods struck Marion, Florence, and Strong City along the Cottonwood River, and at Council Grove, Dunlap, Burlington, Neosho Falls, and Iola along the Neosho River.<sup>67</sup>

Three-fourths of Council Grove was quickly under water as 2,800 people fled the Neosho River. By the morning of July 11, the Neosho River at 29.25 feet and the Cottonwood River at 27 feet were nearing all time heights. Rain measuring 4.8 inches fell the night before at nearby Emporia. In one twenty-four hour period, Cottonwood Falls received 6.05 inches of precipitation, Lebo 4.93, Neosho Rapids 4.5, Osage City 4.35, Lindsborg 4.95, Ottawa 5.26, Beloit 5.43, Barnard 7.75, and Hillsboro 6.64 inches of rainfall.<sup>68</sup>

Many towns were flooded and isolated. In Hartford, where the Neosho and Cottonwood Rivers merged, all of the business district and most of the residential sections were flooded. Iola was flooded by the Neosho River to depths of four to five feet. Burlington was under eight feet of water. Strong City had a large part of its business district flooded. At Emporia, passenger trains with 1,000 passengers were stranded in the city because of flooded track on the city's borders. Meals and housing for their people were found at the College of Emporia and Kansas State Teachers College. The Neosho River was twelve to fifteen miles wide at places and the whole town of Neosho Rapids just fifteen miles southeast of Emporia was under water.<sup>69</sup>

To the reader the list of towns flooded might seem endless. Junction City had between 70-80 city blocks flooded. Most of Salina was flooded. Two hundred families fled their homes. In Abilene, waters reached a depth of four feet deep. Flood waters came into the yard and up the front steps of the Dwight Eisenhower home.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>60</sup> US Department of the Interior, Geological Water Supply Survey Paier, Kansas-Missouri Floods of July, 1951, p. 7

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Davis, River on the Rampage, p. 23

<sup>63</sup> Kansas City Star, Aug 3, 1951, p. 9

<sup>64</sup> Kansas City Times, July 13, 1951, p. 3

<sup>65</sup> US Dept of the Interior, Geological Water Supply Survey Paper, Kansas-Missouri Floods of July, 1951, p. 10

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 11

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>68</sup> Kansas City Star, July 11, 1951, p. 1

<sup>69</sup> Kansas City Times, July 13, 1951, p. 1

<sup>70</sup> Kansas City Times, July 14, 1951, p. 1

Destruction in the Marais des Cygnes River Valley was also extensive. The damage to Ottawa was estimated by the Army Corps of Engineers to equal \$5,537,000. Twelve blocks of businesses were flooded and nearly half of the town's population was forced to move. At Osawatomie, 1,500 out of a total population of 4,500, were evacuated.<sup>71</sup>

Kansas Citizens naturally sympathized with the plight of these towns. But most of the flood stricken areas were over 100 miles away. The danger to Kansas City did not appear imminent. After all, the flood control levees at Kansas City had been erected to a height of thirty-five feet.<sup>72</sup>

Anyway, some of the same people whose homes and farmlands were flooded around the Manhattan area had been some of the greatest opponents of the proposed flood control legislation. Farmers of the Big Blue River Valley had not wanted their lush valley turned into a reservoir. They had blocked for years the Army Engineers' proposal to build the Tuttle Creek Reservoir which the engineers promised would hold enough water to make the Kaw less dangerous. These farmers and their lobbies in Washington, D.C. had managed to kill also every flood control appropriation bill. One of their arguments had been that Tuttle Creek would be built just to protect Topeka, Kansas City, and other big interests. Some Kansas Citizens felt that this might be a cruel lessons for such narrow-minded interests to learn.

Any sarcasm quickly turned to apprehension as the flood crest on the Kaw passed Lawrence, just 27 miles upstream. The Kaw at Kansas City began rising at the rate of seven inches an hour. By the afternoon of July 12, the flood stage reached 30 feet. The dikes at 35 feet were threatened. Scores of families were evacuated from their homes in Argentine, Armourdale, and the Central Industrial District of Kansas City, Kansas.

The following system of alarms was agreed upon by Civil Defense authorities for the residents of Argentine and Armourdale: "A warning of any break in the dikes or an overflow will be given to radio bulletins, the shrieking of police sirens and loud blasts from the whistles of industries in the area."<sup>73</sup>

Argentine prepared for the rising waters. The equipment of the new fire station in Emerson was moved to the old fire station on Silver Avenue. All police were alerted to emergency calls and constant police patrols were maintained in the Argentine area. The Stanley School at 3604 Metropolitan was set up as a refuge center.<sup>74</sup>

Streets in the Armourdale and Argentine district were closed by nightfall of July 13, when surface water backing up from sewers began flooding the intersections of some streets to depths of one to two feet. The Kansas City Structural Steel Company at 2100 Metropolitan was closed down and employees sent home. Water was already entering the plant from backed up sewers.<sup>75</sup>

Hundreds of volunteers and paid workers began placing sandbags on the levees. A crumbling earthen dike gave way west of Turner, Kansas. The Santa Fe Railroads sheep feeding yards at the little town of Morris, Kansas, west of Argentine and Holiday Road three miles west of Argentine were flooded.<sup>76</sup>

Then the dikes in the Argentine area gave away. At 11:45 p.m. the Kaw River splashed over the dike protecting Argentine at the old South Bridge. Water quickly overwhelmed a stone and earth barrier erected a few feet away. Five thousand people fled their homes. Within two hours, much of Argentine was flooded. Fifteen minutes after the break of the dikes, the Kansas City Structural Steel Company was under a foot of water. Strong Avenue, the main business street was under four feet of water. The rise continued along parts of Strong and Metropolitan Avenue until a height of 6-12 feet of water was reached.<sup>77</sup>

Ray J. Stannard, the superintendent of dikes for the New Valley Drainage District, was an eyewitness to the event. He reported that he was at the pump house below the west end of the Old Southern Bridge when the water began to flow over the dikes. Then water flowed, he said, over the Santa Fe Shop yards and into the business district.<sup>78</sup> (Note: When bridges were built across the

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<sup>71</sup> Kansas City Star, July 12, 1951, p. 1

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Kansas City Star, July 13, 1951, p. 1

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

rivers, this eliminated the ferries. In 1858, the first bridge across the Kansas River was built at the crossing of the Santa Fe Road. The toll bridge was known as "The Southern Bridge.)

When the dikes gave way, the warning sounds of police sirens were heard. National Guardsmen picked up evacuees. Some trucks and motor cars on rescue duty were stranded by rising waters. Two National Guard trucks were stranded at 30<sup>th</sup> and Strong Avenue. Eight cars were trapped on the Goddard Avenue Viaduct which spanned the Santa Fe Railroad repair yards. Rescue boats had to be sent to pick up the motorists.<sup>79</sup>

Rescue boats also evacuated people trapped on roofs or in the upper floors of their homes. George Brown, 82 years of age, and seven members of his family were pulled off the roof of his home at 1419 South 31<sup>st</sup> Street.<sup>80</sup>

Only the tops of shade trees in Emerson Park were visible. Water was 12 feet deep in the park. Water covered an area from Ruby Avenue to the Union Pacific tracks. Metropolitan Avenue was covered with flood water up to 32<sup>nd</sup> Street. Water was up to the second floor of all houses in the vicinity of 26<sup>th</sup> and Strong Avenue. A drugstore there was completely covered.<sup>81</sup>

Before the flood, workers frantically piled up merchandise and personal belongings into trucks and cars. Much of what was not removed was later seen floating in the streets. National Guardsmen even reported a house with three people clinging to the roof going downstream in the Argentine district.<sup>82</sup>

Lights in the Argentine district went out about five minutes after the water broke through. Power was restored two hours later. Street lamps, porch lights, and front store lights were soon burning less than a foot above the water.<sup>83</sup>

The Saint John Evangelist Catholic Church at 2930 Strong Avenue in Argentine was inundated by both the 1903 and 1951 floods. A marked block on the southeast corner of the church indicated the height reached by the 1903 flood. This mark was easily surpassed by the flood of 1951. The Reverend William L. Landwehr, pastor, and Reverend John Burdall, assistant pastor, watched the waters of this flood rise. They moved the church records to the second floor of the parsonage. The waters continued to rise around the church. Finally, the two ministers, taking the church records with them, were rescued by boat from a porch roof of the church.<sup>84</sup> Damage to the church was extensive. The churning water nearly reached the top of the altar. Many of the pews were upended or piled on top of one another. The statues on each side of the altar were knocked from their pedestals.<sup>85</sup>

A fire even raged in the midst of the flood in Argentine. A fire started in the McCall Service Station and quickly spread to the Antone Transfer Company at 2415 Metropolitan Avenue. Fire fighters battled waist deep water in efforts to quell the flames. Despite flood waters surrounding the two places, the fire burned out of control for some time.<sup>86</sup>

The flood swept into other parts of Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. Over 9,000 inhabitants of the Armourdale area of Kansas City, Kansas during the night of July 12. The levees on the left bank of the Kaw River protecting Armourdale were topped during the early morning of July 13.<sup>87</sup> Water covered Armourdale to the same depth that it had covered Argentine. Flood waters rose above many rooftops. Industries and businesses, the value of which ran into the hundreds of millions of dollars, were hidden under tons of dirty water and stacks of debris.

A gas oil storage tank in the area floated downstream into some high intensity wires. A huge explosion and fire resulted that engulfed the Phillips and Socony Oil Storage yards resulting in a loss

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<sup>79</sup> ibid

<sup>80</sup> ibid

<sup>81</sup> Kansas City Kansan, July 13, 1951, p. 2

<sup>82</sup> ibid

<sup>83</sup> Kansas City Star, July 13, 1951, p. 1

<sup>84</sup> ibid

<sup>85</sup> Kansas City Star, July 22, 1951, p. 3

<sup>86</sup> Kansas City Star, July 13, 1951, p. 1

<sup>87</sup> US Dept of the Interior, Geological Water Supply Survey Paper, Kansas-Missouri Floods of July, 1951, p. 11

of \$10,000,000.<sup>88</sup> This was the worst fire in Kansas City's history. For five days the fire was out of control. Seven solid blocks of buildings and industries were consumed.<sup>89</sup>

The Central Industrial District was flooded next, shortly after T. P. Cookingham, the city manager of Kansas City, Missouri, had ordered the district evacuated. The stockyards, packing plants, warehouse and manufacturing plants in the area were flooded. Hundreds of cattle and hogs in the stockyards drowned and dead carcasses were floating in the debris. The city water works, after frantic sanding, were barely saved. Total damage in the Central Industrial District came to \$140,000,000.<sup>90</sup>

The Fairfax and Jersey Creek industrial districts of Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, located along the right bank of the Missouri River just above the Kaw's mouth, were flooded. The Fairfax Airport was heavily damaged. Municipal Airport in Kansas City, Missouri was narrowly saved by protective dikes. All air traffic, however, for precautionary measures, was rerouted.

The Kaw River crested near its mouth around noon of July 14.<sup>91</sup> Flood levels of the Kaw varied with depth and width of the river. A record height of 45 feet was reached at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Viaduct. This was ten feet greater than the height reached by the 1903 flood.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps it was even equal to the great flood of 1844.

Statistically, there was little comparison between the 1903 and 1951 floods other than the wide spread damage. Army Corps of Engineers estimated that about 30% of the flood waters came down the Kaw River while the remainder came down the Missouri River. In this flood, however, 85% was estimated to have come down the Kaw.<sup>93</sup> The US Weather Bureau claimed that the damage would have been several times as great if the pattern of rainfall from July 12 through July 14 had been slightly different. During those few days heavy rains fell in Central and South Central Kansas. Much of this water was drained off by the Kaw but important amounts went into the Marais des Cygnes and Neosho Rivers. These flood waters missed the Kansas City area. If the rains had been 50-75 miles farther north in Kansas, virtually all of this rain water would have drained into the Kaw.<sup>94</sup> The reader can further realize the intensity of this great storm by the fact that meteorologists claimed that a storm of such intensity occurred in this part of the country only about once every 100 years.<sup>95</sup>

After the waters receded, much of Argentine and the other flooded areas was covered by a layer of mud several feet thick. As many as 3,000 National Guardsmen aided in the cleanup in the Kansas City area. They also did patrol and guard duty for approximately 60 days. Then, on September 4, the guardsmen were again alerted.<sup>96</sup> The rains had come again. On September 1, the north part of Topeka was again flooded. Eight thousand persons who were flooded out in July 2343 gain forced to seek higher ground. Residents of Argentine and Armourdale were again evacuated. Low lying areas were again flooded. This time, however, the river was only a few feet above flood stage and damage was minimal.<sup>97</sup>

More words by the author cannot express the suffering Argentians were through. Joseph Shalinsky, who operated a drug store at 3475 Strong Avenue, the main street of Argentine, had this to say after his drug store was wiped out:

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Davis, River on the Rampage, p. 24

<sup>90</sup> US Department of the Interior, Geological Water Supply Survey Paper, Kansas-Missouri Floods of July, 1951, p. 11

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>92</sup> Kansas City Kansan, July 13, 1951, p. 1

<sup>93</sup> Kansas City Star, Aug 3, 1951, p. 9

<sup>94</sup> Ibid

<sup>95</sup> Kansas Board of Engineers, Report on Flood Protection for the Kansas Industrial Development Commission, p. 17

<sup>96</sup> US Congress House Committee on Appropriations. Special Sub-committee on Rehabilitation of Flood Stricken Areas, Hearings before a sub-committee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, First Session, 1951, pp. 13-14

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 12

The thing that worries me most is that people down there don't want to go back to their homes. Many of them are middle aged. They were appalled at the destruction.

It's all right during the emergency. They're happy if they can get into some kind of home. But they don't want to go back. They're afraid. They have no assurance that there won't be any more floods.

If they don't get that assurance, they won't go back. They'll go away.<sup>98</sup>

George Males of 1336 South 28 Street also summed it up simply:

The whole situation is messed up. I think the whole community is that way. We saved part of the furniture but the house is gone . . .<sup>99</sup>

Jack Linton, the operator of a furniture and appliance store at 32<sup>nd</sup> Street and Strong Avenue, said that his place was under twenty-two feet of water at the height of the flood.

I went down yesterday and threw about \$8,000 worth of furniture out the back window and probably \$12,000 worth out the front door. I started with \$200, so I can get started again, but I bought the building, and it would cost about \$30,000 to repair.<sup>100</sup>

The author interviewed several persons to gain their recollections of the flood. Mr. J. C. Harmon, the principal of Argentine High School, stated that the high school facilities were used for many days as a refugee center.<sup>101</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Couch, a resident of Argentine for over thirty years, recalled that the cleanup effort was almost insurmountable. Mud and debris were everywhere. Water, in fact, was within a few feet of her house on 38<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>102</sup>

Mr. Glen Culp, who lived on Barber Street, was an employee of the Kansas City Structural Steel Company. He commented that the steel plant was able to get back into operation within a few days after the flood. However, he said that water was so high in the plant that cranes toppled over and floated out.<sup>103</sup>

The author was six months old at the time of the flood and lived in the Quindaro section of Kansas City, Kansas. Temporarily, while his father was away at Army Reserve Camp, he and his mother were living with his grandparents at 1922 South 15<sup>th</sup> Street in the Argentine area. Flood waters prevented them from returning to their home across the Kaw.

The author's mother, Mrs. Mabel Shutt, had these recollections:

I remember that the water main across the Kaw River waqs broken. Water was in short supply and residence were ordered to boil all drinking water. Also, all residents of Argentine had to report to the Argentine High School and Stanley Grace School for inoculation against tetanus and typhoid fever.

During the flood, I walked across Monkey Mountain, a hill in Argentine overlooking the valley, and saw nothing but water everywhere. The Mack Lumber Company at 26<sup>th</sup> and Metropolitan was almost completely covered with water. Argentine was to be under water for about two weeks. Most of the stores and businesses did not open for three weeks. Some people did not set their water restored

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<sup>98</sup> Kansas City Time, July 23, 1951, p. 8

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> J. C. Harmon, personal interview held at his home, 1424 Ruby, Kansas City, Kansas, January 7, 1974.

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Couch, personal interview held at her home, 2434 South 47<sup>th</sup> St6reet, Kansas City, Kansas, February 18, 1974.

<sup>103</sup> Glen Culp, personal interview held at his home, 2514 South 49<sup>th</sup> Terrace, Kansas City, Kansas, February 25, 1974

for about three weeks. The railroad lines were not in operation until about the first of September.<sup>104</sup>

A particular problem encountered by Argentians was that most of the doctors' offices and medical facilities were flooded. Dr. Haas, with his office at 21<sup>st</sup> and Ruby, was the only physician who was not forced to move. The other doctors, Ernest G. Neighbor, Gaylord P. Neighbor, J. A. Burger, Maurice A. Walker, and Lee C. Rook were forced to set up temporary headquarters elsewhere.<sup>105</sup>

There has been some debate over the years as to whether there would have been a major flood along the Kaw if all the flood control dams had been completed by 1951. Kansas engineers, in later years, estimated that if all the proposed dams had been built, the price tag might have gone as high as \$4,000,000,000. Yet they estimate that major flooding would still have occurred.<sup>106</sup>

On the other hand, Major General Lewis A. Pick, the Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, told members of the Senate Flood Control Appropriations Committee that the flood could have been easily averted. The construction of the Tuttle Creek, Perry and Milford dams alone would have held most of the flood waters. Pick also blasted those critics who blamed his agency for the floods on the Kaw and Missouri.<sup>107</sup>

US Senator John McClellan, a Democrat from Arkansas, supported Pick. He stated, "If Congress, a few years ago, had appropriated \$300,000,000 for flood control reservoirs in Kansas, we would have been spared in this flood of at least twice that amount." McClellan went on to say that too often when Congress voted money for flood control, the opposition would raise a cry of "pork barrel."<sup>108</sup>

William J. Breidenthal,<sup>109</sup> the chairman of the Flood Protection Planning Committee of Kansas, may have expressed this viewpoint best. Breidenthal said, "This is the granddaddy flood we've been talking about. I think this will convince any doubters on the value of flood control."<sup>110</sup>

Yet, there were still doubters. Farmers in the Kansas River valley continued to offer opposition. This time, as a result of the flood, their influence in Washington had greatly diminished. Citizens of flood-stricken areas of Kansas and Missouri raised such an outcry that it could not be ignored. A special sub-committee of the House Committee on Appropriations held sessions to get information on the issues. The committee recommended an extensive program of flood control legislation.

Even after funds were appropriated, there were delays. The vital Tuttle Creek Dam at Manhattan, Kansas, was one of several examples. Construction was started on that dam in 1952. Difficulties forced a brief work stoppage. Then came four years of drought. Memories seemed to be short about the urgent need of flood control. Work was started, but remained at a somewhat slow pace. By 1960, however, the dam was completed at a cost of \$80,000,000. At the dedication, in recognition for his efforts, Willard J. Breidenthal was given the fitting title of "Mr. Flood Control." By 1966, engineers estimated that the Tuttle Creek Dam had prevented floods that would have totaled at least \$23,000,000. In 1969, more rain occurred in central parts of Kansas than was received in 1951. This time, however, there was no major flooding along the Kansas River.<sup>111</sup>

The federal government, the state of Kansas, and local government units have worked together over the past twenty years to develop a system of flood control. In the Kansas portion of the Missouri River basin, six lakes and numerous local protection projects have been completed.

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<sup>104</sup> Mabel Shutt, personal interview held at her home, 2428 South 47<sup>th</sup> Street, Kansas City, Kansas, December 10, 1973.

<sup>105</sup> Kansas City Kansas, July 15, 1951, p. 2A

<sup>106</sup> Kansas City Times, July 20, 1951, p. 6

<sup>107</sup> Kansas Board of Engineers, Report on Flood Protection for the Kansas River Basin, p. 4

<sup>108</sup> The term "pork barrel" is legislative slang referring to a fund of tax money which is appropriated for patronage rather than for any really needed improvements.

<sup>109</sup> See text at footnotes 42 ff. earlier in this chapter

<sup>110</sup> Kansas City Star, July 13, 1951, p. 6

<sup>111</sup> McDowell, Building a City, A Detailed History of Kansas City, Kansas, p. 21

Other major lakes, besides Tuttle Creek, have been completed. These include Milford Lake on the Republic River, Perry Lake on the Delaware River and the Pomona and Kanopolis Lakes.

Other dams and lakes were completed or are currently under construction. This list includes Clinton Lake on the Wakarusa River, Fort Scott Lake on the Marmaton River, Garnett Lake on the Pottawatomie Creek, Grove Lake on Soldier Creek, Hillsdale Lake on a tributary of the Marais des Cygnes River, Melvern Lake on the Marais des Cygnes River, Onaga Dam on Vermillion Creek and Wilson Lake on the Saline River.

In addition, local protection projects have been completed. These projects were authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1936. Construction was started in 1940. Amendments to this act were passed in 1944 and 1954. The projects were partially completed in 1951. Works along the Kaw River at Kansas City afforded protection for several days but were finally overtopped. Losses prevented by these works during the floods of 1943, 1944, 1945, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1958, 1960, 1964, 1965, 1967, and 1969 are estimated to be \$1,075,965,000 or about 23 times the cost of the protection works.<sup>112</sup>

The Flood Control Act of 1962 provided additional protection to the Argentine and the Kansas City area. Existing levees and flood walls were raised. The 1972 estimate of the cost of modifying the protective works was approximately \$44,000,000. Federal aid included \$37,800,000 of this total.<sup>113</sup>

Thus, today Argentine can feel somewhat secure. The chances for a flood rivaling that of 1951 are not impossible but highly unlikely. Springs floods, however, continue to plague the lowlands of Kansas City. A heavy cloudburst or several days of steady rains will continue to cause flash with localized damages.

As late as October, 1973, flooding occurred in the Argentine vicinity. Heavy rains fell in the first half of that month. October 11 had the heaviest rainfall for an October day since the first records were taken in 1898.<sup>114</sup> Streams and creeks began to rise. The Army Corps of Engineers said that the Kaw River crested at 28.5 feet. This was the highest level that the river had reached at Kansas City since the 36.2 mark of 1952.<sup>115</sup> The A-1 Mobile Home Village in Turner, just two miles west of Argentine was flooded. Damages were light, although 1,000 residents were evacuated.<sup>116</sup> Although storm sewers backed up, no flooding occurred in Argentine.

Big floods hopefully are a thing of the past. Few local residents can recall the floods of 1903, 1904 or 1908. Even scars of the 1951 flood have been erased. Most flooded businesses, though suffering heavy losses, returned to the community. Many inhabitants of flooded areas, however, did not return. For this reason, the flood of 1951 had a profound effect on Argentine. Only the urban renewal projects of the 1960's can be said to have changed the community more.

The Winn-Rau Housing Project was to be the new home of many flood sufferers. This development was begun in 1952 and consisted of several hundred low cost dwellings for flood victims. The location was a largely uninhabited, hilly area a few miles southwest of Argentine. Many residents of Argentine and other areas of Kansas City were to move to this new community. Soon this area was one of the most populated parts of Wyandotte County.

Over twenty years have passed since the great flood. Most present day residents of Argentine were not yet born. But those who did experience the flood will never forget. For on a rainy day in July, the Argentine Community was hit by what was the greatest flood in our nation's history. That **"Black Friday"**, July 13, 1951, will always go down as the darkest day in the history of the Argentine community.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 39-40

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28

<sup>114</sup> *Kansas City Kansan*, October 11, 1973, p. 1

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, October 16, 1973. p. 2

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, October 16, p. 1