

Republican Valley Flood  
Disaster Story

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ferguson, who drifted eight miles down the river from the Wilson farm to an island in the South Fork east of the McDonald farm, tasted neither food nor water for thirty hours after their perilous flight down the raging torrents. The J. A. McDonald family tried to get coffee and a lunch to them but the river channel was too wide. They said that they had not suffered from either hunger or thirst during all that time but that strong coffee tasted mighty good to them after the rescue. In a conversation with Benkelman friends later, Mr. Ferguson said that the roof was reduced from its original size to less than one fourth at the time of striking the island. Constantly hitting floating trees and wreckage on its mad flight down the river was weakening it rapidly and he said he doubted if it would have held together much longer to serve as the only possibility between life and death for them. He said that it was caught in high waves and submerged at intervals of several seconds at a time for as many as ten times in the eight miles they rode it. "Whenever it hit wreckage or a cross current I would yell to my wife to hold on and then under we would go. Sometimes it seemed like a long time before we came to the surface again and each time relief came to me in unexpressable terms when I discovered that Mrs. Ferguson had been able to hold on and that we were both safe again, at least for the moment. When it hit the island, outstretched limbs of friendly trees seemed to be extended to us and when we got a firm hold on them and found ourselves safely on the island, it was far above the power of words to express the feeling of gratitude for the almost miraculous escape from almost certain death that came to both of us."

There were all kinds of small animals lodged on the island but "after riding those river currents for eight miles, there was not any more scare left in us". The only thing that gave cause for serious thought was a huge bob cat that at one time became so friendly that he came within six feet of them. He didn't seem to be a bit vicious nor yet again was he afraid. "In fact," Mr. Ferguson said, "he seemed to be in a stupor and wasn't much interested in anything further than keeping out of the water." Opossums were quite numerous on the island and there was at least one skunk. The thing that worried Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson most was the presence of snakes, especially those of the water variety. "They seemed to be everywhere," Mr. Ferguson said, "and I killed several of them to keep a spot clear. Dozens of them were clinging around the trees and entwined around the bushes and smaller trees. It got terribly chilly during the night and there was no way of helping it. All one could do was to sit still and watch for the dawn. But all of these things were better than the howling, gurgling waves that were around us on every side. When the sun came out all we had to do was to wait for the rescue which was begun shortly after daybreak, and to keep from stepping on snakes "