

Olin Ferguson's Letter About the Republican River Flood

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OLIN FERGUSON'S LETTER ABOUT THE REPUBLICAN RIVER FLOOD
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June 17, 1935

Dear Folks:-

Frank Jr. is back from a trip to St. Francis and gave us word-of-mouth message from the folks there, which I'll try to pass on to you.

Junior drove to St. Francis by the Kansas route and had to ford streams and run thru mud up over his running board. At St. Francis they used a tractor to pull him thru the river and water went up over the floor boards of the car. There just are no roads, washed and gullied, with culverts gone as well as bridges,- it's a wonder he got thru at all. Will and Nina beat him to Cris's place by 3 or 4 hours but had to drive perhaps 150 miles extra to get there.

Frank and Nora had some forewarning of the flood on May 30. That night at 11:00 o'clock the water was up around their house. Later it entered the house to about the depth of the mop-boards, and then it began receding somewhat. They thought the worst was over but early in the morning it came on again in recurring waves that just gave them no time to do anything; got arm-pit deep to Frank very quickly. Nora was perched on the table, wrapped in a Navajo rug. They decided to climb out and Nora reached for a coat, slipped and fell off and submerged. Frank succeeded in grabbing her by the hair, and bringing her up. In the meantime, Frank had gone to the bedroom window and kicked it out in order to crawl out that way. Just as they started out the window, the house walls collapsed outwardly and the roof came down, but they were swept outward from under it. They really clung to the roof more than anything else as they were swept down-stream. Went about 8 miles in some 30 minutes, and by that time saw that their roof was soon going to pieces. They caught hold of the branches of a tree and stopped themselves, and after a great deal of difficulty, Frank succeeded in clambering up on the trash that had piled up around the tree, with water perhaps 18 feet deep below it.

It was a long time before his efforts and Nora's got her up to a similar vantage point, and she was pretty nearly exhausted by that time. They rode it out there, with 3 or 4 bull-snakes, a racoon with its young, and a bobcat!

The water went down eventually, and I believe they got their feet on the ground. It rose again somewhat but not seriously. It was 30 hours before they were rescued from this place.

The hired man had been away from home on the 30th, and was just returning when high water stopt him. I think he spent the night in his car and then got out and walked toward home; didn't reach the house in time to help but got there just in time to see it floating off with Frank and Nora. He hoofed it over toward Cris's, and finally borrowed a horse to finish the trip. Cris

and others got out and went down the river until they spotted Frank and Nora and recognized them. The latter, however, didn't know it was Cris because they had lost their glasses. There wasn't any possible way of getting to them and it was only after the water had gone down somewhat and Cris and others had built a raft of bridge planking, supported by oil-barrels, all wired together that they could let the raft down by wires and get the folks. In the meantime, a rescue party was working just as feverishly on the other side of the river, and Cris beat them perhaps only 30 minutes.

Frank and Nora were taken to a farm-house where they cleaned up and went to bed. Cris went on home to get more clothing for them. The rescue was on Saturday afternoon, and on Sunday they went back with Cris. They are not seriously injured, just bumped and bruised around the legs, and neither one has had the slightest bit of a cold after all that exposure. Nora, who had to hitch her way upstairs because of a bad knee now patters right upstairs like anybody else. Rather heroic treatment for knee trouble, and not prescribed for general use!

Only a few things recovered from Frank's place, and those were picked up by various people miles down the river, and saved for them,- a Navajo rug; a brand new quilt Nora had just finished; a china platter and a china wash bowl,- neither one checked or chipped at all, etc. Cris and his brother-in-law lost some cattle, but are profiting from the fact that they were all branded and ear-marked, and the sheriff has gone with them to help reassemble them. They are still shy some 35 head. Up where Cris lives it rained so hard that the water couldn't get away, and it just came into the house anyway. He is away from the rivers so this was not the river flood.

Frank and Nora may come down to Edison in a week or two, and Junior thinks they may spend some time with him this summer, here in Lincoln. Hannah and I were talking about it last night, and would be glad to have them take care of our house for us while we are away July and August. We don't know what their plans will be, and I don't believe they know yet themselves. Mina and Will brought them a lot of things from their store, which naturally met their most immediate needs. When I asked Junior if there was anything at all that we could do he said, "No, there isn't, it's just a matter of waiting until their plans are made." Cris wants to keep them; Frank wants them; and we want them.

I guess this is the end of Report No. 3

Sincerely,
O.J.F.