

HAWARDEN....HOW IT ALL BEGAN

FLOODS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

PROBLEMS AND PROMISES

Chapter 25

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There are two reoccurring themes in the history of the floods produced by Dry Creek. The first is without question; the determination of the City fathers and citizens to "Make sure this never happens again!" The second is the Northwestern Railway Company. A company that is credited for the very existence of Hawarden, and later seemed to be the single largest contributing factor causing consistent flooding of Hawarden by Dry Creek.

In the days and years following each flood, there were countless meetings and solutions presented to solve the flooding of Hawarden. One of the first was a Hawarden Booster Club dinner held in October of 1926. At this dinner, Mayor French gave a talk about the history of Hawarden's floods and mentioned that in 1883 there were three separate and distinct floods in that summer alone. This gives credence to the previous stories revealing that the residents of Calliope could not imagine that anyone would want to live in that "swamp" called Hawarden.

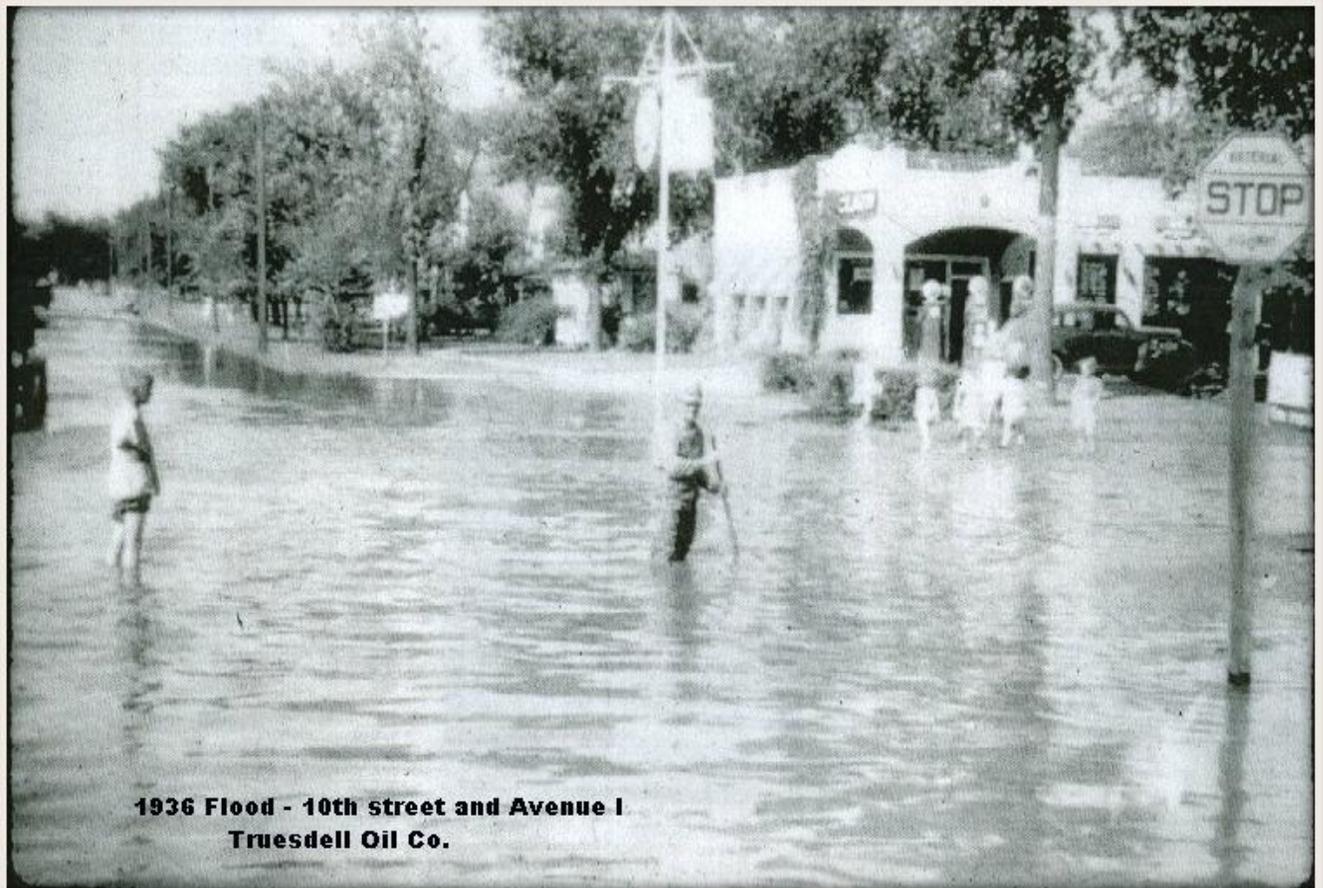
After the floods of 1883 the Western Town Lot Co., who owned most of the land in town, changed the creek channel and the town was not flooded again until 1897. The flood of 1897 was blamed on a grade constructed by the Northwestern Railway Co., and they were forced to install a sixty foot waterway under their railroad grade south east of town. Unfortunately, when the Short Line cutoff to Sioux City was constructed in 1910 the waterway was again filled with dirt. Instead of a sixty foot waterway, two small culverts were installed in its place. When city officials finally recognized the changes to the waterway they were not concerned. Heavy snow run-offs and rains since the flood of 1897 had caused the Dry Creek channel to become much wider and deeper and the popular belief was that this larger channel would accommodate any rainfall that may occur and so no attention was paid to the smaller openings under the Northwestern grade. Obviously the flood of 1926 proved them wrong.

At this same meeting an engineer from Sioux City who had been doing preliminary work on flood control for Hawarden gave several proposals for the Council to study. At the end of the meeting a Flood Committee was established and the Booster Club gave its unanimous support to do whatever it took to solve this problem.

In December of 1926 a referendum was held and a majority of citizens and taxpayers voted in favor of changing the channel of Dry Creek as the engineer had recommended. The project still had to be approved. The City Council had to pass a "resolution of necessity" which required four affirmative votes. Because of some unanswered questions concerning the outcome of the referendum, only three councilmen voted to support the "resolution of necessity" and it failed. The outcome of the meeting resulted in unanimous vote of the council to request a meeting with the railroad and demand that the railroad would open the grade that blocked the waterway. They felt that if this requirement was met, the concern of changing the channel was not necessary.

In March of 1927 the City Council received word from the Northwestern Railway that they would refuse to make an opening in their grade unless it was done under an order of the Public Authorities as a Public Improvement which would spread the cost over all the benefitted properties and protect the railway from any damages. They suggested that the City should work out the details and submit them to the railroad for approval.

Headlines in the **June 14, 1934 HAWARDEN INDEPENDENT: " DRY CREEK GOES ON RAMPAGE."** On this day over five inches of rain fell in Hawarden, and as much or more fell on the fields northeast of Hawarden where Dry Creek begins. Although not a match for the damage of the flood of 1926, this flood did substantial damage to basements and property from the Avenue K bridge north to ninth street and the west to Avenue I and on to tenth street then traveling north as far as the city park; leaving a muddy reminder of the fury of the creek.



On the front page of the same paper the column headline read:” **FLOOD CONTROL STEPS TAKEN: OFFICIALS OF NORTH WESTERN ATTEND MEETING HERE: Lack of Proper Opening in Railroad Grade Viewed as Chief Flood Menace to Hawarden.**” The article continued to report that the railroad officials at the meeting that night agreed that they would have their engineers look into the situation at once and see if a plan could be worked out to protect the city from any further flood menace that could be caused by the railroad grade in its present condition. “The meeting Wednesday night was a most harmonious gathering and there was general conviction that a satisfactory solution would be reached.”

The headlines in the **HAWARDEN INDEPENDENT: September 17, 1936 "DRENCHED BY BIG DOWNPOUR"**. The article told about heavy damage that was inflicted by flooding and also caving along the creek bank due to heavy rains. The opinion was expressed that widening of the channel east of the ball park on Avenue K was responsible for forcing the huge volumes of water through the narrower channel below and the increased velocity formed whirlpools that cut away the creek bank. The greatest damage was on the west side of the creek between 9th and 10th streets and in the city park.

Quoting from the above article: **"Dry Creek still continues as Hawarden's greatest menace."** Obviously despite all good will and concern, the fury of Dry Creek had not yet been harnessed.

And so the story goes, more pages of history filled with good intentions on the part of Hawarden's city government and excuses and politics used by the Railroad and their council. Decisions and tactics that continued to plague the citizens of Hawarden with the prospects and reality of one flood following another.

Will Dry Creek ever be tamed? No one has that answer. More solutions next week.