

HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN

FLOODS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

THE LAST BIG FLOOD?

Chapter: 26

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The floods of the '20s and '30s were in the past. With each flood and scare of a flood, the City Fathers became more determined "THIS would be the LAST." It seemed that as soon as the Flood Committee or Chamber of Commerce or City Council declared that a cure had been found, the cloudbursts from the heavens proved them wrong.

In 1942 Dry Creek greeted Hawarden with floods in both June and September. One of the bright spots of the September flood was an early warning from a farmer northeast of Hawarden where runoff water runs into Dry Creek. The farmer was George Baldwin, and he had observed that Hawarden was always flooded when the water from the creek went over his road. Mr. Baldwin's farm was located five miles east and seven miles north of Hawarden. After that first warning, businessmen in Hawarden kept a close watch on the area where Dry Creek had its start. My father, Rex Truesdell was an avid student of Dry Creek and its destruction, and he told me that when the water went over the road at Baldwin's farm, Hawarden had 11 hours to prepare for the flood. Over the many floods to follow, this information saved untold dollars in damages and destruction. When the phone rang in Hawarden with news of the overflowing creek, the whole town would spring into action filling sand bags and making dikes of sand along the doors of buildings. It also gave business men and families time to remove many of their valuables from the basements and first floors, so even though the flood water surged through town, the advance preparation helped diminish the loss. I have been told that water from as far away as Perkins Corner drains into Hawarden's creek, so the amount of rain received north of town certainly affects the intensity of the floods.

After the two floods in 1942 the City fathers were even more serious about avoiding any more damage from the creek. The October 6, 1942 issue of the Hawarden Independent reported that the City of Hawarden was attempting to purchase 31 acres of land from the Northwestern Railroad that was located south of their roundhouse. The paper wrote, "*The offer was made as a step toward control of the Dry Creek floods which twice this year have inundated the Hawarden downtown district*".

The article continues to state that the Railroad has agreed to open its right of way to allow the flood waters to go through if some arrangement can be made to contain the water once it gets south of the tracks. The City believes these 31 acres will handle this problem.

Almost a year later, the August 8, 1943 issue of The Hawarden Independent contained a front page picture of the 5 span 65 foot trestle that is hoped to be the key to the new Hawarden Flood Control project. The dirt removed beneath the trestle was used by the City to elevate the street grades which will serve as a dike to divert the flood waters under the trestle to the southwest. *“According to the engineers, completion of the project assures Hawarden of protection from heavy flood damage that the City has experienced during the past years.”*

Ten years later, the headlines in the Hawarden Independent were forced to exclaim: **“RAMPAGING FLOOD HITS CITY”** June 11, 1953 edition.

On Sunday a total of 7.77 inches of rain, six of them coming in only 4 and one half hours were recorded in Hawarden. Heavier rains were reported in the area north and east of Hawarden. A call for help from Dick Vander Lugt who lived on the farm directly east of Dry Creek and north of the Hawarden Golf Course was the first warning of the impending disaster. Mr. Vander Lugt asked for help to rescue his cattle that were trapped in the flood waters. The siren was sounded at 4 PM and again around 6 PM.

The entire main street of Hawarden was flooded. The basements were filled to the ceiling with muddy flood water. There was at least 18 inches on the main floors. Flood waters to some of the buildings were held at bay by sand bags and in some cases even sacks of flour, but seepage from one building to another caused much of the damage. Firemen on the scene had to use axes to break down front and rear doors of the businesses of owners who could not be reached, in order to let the flood water flow through, rather than create a vacuum and collapse the exterior walls. Many businesses including the Post office reported over 6 feet of water in their basements.

My father owned the Ford Garage in 1953 (located on Main Street in the former Bomgaars building). We were not in town the week of the flood, but upon returning we heard the story of an attempted rescue of a trailer house that was located across the road to the south of the current HiTec building located in the old ball park. Employees of my father took the wrecker (a new Ford F600) down to pull the trailer to safety. While hooking the trailer to the wrecker, the water came up so fast and furious that their only option was to run to safety and abandon the large wrecker and trailer house. When the water receded and they went back to see the damage, they found a large log that had broken the windshield of the wrecker and was lodged in the cab. The water was that high and had that much force!

As you can imagine Flood control was again the topic of discussion. Answers next week.