

May 7, 1969

Denver Area Mops Up After Near-Disaster

By GEORGE KANE

Rocky Mountain News Writer

A sopping wet Denver saw the sun rise for the first time in four days as residents in a five-county area began cleaning up after a near-disaster.

Seven mountain towns were still isolated Thursday and it appeared it would be sometime Friday or Saturday before telephone service was restored and roads opened into the areas.

One possible death has been attributed to the four-day storm, two injuries were reported when a hotel collapsed at Georgetown, and a Denver man died of a heart attack after trying to bail out his flooded basement.

Boulder police said Paul E. "Toby" Tobler, 22, a former University of Colorado student, was feared drowned in rampaging Boulder

Creek. Another youth told officers he saw Tobler floating down the flooded creek on an inner tube. He said the tube hit some debris and "jarred him loose." A search team is still trying to recover the body.

Two children were hospitalized for what was described as minor injuries when a part of the Silver Queen Hotel, one of the oldest buildings in Georgetown, collapsed Wednesday under heavy snow. Some 20 other persons escaped injury.

The children were identified as Mary Miller, 7, and her brother, Richard, 3, the children of Mr. and Mrs. C. Richard Miller of Idaho Springs.

Denver Patrolman Gordon Reed said Francis Richard Swisher, 63, of 1459 S. Elizabeth St., died of an apparent heart attack Thursday after trying to bail water out of his flooded basement.

Reed said Mrs. Swisher told him her husband had worked about 15 minutes at the job, then complained of shoulder pains. He went to bed and was found dead a short time later.

Boulder County was the hardest hit by waters sloping out of the banks of streams, fed by incessant rains since last Sunday. Boulder officials, however, could not yet estimate damage.

From scattered reports from the inundated five-county area, most of the damage apparently was done to low-lying homes and businesses and to roads and highways.

The Denver Fire Department reported receiving more than 2,000 telephone calls from residents asking for aid in pumping out flooded basements. That story was the same in Littleton, Englewood, Sheridan, Thornton, Westminster, Arvada and Boulder.

Four days of continued rains swelled a half-

dozen creeks, forcing them out of their banks, and tributaries of the South Platte River fed that stream to overflowing.

Wednesday afternoon, flood stage on Bear By late Thursday, the reading at Morrison on Bear Creek had dropped to just under 7 feet. It had hit a high reading of 7.37 feet late Creek is 3.5 feet.

Although it and other creeks were receding, the Weather Bureau said flooding in lowlands along the tributaries in the Denver Metropolitan Area and into some portions of northeastern Colorado would continue for several days.

The South Platte, crested last Wednesday night at 10.6 feet, and was repaired at 10.3 feet at midnight. It had receded even more by late Thursday. Flood stage is 7 feet on the Platte.

The multi-million-dollar flood of 1965 resulted when the South Platte crested at 16 feet. Officials had been concerned that the last four days of rain might cause a repeat of the earlier flood, and all street, highway, police and fire personnel were kept on duty through the night.

Gov. Love, after a helicopter trip with Chief Highway Engineer Charles Shumate and State Natural Resources Director Tom Ten Eyck to survey flood damage Thursday, said he had not yet made up his mind to ask for federal aid to help offset flood losses.

He said highway damages alone would be about \$750,000.

Jefferson County Commissioners estimated damages in that county at about \$1 million.

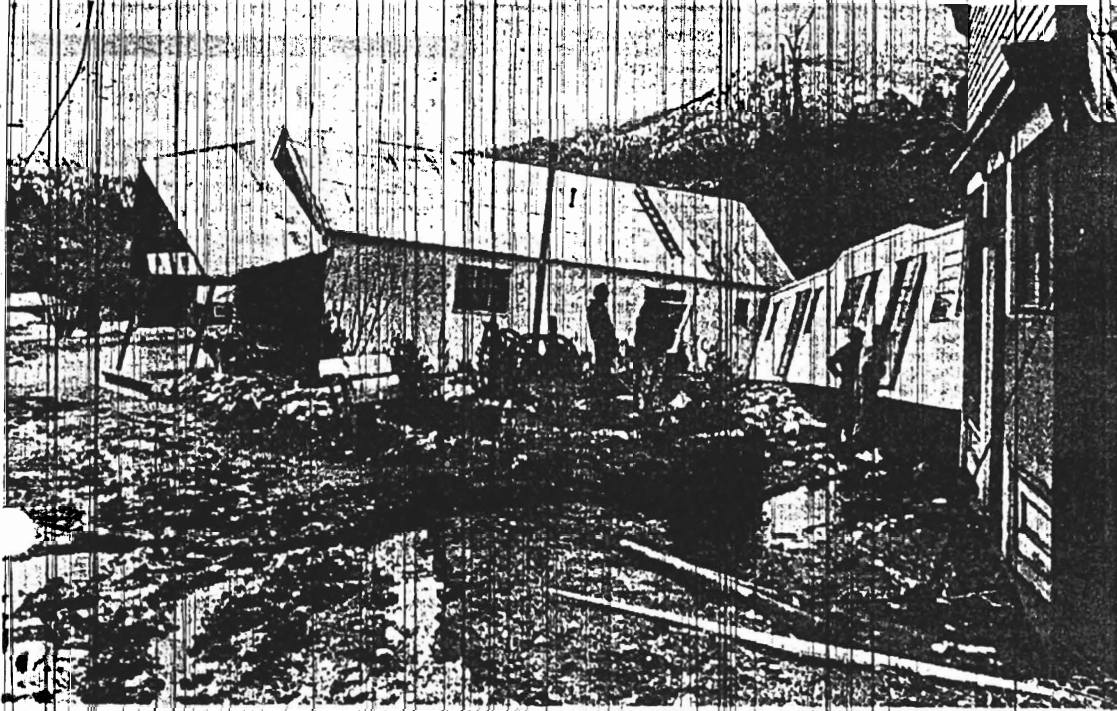
U.S. Weather Bureau forecasts were bright. Weathermen said the rain had ended and held out only a 5 per cent probability for precipitation overnight Thursday, with the percentage predicted to decrease to zero on Friday.

However, some trouble was still expected into the weekend in spotted areas as snows which were dumped in the mountains by the massive storm system began melting.

Some communities — Allenspark, Georgetown and Ward among them — received up to 18 inches of snow Tuesday and Wednesday.

Roads were blocked to Bailey, Dockers, Idaho Springs, Central City, Georgetown, Allenspark and Fairplay Thursday, and Mountain

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Across from the general store and post office in Jamestown, an old pool hall (right)

and the Lively Cafe, joined by a house trailer, tumbled partly into Left Hand Creek

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS PHOTO BY MEL SCHIELTZ

Wednesday as raging waters from three and a half days of steady rains swept by them.

Jamestown Residents Reflect on 'Longest Day of Lives'

By CLEM WORK

Rocky Mountain News Writer

"Yesterday was the longest day in our lives."

Looking out the window of the combination general store and post office, the woman pointed to a spot across the road, now sunken to the level of the rolling chocolate creek.

"That's where our new Jamestown Post Office was going to be," she said, chuckling now.

The irony was that it was the Post Office Department that decided a new facility was needed. Jamestown residents hollered "no" and the plans had been dropped.

Next to the site that was no more, an old wooden building tilted into the creek bottom.

"Robert Galt was going to make a recreation center for the kids out of that. It used to be a pool hall. He had a half-diamond and a skating rink behind it, where the creek is now," the postmaster's wife said.

Between the old pool hall that had lost its past and future overnight, a long house trailer seemed to be inches from its fate; a misspelled sign over the door defined — too late — its uncertain position: "Sorry, We will be close." Next to it, Helen Robertson's Lively Cafe as the same downward angle as the pool, leaving its false front behind.

Foundation Damaged

A little, further downstream, shiny door-knobs and fresh paint on a ranch style house contrasted with the scene of fresh fury behind it, but a peek around the back betrayed its untouched elegance. A corner of the foundation had been washed away; where Wednesday there had been a lawn, on Thursday was a

boulder-strewn waste. Built by a Kansas City, Mo., couple, it has yet to be lived in.

A little two-tone two-storied red and white house, which would have looked more at home between two skyscrapers, stood misbegotten in the wash, standing a lonely watch over its own fate.

Main Street in Jamestown looked more like a creek bed than a street Thursday morning. Just south of the bridge, which still stood, the street had been cut in half by the water early Wednesday. The water had then followed the street a short way before cutting back toward its normal course.

Several houses that stood in the way of the rampage were badly flooded, and sheds on the low-lying land had been swept away. A small pump house near one of the flooded buildings pushed back against the flood, holding its own at least for the time being.

House Across Road

Milton Janssen was one of the men who was up all night, trying to divert the flow of the creek from their houses. His house stands on Main Street, but fortunately the creek turned toward its bed before it reached it. The house across the road, however, had lost its front lawn and was separated from the street by a deep gully.

"My granddaughter, (Mrs.) Lynn Wright, is expecting a baby, you know. It's her first and they might have to do a Caesarean. I hope they get her out of here," he said, looking skyward.

The chopper had just been by, and had landed on the road, but took off again. "He said he'd be right back," a friend told Janssen.

Mrs. Wright, according to Dr. Gary L. Ballard, who led an emergency team to the belea-

guered town Wednesday, is a week past full term, but may not deliver for another two or three weeks. He decided not to evacuate her by helicopter for the time being.

"It's her first child, so she'll give us plenty of warning. Then we can take her out by road," he said.

"Our main problem now is drinking water," Janssen said. "Over there's where the old pump house was," he pointed to a few shreds of wood in the creek bed. "Our new water system—we couldn't get up there fast enough to shut the valves off, so the mains blew."

Won't Last Long

"Some of us got our bathtubs full in time, and a few people have tanks, but we don't have enough to last for very long," Mrs. Lorraine Upp, clerk at the general store said.

According to Dr. Ballard, the old water system's tank is still intact, and holding 17,000 gallons, enough to last the 185 residents a few days until more water can be trucked in over the makeshift road. Food is in short supply; he said, but there will be no real problem in trucking in supplies for the time being.

"Don't stand too close under that power line," Janssen shouted. "There's 13,000 volts there, and the only thing that's holding it up is that nylon cord and the guy wire. It's broken loose at the bottom."

A group of people—men, girls and young boys—rolled up in a decrepit old truck across the creek. They started pulling out logs and carrying them down to the water. Several on the other side began hauling stones.

Within a half hour, a makeshift bridge, shaky but serviceable, had appeared, one of two links between the flood-split halves of the town. Waters were rising again Thursday noon.

though, as melting snows added their volume, and threatened the hasty bridge.

The other bridge, toward the north end of town, was more secure. A tree had very fortunately fallen over the creek, and was bolstered by a log and crossboards. Main purpose of the bridge was to evacuate Mrs. George Hauser, due to have her seventh child Thursday.

Taken to Hospital

Minutes after the last nail had been hammered into the cross boards, Mrs. Hauser, looking pale and drawn, was escorted gingerly across the boiling creek, and taken overland by jeep across a rough, crude newly-cut access road to a Boulder hospital.

A Jamestown man was evacuated later by helicopter, suffering from a severe eye injury. Dr. Ballard said the man had been helping salvage equipment from the creek Wednesday morning when he was hurt.

Thursday noon, the sun came out in Jamestown for the first time since Sunday. It wasn't necessarily good, not at first anyway. A fast snow melt could prolong the tiny community's water woes another day or so. But except for that less severe threat, it appeared that the worst was over.

All day Wednesday, people of all ages and descriptions had been working to save their town. They had dumped cars in the creek to save the main road, built stone diversions and log bridges, done whatever they could do with their bare hands and the few tools they had.

Wednesday night, many of the men had worked all night. Thursday morning they showed the strain in their faces, but they kept working. This was not the first flood—in the 1890s, Left Hand Creek had gone on an even worse rampage, according to the memories of some of Jamestown's oldtimers.

which would cost the state's motorists between \$2.1 million and \$2.8 million more a year.

Lawmakers decreed that the State Parole Board will become a full-time body under Civil Service. But they turned down recommendations by an interim study committee and the gover-

tax burden of some \$7 million a year.

Enacted was a one-cent a gallon gasoline tax hike to take effect June 1 and increase state and local revenues almost \$10 million a year for use on highways, roads and streets.

The legislature ordained

dividual concerns and, in the Senate yesterday, civil unrest."

"Democracy is not a system designed to deal technically or quickly with this kind of unrest and . . . it is concerned with the freedoms of the individual."

The new school aid equals an increase of approximately 50

Mopup Begins After Near-Disaster

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States Telephone Co. reported all those communities were still without telephone service.

Public Service Co. crews, however — most of them sent into those areas when it appeared there might be some trouble — had managed to restore electric power in all the isolated towns by Thursday morning.

Telephone crews — which totaled some 1,200 men working throughout this area of Colorado — were expected to be able to get into the troubled areas sometime Friday.

All services were restored by Thursday morning to Breckenridge, Nederland, Joes, Cope and Kirk, and six emergency telephone circuits were operating through Craig to previously isolated Granby.

Most of Denver's power and telephone problems were ironed out by crews working through the night to restore service.

Public Service Co. said there was no problem with its major generating facilities, as was encountered in the 1965 flood, but that some 800 men worked Wednesday and Wednesday night repairing power outages caused by water seeping into small transformers serving one and two-block areas.

Another 200 PSC men were on special duty in the mountains restoring lines downed by snow-laden tree limbs and other lines shorted out by water.

Wet telephone cables and manholes full of water caused Denver's major telephone troubles, but service to almost all phones in the area was restored by mid-day Thursday.

Some streets, such as W. Dartmouth Avenue which was crumbled by waters from Bear Creek, were still closed Thursday. Bear Creek was receding rapidly, however, and residents along it were treading mud as they began a massive clean up.

The near-disastrous rains, nonetheless, had their lighter side. One man who had just bought a home along Bear Creek, and had installed expensive wood paneling and carpeting, watched back-up water begin bubbling up in his drains Wednesday.

He had a sack of cement in his basement, so he poured it in all the drains and commented that he considered it cheaper to later unplug the drains than to repanel and recarpet the home.

More than 50 Metropolitan State College students worked for 16 hours Wednesday and Wednesday night helping evacuate 135 families from areas around the Platte, and McDonald's Hamburgers donated food and beverages to all the workers and victims.

A temporary shelter was set up in Platte Valley Action Center, 3607 W. 14th Ave., and furniture and personal belongings of the families was taken to Rudey Park Recreation Center at 12th Avenue and Decatur Street.

Staffers and dozens of volunteers from Metro Denver Fair Housing Center also moved Platte River flood victims to higher ground.

The center donated its two 1½-ton trucks, which joined a fleet of one-half and three-quarter-ton pickup trucks manned by Metro State College students to move families and furniture out of the flooding areas.

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