

LIFE ON THE OHIO

Patriot Threatened By The River

HISTORIC PATRIOT

By Dan Back

In the previous article I described how the Ohio River helped Patriot prosper. The river also repeatedly tried to wipe Patriot off the face of the Earth with devastating floods.

An 1877 article in the Vevay Reveille described the chosen location of Patriot; "The location was excellent, and the country around it was fertile and healthy. Situated upon a high bank, entirely above the highest floods in the Ohio River, with a beautiful shore in front and commanding a delightful view of the Ohio River for several miles above and below."

Although the founding fathers thought they were high above the river the mighty Ohio repeatedly proved them wrong.

1883 - One of the first recorded floods to invade Patriot occurred in 1883 when the river reached a depth of 66.3 feet on the Cincinnati Gauge. It was reported that 5 or 6 homes were swept off their foundations. Some were washed down the river leaving no trace they ever existed. At least 150 people were forced from their homes. It was noted that many of the residents risked life and limb to rescue others. Many opened their homes to the refugees.

1884 - In the spring of 1884 Patriot was again hit with an even more devastating flood with a depth of 71.1 feet. Many of the victims of the flood the previous year had not fully recovered when this flood hit. However, they were more prepared because of their experience the previous year and began evacuating well in advance of the rising water. Again the town residents, who were not directly affected by the flood, came to the aid of their neighbors.

The reporter from the Vevay newspaper covering the flood reported; "When the water was about its highest, your correspondent in company with our old friend Dr. Olcott, boarded a hastily constructed craft started on a tour of inspection. Proceeding to the drug store of C. W. Olcott we entered in at the door in our boat, which we moored at the counter. In our circuit, in the business portion of town, we found all the stores standing in more or less water; in many instances it being over half way up, and in some entirely over the counters." The reporter concluded his article with; "Patriot is not so greatly damaged, but many of the poorer families will be in a pitiable condition even after the flood is over. It is a sad sight but we believe Patriot's heart is big enough to care for its own."

1907 - In January of 1907 the Ohio River rose to its highest level since 1884 to a depth of 65.5 feet. Damage was again substantial as the homes of more than 100 families were flooded. Many people awoke to find their homes completely surrounded by water. An interesting article in the February 1907 Vevay Reveille reported: "All kinds of drift floated by while the flood was at its height, and some very good pieces of furniture were caught by people in the city. Dr. Wm. I. Reed caught a good refrigerator, as did Joe Cox. Both pieces of furniture were in good condition."

1913 - In 1913 Patriot saw two significant floods. In January the river went over 62 feet and on April 4th the river reached 70.7 feet. The Vevay Reveille-Enterprise of April 3rd, 1913 reported; "the "quickest rise" raised the river 40 feet in one week, and – incredibly 21 feet in one day. From March 25th to March 26th, the river rose from 29.3 to 50.3.

The paper also reported, "The town of Patriot is completely hemmed in by the flood and in the main section of town not more than half a dozen houses are free from water". The paper reported the businesses in the main part of town to be under at least 6 feet of water. Half of the businesses and 95 percent of the homes are filled with water.

1937 - As bad as the 1913 flood was, it was only a sampling of what was to come. In 1937, with heavy rain up the entire Ohio Valley, the Ohio River reached a record level of 81 feet in Patriot.

The Vevay Newspaper reported: "A report from Patriot indicates that 273 of the 287 citizens are affected by high water, only 14 residing beyond the reach of the present crest. Only seven dwellings, the M. E. Church, and schoolhouse have no water on their floors. Twenty-one business houses are completely submerged and 94 dwellings are inundated." There were many reports of heroic efforts to rescue all who were stranded by the flood.

Many people had moved their furniture to the second floor of their homes during the first days of the flood. When they returned home they discovered the water had reached the second floor and their possessions were destroyed beyond repair.

The library was lifted off its foundation and carried more than a block down Main Street and deposited on its side.

1997 - When the Ohio River returned to the streets of Patriot in 1997 with a crest of 65 feet, she found little to claim. By 1997 Patriot was only a fraction of what it had been. Most of the business district and many of the homes were long gone.

The floods and their attempt to destroy Patriot will be featured in the new Historic Patriot exhibit being assembled. If you have photographs, personal correspondence or remembrances, news articles or artifacts associated with Patriot please contact me (Dan Back 594-2628) or Pam Hutchinson at the Patriot Town Hall.