After the Floods, Caineville Would Never Be Quite the Same

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CAINEVILLE,Wayne County-When disaster strikes now, the world comes to our aid. But in 1909, when a roaring flood destroyed the toil and hopes of the Mormon pioneers that settle Notom, Aldridge, Caineville and Blue Valley, we had only ourselves.

There were no phones, no radios, no jeeps, no helicopters, and no roads because mud made the roads impassable between villages on the east, and floods cut them off from the larger communities to the west.

Even today, after having seen many towns, there is, in my mind, no place in the world so perfect as that little town of Caineville: 16 four-acre blocks, laid off by two roads with lanes between each block, sidewalks planted to poplar trees like a Christmas card. The church house had a bell in the belfry that acted as town crier when Uncle Billy Pectol-a tiny gnome of a man who did nothing else-pulled the rope.

There were so many dreamers of dreams. Old men sitting on doorsteps dreamed of the promise of this land: good roads, fine schools, and better crops. No one saw the serpent.

August of 1909 brought heat that bored into the skull. Dogs panted in the shade. People working in the fields, wrung clothes in cold water and folded them in the crowns of their hats to prevent sunstroke. The river evaporated to a trickle, with not enough water to reach the town through four miles of ditch.

Late in September, a black cloud appeared on the horizon, lifted thunder heads above the mountain tops to the west, and one lay on the top of Mount Ellen in the Henrys. The black cloud rolled steadily up the sky in the west, higher, higher, thick and heavy without a sound of thunder or flash of lightning. The first gusts of wind in three months twisted the trees and shook the leaves.

As splatters of rain hit the window panes and pounded the roofs, children opened the doors and caught the water from the sky in cupped hands. Joy swept through the town.

The next morning found a freshly washed world, with a rainbow hung bright across the western sky. The air was so refreshing, the people took heart. The drought was broken.

The rain kept coming every day.

Small flash floods came down the Fremont River and the Caineville Wash. All the people ran to the river bank to watch the pine and cedar drift wood on top of the thick, red water. The wood was a welcome sight-it meant winter kindling.

The day came when the rain was no longer a blessing. Blue mud bogged the wagons on the road. Fruit was rotting in the orchards when it should have been going to market. Crops of grain were too wet to harvest. Now all the people wanted the rain to stop.

When a watershed, covering 5,000 square miles, begins to fill every canyon, wash and gully, it has only one place to go: the river. And the banks began to overflow and break up on the Fremont.

Always before, storms were localized. It struck one area, and then another. But this

was different.

The Fremont River was steadily rising. Sulphur Creek was running bank to bank. Pleasant Creek was in full flood, and the Capitol Wash had 20 feet of water roaring down it dry throat. What the upper valley did not dump on the lower valley, the Water Pocket Fold spilled onto every dray. The Caineville Wash was the highest ever, with five feet of water and spray shooting 30 feet into the air above the crest of the hill.

The Fremont River, that days before had spanned a 12-food plane, was now nearly an eighth of a mile across. Apple, peach, and pear trees were coming down the river, loaded with fruit. Pigs, chickens, cows and horses struggled to swim out of the engulfing mud. As they whirled past, caught in tree branches or crushed by logs, they raised desperately pleading eyes to the equally helpless people on the shore, who watched all they owned disappear beneath the sea of mud.

The huddled band of people panicked when the overpowering tragedy was understood, but now the need to survive drove them. Men stood shoulder to shoulder in the most threatened fields, swinging scythe and show, cutting the corn from crumbling banks, while women carried loads out of reach of the flood.

As they worked, they saw whole fields disappear in the jaws of the flood. Great chunks of land split from the solid earth, seemed to rise, away and explode with a bang, sucked down in the red foam boiling and dying like a living thing.

The whole valley was filled with the boom, as from cannons: the roar of the water, and the stench of a dying world.

With the among of night, the weary people straggled to their homes, lighted their coal oil lamps and feel exhausted across their beds. Children, still hearing the boom of falling banks-a thousand times louder in the dark-cried to their fathers, "Where will we go if the flood comes here?"

Fathers looked at their little ones and lied nobly, "We will go to the blue hills, of course. Now say your prayer and go to sleep" they said, knowing full well there was no place to run.

When the sun rose one morning, the river was stilled. The houses were still in place. People walked to the river and what greeted their eyes were river bars swept clean, brown and wet, with a muddy little stream wending its way down the channel.

Wagons sat in front of houses, and boxes were loaded. Children clung to toys. One by one, sun bonneted women and men, stooped by the loss, mounted the wagon seats, and took up the lines. They waved to neighbors as the teams plodded out of sight around the bend, in search of another hope.

My father and mother loaded up the covered wagon, and left after everyone pulled out. It was November, the month of Thanksgiving.

As we rolled out of town, I sat with my face framed in the circle gathering of the wagon cover at the back. Not a living thing was in the street; not one puff of smoke from the stovepipe.

Our wagon and the click of the horses' shod hooves were the only sounds in the valley. I looked up at the church bell in the belfry. It hung cold and still.

Where all the people had gone, I did not know, but we went to Delta where a reservoir was being built on the Sevier River. We lived in tents, west of Delta and the river, in a sea of greasewood trees, which stretched farther than I could see, to the Blue Mountains on the Nevada border.

Father was a surveyor, and brought his transit and tripod home every night to take bearings on the North Star.

Mother cooked, washed, and swept the scorpions out from under the dry goods boxes we used as chairs. She sprinkled water on the

clay floor and warned me to watch where I walked because of Diamondback rattlesnakes. She never let the younger children out of her sight.

Mother was crippled, with a short leg that never stopped giving her pain. But she reached beyond her pain, and I remember her before the flood in the top of a cottonwood tree, bringing down a swarm of bees. She played the harp for dances, and sang more beautifully than anyone else in the choir. She sang to keep from feeling the pain in her hip.

It seemed we were never to know security again. That September, almost a year from the time of the flood in the Fremont River, a thick, hot day brooded over the desert. Clouds, thick and black, climbed the sky in the west. Lightning split the clouds open and thunder crashed upon the land. Wind ripped the ballooning tents from the guy ropes, and rain rushed at us in torrents.

Blue water thickened and rolled through the greasewoods like a living thing. The tents shuddered and collapsed beneath the slimy fluid. Mother grabbed my sisters, Laura and Lorraine, and shoved them into the wagon box. The slick blue mud clotted on my bare legs.

Where the camp had stood seconds before, were only lumps of mud caught in our tents and held up by the squares of boxes inside the tents.

It was the first time I heard and saw my mother crying out in our misery. My singing, laughing mother bent double with grief so great she could not stand up under it. "Not again! Not again!" she cried.

My father found her with anguish too great to bear. I heard him crying out to her, "Elsie, Elsie, don't cry. We're going home. Do you hear me? We're going home. I'll put that ditch in alone if I have too." His Adam's apple bobbed up and down as though choking him, but he gulped it back beyond the tears.

They gathered up the mud-soaked camp, dried it in the sun, loaded it into the wagon, and we went home to Caineville.

On arriving in Torrey, Father met Will Gifford. They stood and clapped each other on the back, and Will kept saying, "Al Ostberg, you old son of a gun! You old son of a gun! Am I glad to see you!"

Father was laughing. Will was laughing. Such joy I hadn't heard since we left Caineville. "Will, we got it made," he said as he unwrapped his precious transit and tripod. "We'll put that ditch on gravity flow, blast a tunnel through Slipping Rock Hill, build a short flume across Behunin Wash, put a siphon flume over the Caineville Wash, and we can forget floods."

Will said, "You plan it, and I'll be right there helping." He was the first man to follow us to Caineville, and they went to work. Will spread the news, and some half dozen men followed Father to Caineville, and they went to work with the emptiest bellies any group of people every had.

When I carried Father's lunch to him one time, he was working on the tunnel's 150 feet of solid rock, and Will Gifford was helping. I looked into the dark hole and saw Father kneeling, while he drove a drill into the rock with a sledge hammer. Will Gifford was leading our bay mare, Old Min, out of the mouth of the tunnel, pulling slip scraper loaded with rock and sand from the last blast.

A drilling 150 feet of tunnel on his knees. Pride filled my heart. That man was my father.

In June 1915, once more, water ran through the Caineville Canal. Frank Hatt, Johnny Curfew, Will Gifford and Alfred Ostberg stood at the head of the canal and raised the head gate, while celebrating people watched the water gush through the gate and flow into the thirsty land. The entire county came to the celebration.

The church bell rang again. This time, loud and long.

The people tried to return to the old ways of work, worship and brotherhood. The people clung to one another, holding church and school as it had been in the past. But there were so many needs.

The cattle men of other times had ranged their herds on Boulder Mountain, putting their cattle in the fields instead of on the street to graze as the newcomers did. The starving range cattle now broke down the fences and ate the crops.

Where once there had been comfort, now there was poverty. Houses were still vacant, and the beauty went from the face of the land. Already, the people knew the range cattle would not let them survive. The cowmen who invaded in 1913 died of old age, but the damage they brought stayed on after.

Discouraged people moved away, and the old ones die. New people have taken over the valley. The church house with its bell is no more. The school is gone. The people drive to Hanksville for school, for church, and children are bused to Bicknell.

I still go back to the valley and ask, "Where did Paradise go?" I see the brush choked streets, the grassburs, sandburs, cockleburs, and wild morning glory. I see the decay. Power machinery should be the answer, but a band of pioneers made that valley far greater and far better than modern technology is making it.