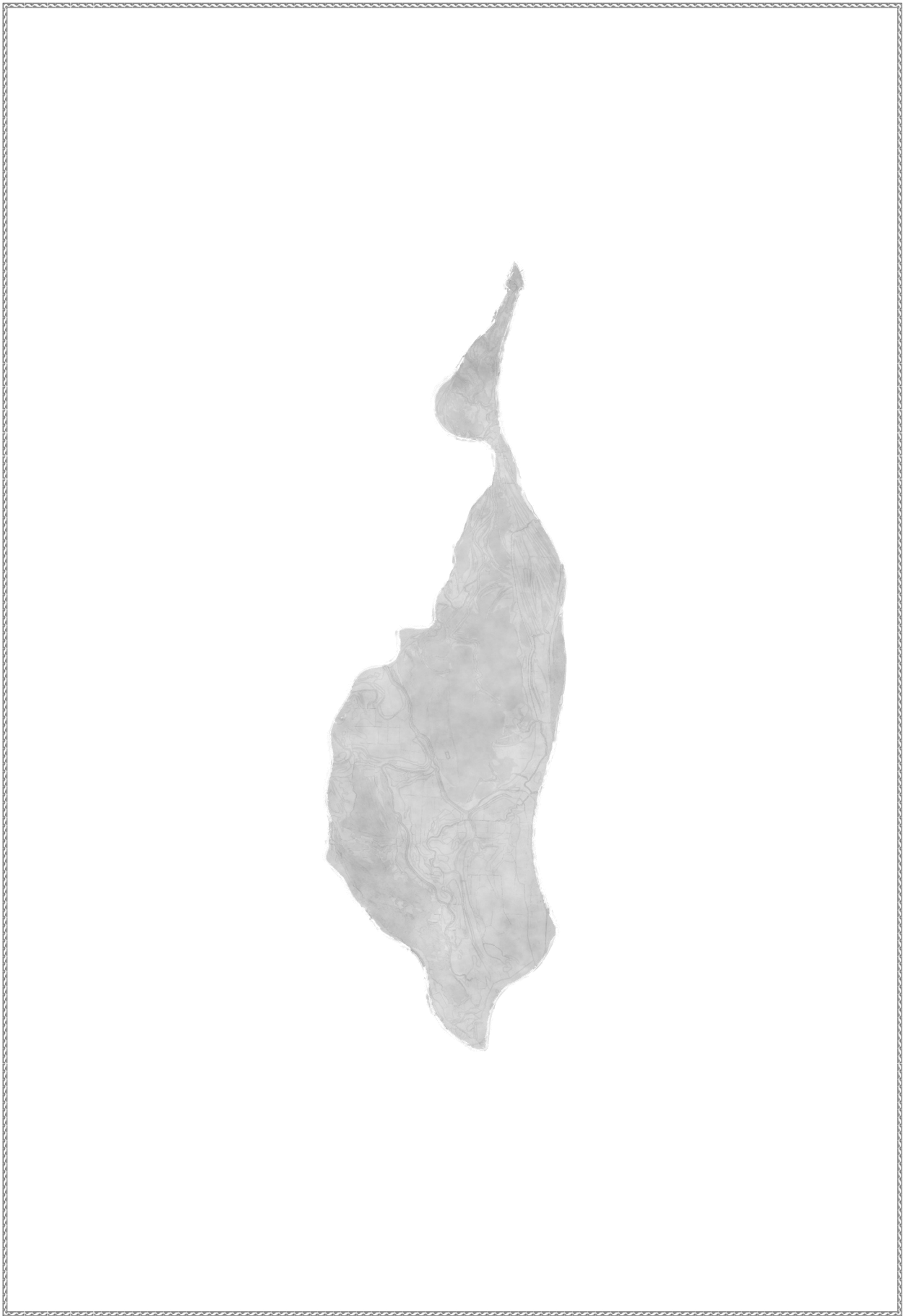


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MABEL HOWELL DUDLEY



Published Posthumously

In memory of  
Mabel Howell Dudley  
1922 to 2019

*For Jane Brunner, Michael Robert Robideau and other  
loving family members and friends of Mabel, the Sauvie  
Island community where Mabel lived her life, and to all  
people that care about recording the history of a place for  
future generations.*



# **The Flood of "48"**

Sauvie Island

Mabel Howell Dudley

This book is the personal memoir of Mabel Howell Dudley including memories shared with her by Al Lerch, Cleo Austin, Leon Cieloha, Ken Ellison, Bob Hutchinson, Evelyn (Bernet) Vetsch, Ida Reeder, Robert (Bob) Dudley, Alice Kampfer, Libby Anderson, Elmer Peterson, Zilpha (Peterson) Allison, Jim Lyons, Tom G. Davis, Reonne (Pinky) Smith, James Manke, Bob Morgan, Pete Patterson; Viola Roth Brown, Les Douglas; Wilfred Dudley, and Judy (Taber) Bridge.



This book represents a series of articles written by Mabel Dudley Howell for monthly community periodical, The Sauvie Island Outlook, edited by Jean Fears. The articles appeared in 8 issues from May 1994 through January 1995. The Sauvie Island Outlook ceased publication August 1999.

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Editor note. This history comes directly from Mabel Howell Dudley's typescript, including her handwritten additions. To preserve her distinctive and lively voice, we've done only the lightest editing.  
Lee Greer, Rebecca McLain, Eric T. Jones

## **PREFACE**

This story about the 1948 flood is for the benefit of the new people on the island or anyone not familiar with the island floods.

Sauvies Island has two dikes; the lower or little dike, which was completed in 1925 (or about), is at the north end on the Columbia side of the island. This dike has broken several times - 1932 - 33 - 48 - 56 and possibly other years I am not aware of at this time.

The upper or big dike was completed in 1941. It includes most, but not all of the remainder of the island. A few exceptions are the far north end where a city was founded by Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth, an ice merchant from Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1836 which he named "Fort Williams". Another [exception] is the land outside of the dike east of the Hall farm. This farm originally was a Donation Land Claim of Presley and Sarah (Howell) Gillihan. Presley came to Oregon in 1843 and Sarah came in 1850. Still another is the section of land between the two dikes on the Columbia river side of the island. At twenty five feet of water most of this area is flooded except for a few high spots where animals would gather, until they could be rescued.

When the section between the two dikes flood it cuts off the people behind the lower dike, except by boat.

Our high waters come from a combination of deep snowpacks with a high water content, and heavy warm rains, -thus creating a fast snow melt, in the Columbia and Willamette river basins. As you probably already know, the Columbia river originates in Canada and is fed by numerous streams and rivers as it winds its way through Washington to

the ocean. The Willamette has its beginning in a small creek south of Cottage Grove.

Before the dams, watersheds etc. the “old timers” could come within inches of predicting the flood height for that year. Many wagers were made on it. They would keep track of the snow depths, the weather forecasts and the flood water levels in such rivers as the Fraser, in Canada, the Snake, in Idaho, the Kettle, Spokane, Klickitat, Lewis, and Kalama in Washington just to name a few that feed into the Columbia. Then there are the McKenzie, Santiam, Calapooya, Johnson Creek and many others that feed the Willamette.

Our highest water was in 1894 cresting at 36.2 feet and the lowest was 9.7 feet in 1992. The 1948 spring freshet crested at 32.8 feet. There were years when a winter freshet was higher than the spring one; for example in June of 1974 the spring water crested at 25 feet while the winter one crested in January at 24.8 feet.

There is a theory that we will have a “high” water every 50 years. If you want to know the answer don’t ask the river forecasters or the weather man as only Mother Nature has the answer, and I don’t think she's telling.

“Little drops of water a mighty ocean makes” or in this case a little bit of information, no matter how small, or a small memory will give us a more complete story of, the 1948 flood.

A Spring “run-off” really means nothing. It’s just nature’s way of getting rid of the winter snow . It is the effect it has on people and property that makes it newsworthy.



## INTRODUCTION

As we start our journey down memory lane, let us turn back the calendar to 1948 and reflect on how different the area was at that time.

We still had a ferry which tied up at 1 AM (2 AM on Saturday nights). Many a person waited in their cold cars for the ferry to start up again at 5 AM. The big dike was still new and houses were being built on low ground with the hopes of not being flooded twice a year, the boys were coming home from the war, if you had electricity it was still a novelty (you could no longer put the kettle on and go outside to work knowing the fire would go out before the food and pot burned up), if you had a phone it was a 10 party line, the Grange was still having dances and the Island was a community consisting largely of dairy farms.

Upstream on the Willamette River was the Oregon shipyards and in Vancouver on the Columbia was another shipyard; it was because the people that were being brought in from all over the United States needed a place to live that Vanport was built. It was the largest wartime housing project in the U.S. during WWII. Sitting on 650 acres, it consisted of 9,942 buildings and at the peak of population had up to 39,000 people. On May 30th at 4:17 PM a 6-foot wide break suddenly appeared in the railroad fill and quickly widened to 500 feet, with a wall of water 10 feet high roaring through. By nine PM, Vanport was no more. The estimated 17,800 people living in Vanport at the time were told again that morning that the dikes were safe and they were in no danger. Some moved out during the night and that day; but most stayed and were left homeless with only the clothes on their backs. I happen to know the U.S. Engineers were told that the dike was moving. The engineers told the railroad to keep quiet as they had no place to put the people and they didn't want a riot or panic on their hands.

## MEMORIES OF AL LERCH (THE DESTRUCTION OF VANPORT)

*On Sunday afternoon of Memorial Day, May 30, 1948, my wife Martha, our 3 sons and myself drove down to Burlington with the intention of ferrying across to Sauwies Island. Since we were not residents or worked on the Island, they would not allow us to cross because of the high water and emergency conditions. We were on our way home when we heard on our radio that the Vanport dike had broken. The police had closed Columbia Blvd. to all traffic, but since we lived near the boulevard, we were able to move through.*

*The north dike of Vanport was actually an earth fill made by the railroad company to bring the trains from Washington to Oregon, across the Columbia bridge to Portland. This fill was parallel to Swift Blvd. and was repaired after the flood and is now used again. This is where the dike broke allowing the tremendous flow of water into Vanport.*

*Vanport was a federal housing project to accommodate the many families who moved to Portland to work in the shipyards and other wartime activities. There were about 18,000 people here at the time of the flood. When the dike first broke it let a huge flow of water into the north Vanport area. Apartments were lifted from their foundations, and crashed into the adjoining buildings, crushing them like match boxes. The main flow of water was from North to Southeast destroying every building and automobile in its path. From our viewpoint we could see apartments and buildings rise with the water and crash into the next building and both of them disintegrate to bits of wreckage. It was difficult to imagine the power of this surging water. Some of the buildings that were not in the main flow of water survived, but not without some water damage.*

*Most of the buildings were apartments or flats, but there were some grocery and shopping stores. Also elementary school and Fire and Police departments. People had only moments warning to get out, and escaped with very little except the clothing on the backs. Some were able to escape with their cars, but were soon caught up in a huge traffic jam trying to*

*get out on the ramp to Denver Avenue. Cars had to be abandoned and people escaped by foot. Families were separated and many did not know who survived the catastrophe. My brother-in-law, Walt Schlafle, launched our boat and was able to rescue some people from roof or upper windows of apartments. He also took a photographer from the Oregon Journal into the flooded area, where he was able to take some very interesting pictures of the huge destruction. An amazing feature of this sudden disaster was the swift response of the private volunteers, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Police, Fire department, National Guard and many other organizations to lend a helping hand. Many buses, ambulances and cars were loaded with evacuees and taken to shelters which were hurriedly set up to receive them. In our neighborhood the gyms at Peninsula and Ockley Green schools were opened to receive food, clothing, bedding and blankets for the evacuees as they arrive.*

*Although Vanport was destroyed in a few hours there was a very low causality number. If I remember the number, it was only 11. The reason for this low number was attributed to Sunday and the Memorial Day holiday when residents were out of town. Vanport was never rebuilt and the property is now occupied with recreation facilities. These are the Heron Lake Golf Course, Portland Meadows horse racing tract, some soccer and soft ball fields and picnic areas. The name Vanport was derived from Van of Vancouver and Port of Portland. A flourishing city at one time, then destroyed in a few hours to only a memory.*

A special "Thanks" to Al for his wonderful story on the Vanport flood. The paper did report only 11 deaths; but the County Coroner's office put this report out later. "Official death count was 13, but unofficially many people were not accounted for and believed drowned and the bodies never found. Possible washed into the river and down into the ocean."

In researching the "48" flood I have talked to many people and 3 separate people mentioned a "school bus". One said he saw a school bus full of people, caught in the traffic jam, with the water up to the door and rising rapidly; another told me

he saw a bus full of dead bodies; and the third told about seeing bodies in a bus that was being covered with a large tarp. Another reliable source said he saw a barge loaded with bodies being taken out through the break in the dike. He didn't know where they were taken to.

### **MEMORIES OF CLEO AUSTIN** (DAUGHTER OF MY MOTHER'S SISTER)

*All of my Aunts and Uncles and their families thought of the Island as their second home and spent many happy hours here. I'm sure this was true of the families and friends of many other Island neighbors.*

*You couldn't ask for a more beautiful Memorial Day than the one we had in 1948. I had come to Portland from Florence several days earlier to stay with my parents in SW Portland, near Tigard, while waiting the birth of my second child. That morning, we spent decorating the family graves. It was late afternoon and I was tilling in my Mother's garden when my sister came running down the hill to tell us her husband had been called to duty at Vanport as the dike had broken. My Father had also been called and told to report to the sternwheeler "Portland" and get a head of steam up in case she was needed. My Uncle Paul reported to the "Henderson". Both were engineers and many friendly debates were held as to which boat was fastest and best. (When the race was held, to celebrate the premiere of the movie "Bend in the River", Paul was engineer on the "Portland" and Charlie was on the "Henderson", same argument - different boat). Our cousin, Al, a bus driver was also called to work. As you can see the flood touched the lives of many families.*

*We, my mother, father, sister, her husband, their 3 year old daughter, my 9 year old son and I got into my Dad's car and off we went to where the "Portland" was tied up at the Steel bridge. My brother-in-law held his fireman's hat in the front window so we wouldn't be stopped for speeding. As we went down Front Street the man-hole covers were popping up about 3 feet, the water would slush out and the covers would drop down again. It was a scary, eerie sight.*

*The water was just starting to seep in around the train depot as we dropped my Dad off; and took off again across the Steel bridge and down Vancouver Avenue. When we got to Vanport it looked like a large lake with the sun glistening on the water, it was already filling with debris. What struck me most was the Vanport College cupola teetering in the water. Vancouver Avenue was full of groups of people wandering in a daze. It was awesome!*

*My cousin, her 6 year old daughter, who was at the matinee and was sent home when the alarm sounded, and a friend, who taught at Vanport College, lived there. It was late that night before we got word that they had made it out alive. My cousin had loaded her sewing machine in the car and they took off for safety. Her daughter was laughing at the waves hitting the car, unaware of the danger they were in.*

*The next day we headed for the Island to check up on my aunt and uncle, Ben and Rose Howell but were stopped at Burlington. My Mother talked to Mrs. Hadley who assured her the family was OK. Somehow word got to them that we were in Burlington so Uncle Ben and Aunt Rose came across the river in their boat and we had a nice visit.*

*That evening I went to Wilcox Memorial Hospital where 3 days later my daughter was born. It is a summer I will never forget. I was told that the water reached as high as 4th Street in the next few days.*

Let us return to the Island and climb aboard our boat "Memory Lane" and start down the Columbia, from where the two rivers meet, we only have to go a short distance before we come to the Cieloha farm. All emergency personnel, fireman, police, bus drivers, medical, steamboat crews, etc., were on standby. As there were no pagers, someone had to be near the phone at all times.

## **MEMORIES OF LEON CIELOHA**

*There is not much to tell as no one was living on the place at the time;*

*however my Father, George, and I were keeping a close check on the farm. We would take our 34 foot tug boat and check out the farm being careful not to get hung up on a fence, as only the tops of the post were showing. All of the buildings were under water so we had to tie some of them down to keep them from floating away. The house had 5 feet of water in it. "It left everything in a real mess".*

As continued down the river we come to the McIntire farm where the Ellisons lived outside of the dike and the McFarlands (their daughter) had built a home (which burned down in 1968) on the inside, side of the dike.

### **MEMORIES OF KEN ELLISON**

*Did you ever see a chicken roundup? Ken did and said it was the funniest thing he ever saw in his life. The story went something like this: Ken's Mother had a few chickens, they caught those they could and put them on the dike. A day or so later, with the water rising rapidly, George McFarland got in his boat and set out to rescue the rest of the flock. Catching chickens on dry land is one thing; but trying to rescue a bunch of frightened, squawking flopping old hens while keeping a boat under control in the river is quite another and to add to George's dilemma an old rooster got on one of the oars and refused to budge. A movie was made of the heroic deed but has been lost. The Ellison house had 3 1/2 feet of water and muck in it.*

As I'm not sure where the cattle were that Jim B. (see Memories of Bob Hutchinson) was going to move; I will put the article from Bob here as we drift between the McIntire and Hutchinson farms.

### **MEMORIES OF BOB HUTCHINSON**

*The Island holds many memories for me. My great, great, grandparents Robert and Sarah Miller claimed the entire south most tip of the island*

*as their land claim. They came to the Island in 1845. My Great Grandfather was Horace J. McIntire, my Grandfather was his son Bob McIntire.*

*My Mother and Father met while my Father, Marion Hutchinson was working for Kitty Hutchinson. My Mother, Narcissus Marie (McIntire) Hutchinson was the daughter of Bob McIntire.*

*Horace J. McIntire took a donation land claim on the Island in 1853. One of the corners of the claim is on the dike near the home of Alfred Lerch on Gilliban Road.*

*I moved to Skyline with my family in 1946. My Father had been a dairy farmer in Washington and retired in 1946. On the fourth Sunday of May 1948, I was seated in church at Brooks Hill Free Methodist Church, where I am now Pastor, and heard the Pastor say that volunteer help was needed on the Island to help fill and place sandbags on the dike. As soon as church let out, I went home, changed my clothes and headed for the Island. Those were the days of the ferry, so I boarded the ferry, crossed over to the Island and headed for the dike. I worked on the dike until after dark and went to my aunt's house, Laura Henrici, to sleep. I was no sooner in bed when there came a knock on the door.*

*Government officials were saying that the dike might break that night and everyone on the Island was to go to the school house - the highest point on the island. I spent that night sleeping in front seat of their car.*

*The next day I worked on the dike and towards late afternoon I started to walk home to Skyline. As I was boarding the ferry a friend of mine Jim B. was driving a truck off on the ferry. I asked him where he was going and he said he was going to the ranch that had belonged to my great grandfather to take the cattle off so they would not drown in the flood, he asked me to go with him. As we were driving across the Island, a China pheasant flew up along the fence row. He promptly stopped the truck, shoved a shotgun out the window beside me, and shot the pheasant. I ran to get it and placed it on the floor of the cab of the truck and we went on our way. When we got to the farm we went in the house and Jim B. (last name not given in case there is no statute of limitations on pheasant killing out of season) put the bird in the sink. We were only*



*in the house a few minutes when an officer knocked on the door. He came in the house to ask us what we were doing there. When Jim B. heard the knock, said "Bob, hide the pheasant". Well the only place I could think of was the oven of the stove. I opened the door and threw the pheasant in and when the officer entered the kitchen I was sitting on the stove, dangling my legs over the front looking as innocent as I could. Jim B. stood leaning against the wall trying to do the same. The officer had no sooner entered the kitchen than the pheasant woke up. It squawked, it flopped, it did everything a pheasant could do to leave the oven. Jim B. totally ignored the sound coming from the over; the officer ignored the sound coming from the oven and I did the same. All three of us acted as if it was a normal thing for strange noises to come from the oven. No one changed his expression even the tiniest bit, no one even looked at the stove on which I was seated. The officer asked us what we were doing there. We said we had come to move the cattle. He was happy with the explanation and promptly went to the door bidding us "goodby". When he left Jim B. went to the oven, took out the bird, went to the woodshed and removed the head of the pheasant. The pheasant was once again placed on the floor of the truck and we loaded the cattle and left the place.*

*Many strange and unusual things happened to me during the flood, this was the strangest of all. I never knew what happened to the pheasant, but I have an idea Jim B's family had pheasant for dinner.*

Most of the land between the two dikes belonged to the heirs of Simon and Catherine Reeder, who arrived on the Island on September 18, 1853, from White River, Indiana and took out a Donation Land Claim in 1854, on that section of land. Our first stop is at the Hutchinson Ranch.

### **MEMORIES OF EVELYN (BERNET) VETSCH**

*The evening of May 24th, Dick and I returned from a few days in Eastern Oregon - the first time away from the farm since our wedding in*

*January - to find that we could no longer get to our rented farm, the Hutchinson Ranch, on the bank of the Columbia. The water was already too deep across the road to the buildings, so we stayed that night at Dick's parents, where we now live. The water had come up so fast during the night it was too deep to drive the cattle through to the diked land, so we had to hire a barge to come up the Columbia River. When the cows saw all the calves that we loaded onto the barge first, they marched right on without any trouble even though they had to walk through water to get on.*

*We unloaded them on the dike at the Spencer Farm (where Merle Givens now lives) and drove them over to the Munson place (where Jake Jacobson now lives) and milked them there. The following day we found a barn to rent up on the hill by Warren - past Scappoose - so hauled them there in trucks. The barn had not been used for milking cows for a long time so a lot of make-shift arrangements had to be made.*

*At home (at the Hutchinson Ranch) the water was already up around the buildings and part way up the porch steps. I remember putting on a bathing suit and retrieving canned fruit and jars from the cellar. (Editors [MHD] note - it was a good thing Evelyn was young at the time as the water was icy cold, as it was melted snow mixed with rain.) Our wooden freezer was floated over to the machine shed and hoisted up under the roof. The furniture was moved to the second floor of the house - except the refrigerator which was put on the table.*

*From Warren, Dick and I drove to the Island about every other day to our boat that we left where Reeder Road goes over the dike. With the boat we went to the farm to feed the cats upstairs in one barn and chickens upstairs in another. Although the house was built with high-water in mind, there was about 6 to 8 inches of water on the main floor. It left 2 inches of gooey muck in every room, and even more in the other buildings. When the water finally receded, it was not the end of the trouble for the farmers. The flooded land looked as barren as a river bed. There was no pasture for the cattle and no hay to make for the following winter's feed supply.*

*A short distance on down the river is the farm Earl and Ida Reeder.*

## MEMORIES OF IDA REEDER

*The 1948 spring run-off in the month of May on the Columbia River was the highest water since the 1894 flood. The very warm weather was bringing the snow and ice out so fast that the flood waters were upon us before we had much chance for preparation..*

*We had to hurriedly get our dairy cattle out of here, sending them to the Dairy Coop to Sam Graham, and he sent them to his nephew Dale Sheiler's farm in Hillsboro for the duration of the high water. We sent our other young stock and a few sheep to the Van Domolen's in the Mountaindale Area.*

*We had to have the Coast Guard take Earl's Mother to her daughter Anita's in Vancouver, Washington, and then his sister Ruth Smoole came and took her to her home at Rainier, Oregon.*

*Our son Jim was graduating from Scappoose High School at the time and we weren't able to attend his graduation. However, Jim was able to make it by boat. His cousin, Bonnie Mason, from Portland was the only one of his family present. My sister, Elsie Mason, said, "Well, Ida, you'll have to try and make it to his wedding!"*

*We had a number of row boats here, but no good boat with a motor, so Earl called his nephew, Roy Kadow at Vancouver to find him a boat. Roy came over with a B & B boat with a 10 HP Johnson Motor, bringing along a case of canned milk, since we had no cows and no milk. We really made good use of that boat for ourselves and our neighbors because most everything was water.*

*The little Columbia County dike had broken, and all the houses were flooded, except for Johnsons', Hunts' and Stutzers'. We and the Hutchinson Ranch and Paul Reeder's house are between the two dikes, and the water roars through the dikes, kind of like a sluice box. We had no water in our house, but had water in our basement which is built above ground. Since Earl's parents were living here on this place before the 1894 flood and had their home destroyed, when they rebuilt in the fall, his Dad had plans in case of another high water when they built the*

*house. The house we now live in will be 100 years old this fall.*

*We had chickens in the hay mow of the big barn, and a few calves in the grain bins in the mow too. Neighbors down the line had chickens in hay mows also. Every couple of days, Earl and Jim would take the boat and go down and feed their chickens for them, and gather the eggs.*

*Walter and Edna Graf were living in our little house in the middle of the field. It was then on the Reeder School ground across the road from us. They lived here while their new house down the road was being built. The little house flooded with water over halfway up the windows on the main floor, so they stayed with us for a while, then they went up to Carl and Minnie Schnabele's ranch at Izee, Oregon, staying for a couple of weeks.*

*We managed to have electricity all during the flood. Our boys put an empty grease can up around the meter base. At that time, we had the water tank tower with the Redwood tank that we pumped well water into to supply the house, so we had that water to use in the house. We dipped water from the river for other purposes. Luckily we had electricity all during the flood and also had a telephone. Telephones were installed in April, the first we'd had, they ran off of the current from 11,000 volt electric lines. Later we got regular telephone lines. Our friends and family could call seeing if we still had our heads above water.*

*The Sauvies Island Drainage District dike was in danger too, the water being so high that the Army Corp of Engineers had their headquarters at the Sauvies Island School grounds. Some low places of the dike had to be sandbagged. They filled the sandbags with sand from the Spencer place.*

*We sent our cars on a barge to Ridgefield, Washington to be driven to Portland later. Someone drove ours to the stock yards in Portland, but we didn't get it until after the flood waters went down because on the day that Earl and Walt went to get the car the railroad fill at Vanport broke, so they weren't allowed to go on.*

*One morning early, about 5 AM, a small boat came telling us they'd*

*heard the dam was cracked and we'd better be getting out. I was the one that was out at that time, and I told Earl. He said to me that he really couldn't believe it because his good friend, Bob Nelson with the Port of Portland, would have notified him. Earl called later and Bob Nelson said they'd cracked the gates to let out some water and that's what was heard.*

*One party that had been off the Island for awhile, upon returning to Burlington, asked one of our neighbors how Earl Reeder was doing and he replied "living the life of Riley running around in the boat shooting skunks and drinking whiskey".*

*Earl and Jim would take some of the neighbors in our boat to their place, took Elmer and Lydia Peterson to their house, and various other ones. So we all helped each other. Once, George Johnson brought us some turkey eggs from the Lyon's turkey farm.*

*Jim and Earl batched for quite a spell while I went to Rainier to help look after Earl's Mother while Ruth's family was harvesting their strawberry crop. I was there until sometime after the 4th of July. Earl and Jim were busy sweeping mud and fish out of the basement as the water receded.*

*In earlier days, before the 1894 flood, Earl's Grandparents, Simon and Catherine Reeder and family had some high land property at Ridgefield, Washington where they would take to at high water time.*

*Now you know the story of the "fish in the basement" wouldn't it be nice to have your own indoor fishing hole; that is if someone else did all the work keeping it clean and odor free.*

*Just past Earl and Paul Reeder's, but before you get to the little dike is a strip of land that was the home of John Grea. Today it is a trailer court (Marshall Beach), and if you had been living there in "48" you would be standing in about 8 feet of water. Sand had been dredged out of the river onto the beach and, during the flood, it washed into John's house, across his place and onto the road. The county had to remove several feet of sand before the road was passable.*

Now let's shift the motor of the "Memory Lane" into high and by pass the little dike and continue with the land outside of the dikes. Our next stop will be the Richardson Farm. I'm sure there is a great story to be told about the farm, but I only have the one my brother-in-law told me.

### **MEMORIES OF ROBERT (BOB) DUDLEY**

*One morning Jake Richardson called and said he had gone to check out the place and discovered the electric meter was half full of water and it was spinning around like a top. He had called the electric company and they had refused to help, so he asked if I would help. I said "sure" and we decided on a time and place to meet. He picked me up in his boat and when we got there I cut the wires. We then went into the house. The hardwood floors were buckled and pushing the walls out but Jake was more concerned about his shotgun in the basement. Knowing just where it was, and standing in water half way up to our knees, Jake sawed a hole in the floor and retrieved the gun. After checking out the rest of the farm, I might add the damage was considerable, he took me back to my truck.*

As we cut across the lower end of the Island and head up the Willamette Slough to the ferry, let's detour to the banks of Sturgeon Lake where the Kampf's lived

### **MEMORIES OF ALICE KAMPFER**

*When we arrived at the ferry, the Moar's houseboat which was on the mainland side of the river looked like it was in the middle of the flood. The home of George McCartney, which was at the top of the ramp at the ferry landing, was being flooded.*

*As the water came up the ramps, where the ferry landed, were being moved up with almost every crossing of the ferry until there was no longer anywhere to move them. At this time the ferry was taken off of its' cable. Dewey Charlton would go down stream when it crossed from the mainland to the Island and would land on the north side of the ferry*

*road almost up to where there is now a house. From the Island to the mainland it went upstream and landed about half-way up the ramp to Burlington. They had to remove sections of the railing and landed there. It was difficult to get on or off the ferry when the ramps were not being used, and the crossings took much longer so only people that lived on the Island or emergency vehicles were allowed to cross.*

*One gentleman (H.H.) wanted to come to the Island to check on relation that still lived here. When he and his family got to the ferry and was asked if he lived on the Island, he said "yes" and they let him on. After the ferry was loaded and started across the channel, the deck hand happened to look at the license plate and asked "how could he live on the Island and have a Washington License plate on his car?"*

*The Red Cross set up a table on the Island side by the ferry landing and served coffee, sandwiches and doughnuts to the hungry and tired workers and to those waiting for the ferry. If I remember right the ferry operators tried to make not more than one round trip an hour.*

Now lets load up the "Memory Lane" and head back across the Island to where the road crosses the dike on Reeder Road. By this time the water is within a foot or so of the top of the dike and the little dike is under water. If you look to your left you will see a house that was built up so it would not flood, but alas, this year it was getting it's floors washed.

When we reach the Johnson house we find it is above water level, but the livestock have been moved off; so we continue on our way till we come to Willow Bar, and there we find Andersons' house flooded.

### **MEMORIES OF LIBBY ANDERSON**

*It was the last week in May 1948 - the air was heavy with the smell of summer and the smell of thick muddy water. We had walked along the dike that morning to see how high the Columbia River had risen during the night. It was rising fast - and looked like a relentless force - not the*



*river we had known - had boated and skied on, had fished in and watched the commercial fishermen drift their nets. This river seemed threatening to the very lands it had created millions of years ago.*

*At that time, we, the Ben Anderson family, had just moved the year before to the Willow Bar Farm, 40 acres of silt soil in Columbia County, and were testing our ability to live outside the city. We had a few head of beef, the usual complement of dogs, cats, geese and ducks. My brother, Paul, was with us, as was Richard, Ben's son, and our two boys, Donald 5, and Douglas 8. We loved the freedom, the land, and especially the nearness of the great river.*

*The test came that morning when word was out - the road was flooded between the two dikes, and we would have to be towed by an army water duck to the ferry landing. I crammed two suitcases with clothes for the boys. The duck towed us and our big Dodge car to the ferry landing, and we went on to town for three weeks of safety.*

*Back at the farm, Ben, Paul and Richard moved furniture, clothing, etc., to comparative safety upstairs in our small house. They put my baby grand piano up on barrels, and that evening watched the water slowly seep its way into the house through the fireplace tiles.*

*The next day the cattle were barged out - they were reluctant until our Jersey milk cow, Dinah, showed the way out. One dog was killed in the process. The cats and ducks had to fend for themselves. Later in the week, the men moved out as the water rose three feet in the house, bringing tons of mud, logs and debris. At one time, the men went back with a power boat, moored to the second story, and salvaged some articles to bring back to town.*

*The water completely covered the North End of the Island - homes, barns and outbuildings were submerged and soaked. The commercial fishermen weathered it by tying up to moorages and returned mostly intact.*

*A big household clean-up job when we returned. The knotty pine walls were scrubbed, the heavy linoleum flooring pulled up, washed and laid down again, curtains washed and damaged goods destroyed. The piano*

*had tipped over and the upper registers had to be repaired - it was sometime before it returned. Otherwise, we were back in business.*

*The Grange members came and took charge of the outside with their large equipment - pulled out huge damaged cherry trees, hauled away tons of litter and shoveled tons of mud from the buildings. The wooden fence posts had popped out and fence lines had to be redone (no steel posts in those days).*

*The good will and service of our fellow Grange members was a revelation to us and enabled us to return to our beloved Willow Bar. The soil itself had been renewed as it had been many times before, from the deposited silt brought down by the river from the northern parts of Washington and Idaho. As the water receded, Ben sowed new pasture grass.*

*Our experience was only a small fraction of the devastation in 1948. The story of the workers in the big dike is one of hard work in patrolling and reinforcing the dikes. Many farms and homes in Columbia County were seriously damaged, and have their own stories to tell.*

Since that time, the dikes have been raised, more dams have been built on the Columbia River, and our own Sauvie Island bridge was completed. They say that the flooding has been controlled - but who can tell of the mighty power of our great river?

A short way on down the road, which is now under water is the Peterson farm where the water first ran over the dike and later washed out. To our left we see that Elmer and Lydia Peterson's house is being christened before it is even finished.

### **MEMORIES OF ELMER PETERSON AND ZILPHA (PETERSON) ALLISON**

I am writing this article from the knowledge I have of the family and the information they gave me. I am sure if I could have waited for a few months that Elmer would have been able to write a much more interesting story himself. He is making

great progress in his recovery from the stroke he had. Zilpha says she does not know a great deal as she was not living on the Island at the time, and by the time she did return to the Island for good, it was just a memory of another year, another flood.

*We, the Peterson family, have lived through many high waters and many changes on the Island since we moved here in 1921 from Lebanon, which is east of Salem. This flood was higher but not much different from all the others, except we now live behind a dike.*

*When we first came to the Island we lived where "Pumpkin Patch" is now, we then rented the "Menzie" place, as it was then called to differentiate it from the other Howell holdings. The house and the barn were both on the bank of the slough, they were moved when the dike was built. As the Howells' had high ground all we had to do was to drive the cattle about a mile. When the water went down we would fix the fences, repair the buildings and move back. If the water did not stay high too long and the ground dried out enough, we would plant a crop of corn for silage. Due to the warmth of the summer, the moisture in the ground from the high water and the new layer of silt the corn grew fast and lush. If we were lucky enough to have a late fall we would make hay from the wild grass. If not we tried again the next year.*

*In 1941 our parents, Paul and Winnie, bought this farm in Columbia County behind the small dike, that we still call "home". I (Elmer) was here on the place the day the water crept over the dike, and later washed out a section. It would be hard to describe the feelings I had. Lydia and I had been married a short time and we were building a new home on the place, a short distance from the folks. Luckily we hadn't finished it so there was not too much damage done. Lydia stayed in town with her folks.*

*I (Zilpha) was living in California with my husband, Den Allison, at that time. However we did come back to the Island to check up on the family and other relations that were still on the Island. We had some trouble getting on but Den talked the ferry operator into letting us cross. A few years later we moved back to the Island for good.*

Here we have 2 different memories. I have found out that after 40 years and "umpteenth" floods, many memories seem to have gotten mixed up as to which flood was which. As long as no lives were lost it makes for a friendly family argument.) Elmer says that their herd of 45 cattle (38 were milking) and "Papa" bull were driven to Kerby and Delphene Brumfield's, near the Soil Conservation office on Reeder Road. Zilpha says they were driven to the Everet farm, that Manke's were renting. Their Mother and Father stayed with Jim and Stella Hamman, behind the school house on Charlton Road.

*We kept close check on the farm during the flood. One building had washed off its' foundation, there was water in both houses and all the other buildings were up to their rafters in water. The folks' house has 4 1/2 feet of water in it, the floors were buckling and the house was a muddy mess. The furniture had been put upstairs, except for the piano which was up on blocks. The hay crop was ruined (it cost Dad over \$10,000 that year for feed, for winter) the pasture was dotted with debris and the fence post were floating so the fences had to be replaced before the cattle could be brought home. One shed was so badly damaged it had to be torn down. The "well" that had been capped before the water reached it, had to be purified and pumped out before it was safe to use again.*

*Living behind a dike is different from living on undiked low ground. For one thing the day to day waiting and wondering if the dike will hold is very nerve wrecking; and it takes a lot longer for life to get back to normal as the water has to be pumped out and the dike repaired, which is a slow process. "We never want to go through another high water again!" say Zilpha, Elmer, Libby Anderson, the Reederes and all the "Old Timers" on the Island.*

As we continue down the Island (at this time was hard to tell the Island from the river) we come to the turkey farm of Max Lyons.

## MEMORIES OF JIM LYONS

*My father, Max Lyons, had just sold to the State of Oregon, but was still operating his 1000 acre farm at the north end of the old dike district. On May 27, Dad called me at work in Portland and said: "I need help!" He ordered a seaplane, and I recruited three other men, and we were picked up in Multnomah Channel and flown to the farm on the Columbia River side.*

*After landing, we found the top of the old dike was under about 2 1/2 feet of water. We knew where the dike was by the power poles, so the pilot taxied over to the area. I got down on the step and felt for the ground with my right, hind leg. Once I found it, we all got out and waded along the top of the dike over to the brooder houses which were a quarter of a mile from the river, where the old dike crosses to the McNary Lake side.*

*As we got there a tug and a large barge pulled in on the down-stream side of the dike and the farm hands already there, and we four, started loading turkey poults out of the brooder houses. We built a fence with turkey coops around the barge to contain the turkeys — we literally threw them on the barge. We got the last one on about dark, as the floor of the brooder house started to float.*

*The turkeys were barged to the Corps of Engineers' dock near the St.*

*Johns Bridge. The minute we arrived we started trucking the turkey poults (utilizing the fence-coops) to brooder houses that Dad rented in Sandy, McMinnville and Salem. I hauled the last load to Sandy the afternoon of May 30. The trucking had been a 2 1/2 day operation.*

*On the way home, coming west on Lombard, I ended up in the traffic jam at Union Avenue caused by the Vanport flood. Hearing requests on the radio for trucks to help people get out of Vanport, I unloaded the turkey coops at Dad's home on Washburne Street, turned around and headed for Vanport. However, due to traffic jams, I never did get there.*

*Prior to the dike breaking, Dad had put a stove, furniture, food and water in the haymow of the barn. Prior to leaving the Island the night we*

*we loaded the barge, I rowed in a skiff from the brooder houses to the barn, and put an Island neighbor, Charlie Dant, in the haymow with a shotgun to keep what was left from being stolen.*

*Somehow the American Red Cross learned that Charlie had been "abandoned" due to the flood, and they mounted a rescue effort. All of this was reported at length in the Oregonian and, as usual, none of their facts were correct. Charlie's only problem was that he had probably run out of booze by that time.*

*I went back by boat a few days later and the two-story chicken house, machine shed and all three brooder houses had disappeared down river.*

*Under the Sale Agreement with the State of Oregon, we had possession of the ranch until January 1949. However, after the flood waters went down we did not bother to go back.*

Now lets return to Reeder Road, but on our way lets reassess all the damage and frustrations the farmers will have to cope with when the water recedes. Damage to buildings, no pastures, no summer crops, lots of debris to be removed, the list goes on and on.

We moor the "Memory Lane" as it is no longer needed and continue our journey by car or on Foot. As we cross over Gilbert River we come to the Soil Conservation office.

### **MEMORIES OF TOM G. DAVIS**

*I had an office in the Sauvie Island Soil Conservation District. My office became the headquarters for the flood operations.*

*One morning, Al Linder came to the office and asked me if I realized how high the rivers were. I had not but checked up on it. It was 25 feet. This was as high as the berm on the dike! I asked Al and his brothers John and Mike if they would patrol the dike for any leaks and they did this. I contacted Archie Hall of the Sauvie Island Drainage District and others. The water kept rising. When it was plain we were in trouble,*

*action began.*

*The Spencer Farm area near the dike was sand and this area was used for sandbags. I had a dragline operating on ditch work and I moved it to the sand area. A loading shoot, or chute, was constructed, sand was put in the hopper by drag line and the sand bags filled.*

*The Army Corps of Engineers took over direction of the activities and did a fine job. Sandbags and brush mats were rushed into place. The dike leaked in many places but held.*

*Many areas in the Sawie Island Drainage District were around five feet above normal mean sea level and some were lower. If the dike had broken at thirty feet of water, things would have been abhorrent. But it held!*

*I remember Dick Vetsch bringing his cattle from the Hutchinson Farm through water. George Cashdollar moved their stock off the Island, as did some others. Elmer Peterson, from his flooded farm, also moved his cattle. I was at the South end of the Island when Mrs. Shields barged her cattle to safety. The quick water from the tug washed over the top of the dike. I could stand with one foot on the dike and put the other in the river, things were that close.*

*Under the direction of the Corps of Engineers, men were hired for dike work including many locals. Boils formed in fields from the river pressure and a large one erupted under the Drainage District pump plant. Car traffic on the dike was prohibited.*

*As I recall the Red Cross and the local ladies worked hard to feed the workmen. I believe there were about 200. I believe the effort put forth was outstanding. I also believe we were lucky.*

The following is a copy of the warning procedure in case of flooding:

#### IMPORTANT NOTICE

In the event that a break in the levee should occur, the following plan will be in effect: A siren will give the alarm



by a continuous blast.

1. All persons on or near the dike will proceed to the top of the dike and move along the top of the levee away from the known break.
2. All persons near the School House will proceed to the School House and await instructions.
3. Persons in the vicinity of the Patterson Home (this was on Lucy Reeder Road where the Drivers live now) should remain there and await evacuation or instructions.
4. Any vehicles on the levee in the event of a break should proceed at reduced speed away from the known break.

Signed by S.R. Overholser, Corp of Engineers; Frank Patterson, Sauvie Island Drainage District, and Marten Nagel, Capt C.E.

A little farther down the road we come to Martin and Alice Holmason's new home which they generously donated the use of during the emergency. It was here that the ladies prepared and served the meals for the volunteers. I'm sure Alice had to have a new stove by the time she got her home back to normal.

At the school house we find the yard full of tents, as the U.S. Army had sent 50 men from Fort Vancouver to help save the big dike, which was still under the management of the U.S. Corp of Engineers. The Army used the school for it's mess hall and they also had cots set up in the school. My sister, Marge Taber, went over to the school to get a large kettle to use at Alice's. She knocked on the front door but was escorted to a rear door as there were men roaming through the hall in their birthday suits.

Now lets wind our way down Lucy Reeder Road, which is

lined with farm machinery, to the homes of Pete & Julia Patterson and Bud & Pinky Smith. That is where the U.S. Army Engineers made their headquarters.

### MEMORIES OF REONNE (PINKY) SMITH

*What do I remember about the "48" flood? Not a great deal, except I kept extremely busy and got little sleep. I would catch a few winks of sleep when and where I could.*

*I could have stayed in Portland with my two small children; but I choose to take the children to my Mother in Scappoose and stay on the Island with my husband and do what I could to help out in the emergency. (In looking back, she said, she was sure it had been the right decision. "Grandmother" enjoyed the grandchildren and she had a unique experience that was an interesting, exhausting, exciting, scary, satisfying period of her life she will never forget.)*

*My husband hung the sofa from the ceiling and put the stove up on blocks, as he was sure the Island would flood again.*

*The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers used our home as their headquarters. My husband, James (Bud) Smith, was one of the engineers. We had men sleeping here day and night; and those that couldn't find an empty bed here slept over at the Patterson home. I did all of the cooking and some of the washing for the men, then went to Holmason's and helped with the food preparation there from 10 PM to 2 AM. At home I used what food I had on hand, including killing my own chickens, and the rest I got at Clarence's little store. (Clarence Eiler had a small grocery store on the Keller farm. The building is still there, boarded up. Clarence was Martha Keller's brother.) Cooking several meals a day on a stove on blocks, for that many men was a real challenge.*

*Julia Patterson and Dalphene Brumfield, both worked at the Soil Conservation office. The Salvation Army was stationed there to help out in any way they could. They gave out blankets, coffee etc., as well as*

*furnished some of the large kettles that was used at Holmasons'.*

*The head engineer on the Island during the flood was from Washington D.C., a tall (over 6'), young, good looking man. He was in complete charge of the entire operation of protecting the upper dike. The dike was completed in "41" and was still under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. After the crisis was over and he got his orders to return home; he put on his dress uniform and remarked to Pinky "my wife is going to kill me". He had put on weight and couldn't button his uniform blouse.*

Once again, THANKS, to Reonne and all the other ladies that helped prepare food for the workers during the flood, the Island lived up to it's reputation "good food and lots of it."

Reonne has numerous memories of the day to day crises that had to be dealt with by the engineers, like false reports that the dike had broken, leaks, boils, hot spots and the report that Bonneville had broken and everybody was to report to the school house. At that time we had experimental radio phones ten party lines, so the men would either have to break in or listen to the conversation until the line was clear. (Being more or less isolated how else could we keep up with the news. This was before TV.) Lucy Reeder Road was lined with farm machinery from the low land farms, which made driving it an experience in itself.

There were also lots of anecdotes like the one about Celia Johnson outside digging up her shrubs and flowers while the family was trying to pack up the contents of the house and move then to safety. She was quoted as saying her flowers were more important. This could very well be true as Celia always had a beautiful yard.

Meanwhile back on the Columbia side of the Island, inside the big dike, activities were humming. I remember one day a report came in that there was a bad leak in the basement ofcFarland's house and they were sure the dike would go.

Spencer's place was another hot spot as the dike was made of sandy dirt. There many reports of weak spots, boils and leaks; but all were quickly dealt with by hard working, dedicated crews working to save the dike.

A quote from Omar Spencer's book about Sauvies Island:

*The job of patrolling, reporting and sandbagging weak spots in the big dike was heroically performed by approximately 100 civilians and 100 soldiers under the direction of the Corp of Engineers, U.S. Army, 3-one half yard dragline shovels, 2 bulldozers, 35 trucks, 800 truck loads of willows and approximately 345,000 sacks of sand were used to stop seepage and strengthen the big dike." He also said that during WWII the population of the Island was about 300.*

### **MEMORIES OF JAMES MANKE**

*My memories of the flood and of all the snow, then of the sound of the ice breaking up on the river. We lived next to the Copelands' and my bedroom was on the river side and the ice would wake me up and scare me.*

*I also remember my grandfather and dad loading our cows on barges and taking them across the river to Washington. All in all it was pretty exciting to a 5 year old!*

### **MEMORIES OF BOB MORGAN**

(4th GENERATION PIONEER)

*Early morning was borne clear and unusually warm that third-week-of-May day in 1948. The spring air still carried the sweet scent of the native Cottonwood tree bloom. If one stood in the Morgan's Landing Farm decades-old family orchard, which was located on land 20 feet above sea-level, hurrying up to the top of the dyke, designed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and suddenly viewing the ferocity of our Mighty Columbia, Great River of the West, as it relentlessly raced toward the*

*Pacific Ocean, one could only be awe-struck with it's destructive, devastating power.*

*The U.S. Corps of Engineers report that morning advised that the river level at Vancouver stood at 28.5 feet and rising.*

*Although a native "Islander", by 1946 I had been married ten years and my wife Wendy and I had four small children and were then living in the Eastmoreland area of Portland. My Aunt Luella Copeland, fearing the flooding river, was staying with us. The previous April Wendy and I had purchased the southern-most 93 acres with 1400 feet of river frontage, part of the original Morgan Donation Land Claim, from my Uncle Alba Morgan. My Uncle Omar Corwin Spencer owned the remaining which he had thoughtfully named, "MORGAN'S LANDING FARM". With extensive improvement expenditures he had built a fine modern barn and established a select dairy herd in partnership with Walter and Edna Graf, they operated the dairy with care and precision.*

*With warnings from all official sources the time had come, painful as it appeared, but with careful planning, Walter and Uncle Omar concluded to move the premier herd of over 90 cows and heifers from flood threatened Sauvie to higher ground.*

*I had risen early and driven to the farm to help move the dairy herd. Walter had arranged with the Shaver Transportation Company of Portland for them to bring down a full-sized sawdust barge onto which was to be loaded the entire herd.*

*I will forever be reminded of the gravity of that hectic morning as the fine old sternwheel steamer HENDERSON, lashed to the barge, bove into sight from upriver and carefully picked its perilous way through the rampaging river now literally clogged with flood loosened saw logs and other general flotsam of every description.*

*Walter Graf, experienced herdsman that he was, had fashioned a loading ramp at waters-edge, up which the cows would have to climb to board the barge deck which stood 7 feet above the water. Choosing a cow Walter knew well, he expertly led her up the steep ramp as we crowded*

*the rest of the herd into formation to dutifully follow-the-leader aboard the barge.*

*Once the herd was loaded, the sternwheeler Henderson backed into the fast moving Columbia's waters and made its' way upstream and into Columbia slough to the old Portland Union Stockyards unloading dock where the cows were re-loaded onto waiting cattle trucks and transported to a Troutdale, Oregon farm.*

It would be mid-July, following the victorious efforts of so many in saving the big main dyke, before Walter could arrange to truck the herd back to Morgan's Landing Farm.

Seepage back of the dyke destroyed the crop of barley that I had planted on my newly acquired acreage. But there were so many pluses when, following the 48 Flood, everyone looked back to assess the victorious efforts by all Islanders to return to their stricken farms and reconstruct their properties to fruitful enterprises.

It was rewarding and heart-warming to reflect that over 100 years after the earliest pioneers settled on Sauvie Island those that followed in the ensuing decades displayed the same determination, as they rebuilt from the flood ravages and rebuild their lives to comfortable "Island" living.

Many families moved off of the Island, particularly the farmers with livestock; others moved their possessions to high ground and made the best of it with as little as possible. One such family was George and Boots Grebe, at the head of the Island, who opened their home to the dike workers.

An item in the Oregonian on May 31 reported "Elsewhere along the river 50 soldiers from Fort Lewis were assisting Sauvies Island residents in working on it's dike, said to be in critical condition at the upstream end. Freeboard of the dike ranges from 2.7 to 3.9 feet and workers are plagued with seepage and boils."

Another article - Oregonian June 1 – “Sauvies Island, where there was a 1.48 foot freeboard on the Columbia River side, was believed to be well protected. Local citizens, assisted by 50 troops from Vancouver barracks, were working on the dikes and engineers believe the area could be kept dry.”

### MEMORIES OF PETE PATTERSON

*It certainly was an exciting time for a kid of 14. One must recall that in 1948 the flood control system of dams on the Columbia, Snake and Willamette river systems as we now know it was not in place. During the winter of 1947-48 the build-up of the snow packs in the Columbia, Clearwater and Snake River basins and the high Cascades was well above average. Then during late April and early May the entire basin experienced above average temperatures and warm rains. Under normal conditions the snow pack in these basins melts slowly first at lower elevations then as spring temperatures rise in the high mountains. Under the '48 conditions much of the four basins began melting at the same time causing a simultaneous runoff from all. The result was the flood crest in late May of 31 plus feet.*

*The Sauvie Island levee as completed in 1941 was designed to withstand the flood of record which was 33 feet in 1894. A condition which soon became apparent to the Island flood fighters was that in the intervening 7 years settlement of the levee in various sections had lowered the effective height to as low as 31 feet. Thus it was only the placement of sandbags along the top of the dike in these low sections that kept the final crest from over-topping these sections. Another exciting circumstance resulting from the 15 to 20 feet of water level difference between the river level outside, and the lower toe of the dike inside, was the occurrence of “boils” or springs that would emerge along the toe. These would be like walking on a water mattress and when left uncontrolled proved a significant risk of levee failure. These “boils” were treated by ringing them with sandbags to build counter pressure or by cutting willows (the old drained inside lakes inside the dike had wonderful stands of young straight willows) to form a crisscross mat which was then loaded with sandbags. With over 30*



*miles of dike to maintain and less than 80 families involved it was obvious that outside help was necessary. Many family friends from Portland other areas came to help. The Drainage District soon requested technical assistance from the Army Corps of Engineers Portland District. As a result of this request civil engineers were assigned full time to assist the District staff. An additional request for manpower support resulted in the assignment of approximately 150 active Army personnel including transportation, construction and maintenance equipment under the command of Captain Nagle, USA. These GI flood fighters were bivouacked on the Sauvie Island Grade School grounds and were crucial in the battle against the river. According to Drainage District Chairman Frank "Pat" Pattersons' dairy there were many "wild and crazy" stories included in the record of the outstanding performance of these Army regulars.*

*The flood fight started in mid April with casual dike walkers and lasted until late June. Many of the Island kids with horses rode the dike during the early part of the flood looking for problems. As the water continued to rise the operation became a small war with evacuation (families and livestock from the low ground)m special operations (Omar Spencers' sand quarry and the Little Sturgeon Lake willow logging operation), and news of other battles lost (Vanport, and several other dikes along the Columbia), supply dumps (trucks, bull dozers, sacks, generators, lights made with dish-pan reflectors, more sacks, radios, shovels and more sacks), a command center (the SCS office), and a community kitchen (Martin Holmasons' garage). The Sauvie Island ferry was an amphibious operation in itself with Dewey Charlton navigating through the trees to land almost halfway to Raus' corner on the Island side.*

*Everyone had at least 2 jobs during this period, (1) looking after necessary farm and dairy operations and family needs, and (2) helping to hold back the flood waters. Because of the 24 hour nature of the flood fight a kitchen was soon found to be necessary. With the help of the Holmason family and the Island women, Chuck Stidd organized a soup and sandwich operation that ran round the clock at the peak of flood operations. This operation made sack lunches for those working on the dikes and maintained soup, sandwiches and coffee at all times in the*

*kitchen. Lodging was also made available in many Island homes to Corps of Engineers and Army personnel so that they could be readily available for flood emergencies.*

Like so many adversities the flood of '48 brought about the best in local cooperation, sharing and leadership within the Island community. After the flood crest river level subsidence to relatively safe levels the Island community gathered at the school grounds and gave a rousing party for the Army personnel, the local families, and all the other outside helpers that were so necessary. It was a very lively party as I remember and many of the soldiers slept in late the next morning... wherever they fell. Somehow milking and haying just didn't seem very exciting after the days of May in 1948.

### **MEMORIES OF VIOLA ROTH BROWN**

*Doyal and I were living in North Portland, University Homes area during the 1948 flood. We were expecting our second son and quite often came to the Island to visit my parents, Pete and Minnie Roth, and brother Ralph and Helen. The ride on the ferry was not the kind of thrill I particularly enjoyed at that time as it was not guided by the cable. We would eventually make it to the island side, then equally disturbing was the ride on the dike road with the water so very near the top!*

*Doyal helped with the sandbagging whenever he could, which was several times. There were some "bubbles" on the inside area of the dike near the Roth place which was a bit worrisome. My Dad and Ralph took the cattle to higher ground when Carl Keller graciously offered his barn and facilities for milking. It was at this point that my Mother decided she'd had enough and so on May 30 Dad brought her to our apartment to stay for a few weeks. harrowing experience.*

*Later that afternoon we heard the wail of many sirens near us and soon learned that Vanport had been flooded. We had friends living there who had packed their clothes into the trunk of the car after church that morning. As they rushed to leave, with the wall of water visible behind*

*them, they realized the keys to the car were in his suit locked in the trunk. With no time to spare he grabbed a screwdriver, put it into the ignition and the car started and they narrowly escaped. Later attempts to start the car in this way were futile! God surely protected them in this harrowing experience.*

### **MEMORIES OF LES DOUGLAS**

*In May 1945 I was just a kid a couple of years out of high school in a "new land" coming to Sauvies Island just a year ago. Water twenty five feet high and rising. That is what brought about the request for volunteer dike walkers.*

*What does a kid think about when he volunteers for something like this? What will I find while walking the inside of the dike at night? What if I find a stream of water blowing out of the dike? Would I stick my arm in it? How many wild animals are around?*

*We went to the Soil Conservation office about dark. I was given a flashlight with a 3 in 1 control knob. You know the kind, on - off - and maybe, if you held it right it worked.*

*I was given a stretch of dike near Reeder Road, just before you get to the junction. The first hundred yards were alright, then I stepped into some water. I went into orbit. I could hardly wait to meet the guy at the end of my run so I could get help. When he asked me if it was clean or dirty, I couldn't remember. We checked it out and it was clear. My heart went back to normal. Those last few minutes had seemed like hours, thinking about the people on the Island that would have lost their homes really shook me up. It turned out alright because it was clear.*

*The water kept rising until it was over 30 feet. I can remember (Pat) Patterson finding a boil and getting, I think it was 13 sacks, of sand in a row boat and dropping them overboard into the whirlpool, outside of the dike. It stopped washing; but we kept an eye on it until the flood was over. It seemed like an eternity before the water went down. They say we won't have a flood like that again and I'm glad.*

Les came from Grand Island, near Salem, so he was use to floods; but he said, "it was a different kind of high water. When the water came up everything was under water except the house and barn, which had been built above flood level. In about two weeks the water was gone and everything was back to normal". He went on to say they were completely isolated, no school, if they needed anything they took the boat and tied it up to the bridge then drove to the nearest store.

As we near the beginning of the dike, the end being on the old Taylor farm, now Pastorino's (or the other way around). There is no dike in between so the low land in those areas flood. Anyway we come to the farm that was the Provisional land claim of Presley Gillihan (who came to Oregon in 1843 and latter married Sarah Howell in 1859); then the D.L.C. of James and Julie Bybee and back to the Howell family in 1873.

We, the Howell family, were one of the lucky ones as we had high ground for the cattle, even if the water did get high enough to come into the house, as it did in 1894. During the day we kept the cattle on the low ground; but at night we held them in a corral, which usually was flooded during high waters. One June 2nd, a report came in that the dike had broken 15 miles from Burlington around the head of the Island, so we rounded up the cattle and corralled them until the "all clear, it was a false alarm" report came in several hours later. We were able to save the hay crop due to the fact we didn't have to use it for pasture, during the flood, as many of the other farmers had to do.

### **MEMORIES OF WILFRED DUDLEY**

*Although I was living in Portland, my parents, Charles and Alice Dudley, were living in a houseboat on the Columbia River side of the Island, in front of the old Hunt place. Howard Hunt had sold them his houseboat. They had to move it or get isolated due to the dredging being*

*done in the Columbia River; and they had to move it while the water was still high enough for them to get the house out.*

*So early one Saturday morning, after the road between the two dikes was again visible, I took my 10 HP Johnson motor and went down to my folks. After hooking the motor onto my Dad's 12 foot plywood boat and make sure everything was secure, we started down the river. It was about nine o'clock by that time, My Mother stayed in the house and my Dad rode in the boat with me. (Anyone that knew my Mother can imagine the state of mind she was in - PANIC!)*

*We stayed as close to the shore as possible until we got just below the Richardson place, we then turned and cut across the Island. Jack Richardson saw us go by and got in his boat to give us a helping hand across the Island so we wouldn't get caught up on a fence or in brush. When we were safely in the slough, he unhooked his boat and wished up "good luck".*

*Coming up the Willamette Slough was slow going against the current; but we reached our destination, just below the ferry landing on the Island side, about dark. By the time we had the houseboat secured to trees on the bank and my car still on the other side of the Island and the walkways having to be brought around the next day, it was late and we were all tired so I stayed with my folks that night. My Dad and I spent all day Sunday bringing the walks around and putting them in place. Meanwhile, my mother was trapped in the house as she had no way of getting ashore.*

*My wife waiting at home with our two sons, one six and the other two months, was a nervous wreck by the time I got home late Sunday night.*

### **MEMORIES OF JUDY (TABER) BRIDGE**

*As a child growing up on Sauvies Island, summer was my favorite time of the year. Each day was filled with small adventures and soft cuddly animals. We had many acres to wander in, my brother, cousins and I had an endless supply of small creatures to play with. Puppies, chicks, calves, mice, kittens and squirrels to mention a few. The days were long,*

*fun filled and safe.*

*All this changed the summer of 1948. Along with the rising flood water came the Army, World War II was still fresh in our minds and the G.I.'s were real heroes to us. It was very exciting to have the Army amongst us.*

*Big trucks, jeeps and men in uniform were everywhere, filling sandbags and patrolling the dikes for weak areas. As the water continued to rise and started to trickle over the big dike, sandbags were everywhere. Talk of disaster was commonplace. WARNINGS: play only in the front yard, send the children to Portland, and prepare to evacuate the low areas.*

*Army cots were in the hallways of the school house. We (everyone on the Island) returned there for vaccinations for Typhoid and again when, in the middle of the night we were awakened by the sound of a horn, it was the Army Engineers telling us to report to the school house as Bonneville Dam had broken and they were sure our dike would go. It turned out to be a false alarm.*

*As the water receded, the Army departed and things began to return to normal; when suddenly a new threat appeared, wild dogs! Homeless from the flooding of Vanport and other surrounding areas and starving they began to kill small animals for food, including rabbits, chickens, turkey and small calves. Our rabbits were killed and the children were not allowed to play outside alone.*

*One casualty was Grandma Howell's turkey hen. Three of her chicks survived along with "Old Tom Turkey". The chicks would climb up onto his back and ride around most of the day for safety. One chick kept this daily habit up until nearly grown. Poor, protective old Tom began to walk bowlegged under the weight of his large baby. He was still trying protect his chicks.*

*The wild dogs became more bold as the food source dwindled; and one afternoon at my Grandparents house, while we were all in the back yard, we heard the barking, yelping and snarling of the dogs. Like a pack of wolves they were coming out of Charlton's woods, running down the hill*

*and through the field toward the pasture with the milk cows.*

*I can still see the dogs and hear the concern in the men's voices as they discussed what to do. They formed into groups to hunt and kill them. They were very concerned about their children and livestock.*

*Within a few weeks we were again enjoying our summer days, safe from the high water and wild dogs.*

*The breaking of the Vanport dike and the dike at Rainier the same day, were said to be contributing factors that saved our dike. It took some of the pressure off of it.*

*George McCartney, one of the ferry operators summarized it in one sentence. "If a seagull had flown over the river when it was at its peak, all would have been lost."*

## **MY MEMORIES**

My memories start the day of the Island picnic, Saturday May 21, when a group of the farmers got together and decided the dike should be checked because of the potential high spring run off. Leo was one of the volunteers and the next day, on a white horse someone had loaned him, he rode the outside of the dike between the beginning of the dike and the Shield's place. He found a fairly large hole somewhere between where the bridge is now and the head of the Island. It was believed to have been made by an animal. He continued as one of the dike walkers until the danger was over. At the head of the Island were several new homes along the side of the dike; and the owners had put fences across the dike. For the first day or two, Leo opened and closed the gates, then they were left open until the danger was over. One owner locked their gate and refused to let the workers through, but after the water got a little higher they opened it up.

I do not know how many men had walkie-talkies but Leo did, and one day he was standing a little north of where the

road comes up on the dike, when the whole dike started moving. A call for help brought quick response and after a few frantic minutes of sandbagging the dike was saved. They formed a chain, like the bucket brigade you've seen in old westerns, and passed the sand bags down the side of the dike until the whole area was shored up. Another time in front of the Howell house, it also started to go; but this time the men of the Army laid flat on it until it was sandbagged.

The water did trickle over the dike in at least this area. There were sand bags from the corner to the end of the dike road.

I helped patrol this section of dike during the day and also helped out at Holmasons' as well as on the farm. We had moved up to my folks and were staying there (if I had to move today I would have to have a months notice, after 49 years in the same place).

Charlie and Alice Dudley were also staying with the folks until the night we were gotten out of bed to go to the school house, not because we were on low ground but because the Engineers said they needed a head count. Charlie said he had had enough and took the first ferry the next morning and spent the rest of the time at their son's home in St. Helens. High and dry as Charlie put it. They returned to their houseboat as soon as the road at Reeders was reopened.

Leo didn't stick his finger, or even his arm in the dike; but he did sit on a hole until help arrived.

As we come to the end of our trip down memory lane, except for a couple of stories that happened after the water started to recede, I would like to "THANK" each and every one of you for your stories and bits of memories that made it possible for me to write this article for Jean.

A special "THANK YOU" to Jean Fears for printing it. When she asked me to write an item for the June issue of the paper, little did she know it would turn into a long serial.



*The End*



Mabel Rose Howell Dudley, the youngest daughter of John Benjamin and Rose Mabel Shafer Howell, was born in a snow storm at her aunt's home in Carrolls, Washington, on January 30, 1922. The family farm on Sauvies Island was her home for the next 97+ years. Mabel spent her early years helping on the



farm; milking, plowing, haying, hitching up the horses - all the things that make a farm a farm. She graduated from Scappoose High School in 1941. In 1945, she married Leo Earl Dudley, who had just returned from the service in the Mediterranean during WWII. They had a daughter, Patricia Jean Dudley. Mabel was a charter member of the Sauvies island Grange #840. She served in many offices over her 84 years association. She loved doing research for the monthly reports as Lecturer. She collected material from Islanders who wrote to her about their experiences and memories of "the old days" and she created visually interesting dioramas and reports that chronicled and educated people about Sauvies Island history. Mabel's ancestors came across the Oregon Trail and settled on Sauvie Island prior to statehood. Today the public knows the family home as the Bybee-Howell House at Howell Territorial Park, a historic property on the National Register of Historic Places. Her great uncle was Thomas Howell, a highly regarded, self-taught botanist that in the late 19th century published the important reference, "A Flora of Northwest America".

