

The W&L Gazette

The Aftermath: A Flood of Goodwill



Washington and Lee ROTC cadets Chris Spear (left) and Marty Chapman removed soaked carpet during cleanup efforts in Buena Vista.



The road through Goshen Pass, a familiar byway for Washington and Lee students, was torn asunder by flood waters of the raging Maury River. Goshen was one of the areas hardest hit by the November flooding.

Photo courtesy, the Lexington News-Gazette

The rain started as an annoying mist on Halloween night—nature playing a cruel trick on the children of Lexington. Then it began to pour. For five days the rain hammered western Virginia with little relief.

Rain gear was the uniform of the day for the 1,250 parents who came to the campus for Parents' Weekend on Nov. 1. For three days the parents and their sons and daughters crisscrossed the Colonnade with heads down, the sheets of rain discouraging contemplative pauses.

By Monday morning the creeks and rivers were beginning to swell. Several campus offices closed early and President John D. Wilson cancelled the regularly scheduled faculty meeting. It was frighteningly obvious that flooding was imminent.

The rivers exploded their banks that evening, sending water, mud, and debris crashing through the village of Goshen, Goshen Pass, the east Lexington area, Buena Vista, and Glasgow. When the

water began to subside late Tuesday, longtime residents realized this was the worst flood ever to hit Rockbridge County.

Although Lexington itself was spared major flooding, the surrounding areas were inundated. The Maury River ripped Virginia state route 39, the twisting road through Goshen Pass, from its bed and washed away the concrete bridge at Rockbridge Baths. State highway officials estimate it will be mid-summer before picknickers can once again enjoy the beauty of the pass.

The Maury continued its destruction further downstream at Bean's River Bottom, an apartment complex customarily populated by law students, and at East Lexington. Several law students were washed out of their apartments when the water reached second-floor levels at Bean's Bottom.

At East Lexington, the river cut a swath almost twice as wide as its normal path. Trees were uprooted, trucks were

flipped upside down, and the Lexington water treatment plant was under water.

Buena Vista and Glasgow were the hardest-hit areas of Rockbridge County. The water level reached above five feet in downtown Buena Vista, flooding City Hall and many businesses. Glasgow, the town situated at the confluence of the James and Maury rivers, was submerged completely and approachable only through Natural Bridge Station.

When the rivers and streams returned to their banks and the cleanup efforts began, the Washington and Lee community contributed in many ways.

The University itself contributed \$5,000 to aid flood victims. The Interfraternity Council donated \$500 and asked each of the 17 fraternities to make individual contributions to the flood relief effort.

The athletic department donated all the gate receipts from the Generals' football game with Washington University to the cause, and the Fellowship of Chris-

tian Athletes took up a collection during that game.

The freshman class raised more than \$500 through a fast in Evans Dining Hall. The University Federation joined with the Interfraternity Council to collect almost \$3,000 in food and canned goods to be distributed mostly to flood victims.

The Intervarsity Christian Fellowship and the Minority Student Association also made cash contributions to flood relief.

Shortly after the flood hit, members of the W&L ROTC detachment mobilized to help clean homes, businesses, and industries hit by the flood. The ROTC unit also helped secure the Lexington water treatment plant, where the flood had washed away the fence, and the town of Glasgow, keeping gawking sightseers from interfering with the cleanup.

The University Women's organization and spouses of the ROTC staff members contributed food and drink for the volunteers. The University Women also organized a food, clothing, and bedding drive for victims of the flood.

Washington and Lee joined with Virginia Military Institute and other Lexington residents to limit water consumption while city officials determined the damage to the water treatment plant. Water use was restricted in the dormitories and at the Warner Athletic Center. Evans Dining Hall helped by serving meals on paper plates.

The Election Day Flood of 1985 brought back memories of times past when the W&L community pitched in to lend assistance to its Rockbridge County neighbors. Following the flood in 1969, the University opened its athletic facilities to volunteers for showers and laundry. W&L also made monetary contributions then to flood victims in Buena Vista and Glasgow.