

# The Great Flood of 1921

One of the most well known natural disasters in Pueblo's history is The Great Flood of 1921. While most Pueblo citizens know the story by heart, there are some things they might not know. One of the most amazing things about the 1921 flood was not the horrendous amount of damage and life loss, but the bravery and kindness of the people caught in this horrible disaster.

The flood warning first came at 6:30 p.m. June 3, 1921. An unknown person called and reported that the Arkansas River was flooding upstream. The flood was caused by a sudden cloudburst on the Arkansas just ten miles west of Pueblo. The flood only became worse later on when Fountain creek also began to flood from down pours 30 miles north. When the two merged in the heart of Pueblo the results were catastrophic.

Fifteen hundred people lost their lives in the flood and there was 20 million dollars in damage. The flood level was over 15 feet in some places. All of the bridges over Fountain Creek were destroyed; however, the bridges over the Arkansas remained. The telephone company had 9-½ feet of water and approximately 225,000 dollars in damage. Almost all of the downtown area was destroyed.

Bravery was widespread that horrible night. The telephone operators stayed even when the floodwaters reached 9 ½ feet. They stayed and continued sending out warnings to those people who lived further downstream. They also received and relayed countless distress calls from families whose houses were trapped in the floodwaters. The operators were eventually rescued themselves and not a single operator died that night. The operators' bravery saved countless lives.

Bryan Thady was responsible for seeing the operators to the third floor. This saved them from the floodwaters that consumed the first floor where the switchboards were. Bryan then returned to the second floor for the subscriber and the first floor for the cable records. His heroic efforts not only saved the operators, but also made it possible to recovery the telephone system after the flood.

Another testament of bravery was when telephone workers went back themselves to rescue mementos. A lady came to them to ask them permission to return to her house, which had been swept into the backyard of the telephone company. Her husband was still missing and at that point was presumed dead. She wished to return for candlesticks that were a wedding gift. The men went back into her house themselves and sifted through the debris until they found her candlesticks. They eased her distress by their simple act of kindness.

One of the citizens of Pueblo's neighbor, Denver, came to help rebuild the telephone system. His name was Abe Maiman. He arrived three days after the flood after a long trip because of the train tracks destruction. When he arrived the smell of rotting bodies (both animal and human) greeted him. There were no utilities and disease was running rampant. The water had to be boiled to be usable and the hospitals were already full and out of medicine. In spite of all these hardships he stayed and worked until he dropped. All the workers literally worked until they dropped. When they dropped the other workers would just leave them, pick up their tools, and continue the job they were doing. His first shift he worked 48 hours straight. He was just one of the many remarkable workers.

The relief effort was remarkable. The community banded together. Before the Red Cross arrived. The Elks Club served as a relief center where three thousand refugees were served a day, until additional help arrived. Fellow citizens also built a camp to shelter the refugees. After a few days additional help arrived from the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Knights Columbus, and military units. Pueblo was under federal control temporarily to restore law and order.

With all the heroes that emerged and relief organizations that came to aid Pueblo's citizens, the City of Pueblo was up and running again in record time. Pueblo had made quite a rally by 1924, only three years

later. Pueblo also established a committee of three men that oversaw the planning and implementation of a flood control plan. Their effort was to help prevent a reoccurrence of this disaster. To this day the flood of 1921 is the largest, most devastating flood in Pueblo history.