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Grant Avenue by Boat: 24 Years Since the 1993 Junction City Flood

The US Army Corp of Engineers built Milford Dam for flood control, and its project manager, Brad Myers, was frustrated. He's quoted in the Junction City *Daily Union* saying, "I think everything was going well up to this point [...] Mother Nature has beat us on this one. She just dumped too much water. We just hit one of those points where we cannot stop this flood."

In mid-July 1993, 32 inches of precipitation fell in Geary County in northeast Kansas, home to Milford Dam and nearby Junction City. On July 19th, with the lake at crisis level, Myers maximized the water going through the dam into the valley below. This kept the lake from cresting the dam but unfortunately caused flooding below.

In Junction City, residents, especially along river-facing Grant Avenue, began preparations for flooding by filling thousands of sandbags and placing them outside low-lying homes and businesses. One volunteer filling sandbags said, "I just wanted to do my part and show my daughter what the human spirit was all about."

Despite efforts at the dam to manage outflow without washing away any of the dam's infrastructure, waters along Junction City's Grant Avenue continued to rise. The nearby Smoky Hill River also caused concern. Sandbagging efforts moved to the I-70 industrial park, which was evacuated. Hundreds of Junction Citians flocked to parking lots to help fill sandbags despite the summer heat.

The situation at the dam continued to worsen. On July 24th, in order to prevent the dam from collapsing, construction crews cut a channel into Highway 57 along the top of the dam. The image is unforgettable—a two-lane highway, used every day by dam workers and tourists headed to the lake, completely washed over by a swollen river.

Junction City evacuated large portions of Grant Avenue, including businesses and mobile home parks—3500 people in all. Hundreds of residents camped in the high school gymnasium on cots provided by the Red Cross and the army. They ate food donated by Godfather's Pizza, McDonald's, and Winchell's Donuts. The evacuees grew weary—it was hot and the gym lacked privacy. Citizens wanted to go home to start recovery efforts, but a sense of community in the face of disaster united everyone.

The next day the governor declared the dam site and adjoining region an emergency area. By 8:30 that evening, 3 feet of water covered Grant Avenue. The depth of Milford Lake, normally 65 feet, rose to 101.18 feet. To try to save the dam, Myers and the Army Engineer Corps had developed a contingency plan that involved using massive stone reinforcements for the channel over Highway 57. Junction City residents stood in their yards and saw Army Chinook helicopters hauling house-sized boulders towards Milford.

On July 26th, a TV-6 news crew travelled Grant Avenue in a boat, offering many residents and business owners of the area first glimpse of the damage. That same day, the output level of the dam finally fell, the first sign that the end was near. After the initial

drop, floodwaters began receding quickly and the residents of Junction City got to work cleaning up.

While the damage was expensive, it was far from the damage from earlier floods such as the infamous 1951 deluge. Careful preparation, advance warning, and smart management of Milford Dam saved the lake, the dam, and many lives. In an editorial dated July 29th, Junction City's *The Daily Union* newspaper wrote, "If one pauses just a moment to reflect on the past several days, one thought that emerges clearly is the heart-warming extent to which people rallied and extended themselves to help friends, neighbors, and strangers alike who were put out by the flood."

Do you remember the 1993 flood? Come share your memories at Memories at the Museum, the Geary County Historical Society's monthly oral history program. The July program, which will focus on the 1951 flood and the 1993 flood will be on July 30th from 3:00-4:30pm.

We are also excited to announce that you can learn more about Junction City and Geary County's water stories at the *Water/Ways* Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition which will be arriving at the Geary County Historical Society January 6-February 18, 2018!

Image: *Release channel cut through Highway 57 atop Milford Lake dam, July 1993.*