THE FLYLEAF

PUBLISHED BY THE FRIENDS OF THE FONDREN LIBRARY AT RICE UNIVERSITY HOUSTON, TEXAS
DON'T GO NEAR THE WATER

In the spring of 1966, a great trench twenty feet deep was dug along the side of the Fondren Library to receive air conditioning and other service tunnels. Early in May, the earth between the trench and the Library basement was broken through, the opening being closed up by a barrier of boards. On the night of May 12-13, a cloudburst hit the campus, and the trench filled up with water, as it had on previous occasions. This time the pressure was too great for the inadequate dyke, and a torrent poured into the basement machine room of the Library. This large area was soon filled to a depth of some seven feet, at which point the level of water was high enough to invade the basement of the Library proper, and the water spread rapidly to a depth of about fifteen inches. Unfortunately, in the basement were the Rare Book Room, the Rice Archives, the Applied Science and Technology stacks, and much besides.
This was the story as it was generally understood after the disaster. Before normal routine was restored, some 7,500 bound volumes, thousands of printed manuscript items of all kinds, and hundreds of items ranging from portraits of trustees to cases of order forms had been rescued, examined and treated or discarded. A few things were never found. More than 6,000 hours of library staff time had been spent on work made necessary by the flood, and damages running well into six figures were eventually paid.

It is the intention of the Editor to ask people who lived through the flood to write down their recollections before these are entirely forgotten, both for the interest which these will hold for all friends of the Fondren Library and because a record of this dearly-bought experience may at some future time be of value to a library similarly beset. It is hoped that the series begun in this issue will be continued from time to time, with a final summary of the findings. As an introduction, however, a few words of advice may be offered at once, under headings of Prevention and Cure:

1. Prevention. If an excavation must be made next to a library, it should be carefully supervised, with possible emergencies in mind.

2. Early Warning. A better watch system, at least during the period when danger from flooding existed, might have alleviated the damage. Even fifteen minutes of fast work while the water was rising would have got many things out of harm's way.
Libraries usually keep the top and bottom shelves of their stacks empty as long as possible, to use the most visible shelves first and provide for expansion. Such a practice could also have a safety value, because in the Fondren flood everything on the floors and on the lowest shelves was soaked, but the bottom shelves were not full. Had the water risen another six inches, the next range of shelves would have been hit, and the damage to books would have been three or four times as great.

3. First Aid. Books as they were brought wet from the lower regions should have been handed to people with receiving blankets of Turkish towelling or some other absorbent material. This is more easily said than provided for, but a bale of towelling was later sent in. The drying process would have gained a head start if the surface moisture could have been taken up at once.

4. Therapeutic Measures. Drying Out. The name of the game in treatment is "dry." Drying should be promoted as quickly and thoroughly as possible. If the day should be dry and sunny, outside drying would be effective, but of course this would necessitate watching and frequent moving of the books.

5. Therapeutic Measures. Anti-mildew. Quick drying will defeat mildew in many cases, but the danger is always present and shows up as a sort of time bomb, either the fuzzy gray mildew which forms on the bindings or the deadly black mildew which affects the end papers, title pages, and so on into the book.
The Chairman of the Biology department recommended a solution of 1/10 of one percent thymol in alcohol. This was swabbed on the inside of the covers and other places where mildew might appear; the swabbers were advised to wear rubber gloves while handling the solution. White vinegar was also used, and this worked well on bindings and leather. The thymol-alcohol, however, has a residual effect against mildew and does not redampen the book so much.

6. Recuperation. The drying out process went on for a long time. Many books, when interleaved with absorbent paper, were subjected to strong but not intense pressure to keep the bindings from buckling and to get the books back in shape. One of the subsidiary purchases made by the department of Buildings and Grounds was a number of hollow tiles, each weighing perhaps ten pounds, which were used as weights in the flattening-out process.

The accounts which follow, from two of the librarians who were there, tell graphically what the flood and its aftermath was like. It must be remembered that, in the early stages, most of the work went on in suffocating pitch darkness or at best dim light, because by definition when the machine room is flooded, the lights go out and the air conditioning and ventilating machinery ceases to function.

H.C.
RECOLLECTIONS OF THE FLOOD AT FONDREN LIBRARY

Coming in to work that morning I was greeted by the excited words, "There is a flood in the Rare Book Room!" Rushing to the back stairs, I looked down to the basement and saw a pool of water.

Already an assembly line was at work passing sodden rare books from the shelves, across the water, and up the stairs, to be taken by others for drying and attention. The sight was unbelievable. From then on the library was the scene of utmost activity, centering on the quick emergency aid to salvage these precious books from destruction. It soon seemed that every inch of space, on floor, tables and windowsills, in all the reading rooms downstairs and in the lecture lounge upstairs, was covered with books set up and opened to expose the pages to the air.

A long table of wire on trestles appeared as if by magic, with blowing fans beneath to send currents of air up to the maps and papers spread out above, changed and moved from time to time by an attendant.

In an astonishingly short time there appeared stacks of blank absorbent newsprint paper, cut to a workable variety of sizes. With these the painstaking individual work began. Workers sat for hours as book after book was carefully interleaved with these absorbent sheets. Consultation with other libraries that had suffered similar water damage had established that this procedure was the only satisfactory method in such circumstances.
Sometimes thin pages in a book had to be teased apart with infinite care to avoid tearing. Color plates with tissue paper protection took the longest time. Often by the time one reached the end of a book, the first sheets were wet and the procedure had to be repeated from the beginning. In many science books the picture plates at the end were of paper with a clay content. Under the moisture these had fused into something resembling concrete and were a solid mass for which nothing could be done. These books would be kept for use of the first pages. If the illustrations were later desired, a complete copy could be obtained through inter-library loan service.

Thus it went on, hour after hour, for days. The personal, painstaking work by the staff and so many welcome volunteer friends will never be forgotten by those who took part.

Ruth Canterbury
Catalog Assistant
RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LIBRARY FLOOD

May 13, 1966. The Flood! Will we ever forget the nightmare of knee-deep water and precious books floating by just out of reach in the basement of the Rare Book Room? Or the human chain passing books one by one up the stairs in the darkness? Can anyone who was there ever forget the awful pungent stench of wet paper and glue that assailed the nostrils the moment the Library's front door was opened? And the in-describable scene of utter chaos that greeted the eye a few paces beyond that door?

In every direction there was a sea of white pages and books of all sizes and shapes propped up at every conceivable angle on every available surface -- tables, floors, chairs, windowsills. Valuable and rare books with once-beautiful hand tooled leather bindings were spread out, soggy and forlorn. Once-handsome art folios and books whose glossy pages of colored plates used to delight the eye were now all reduced to a gummy mass.

It was unbelievable that such a catastrophe could happen here in the twentieth century in our own library through no fault of ours. The feeling of despair was overwhelming and so was our frustration over the carelessness that was responsible for this needless loss. It could all so easily have been avoided.

Houston newspapers sent blank newsprint to be cut and used in the mopping-up process. Piles of this absorbent paper were soon stacked at convient intervals for the use of a remarkable miscellany of rescuers.
Besides the Fondren staff there were Rice faculty members and students, a Catholic nun from a parochial school with her entire class, a few interested strangers, each quietly and patiently opening book after book to insert blotters of newsprint between the pages. Sometimes a worker paused a moment to acknowledge a particular book enjoyed before the flood, now wet and disheveled. So it went hour after hour, almost around the clock. Weary staff members turned pages and changed newsprint blotters and rotated the position of the books in front of fans. New volunteers arrived. Some of the children of faculty families came, and there were teenagers who heard the call for help and answered it. Other persons who simply loved books came and offered their services. One delightful gentleman, who worked tirelessly, lifted our spirits with his hilarious and irreverent quotes and quips and witty (and often rakish) comments. Sometimes tragedy does have its lighter moments!

Straggling lines of people trudged across campus with books, taking them to other buildings where there was more room to spread them out or to the lab for "operation Dry Out." Ryon Civil Engineering Lab became the main drying chamber, and here too people worked tirelessly at turning pages and shifting books. Supplementary heat "tunnels" were fashioned in the Library with tables draped with sheets of plastic. In the plastic-sided tunnels beneath the tables the books were stood on end, leaves fanned out. At intervals among the books plates of silica gel were placed. As the highly absorbent chemical soaked in the moisture, fresh plates of silica gel replaced the wet ones which
were in turn baked dry again for reuse. Air was circulated in each tunnel by an electric fan. One young staff member was in her element, wearing becoming stretch pants (which in antediluvian days were prohibited under normal conditions), working with incredible energy in these makeshift labs.

Slowly, little by little, pages and bindings did dry out. Each piece salvaged was a cause for rejoicing. So was the wonderful discovery that the really old and very rare books had fared better than anyone dared hope, in fact much better than their younger counterparts printed on slick paper. Although many of the lovely old bindings were damaged or destroyed, the good rag paper used in these old books dried out nicely and the printing was not ruined. With a moderate amount of tender-loving-care and new covers these older books could be returned to usefulness again, while the books with glossy paper did not fare so well. Their wet pages stuck together so tightly that even with rewetting they could not be pried apart.

Gradually, imperceptibly at first, chaos disappeared from the Library. Salvageable books and materials that needed major repairs were sent off to be restored. Some that required relatively minor remedies Miss Lane, the head of the binding and repair department, tended lovingly and restored to usefulness. Finally there remained only the sad task of sorting and listing those items that were either beyond repair or had been lost completely. The latter included original documents and archival material that can never be replaced.

Ola Z. Moore
Exhibits Librarian
BASIC FRIENDS DUES INCREASED

Because of steadily rising printing costs it has become necessary to increase the basic Friends dues from $2.00 to $7.00 to help pay for the FLYLEAF. This change is noted on the membership blank insert.

CARDS FOR SPECIAL GIFTS

Available now are cards, similar to the form printed below, for the convenience of Friends who wish to make special gifts to the Library. These cards may be obtained (upon request) from the Gifts & Exchanges section, Frondren Library.

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A noteworthy gift is the history of The Fourth Marine Division in World War II, presented to Fondren Library by James Morton McMenemy who served with the Fourth Marine Division in the Pacific.

The presentation was made in February, 1970, at the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the amphibious assault by the U. S. Marines on Iwo Jima in which Mr. McMenemy took part.

Mr. McMenemy has made this gift in memory of the marines of the Fourth Division who died at Iwo Jima.

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