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Lawrence Ladd letter about Montpelier, Vermont, 1927 Flood

Montpelier, Vt.  
Nov. 16, 1927.  
Wed. 7:40 P.M.

Dear Mother & Dad:-

Will try and do a bit of explaining for myself. Of course, I've been awfully busy since the flood. Well on Wednesday night, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, at 9:30 P. M., it started to sprinkle. I had just returned to the store, and had called Helene. Ran home and woke up in the morning to hear the water running down the eaves, and to see a dull leaden sky completely overcast with low hanging clouds.

Thought nothing of it, however, and went to work as per usual. Changed several counter displays in the A. M. and before going to lunch, I went across the street and purchased a pair of low rubbers as I thought I might need them this winter. Got soaked on the way home and had to change my clothes before eating dinner. The rain was coming down in sheets when I left the house to go back to the store, and I had on my best clothes, as they were all that were dry at home. Got Mr. Horne's car for him to drive home to dinner, and went down in the basement to change my trousers, as I had an old pair in the store. No business and the girls were having a great time laughing and joking over the counter.

A little before 2:00 Chief of Police Sloan came to the store door and told me that both rivers were rapidly rising, and that they would soon reach high water level. He advised that I remove as much as possible from the basement. At 2:15, first high water alarm was rung, which meant that lower State Street was under water. We worked like Beavers, and got all the M'dse in the lower bins either upstairs or high in the cellar. By this time, the water was knee deep at the corner of State & Main. Water rose rapidly, and the cellars were flooded in no time. As yet we had experienced no difficulty, as the water had not reached our store. Mr. Horne and I went across the street and bought 2 pairs of 16" lace boots, which were all that the shoe store had left in stock. Water had filled Shoe Store's cellar, and was creeping upon his floor. As yet Green Stores was dry.

We had just finished lacing our boots in our store, and were running down stairs to bring up more stuff when we heard a terrible crash. One of the basement bulkheads had broken under the force of the torrent which hit it. We rushed more goods upstairs. There were stalled cars at this time, all over Main Street. Mr. Horne's among them. Miss Wilkin, Miss Harron, Miss Chase, Mrs. Jones, Mr. Horne, Roy and I were still in the store. We had M'dse all over the floor, and were rushing it upstairs as fast as

possible. I was down stairs when the water started rushing in and it surely was alarming, the way the water rose, first to my ankles, then to my knees, next to my waist, and finally after 10 or 15 minutes, the water was to my chest. Everyone else was upstairs, as the water was beginning to seep in at the front doors. I had quite a time getting to the stairs, what with obstructions placed in my way by the flood, but I made them and went upstairs. All M'dse possible was placed on top of the counters, along with understocks. Finally the water reached the head of the stairs. There was a roaring sound, which was terrible to hear. I looked out on the street. A row boat was being propelled on the sidewalk directly in front of our store. The water which was Icy, by the way, was 2 feet deep at our door.

Then a rumbling, which shook the whole building. The floor started to rise under our feet, and the building creaked and groaned in every joint, that was too much for the girls. They ran screaming into the street where they were picked up by the boat, and carried home (to the house of one of the girls). That left Mr. Horne, Roy and I in the store. The water was surging up around our ankles. The fixtures on the counters tipped over, and the counters hung at a precarious angle. Mr. Horne & I simply sobbed for a few minutes when we thought of all that work which we'd put into the store and of all the "Xmas" M'dse going to Glory in the basement. Then we decided to leave the store. The water was 18" deep on the floor. The floor was buckled all out of shape, and the building was groaning under the stupendous pressure. Lo and behold – we could budge neither of the front doors. They had swelled so it was impossible to open them. Luckily for us, the back door was not so badly swelled and we three stepped out into three feet Ice Cold muddy, raging water. We made our way through the pouring rain to Northfield Street where Roy left us to go to his home. Mr. Horne and I plodded wearily up the hill. I was stopped by Miss Wilkins Mother and I reassured her that her daughter was safe at the home of one of the girls. Mr. Horne had gone on. I did not see him so I supposed he'd gone across the street and into the house. I took one step into the torrent that was cascading down the street and was nearly swept off my feet. I stood back and jumped as far as I could out into the water. Luckily my footing was solid and I waded nearly across before I fell into the river on the opposite side. I was carried several yards downstream, before I caught a bit of solid bank, and hauled myself out. I stumbled across the soggy lawn, and up the steps. Mrs. Horne met me at the door with "where's Ralph?" I told her that I'd left him down the street, and supposed that he would be home when I got there. She promptly went into hysterics. Mrs. Collins (in the opposite side of the house) refused to let me go back across the street, but I combed the bank to see if I could catch a glimpse of Mr. Horne. Finally I noticed a flash light turned on me from the opposite side of the street. It was the boy himself. I picked up a short ladder on my way, and hurdled the first washout the water was thigh high but the Macadam road was good and solid. Threw one end of the ladder to Mr. Horne and dragged him across the (street)(?) We ate supper and discussed conditions until 10:30. The flood had kept rising and the rain had not abated. This story must be continued in my next as I'm awfully tied and have writers cramp. Please be satisfied with the information that all is O.K. now. Good by for now, Love Law.

Thursday

Dear Mother & Dad:-

Let's see where was I? Oh, I remember,

On Friday A.M. Mr. Horne and I rose early, donned our old clothes and new boots and started for the store. We got as far as the foot of the hill, where we were completely cut off from Main St. by the swirling flood. It was still raining hard but we managed to ford the stream (by the house) without difficulty. This was the sight that met our eyes when we got to the foot of Northfield St.

A house had come down Barre St. (two and one half story wooden structure) and had parked on the corner of Barre and Main Streets. Later in the day it floated down Main Street, nearly to State St., where it disintegrated. Main St. was a veritable sea. The large red "Green Stores" sign (over the front of the store) was just emerging from the water. Water had washed completely over the building. Freight cars 7/8 in the water, and Autos on Main Street under 18 feet of water. Railroad Bridge down, windows all out of stores and lower stories of houses. The lunch carts were completely gone, one not yet found. I can't begin to tell all the damage we saw. Will have to leave the rest until I see you.

On Saturday A.M. we made the store and broke open one of the doors. The havoc wrought was indescribable. Counters on end. Front all gone. Floors two feet higher than it ought to be, 18" of mud and merchandise every where. Cellar full of water and office hanging by a "thread". But we are thankful that this was the only store in the chain damaged by the flood. We are rapidly getting things cleaned up and hope to be open for business by the middle of December. What more is there to say but that we are all working hard to get the store ship-shape once more.

Must close this letter now and get to bed. Do hope I'll see some one from home soon,

Love  
Ladd (?)