

Flood of 1972

Bloomsburg Fairgrounds Flood of 1972
Interviewed by Jessica Hilsdorf and Tim Hauer in the spring of 2003

Galen Fasnacht Jr., a 41-year-old pressman lives in the town of Bloomsburg. He has one brother and three sisters.

At the time of the flood, Fasnacht was 10 years old and living in Ephrata, PA. His grandparents owned a stand on Church Row in the fairgrounds. During the cleanup he witnessed the results of the flood and the damage that was a part of it.

PATCHWORK: Where exactly in the fair was your grandparents' stand located?

FASNACHT: My grandparents' stand was located on what they call Church Row, which would be at the east end of the fairgrounds, east end of the race track. The stand had been there for around thirty some odd years.

PATCHWORK: What did they sell there?

FASNACHT: It was a family dinner style stand that sold ham and turkey dinners and desserts.

PATCHWORK: What caused the flood?

FASNACHT: Well other than the rain naturally, it was tributaries from Fishing Creek and the Susquehanna River coming up and meeting together. They can't handle that much water.

PATCHWORK: How did you know a flood was really happening?

FASNACHT: At that point, the television and basically just watching the news and seeing all the rain.

PATCHWORK: How did long did it rain?

FASNACHT: Oh my goodness...it was like two days or something like that, I really don't remember. A lot.

PATCHWORK: Can you describe the rain?

FASNACHT: Describe the rain? You would have downpours that would be ungodly that would accumulate several inches per hour and then it would slack off and you may only get a half an inch an hour. At one point it was like 3 or 4 inches coming down in an hour. It was quite heavy at times.

PATCHWORK: How high did the water get?

FASNACHT: To give you an idea it came all the way up, start at the Fishing Creek came all they way up to what is now considered Railroad Street. So you are talking probably in the neighborhood of twenty some odd feet. It came up that high. It flooded all of what is now Rupert that was flooded, it flooded all from the Susquehanna all they way up to 9th or 10th street. So it covered a large area.

PATCHWORK: Did it cut the fair time short, and if so how short did it cut it?

FASNACHT: No, it didn't cut the fair short. It made cleanup for the fair very bad. That's what happened there.

PATCHWORK: How long did it take for the water to recede?

FASNACHT: The water never receded out of the fairgrounds for almost three weeks till the water receded back to its banks.

PATCHWORK: How much warning was there of the flood to come?

FASNACHT: Basically maybe 48 hours tops.

PATCHWORK: How extensive was the damage to your grandparents' stand?

FASNACHT: The damage to the stand, we lost quite a bit of equipment in the major cleanup so in all I think it was around \$10,000 that was lost.

PATCHWORK: What role did you play in the cleanup process, if any?

FASNACHT: I was...I had to go down and move the equipment out and clean up what we could, salvage it what we could if not get rid of it, repair it along that line.

PATCHWORK: Do you remember any other damage?

FASNACHT: The damage to the fairgrounds was extensive. For that flood there was also at the lower end of the fairgrounds an exhibition building, that was totally wiped out. There was also the racetrack, which after that happened they no longer held midget races on the fairgrounds. Magee lost millions of dollars worth of equipment. A lot of business lost a lot in that flood not including what people lost in their houses. And road damage and everything.

PATCHWORK: Emotionally, how did it affect your family?

FASNACHT: Emotionally, it was quite devastating due to the fact that at that point my grandparents were 70 plus years old and we had been on the fairgrounds at that point for in the neighborhood of about 40 years so it was quite devastating to them and also to the family because that was my grandparents, basically, retirement livelihood at that point in time.

PATCHWORK: What moment stands out most in your mind?

FASNACHT: I would have to say just the devastation of the cause to the lower end of town with the loss of the racetrack and one of the main things was when they moved,

when the exhibition building went down. That moved everything to the opposite end of the fairgrounds so that quite devastating as far as that goes.

PATCHWORK: Where the buildings are now, is that where they were before the flood?

FASNACHT: OK, what happened was before the flood at this end of the fairgrounds up here towards East Street there was what they call a Schoolhouse Exhibition Building, which was where all the schools showed off their things.

PATCHWORK: Where the livestock are now, is that where they were before the flood?

FASNACHT: The livestock buildings as far as the horse builds, which would be the livestock, those buildings were there at the flood, but during the flood when the flood was coming in, they have horses housed there year round and it was hard for them to get the horses out. They took the horses out on boats and everything they could get them out on. Those buildings had to be rebuilt due to the severe flood damage.

PATCHWORK: Is there any other important information that you think would be important to share?

FASNACHT: I would say there's more information to tell but it would have to deal with up the coast like you know if you got involved into where the airport is that was pretty well damaged. ConAir was pretty well damaged. Up in Berwick you had the Wise Potato Chips plant was damaged. There was very severe damage all the way up the coast all the way up the river and over into the little town of Fishing Creek was no more and a lot of the low-lying areas were no more.

PATCHWORK: How long did it take the local communities around here to recover from the event?

FASNACHT: A lot of the local communities took several years to recover. Over in Rupert and down in Fishing Creek there are still remnants of the flood around. And on the fairgrounds there are still the markings on the buildings and everything from the flood. I'd say that we never really fully recovered from the flood, but the towns have come back. So I'd say it took them a good five years to come back.

