

Ancestry

Logan County Genealogical Society

Tragedy on Buffalo Creek
February 26, 1972

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All meetings will be
held at the
Logan Public Library

*Upcoming meetings will
be held at 6:00 on:*

April 9th

May 14th

*June 16th- Picnic
at Chief Logan St. Park.*

*Shelter #5 at 10:00 A.M.
Logan Co. Genealogical Soc.*

P.O. Box 1959

Logan, WV

25601



People living along Buffalo Creek in Logan County, West Virginia were accustomed to hearing that the earthen coal impoundment dam at the head of the hollow was in danger of giving way. Most paid little attention to the warnings which came again on the morning of February 26, 1972. Some were still in bed that Saturday morning when they were warned by telephone or by the honking horns of cars and truck. Some never heard

any warnings at all.

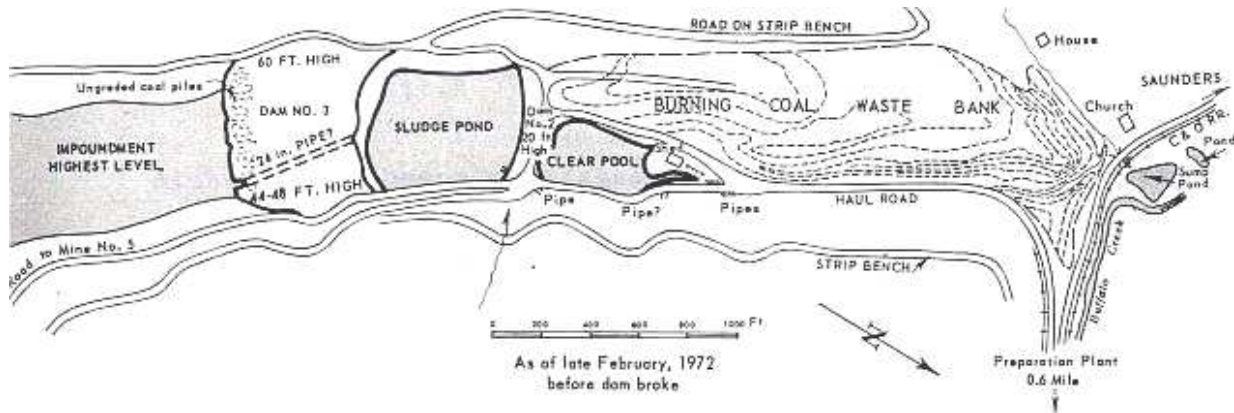
In 1972, approximately 5000 people lived in the small coal camps along Buffalo Creek. It was estimated that around 1000 of them were working miners, receiving about \$40 a day in wages, a good salary in Logan County in 1972.

There were actually three impoundment dams, one behind the other containing the waste from mining coal. The one that was farthest up the hollow failed first,
(continued on page 3)

*"Other things may change us, but
we start and end with family."*

~Anthony Brandt

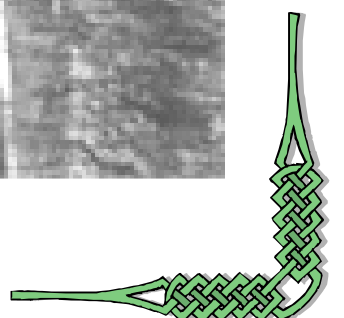
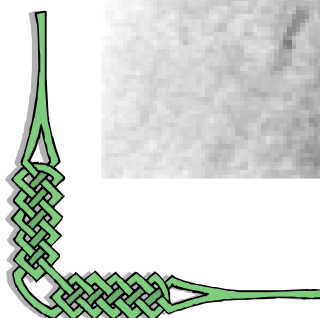
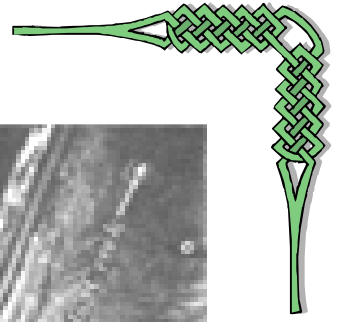
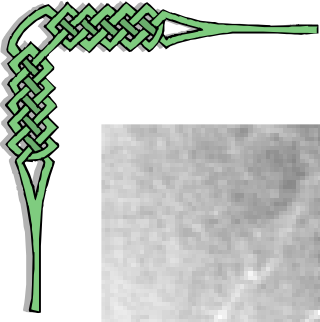
taking out the other two. A wall of water and debris that would reach 20-30 feet in height cascaded down the hollow at a rate of seven feet a second. It took out the community of Saunders first as it continued down the Buffalo Creek valley. The dams were at the elevation of 1493 feet. By the time Buffalo Creek entered the Guyandotte River at Man, the elevation was 710 feet.



After going through Saunders, the wall of black water and debris hit the communities of Pardee, Lorado, Lundale, Craneco, Stowe, Crites, Latrobe, Robinette, Amherstdale, Becco, Braeholm, Accoville, Crown, and Kistler. While going through each community, the 132 million gallon wall of black, oily water picked up more houses, other buildings, cars, trucks, etc.

Some people who saw the water coming in time, ran for the hills and managed to escape. Quite a few homes that were carried away or broken up on contact still had families in them. A few people were able to escape by clinging to tree limbs or logs. One mother, seeing that she could not outrun the water, threw her infant son to the hillside. She did not survive, but her son lived. Whole families perished or families were torn apart from each other in the water, some surviving and some dying.

In a matter of minutes 125 people were dead or dying, 1100 were injured, and over 4000 were homeless. The flood demolished 502 houses and 44 mobile homes and damaged 943 houses and mobile homes. Property damage was estimated at \$50 million. The dam gave way at 8:05 a.m., and the flood waters traveled the 17 miles down Buffalo Creek. By 10:00, the water entered the Guyandotte River at Man. It had destroyed most all it had come in contact with by then. Buffalo Creek was never the same.





TIMELINE

- 1972: At the beginning of the year, about 5000 people lived on Buffalo Creek, representing approximately ten percent of Logan County's population. There were over 1000 working miners living on the Creek and they were enjoying the relative prosperity that their \$40-a-day wages provided them.
- February 1, dam #3 was being added to at a rate of about 1000 tons of refuse a day, carried from the preparation plant to the dam in 30 ton trucks. The company was operating eight mines in the vicinity and ran all the coal through the preparation plant above the dams. The plant was pumping about 500 tons of water-saturated waste into the pond behind dam #3 every day.
- February 22, a federal mine inspector and the company safety engineer observed the dams and found conditions satisfactory.
- February 25, fed by heavy rains, the water behind dam #3 was rising one or two inches per hour.
- February 26, at 1:30 am the water was only twelve inches from the dam's crest and oozing through the surface of the dam.
- February 26, at 8:03 am dam #3 failed. Dams #2 and #1 were carried away. The wall of water caused an explosion in the burning refuse pile before cascading into the valley of Buffalo Creek.

Sources for This Article and/or for More Research:

<http://www.wvculture.org/history/thisdayinwvhistory/0226.html>

http://www.marshall.edu/library/speccoll/virtual_museum/buffalo_creek/html/default.asp

<http://www.appalshop.org/buffalo/disaster.htm>

<http://www.wvgazette.com/static/series/buffalocreek/index.html>

Death at Buffalo Creek: The 1972 West Virginia Flood Disaster by Tom Nugent, 1973

Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood by Kai T. Erikson, 1978

The Buffalo Creek Disaster: How the survivors of one of the worst disasters in coal-mining history brought suit against the coal company-and won by Gerald M. Stern, 2008

Buffalo Creek Valley of Death by Dennis Deitz & Carlene Mowery, 1992

Archives of The Logan Banner, newspaper

In Memoriam

- | ● Killed, Age, Residence | ● Killed, Age, Residence | ● Killed, Age, Residence |
|---|---|---|
| ● Brookie Mae Adkins, 31, Lundale, WV | ● Curtis Dillon, 10, Lorado, WV | ● Jeanette Osborne, 35, Lundale, WV |
| ● Lonnie Lee Adkins, 7, Lundale, WV | ● Sharon Dillon, 13, Lorado, WV | ● Regina Osborne, 12, Lundale, WV |
| ● Mary Jane Adkins, 5, Lundale, WV | ● Darla Dillon, 5, Lorado, WV | ● Carolyn Osborne, 20 months, Lundale, WV |
| ● David B. Adkins, Sr., 27, Lorado, WV | ● Howard Dillon, 8, Lorado, WV | ● Geneva Osborne, 11, Lundale, WV |
| ● David B. Adkins, Jr., 4, Lorado, WV | ● Ruth Ann Elkins, 29, Lundale, WV | ● Wandell Osborne, Jr., 15, Lundale, WV |
| ● Steven Albright, 17, Lorado, WV | ● Judy Ferguson, 27, Lundale, WV | ● Henrietta Owens, 22, Lundale, WV |
| ● Sylvia Albright, 39, Lorado, WV | ● Connie S. Ferguson, 18 months, Lundale, WV | ● Thomas Owens, 3, Lundale, WV |
| ● Janice Bailey, 32, Saunders, WV | ● Martha E. Gunnells, 21, Robinette, WV | ● Herbert Peters, 71, Pardee, WV |
| ● Kimberly K. Bailey, 6, Saunders, WV | ● David Gunnells, 3, Robinette, WV | ● Martha Peters, 71, Pardee, WV |
| ● Jason Bailey, Jr., 11, Saunders, WV | ● Jessie Gunnells, 1, Robinette, WV | ● Callis Perry, 81, Pardee, WV |
| ● Rhoda Rene Bailey, 8, Saunders, WV | ● Etta P. Hatfield, 60, Lundale, WV | ● Margie M. Prince, 42, Amherstdale, WV |
| ● Carla J. Bailey, 18 months, Saunders, WV | ● Layton O. Hatfield, 50, Lundale, WV | ● Macie Queen, 54, Lorado, WV |
| ● James Bailey, Jr., 16, Amherstdale, WV | ● Ruth B. Hatfield, 53, Lundale, WV | ● Otis Ramey, 49, Latrobe, WV |
| ● John H. Bailey, 58, Lundale, WV | ● Steven Hatfield, 16, Lundale, WV | ● Mattie Ramey, 45, Latrobe, WV |
| ● Eleanor Bailey, 44, Lundale, WV | ● Albert O. Hedinger, 34, Godby, WV | ● Virgie A. Ramey, no age give, Latrobe, WV |
| ● Milton Baker, 71, Lundale, WV | ● Angela J. Hopson, 2, Crites, WV | ● Marvel R. Scarberry, 73, Lundale, WV |
| ● Effie Baker, 68, Lundale, WV | ● Margaret Y. Jarrell, 42, Lundale, WV | ● Goldie Sipple, 38, about 38, Lorado, WV |
| ● Joyce Bartram, 40, Lundale, WV | ● Karen Jarrell, 16, Lundale, WV | ● Anita Smith, about 17, Lundale, WV |
| ● Betty Lee Black, 51, Lundale, WV | ● Patrick Jarrell, 24, Lundale, WV | ● Florencio Sosa, 65, Lorado, WV |
| ● Edith Blankenship, 61, Lorado, WV | ● William L. Jarrell, 50, Lundale, WV | ● Mary M. Sosa, 46, Lorado, WV |
| ● Rebecca Broady, 15, Lundale, WV | ● Lottie May Jarrell, 45, Lundale, WV | ● Gladys Staton, 25, Lundale, WV |
| ● Donna Sue Browning, 21, Lundale, WV | ● Andrew Johnston, 73, Crites, WV | ● Kevin Staton, 1, Lundale, WV |
| ● Norman B. Browning, 3, Lundale, WV | ● Grace Kennedy, 71, Easley, SC (visiting relative) | ● Della Trent, 69, Saunders, WV |
| ● James Brunty, 82, Kistler, WV | ● Gary M. King, 24, Lundale, WV | ● Johnny Trent, 32, Saunders, WV |
| ● Dessie Butcher, 57, Lundale, WV | ● Sharon A. Lester, 25, Saunders, WV | ● Gene Trent, 26, Saunders, WV |
| ● Leonard Butcher, 66, Lundale, WV | ● Denise Lester, 3, Saunders, WV | ● Henry Trent, 49, Saunders, WV |
| ● Ballard Carter, 36, Lundale, WV | ● Norman Lester, 24, Saunders, WV | ● Wanda Trent, 39, Saunders, WV |
| ● Janice H. Carter, 29, Lundale, WV | ● Dennatta Lester, 5 to 7, Saunders, WV | ● Betty Frances Vernatter, 4, Lorado, WV |
| ● Matthew Carter, 6, Lundale, WV | ● Opal Lester, 45, Saunders, WV | ● Thomas Vernatter, 65, Latrobe, WV |
| ● Lillian S. Carter, 3, Lundale, WV | ● Barry K. Lester, 15, Saunders, WV | ● Ethel B. Vernatter, 65, Latrobe, WV |
| ● Margaret L. Davis, 35, Stowe, WV | ● Rita J. Lester, 16, Saunders, WV | ● Roby L. Waugh, 45, Lundale, WV |
| ● Mary Jane Davis, 8, Stowe, WV | ● Mary B. Marcum, 44, Latrobe, WV | ● James L. Waugh, 11, Lundale, WV |
| ● Willie Dempsey, 42, Lorado, WV | ● Diana L. McCoy, 18, Amherstdale, WV | ● Grady M. Waugh, 18, Lundale, WV |
| ● Aletha V. Dempsey, 38, Lorado, WV | ● Kimberly McCoy, 3, Amherstdale, WV | ● Donald Waugh, 20, Lundale, WV |
| ● Berma Jo Dickerson, 20, Lundale, WV | ● Jesse Messer, 35, Lorado, WV | ● Larry K. Wauch, 5, Lundale, WV |
| ● Steven T. Dickerson, 18 months, Lundale, WV | ● Augusta Miller, 69, Pardee, WV | ● April E. White, 11, Lundale, WV |
| ● James Dillon, 32, Lorado, WV | ● Robert Murray, 71, Lundale, WV | ● Dora Wiley, 60, Latrobe, WV |
| ● Thelma Dillon, 36, Lorado, WV | ● Wandell Osborne, Sr., 37, Lundale, WV | ● Richard Wiley, 78, Crites, WV |
| | | ● Frank Lee Workman, 69, Lorado, WV |
| | | ● Three unidentified babies |

Missing

Dorinda L. Adkins, 3 months, Lorado, WV
Samuel Carter, 20 months, Lundale, WV
Roscoe Clay, 74, Lorado, WV
James N. Davis, 2, Stowe, WV
Nancy Hopson, 1, Crites, WV
Donald McCoy, Jr., 18 months, Amherstdale, WV
Kathy Waugh, 8 months, Lundale, WV