

## The Crow River Flood of Spring, 1965

From the St. Michael Historical Society:

Here is a photo from almost exactly 59 years ago. The Crow River flooded periodically, but flooding in 1965 was the worst for this area. It followed a snowy March which included the St. Patrick's Day blizzard. The Crow River reached its highwater mark on April 15, 1965. That morning the river crested above the bridge deck at Berning's Mill. Meg Klaers, who wrote the local column for the Crow River News, reported that "at 5:30 Thursday morning (April 15th), the St. Michael fire siren was sounded for men to help in a last ditch stand to bolster the dike along the road past the Becker farms. Twenty-five men answered the call but they were too late. The angry river had broken through." The Becker farms to which she referred were the farms that once existed inside of what is now Crow Hassan Park. The River Bend Group Campsite was the site of the original Pius Becker farm, but there were two more Becker farms further down the road still used by horseback riders and hikers today. The barely visible buildings across the bridge in the photo are the farm of Harry and Martha Berning. The Berning and Becker farms were all purchased by the Hennepin County Park Reserve District (now Three Rivers Park District) in the period 1964-1969. The purchases had nothing to do with the flood, but were part of long-range park plans. A more complete history of the Becker farms and the creation of Crow Hassan Park can be found in the May 2021 issue of the "St. Michael Historian", the quarterly newsletter of the St. Michael Historical Society.



Tom's Remarks:

I was there.

I helped haul the sandbags in the foreground. They were not the usual little sacks for sand. Few used full sized gunny sacks from the close-by mill. The sacks probably weighed more than 200 pounds filled with wet sand. Even farm boys struggled to toss them.

We filled carried and tossed many hundreds that night.

I was there when electric pole tipped about midnight. The lines were live and it sparked terrifically.

Early on the river carried miles of huge ice chunks. We feared the ice chunks would form a dam at the bridge and take that out as they had the Hannover bridge.

But the ice cleared with only the biggest icebergs hitting the bridge deck and flipping under.

I went home in the early morning after the ice cleared.

Our farm was two miles from Dayton where the Crow meets the Mississippi. Two men from Dayton came for me before sunup. They were Al Corrow and I think the other man Melvin Rouillard, both family friends. They were looking for dike workers to protect Dayton.

I left Pa to finish the morning milking and came home two days later.

We built dikes along the Crow and the Mississippi on three sides of Dayton village. Both rivers were flooding. At night we took turn patrolling the dikes and patching leaks.

Langer's Bar stayed open pretty all night as I recall. Dike workers weren't charged for beer or food.

Al Corrow, who was in the construction business, had a shiny red dump truck. The gravel pit was right behind the Crow's Nest Bar. The well-known bar was just northwest of the Dayton bridge. Dud Mclean owned it. The average round trip from the pit to the dikes was not more than one mile.

Al put over 500 miles on his new truck hauling sand for the dike

