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## Remembering tropical storm Irene and the 1927 Vermont flood History Repeats – A letter from the 1927 flood



Storm Water floods Bank Hill in Waterbury, on Nov 4, 1927

**Editors note:** A year after tropical storm Irene devastated many areas in Vermont, this story of a comparable event, the 1927 flood, is a timely reminder of the forces of nature and their impact on our environment.

One of Vermont's most devastating events, the 1927 flood occurred on November 2 – 4, with rainfall averages ranging from four to nine inches total. Excess rain during the month of October had saturated the soil, and the additional rainfall in early November caused mass flooding all over the state. The flood greatly changed the landscape and forced a massive reconstruction effort in all counties.

At the time of the 1927 flood, Mary Martin Hopkins was living in Perkinsville, a village located in the town of Weathersfield. Hopkins had been in Perkinsville, where her father managed the general store. She married Adoniram Judson Hopkins, and their son Ernest Martin Hopkins served as the 11th president of Dartmouth College from 1916 to 1945.

A few days after the flood, Hopkins described her experience in a long letter to her children. Excerpts are included here, with explanatory material in parentheses.

Perkinsville, Vermont

Sunday, November 6, 1927

My dear children,

We have been going through the most terrible freshet (flood from heavy rain or a spring thaw) ever witnessed, and I am something of a wreck myself.

It never rained as it did Thursday all day. At 11:20 in the evening the distress signal on the telephone was followed by the message that Mr. Dingman was calling for help, as his house was surrounded. At

once trucks were going down; then comes the next message, “The hydro electric dam at the gorge has gone, and the lights will go in a minute.” I had time to get to my bedroom when they went, and just this minute Sunday afternoon is the first time we have had them since.

Thursday night people at the lower village were ready to start at a minute’s notice but stayed through the night. The morning brought only horror — houses, beds, and pillows, all sorts of furniture, dead horses and pigs, pumpkins and hay — and everything rushing down. This kept up all day Friday. We were cut off from everywhere by telephone, as our line goes to Gassetts. At midnight Friday night a messenger on horseback and one in an auto was sent to Gassetts to warn Perkinsville that Plymouth Reservoir had burst, and our danger was very great.

I remembered perfectly that in the 1869 freshet father (Horace Martin) said that if that ever happened this part of Perkinsville would be wiped off, as well as the lower village. People were running in the dark down to help lower Perkinsville when Neil (Neil Pike, owner of the local telephone system) sent another call to go over sand hill, as the other road was gone.

I had nothing but my feet to escape with. At 1:00 a.m. Lillian (Lillian Daily, later Mrs. Joseph Stoughton) and I with the lanterns and flashlight started on a run as

long as we could for Mr. Chatsey’s (friend and neighbor).

The awful roar of the flood was enough to urge us on. We got up there at 1:20 a.m. From there we could see the trucks bringing the lower village folks to the church, which had no lights. Every minute they expected the bridge at the lower village to go — there are holes at the ends that a span of horses went out of sight into, but the bridge is still there. People say Horace Martin built those piers and that bridge.

The second bridge to the cemetery is damaged, and the one down here not safe. We couldn’t get a call to Springfield, Felchville or Windsor. No trains are running yet; they hope the mail will go tomorrow but are not sure.

George Phillips and nine other young men went yesterday to investigate the Plymouth lakes. They were stopped several times by the police, but they told them they were going at their own risk and went



**Mary Martin Hopkins**

on. George said they went through rocky plunges as deep as a house — they would go down in them, all get out but the driver, and lift to get out. But he said I could sleep tonight for there was no more water in those lakes than during the dry time last summer.

Yesterday the radio sent messages to the flood area every hour, begging the milk trucks to start and saying that the Hood Company would meet them anywhere. But the poor farmers can't swim with their cans, and there is none to collect. The Westinghouse Company sent word that the hydro electric company could have their engineers. The Boston coal companies said that carloads were being sent and could be diverted to the needy, but when the tracks are gone they can't come far. Worst of all was people trying to locate friends.

That road to Cavendish we liked so well is all gone, and the clay bank slid down and filled the hole. St. Johnsbury dam went Saturday night and Wilder Dam, so the Connecticut is on another rampage.

A milk truck has gone by so I hope things are bettering some. Lillian has just come in, and she had been talking with a woman who lives where she could see the river, up toward Felchville, and she says the worst thing she saw was a cradle with a baby in it out in the middle of that torrent. John Hicks has gone past with his truck loaded with house timbers that lodged on his meadow. They say Mahone's meadow is three feet deep with sand.

Monday morning, well as usual but so tired I can hardly move.

Most lovingly, Mother.

Mary Martin Hopkins' letter was kindly provided by her great-granddaughter Lucinda Brown, who lives in South Deerfield, Mass., and can be contacted at [lbrown1st@aol.com](mailto:lbrown1st@aol.com).