

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #34

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the newsletter, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

THE DEVASTATING FLOOD OF 1917

June 10, 1917 saw a torrential thunderstorm, the likes of which had seldom been observed by the citizens of the area. The rain did not let up during the afternoon and evening. The level of water in the mill pond at Solsville rose to a point where the retaining boards, placed at the top of the dam to create a higher water level in the mill pond to increase the power of water going into the mill, should have been removed but were not. The scene was set for disaster.

The dam at Solsville gave way in the early morning of June 11 and the torrent of water from the mill pond started down the valley, eventually destroying the dams at Fisk's Grist Mill and Lyon's Sawmill. Now the water from the three large mill ponds was racing down the valley toward Oriskany Falls.

Let's read the story of this tragedy from an article written in the Madison County Leader and Observer written on June 14, 1917.

The damage done, the havoc created, including the loss of two lives, in the heart of Oriskany Falls, a busy mill town along the Oriskany Creek, is beyond estimation. Businessmen of that village place the damage sustained within the corporation between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

A dozen houses, barns, and warehouses, besides scores of smaller structures, were either crushed or carried downstream. Many dwelling houses were filled with water from a depth of five to ten feet, the receding waters leaving a deposit of several inches of slimy mud on carpets and furniture, making the ruin well-nigh complete.

Twisted railroad tracks, tottering freight cars, and mounds of strewn wreckage, consisting of house furniture, vehicles, lumber, etc., greets the visitor on every side. The new O. & W. depot, directly in the path of the flood, presents a sorry appearance, battered and undermined. Both the big knitting mills there sustained heavy losses, of from \$10,000 to \$50,000 through damaged stocks and ruined power plants.

The catastrophe at Oriskany Falls occurred shortly after 6 o'clock Monday morning, and was due to three mill dams giving away. These dams were at Solsville, Fisk's Mill, and Lyon's Sawmill. All three dams held back waters creating large ponds. When it became evident that they were about to break, automobiles and a man astride a horse dashed down the valley shouting a warning to the inhabitants of the impending danger. There was great confusion among the villagers in the path of the oncoming flood in their attempts to save valuables and seek places of safety.

The great wall muddy water swept down the grade along the railroad track and struck the houses on the west side of Madison Street, tore through the railroad yard and against the buildings above the falls.

Thousands of feet of lumber, in fact the entire stock of Dolan's yard was swept away. Mrs. William Huson, 66, a widow living alone, was asleep in her bed when her little home on Madison Street, in the direct path of the flood, was struck and crumpled up.

Albert Talaczyski, a young Austrian section hand for the railroad, was caught up by the flood in front of the O. & W. depot as he was about to go to work and was swept over the falls to his death.

The bodies of the unfortunate man and woman were found after the flood had subsided, caught in wreckage on lower Broad Street. The damage done in Oriskany Falls was done in the space of about twenty minutes.

**** The three dams were all located in the Town of Madison. After the dam broke in Solsville, the raging waters claimed everything in its path until the damage was complete in Oriskany Falls at approximately 10:00. Albert Talaczyski was the first person to be buried in the new Roman Catholic Cemetery.