LOOKING BACK

REMEMBERING THE HAGUE FLOOD OF 1947

From the memoirs of the late Clifton West, Hague Town Historian

The date of Tuesday, June 3, 1947, will go down in history as the day of the Hague flood. Following a night of torrential downpour, the Hague Brook, already swollen from a previous rain, was rushing through the valley with a volume of water never before seen, even by the oldest residents of the town. It washed over a two-foot stone wall on West's property on Route 8, just past the community center. The brook was at least three feet above its usual flood stage. He tried to walk up to the Big Falls on Route 8 but came upon a landslide above the Rock and Rye corner. A 40-foot section of the high bank had slid down, and mud covered the road to a depth of two feet.











TOP TO BOTTOM, L to R: Cobbs Esso Station; looking east on Route 8; the flooded downtown; the dairy; Route 8; and Uptown

The brook was flowing over the bridge and running down the road. In no time, the street was a raging torrent. Barrels, fireplace wood, and assorted debris floated by. The nearest *terra firma*, West recalled, was beyond The Beachside, across from the town park. A current of water was pouring through Bob Hoyt's garage, behind the Hague Market, where a pile of at least 20 big casks, vinegar barrels or cider barrels, were tumbling end over end out the open side of the building. They crossed two wire fences and floated right along to the lake. Such a force of water crossed the highway bridge that Bill Cobb's gas tanks at the corner of Route 9N and Route 8 were washed out of the ground. The main road was gullied out as much as six feet deep.

The flood washed out much valuable land in town and also further up the brook in West Hague. One favorable result of the flood was that a great quantity of fish came down from the Beaver Marsh. Bushels of bullheads were washed into the lake. People were picking them up on their lawns. The brook was so full of trout that it was an angler's dream. West wrote that he caught 186 trout the next year, keeping only those over eight inches in length, and the Lake George bullhead fishing was excellent for many years thereafter.

The cause of the flood was a combination of circumstances, all working together. In 1941 the Hague Fish & Game Club improved the beaver dam at the marsh in West Hague by building a high dirt dam all across the lower end of the pond and installing a concrete spillway. When the level of the pond raised with the rain, the rowboats drawn up on the shore floated down against the spillway, clogging it. Water then eroded the dam, so it soon gave way and the whole pond was soon on its way down the valley, taking all in its path. The stream bed was too narrow to carry this great body of water. The Beaver Marsh was a mile long and, in places, 15 feet deep. When this amount of water followed the course of the stream to Lake George, things had to happen.

The result was the Great Flood of 1947, an event that was the talk of the town for many years thereafter.