

Remembering The ‘77 Flood

Looking back at the worst disaster in Pineville’s history

(EDITOR’S NOTE: The City of Pineville has a long and rich history. But no event has impacted the town as deeply as the Flood of 1977. In looking through past newspapers from the time of the flood and various anniversary articles, we could find no better summary of the events that took place than that written by then-mayor Bob Madon for the flood’s 30th anniversary. Here’s that article, which first ran in the Pineville Sun in 2007.)

By **BOB MADON**

Rain began so innocently shortly after 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 2. It continued Sunday, April 3rd, and no one seemed to be concerned Monday morning, April 4th, as the Cumberland River began to swell and leave its banks.

Flooding was, and continues to be, common in the spring. After all, we had our floodwall, built in the early fifties and it had saved the city numerous times through the years. In fact, most of us had become complacent, thinking that our wall would always protect us.

By Monday afternoon the river had risen to the base of the floodwall and we were being told by the National Weather Service that the river would crest several inches below the top of the wall. The warm

rain continued, and at times came down in sheets. No one had taken into consideration that Black Mountain in Harlan County was packed with snow up to four and five feet deep in its ridges and valleys. By 7:00 p.m. on Monday, the rains with a total accumulation of 5.75 inches had melted the snow and there was a tremendous runoff in the upper Cumberland watershed. We talked with Harlan officials and learned the river was still rising at Baxter and that meant it would continue to rise in Pineville for at least the next eight hours. We later learned that the rain from 6:00 p.m. on April 2nd through 6 p.m. on April 3rd amounted to less than one inch. Over the next thirty hours (6 p.m. April 3rd to midnight, April 4th) about five inches of rain fell on Pineville, totaling 5.75 inches. The upper Cumberland received a little more.

By 8:00 p.m. everyone in the city knew the water was going to come over the wall. The floodgates around the city had been closed. Now we were trapped with now way in, no way out. We were in a world of trouble.



This photograph from the air shows the wide scope of damage in city of Pineville when it was inundated by the waters of the Cumberland River on April 4, 1977. This copy was scanned from a 1977 Middlesboro Daily News and credited to Colson Flying Services.



Photos courtesy John G. Howard

This picture show a closer look at the flooding throughout the downtown area. Near the center is the back of the Bell County Jail with several surrounding buildings nearly submerged. Water rose as high as 18 feet in some parts of the city during the flood.



Boat was the only means of travel for days, even on U.S. 25E through Pineville.



Highway U.S. 25E North into Pineville



The Bell County Courthouse after the flood waters has started to recede.



The flood nearly buried First Federal Savings, the building that now serves as Pineville’s City Hall.



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**Call 606-248-7859
or email**

Bob Dixon
Bob.Dixon@kyfb.com

Joe Stamper
Joe.Stamper@kyfb.com

Amanda Hoskins
Amanda.Hoskins@kyfb.com



Amanda Hoskins

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