

James Zartman Diary

1913 Flood

Tuesday, March 25 to March 28, 1913

James Zartman was detained in a room of the Island View Hotel along with George Case, W. H. Gifford, and Frank McCoy. He kept a journal of the experience

Tuesday, March 25, 1913

6:00 a.m.: Six inches of water on the floor of the hotel, guests aroused and carried to hacks to be transferred to dry territory. Mac (Frank McCoy) took some provisions to his mother via the boat route and brought back two pair of boots.

8:00 a.m. Water is two feet deep in the restaurant. Panhandle engine passed in front of hotel causing waves to break in the glass doors. Jimmie went to Johnson house for a pint of whiskey.

10:00 a.m. Taking supplies upstairs to provision ourselves. Jimmie stood on two stools and cooked ham and eggs enough for two days. Mac fell off the counter into three feet of water.

11:00 a.m. Moved all cigars upstairs and found two quarts of whiskey, rescued cat from the kitchen. It was floating on meat block.

11:30 a.m. A man on the island was firing a gun to get someone's attention to rescue him. Water still rising.

12:30 p.m. All cars stopped on the Panhandle

2:30 p.m. Water about four feet deep. Mac swam to the counter and rescued the account books.

4:30 p.m. Floating debris has broken most of the windows in the front of the hotel. A house came down stream, bumping into the veranda, knocking it down. Mac yelled for everybody to go north, which we did.

5:30 p.m. Water still rising, counter, tables now floating; houses and large timbers are floating downstream.

6:30 p.m. Water about 5 feet deep on the first floor. Bridges are in danger as timbers are lodged against them. Wabash RR has weighted their bridges down with cars.

8:30 p.m. Large houses are passing downstream in front of Depot and the hotel.

Midnight A house hit the corner of the hotel making everyone step lively to the rear of the building for protection as we were sure that the building would be wrecked. Giff is very nervous walking the floor. George is a little fearful too and told Mac to cut out his swearing.

Wednesday, March 26, 1913

1:00 a.m. *Panhandle icehouse* is starting downstream, knocking down the telegraph poles as far as Third Street interurban Bridge.

2:00 a.m. Interurban and wagon bridge crashed down, city and trolley wires made a magnificent display of fireworks as they broke. Water still rising. We climbed to the roof, then passed over to the third floor of the Western Union building after being frightened by a large house which hit the hotel nearly knocking it over. Spent the rest of the night in that building.

8:00 a.m. Returned to the hotel via the roof. From the roof we could see where five bridges had been washed away. Ate cold breakfast of ham sandwiches and oranges. Mac has a headache, too much whiskey. Good water is at premium as we have none.

9:00 a.m. News from the Johnson hotel by wireless that they have had nothing to eat for forty hours. Water seems to be at high mark, about ten feet deep in the streets.

12:30 p.m. Water seems at a stand still.

1:00 p.m. Helped seven people down ladder to the rescue boats.

2:00 p.m. Had a meal of fried eggs and coffee. Used water from the muddy Wabash to make the coffee. Are doing without drinking water. Have plenty of chewing and smoking tobacco.

4:00 p.m. We still have two shovels of coal left. *Been snowing for about three hours.*

5:00 p.m. Giff and George are breaking up the beds for fuel. Mac is in the hall throwing up his dinner.

6:00 p.m. Heard two men on another building calling for rescue boats, they report the Sanders building is going to ruin.

6:30 p.m. Mac is on the bed with a hot water bottle on his stomach. The river is still at a standstill. Giff wants to desert the building. The electric lights aren't working. George is melting snow to get water to drink.

7:30 p.m. Lights are now working again. River is lowering some. Giff says we are all flirting with the undertaker.

8:30 p.m. Water about nine inches lower now. Mac is better. He is now telling of his past life. He has certainly had some narrow escapes. Giff is resting at present.

10:00 p.m. Mac heard noises. We found rats had been able to reach the stairway and climb to the 2nd floor, we succeeded in killing one of them.

11:30 p.m. River still receding. Playing Rum for pastime.

Thursday, March 27, 1913

1:00 a.m. Everyone asleep but George who is keeping watch.

3:00 a.m. Mac asleep with a chew of Mail Pouch in his mouth, the tobacco juice running down both sides of his face.

7:00 a.m. River still going down. *Very cold this morning. Three inches of snow.*

8:00 a.m. We were part way down the stairs. The counters, tables and ice boxes are still floating. The cash register is still in an upright position. Giff is frying onions for breakfast. Saw three men looking out of the rear of the Sanders building but were not able to communicate with them.

9:00 a.m. First burst of sunlight since our incarceration. Winter is lingering in the lap of spring. River now down about three feet.

10:00 a.m. The Wabash has an engine and a coach on the opposite side of the river, probably a working crew. George is worrying about his whiskers, which haven't been cut since Saturday. About out of fuel again.

11:00 a.m. We demolished some beds, chairs, wash stands and dressers for fuel.

12:00 Noon It is dinner time and we have four cookies and some bread that is four days old, but it tastes good to the hungry. Haven't seen anyone in the boats today. Mac is trying to become a musician. He found George's saxophone and can make a noise on it resembling a calf just before breathing its last at the packing plant. Giff told us that in his country, wherever that is that the streams don't act this way.

12:30 p.m. Forty inches of water on the floor.

1:00 p.m. 38 inches of water on the floor.

2:20 p.m. 36 inches of water on the floor.

3:30 p.m. 33 inches of water on the floor.

4:00 p.m. 32 ½ inches of water on the floor.

5:00 p.m. 30 inches of water on the floor. Jimmie and Mac succeeded in getting to the ice box and secured some boiled ham and some canned soup, which we handed in part to the Johnson house and Sanders house people. They were glad to receive it, too. The Johnson people say they've had nothing to eat and nothing to burn since the flood started. There are 8 people in the Johnson hotel. We also made them some coffee and handed it across the alley.

5:15 p.m. Mac was able to make it to the kitchen with his hip boots and rescue his meat cleaver. We can now cut wood a little better. Hurrah for Mac. Sanders has 17 people with hardly nothing to eat. One corpse floated past today, maybe more have passed unseen.

6:00 p.m. water is 28 inches deep on the floor. Was able to reach the water tank and get good, clean water. Mac saw a large turtle in the kitchen but was unable to catch it, must have weighed 5 pounds.

7:00 p.m. Mac waded through 26 inches of water and floated out a barrel of coal. We now have enough to last three or four days.

11:00 p.m. Still playing Rum (cards). 15 inches of water on the floor.

Thursday, March 27, 1913

6:00 a.m. Water about 4 inches below the level of the floor. Rescue people out wading and in boats; feeding people in the churches and schoolhouses.

7:00 a.m. Giff opened the safe. Safe had been entirely submerged. Mac went up street to find mother, found she been taken out in a rescue boat; boat upset, his mother had been thrown out into the water, she swam one block, held onto a fire escape until rescued again and was taken to the hospital and taken care of. Jimmie was able to telephone to friends at home and notify them he was all right. He found that his folks were all right. George cannot communicate with his folks but he thinks they're all right. Thugs are arriving and pillaging things. City is under martial law, with orders to shoot anyone found looting. George's mother is found all right. Three hundred people were sworn in as officers to patrol the city. Water is still lowering.

9:00 a.m. Wabash RR Company is taking cars off of the bridge, preparing to getting trains moving again. River is nearly within it's banks. One body is reported to have been found in a building, drowned. Everybody is looking for friends and relatives. This city is certainly in a bad condition.