

The FLOOD of '55

Farmington Ave.

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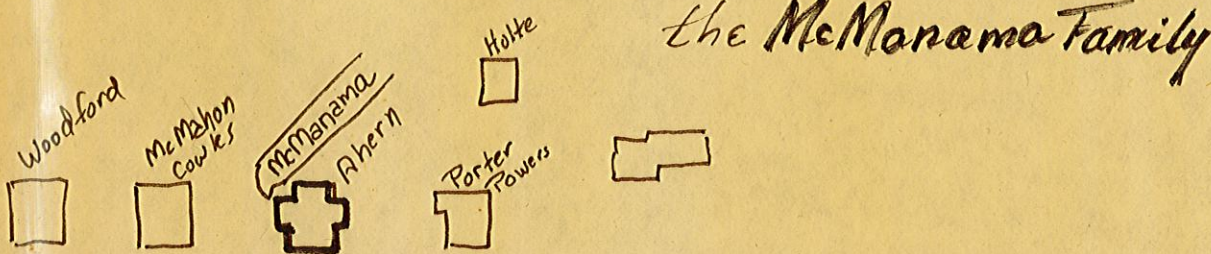
Union School

John McManama

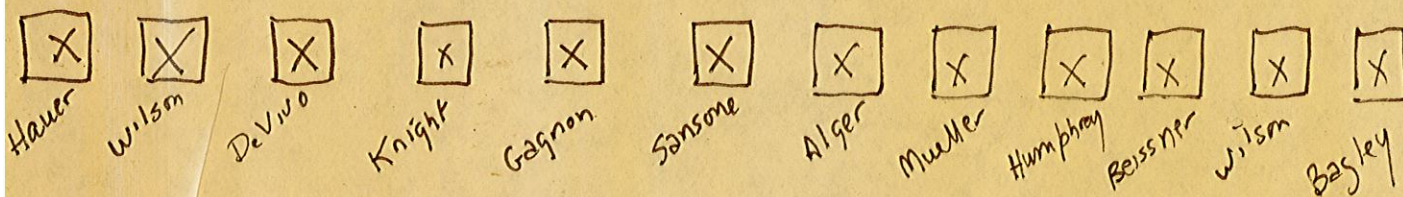
FLOOD OF '55

FARMINGTON AVENUE - UNIONVILLE

UNION SCHOOL - UNIONVILLE



FARMINGTON AVENUE



12 NEIGHBORS GONE!

Prelude -

Ten days before the Flood of '55, Hurricane Connie slashed through central Conn. ripping off large tree limbs and filling lakes and rivers. This picture, taken on August 11, 1955, shows a tree which had fallen across the road which had to be cut to allow traffic to pass. Across the street is Adeline Case's house which was badly damaged seven days later. The Joseph Hauer house standing just beyond became the most photographed home in Connecticut as it leaned precariously above the river for several weeks before it was torn down.



August 19, 1955

We were visiting in Massachusetts when Hurricane Diane, no longer considered a hurricane when it reached Connecticut, stalled and deposited torrential rain on Central Conn. and Southcentral Mass.

The rains and flooding had kept us from heading home but now we called the Conn. State Police to find the best route back. "Avoid Putnam, it's a mess," he said. "How's Farmington?" I asked. "No problems there," he responded. "What about Uxbridge? It floods there every spring." "Not a report on that, Sir. It must have missed there." Relieved, we headed home.

Heading Home

We took ten detours coming back, to avoid washed-out bridges. Everywhere we went we saw high water and flood damage and, in Putnam, we looked across the river at half-submerged mills, some badly damaged.

We approached Farmington from West Hartford totally unprepared for the sight we would see as we rounded the corner by Parson's Buick. Ahead of us the road was clogged with people looking out at an ocean of water.

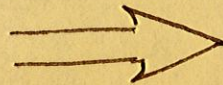
In addition to the spectators, there were amphibious army ducks and groups of National Guard troops, one of whom signalled us to stop. "You'll have to turn back, Sir," he said. "But we live down there." Pointing toward Urimville, he said, "Look out there. How do you expect to get there?" "We live on Farmington Ave," I responded. "In Urimville. Can we go around through Avon?" "Sir," he replied, "there isn't a home on Farmington Ave from here to Urimville center that doesn't have six feet of water on the first floor. You'd better talk to those people over there," he added, pointing to a few Farmington volunteers seated at a table.

In a state of shock, we went to the table where we were told that twelve homes across the street from us were gone. Gone? The river was nowhere near us and never had come up to those houses in past floods. Our house - the Chern's house actually? Badly damaged they told us. Water up to the ceiling on the first floor. They made arrangements for us to stay with the Hunters on High St. for the night.



While we were gone... ten and one-half feet of water roared into Tarmington Avenue. This photo was taken from the hill above the avenue. Note the high-water mark on the barn on the right. Water was up to 7 1/2 feet on first floor of Ahern's house (white) where we lived and McMahon's next to us. McMahon's barn is on right - Holli's house on right.

The first eerie look at Tarmington Ave when the water receded as seen by National Guard troops. Muck and debris are still in the road. On the right, twelve of our neighbors homes are gone. To the left the badly damaged homes of Brooke, Woodford, McMahon, McManama, Ahern, and Porter.



FARM AVE





↑ Our house on left three days after flood. Muck and Sanford Hawley lumber taken out of living room. Across the road, what's left of the Gaylin DeVivo home.



Across the road - 12 of our neighbors homes gone! Land gouged away almost to sidewalk. Jean Bagley's house destroyed. Just beyond, Grant Brockett's - badly damaged.

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Another view of site where twelve homes stood. Tree at right on former shoreline illustrates how much land was torn away. Army engineers filled in part of this area with 950 tons of traprock to create the Yodkins-Marion Park.

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Across the road-- the much photographed Hauer home which was purchased from Charlie Young two months earlier

OCT • 55



McMahon/Cowles on left. McManama/
Rherr center. Porter/Powers on right

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McManama left / Rherr right
None of items on porch and in yards
were useable.

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Adeline Case Home - first survivor to
the west. (Now David Brooks)

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Grant Brackett home - first survivor
to east; just barely.



The "Shanty Irish" - McManamas
and Aherns.

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Our backyard. Note my tracks in
muck. Everything taken out of house
so hopefully had to be thrown out.
There was two feet of muck in the
cellar - oily and smelling bad. We took
it out by the pailful.

looking across avenue from DeVino's
to Porters, (Picture is reversed)



Neighbors

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Donald & Marge Holte's
home.



Bagley's garage
Brockett's house beyond



More
Neighbors



Salings

Dan & Bea
Collins home



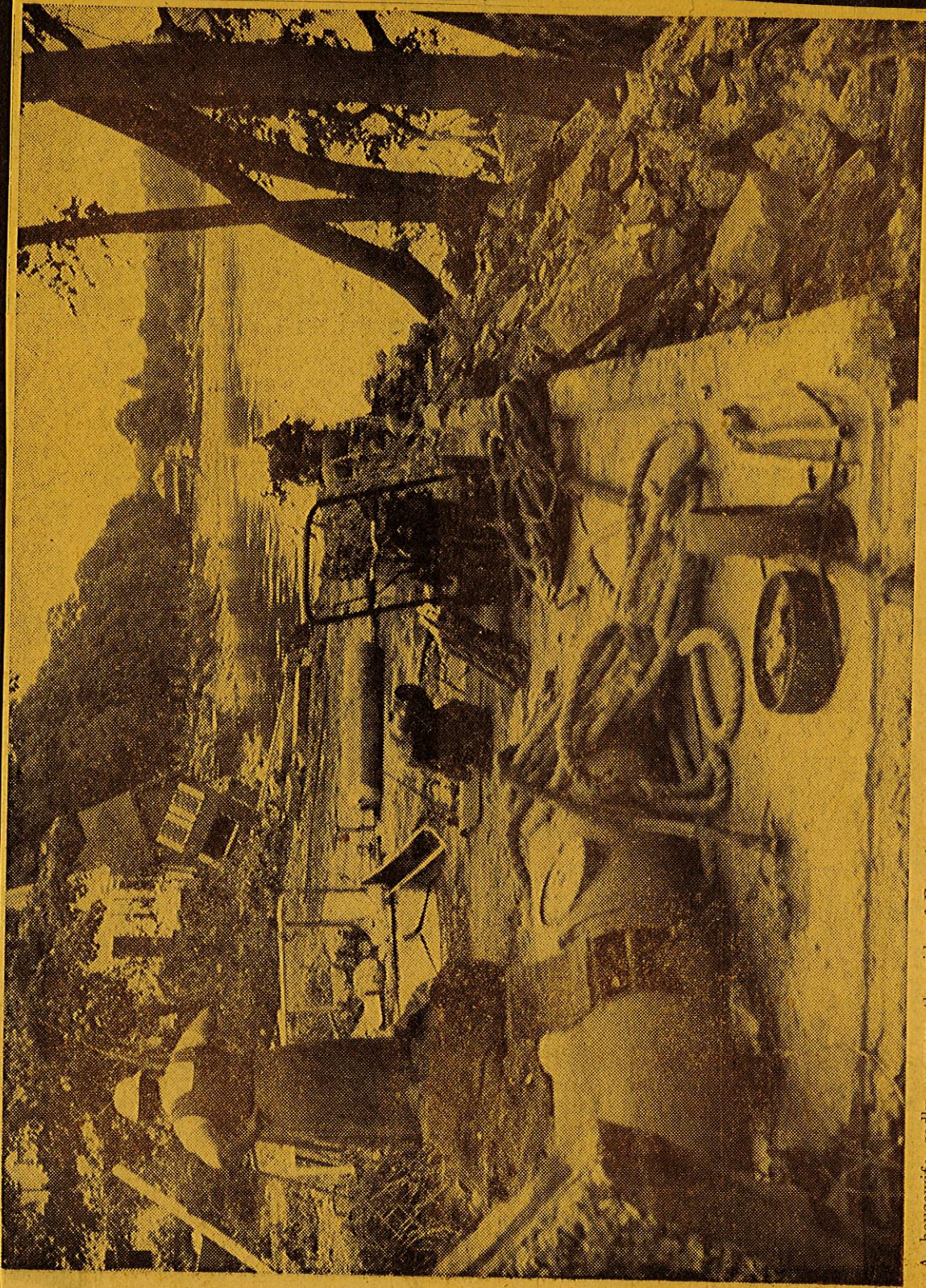
Henry Woodford's
→



Mone
Neighbors

Store next to
Dan Collins's house





A housewife sadly surveys the side of Farmington Avenue in Unionville. There were 13 to 15 homes along this washed out curve of the road, with everyone on the south side gutted or wrecked.

We get much appreciated help.

HARTFORD COURANT: SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 1955



GOOD SAMARITANS: Members of the Life Insurance Management Association pitch in and help clean up flood stricken areas in Unionville. After office hours they get into old clothes and work until dark. They help anyone that needs help and there are hundreds that do. Friday afternoon they helped clean out the cellar of John McManama, principal of the Union School in Unionville. Left to right; Boris Melikoff, Bill Whorf, Sheldon Toder and Tom Fahey (Courant Photo—Kiely).

Unionville

Insurance Group Pitches In With Clean-Up Work

UNIONVILLE, Aug. 26 (Special)—Twenty men from the Life Insurance Agency Management Assn. in Hartford spent the day working helping to clean up the flood-damaged area of the village. Two of them paid a visit here two days ago and asked John McManama, Union school principal, who was standing before his Farmington Avenue home, if help was needed.

McManama replied that it certainly was. The group response resulted. Included were two Frenchmen from Paris who were visiting at the insurance association.

'Shanty Irish'

A well known resident of the village, of Irish descent, has placed a sign in front of his home "The Shanty Irish," after the flood damaged his "lace-curtain" home.

When I first saw the inside of our house, I couldn't believe the mess—muck, lumber, oil, etc. As I stood looking, John Vibert came along with a shovel and said, "Are you just going to stand there feeling sorry or shall we dig it out. He stayed for three days.

So many people helped out— it was unbelievable

Jean Bagley's house. Beyond - Grant
Brockett's

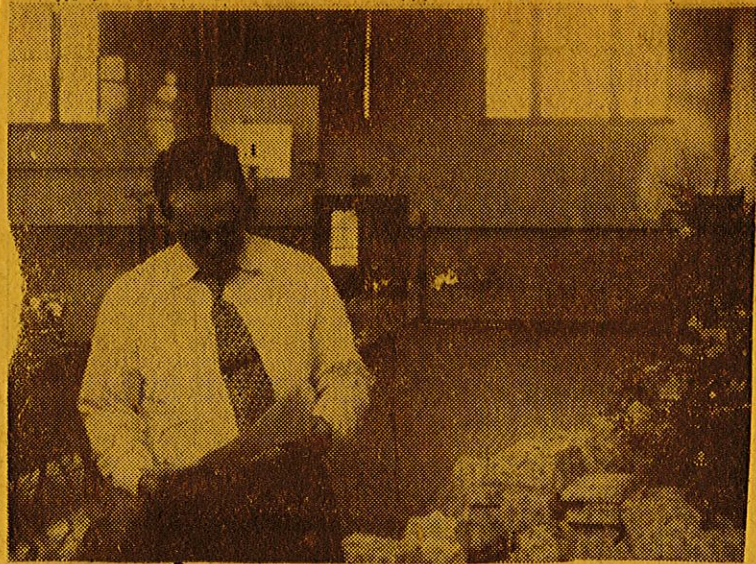


NEW YORK STATE
BROCKETT'S



Meanwhile-- back at Union Shore
where I was Principal, the floodwaters
reached five and one-half feet on the
lower level which included the gym, and
kindergarten, cafeteria, industrial arts, and
homemaking rooms.

Santa's Helper: 1st Class



—Herald Staff Photo

Principal John MaManama of Unionville's Union School is shown with part of a tremendous pile of Christmas gifts carefully prepared and arranged for some 133 children of Farmington and Unionville who were washed out

of their homes in August, and who longed for the return or replacement of a favorite toy lost in the flood. The project of replacement was originated and undertaken by MaManama, whose efforts, assisted by the Noah Wallace PTA, the Kiwanis Club of Hartford, Farmington High School, the Laurel Cage Bird Society and others, resulted in a happier Christmas for many youngsters in Farmington and Unionville.

Union School Head Is Santa Claus In Business Suit

In the truest sense of Christmas spirit, Principal John McManama of Unionville's Union School has completed a project to bring some Christmas cheer into the homes of children who lost playthings and treasured possessions during the floods.

Aided by organizations and clubs in Farmington and Unionville, including the PTA, the Kiwanis Club of Hartford, Farmington High School's Conservation Club, Noah Wallace PTA, and the Tunxis Hose Company, McManama has collected gifts for some 133 children. Parents of the children were contacted to find out what articles were wanted most in order that they may be presented as Christmas gifts.

One of the most unusual requests was for a goat, but speedily solved when a goat rancher from Coventry donated a prize goat to the cause. The Conservation Club of Farmington High built a shelter for the animal when delivered.

One request had McManama and his staff temporarily baffled, until a Herald reporter placed a quick call to Phil Di Fronzo, operator of the Simsbury Pet Shop and official of the Laurel Cage Bird Society. Mr. Di Fronzo immediately approved the request, and one more youngster will get his wish on Christmas.

Tunxis Hose Company of Unionville, always anxious and eager to assist with such a project, provided 133 brand new dollar bills to be included with the gifts.

When interviewed about the project, John McManama, with the spirit characterizing the people of Unionville after the flood, merely shrugged his shoulders and wondered what was so unusual about the whole project.



L200D OF 1955



"BUT I LOVE THE COATS"—Kenneth LeBlance, six, with the goats he got for Christmas to replace the one he lost during the flood. With him is John McManama, principal of Union School, Unionville, Conn., who started the drive to replace the children's lost toys.



JOAN JAMES, SCHOOL SECRETARY, SHOPPING FOR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Unionville Tragedy: 90 Homes Swept Off

By JAMES MURRAY
UNIONVILLE, Ct.—A pair of dazed newlyweds, hand in hand, searching for their honeymoon cottage and unable to find even where it once stood.

An old woman poking in the sand with a stick and coming upon an antique bedspread, the only possession she has left on earth out of those which once filled a 10-room house.

Thirteen people, men, women and children's just vanished, and no one knows whether they are alive or dead.

Down one side of Farmington ave. nothing beyond the sidewalk but a roaring river which has changed its bed. There were 12 big houses there Friday. Where are they now?

Where 24 other houses stood, nothing now but a desert of sand. Piles of debris 70 to 80 feet high that once were houses and now just piles of splinters.

This is Unionville today, a quiet little Connecticut town before Friday's flood roared down the Farmington river.

Town Manager Stephen A. Flis gives facts and figures. More than 90 homes were completely washed away, 110 other homes and 15 businesses damaged beyond repair.

Only one body has been found, that of Patricia Bechard, 7,

whom the river snatched away while her mother, Mrs. Leon Bechard watched helplessly while holding another child in her arms.

Of the 13 missing, three were children in one family: Charles Wodkins, 46, Farmington police man, and Joseph Morin, 21, a college student, were last seen being swept down river in a reed boat; three people were perched on a roof top; one man was seen waving frantically from the window of a house afloat on a roaring torrent. They're all gone.

"The helicopters did a tremendous job," says Flis. "If it hadn't been for the helicopters hundreds would have drowned."

William Ahern, 17, got to high ground last Friday night and watched the raging river rip away a dozen houses.

"Some fell down like bowling pins," he said. "Some floated off intact. Two and three at a time would crash into each other as they went downstream. One 15-room house did a complete square-sault and floated away upside down."



"BUT I LOVE THE GOATS"—Kenneth LeBlance, six, with the goats he got for Christmas to replace the one he lost during the flood. With him is John McManama, principal of Union School, Unionville, Conn., who started the drive to replace the children's lost toys.



Herald Tribune photos by Joe Engels

Joan Janes, secretary of Union School, shopping for presents for the children of the town.

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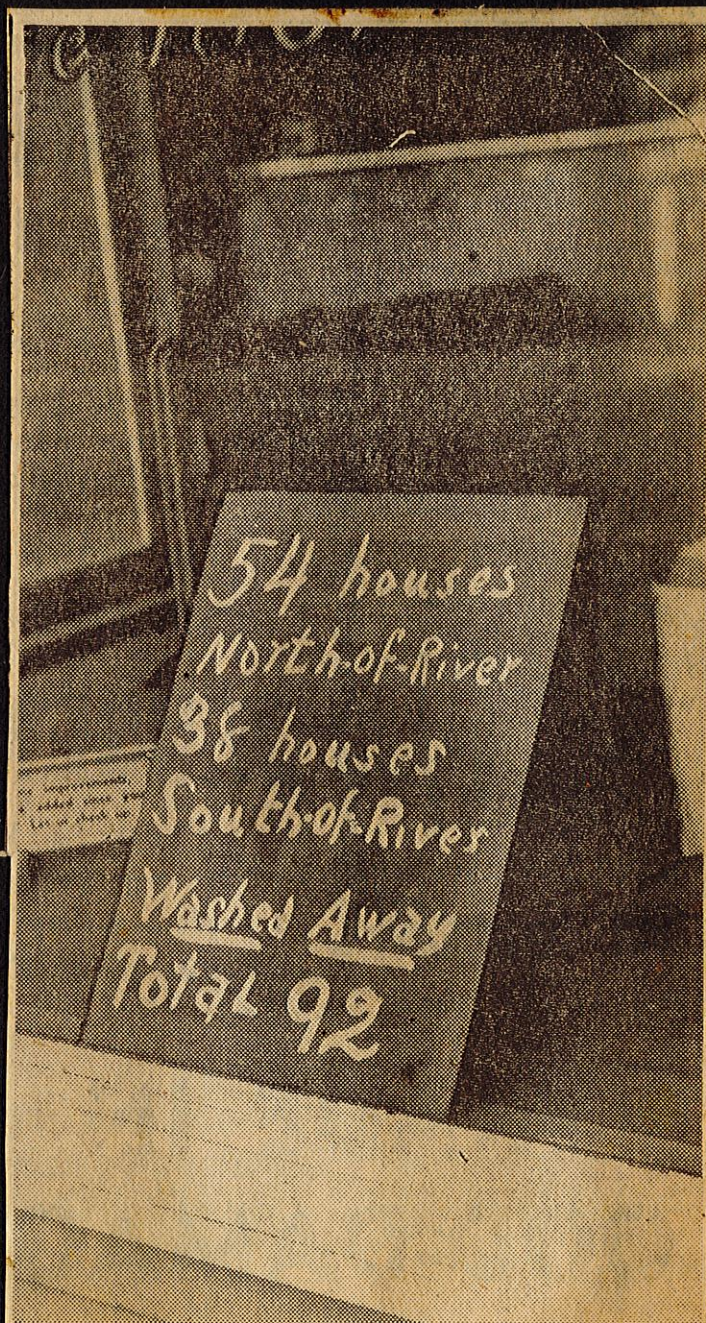
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Our neighbor, young Bill Ahern, makes the New York Daily News.



Flood Tabulation in Unionville

SIGN IN WINDOW of insurance company in Unionville lists box score of houses destroyed in that town. — [Times Photo.]