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IMAGES OF THE PAST - by the Kamloops Museum

Peterson Creek in Flood - by John Stewart, assistant archivist.

It is probable that most people in Kamloops are hardly aware of the existence of Peterson Creek other than as a park in the south end of the city. The small canyon created by it higher up is quite impressive as one drives over it on the new bridge, but the remainder of the creek flows more under the city than through it. Today its waters are very much under control, but not very long ago Peterson Creek would annually threaten parts of the city with flash floods.

The creek is fed by Jacko and Edith Lakes and every spring, with the combined rapid melting of snow and the spring rains, the water flow can increase dramatically overnight. The problem in the past was also made worse by the nature of the creek bed. After falling sharply to the valley through the canyon, the water rushed into a shallow and gravelly bed as it passed through the city. During the spring freshets the creek routinely overflowed its banks.

This of course presented no problem before residential areas were built up around it in the first two decades of this century. Most of the housing near the creek was built after 1910 and it is only after that date that we notice warnings and complaints about flooding.

From 1911 onwards the city sought to control the problem. But it was expensive and the ~~and the~~ source of the water was beyond city jurisdiction. Beginning in 1912 the city almost yearly appealed to the provincial government to help control the run-off. Slowly, over the next thirty years, dams were built in the lakes and tributaries to the stream as well as Peterson Creek itself.

Even before that however, the ranches bordering the creek south of Kamloops had built their own dams for irrigation. Their structural strength of ~~these dams~~ caused the city engineering department some concern. In 1913 the city engineer gave a lengthy report to council in which he pointed out that these dams

constituted a menace to the city should they ever give way during flood season.

The council decided to appeal to the Province to rectify the situation and, over the succeeding years, the problem was gradually lessened. This did not eliminate floods however.

There was a bad flood in 1913 and another in 1915 though it is hard to say how much damage was done to property. During the next fifteen years the channel was deepened and much of the sides lined with concrete. This lessened the chances of water overflowing the banks and prevented the banks from caving in.

Between 1915 and 1930 there was no serious flooding, and the new arrivals living along the creek from Columbia Street ~~and~~ ^{to} the river were unaware of any danger. In 1930 it was feared that Peterson Creek would flood worse than ^{at} any time since 1913, and the city council debated the expense of sandbagging. Some alderman said that the affected residents should pay as they were aware of the danger when they built there. Others said that this wasn't so and that the developers should be held responsible. As it happened, the water level was not as high as feared nor were the costs.

Today the water flow of Peterson Creek is well, though not perfectly, under control. The water level can get very high in the spring but usually poses no threat to surrounding houses. However, there are still occasional problems. In 1972 the city expended a good deal of money and effort to build new trails, bridges and gardens in the new Peterson Creek Park. The next spring a flash flood destroyed many of the trails and washed most of the flowers and shrubs downstream.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

- 1.) photo #2016 - Bridal Veil Falls on Peterson creek in flood in 1901.
In the foreground is one of the bridges built by prison labour in the 1890's.

- 2.) photo #6424 - Peterson Creek in flood in 1913 or 1915. The location is the 500 block of Columbia. At this time bridges crossed the creek at all streets from Columbia Street to the river.

- 3.) photo #6425 - This photograph was taken at the same time as the previous one but further downstream, probable at Nicola Street. In the foreground men and horses can be seen working to keep the bank from collapsing.