The Unforgettable

June 2008 Cedar River Flood

By Keri Annis
Dedication and Acknowledgements

This booklet is dedicated to my husband Brian, and my sons Tyler and Nate. It was with their encouragement and positive attitudes that I completed this booklet as part of my Masters requirement.

K. A. A

Picture credits: All of the pictures used in this booklet were taken in Cedar Rapids by Cedar Rapids Gazette newspaper photographers before, during, and after the June 2008 Cedar River flood. The pictures were used with permission by Paul Jensen of the Cedar Rapids Gazette.

The map on page 17 was created using the website Community Walk http://www.communitywalk.com/

The further research questions on page 25 were taken from The Question Mark website and the Social Studies section of the Iowa Core Curriculum.

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June 2008 will be remembered by many people because of the devastating flood that the Cedar Rapids community endured. Of the 125,000 Cedar Rapids residents, the flood directly affected approximately 29,000 people. Luckily, no one died from the flood.
Before the flood

On June 9, 2008, the Cedar River was predicted to crest at 20 feet in Cedar Rapids. The next day city officials told residents and businesses in the 100-year flood plain to prepare for a flood similar to the flood of 1993.

Police knocked on doors and announcements were made on the television and radio. Little did they know that the June 2008 flood would pass the 1993 flood by 20 feet and affect people living in the 500-year flood plain.

2008

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Thousands of Cedar Rapids residents helped sandbag homes and businesses days before the river flooded. Despite their sandbagging efforts, this powerful flood couldn't have been stopped. The heavy rains continued to fall.

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During the flood

The flood caused 45 of the city's 46 water wells to stop working. When residents heard that their city may be without water, they showed up by the thousands, in the rain, to sandbag and save the last water well.

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Some people didn't believe the water would rise, and others didn't want to leave their pets behind, so they stayed in their homes and later had to be rescued by boat. There were 423 boat rescues by area firefighters.

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2008
To try to save the 105-year-old CRANDIC railroad bridge, railroad officials put train cars full of rock on the bridge hoping that would save it. Lots of debris, including boat houses from the Ellis boat harbor clung to it. Unfortunately, the water was too powerful and it eventually collapsed. It cost nearly 7 million dollars to repair the bridge in the summer of 2009.
Photos from June 13

Downtown Dairy Queen

National Czech and Slovak Museum
Travel was difficult throughout Cedar Rapids with the downtown bridges flooded. The water never reached Interstate 380, but parts of the interstate were closed from June 13 to June 17 making travel a problem between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.
For 7 days, to help save water, people were asked to only drink the water, not to do laundry, take showers, clean the dishes, or use water in any other way. Some businesses gave away free bottled water to help save the little water that was left. Residents were allowed to use water normally on June 20.
The Red Cross set up shelters in school gymnasiums around Cedar Rapids for people that left their flooded homes and had no place to go. People were allowed to stay at the shelters and get free meals through July.

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The downtown area of Cedar Rapids was greatly affected by the flood. The flood covered almost 10 square miles of the city - about 1,300 city blocks. There were about 940 businesses and about 5,400 homes that were damaged by the flood. On June 14 Linn County was declared a federal disaster area.
After the flood

Homes were marked based on the damage that was done. The marks also determined how soon and if residents could get back into their homes. Seventy one homes were destroyed by the flood and had to be demolished. These homeowners were never allowed back in their homes because the homes had moved off their foundations.
When the water started going down, city officials had checkpoints where residents were told when they could get back into their homes. Some people were upset by not being able to get into their homes when they wanted. City officials made it clear that safety was important.
When people were allowed back into their homes, they had a huge mess to clean up. Things that were touched by the dirty flood water were placed on the curb, next to the road, to be hauled away to the landfill. An estimate of 81,000 tons was taken to area landfills.

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On Thursday, June 19, the water was completely back into its banks leaving nothing but a muddy, stinky mess behind.
Photos from June 19

Grant Wood stained glass window inside Veterans Memorial Building

Paramount Theater
On June 19 President George W. Bush meet with Cedar Rapids Mayor Kay Halloran and Iowa's Governor Chet Culver to discuss the flood and what would happen next for the community.
Interesting flood facts

Flood facts
- On June 12 the National Guard arrived to help, and on June 13 the United States Coast Guard arrived to help.
- Based on financial public assistance estimates, this flood ranks Iowa fifth in the largest state disasters in the United States.

Facts measured in feet
- The river's highest point was 31.1 feet on June 13 - that was about 20 feet above flood stage.
- On June 21 the Cedar River dropped below the 12-foot flood stage for the first time since June 2.

Facts with large numbers
- About 1,360 people lost their jobs because their places of employment were flooded.
- The flood displaced about 1,800 Cedar Rapids Community School District students.
- The Cedar Rapids Public Library lost over 160,000 items in the flood, which included the entire adult collection.

Dollar amounts for flood damages
- The Cedar Rapids Community School District had approximately 33.5 million dollars in damages.
- Estimates show that the flood caused about 6 billion dollars in damages to the community.
Millions of dollars in donations for clean up and rebuilding

- The United Way raised 1.3 million dollars.

- The Flood 2008 Fund collected more than 5 million dollars, which included talk show host Jay Leno's $160,000.

- The American Red Cross received more than 2 million dollars. $100,000 of that was from singer Taylor Swift.

- The Embrace Iowa group sent $3,475,000 for small business recovery funds.

- The Vision Iowa Board awarded 1.5 million dollars to help renovate and expand the historic Paramount Theater.

- FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Assistance) gave more than 1.1 million dollars to the city of Cedar Rapids for removal of tons of debris following the flood.
The City Council's Future Flood Protection Plan

- The City Council endorsed a plan on November 12, 2008, that featured adding earthen levees along the river, building floodwalls to protect industries near the downtown, and making removable floodwalls to protect the heart of downtown Cedar Rapids.

- The City Council would also like to buy out some homes near the river and create a river front "greenway" area as part of the neighborhood planning process (see map below*).

- The City Council plans to have these flood control projects completed in eight to fifteen years at a price of 1 billion dollars.

Source:
Student questions for further flood research from the Question Mark website by Jamie McKenzie* and from the Social Studies section of the Iowa Core Curriculum**

Note: any river may be substituted for the Mississippi River.

*How can we build levees capable of standing up to the biggest of floods?

*What steps can be taken to manage the Mississippi River system to make terrible floods less likely?

*What regulations will minimize risk and environmental damage?

*How can we prevent greed and business interests from increasing the flood hazards?

**Describe the social and economic effects of environmental changes that arise from floods.

**Give examples of human alterations of the physical environment that have produced positive and negative consequences.

**Analyze how changes in weather affect people.

**How do physical processes and human actions modify the environment and tell how the environment affects humans.
Use the following numbers or addresses of flood damaged buildings to locate them on the map found on page 25.

#1  Cedar Rapids Community Schools Educational Services Building
    346 2nd Avenue SW

#2  Cedar Rapids Public Library
    500 1st Street SE

#3  Central Fire Station
    1010 1st Street NW

#4  Downtown Dairy Queen (see photo page 8)
    208 1st Avenue NW

#5  Federal Court House
    411 3rd Street SE

#6  Mercy Hospital
    701 10th Street SE
#7 National Czech and Slovak Museum (see photo page 8)
30 16th Avenue SW

#8 Paramount Theater (see photo page 17)
123 3rd Avenue SE

#9 Quaker Oats
418 2nd Street NE

#10 Taylor Elementary School
720 7th Avenue SW

#11 Veterans Memorial Building featuring Grant Wood's stained glass window (see photo page 17)
50 2nd Avenue SW

#12 YMCA
207 7th Avenue SE
Map of flooded downtown Cedar Rapids
created on Community Walk website
http://www.communitywalk.com/
Glossary

**100-year flood plain** - an area of land that has a chance of a flood occurring once in a 100 year time period.

**500-year flood plain** - an area of land that has a chance of a flood occurring once in a 500 year time period.

**checkpoints** - where traffic is stopped, as for inspection by authorities.

**crest** - The highest or culminating point, the peak.

**federal disaster area** - An area that officially qualifies for emergency governmental aid as a result of a catastrophe, such as an earthquake or flood.

**foundations** - The lowest and supporting part that includes the base of a house.

**landfill** - a low area of land that is filled in with layers of garbage and soil.

**residents** - people who reside in a particular place.

**sandbag** - bag filled with sand and used to form protective walls.

**shelters** - temporary housing for homeless or displaced people.
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