

"WILD RIVER"
A
PICTORIAL PETITION
PRESENTED TO THE
STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEES
of the
45th LEGISLATURE
in joint session assembled
at Austin, Texas, March 4th, 1937.
URGING FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION OF
Senate Bill Number 114, and
House Bill Number 234.

Creating the Harris County Flood Control District, and donating and granting to such district by the State of Texas, for a period of ten years, one-half of the ad valorem taxes collected for general revenue purposes upon the property and from persons in Harris County, such fund to be used for the purposes of preventing continued public calamity caused by great floods, and to construct improvements to control flood waters in said district, and declaring an emergency.

STATE OF TEXAS }
Harris County }

To the Honorable Members of the State Affairs Committees of the House and Senate of the Legislature of the State of Texas, 45th Session, in joint session assembled:

G R E E T I N G S

The designated officers of the political subdivisions known as

THE HARRIS COUNTY HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL NAVIGATION DISTRICT,
THE CITY OF HOUSTON, TEXAS, and
THE COUNTY OF HARRIS,

joined in by the designated officers of

THE HOUSTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, and
THE BUFFALO BAYOU PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION, do hereby respectfully

P E T I T I O N

Your individual and collective interest, careful consideration and favorable recommendation to the 45th Legislature, in the matter of consideration and adoption of Senate Bill Number 114, and companion House Bill Number 234, same being

A B I L L

TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT CREATING THE HARRIS COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT

An Act creating the Harris County Flood Control District, declaring it to be a governmental agency for reclamation and flood control in Harris County, defining its powers, authorizing it to acquire and dispose of property, to sue and be sued, to adopt a seal, to appoint a general manager and other officers, agents and employees, and counsel, to fix compensation and to prescribe their duties, providing for surveys, authorizing the devising of plans and the construction of works for flood control and reclamation, to prevent the deposit of silt in navigable streams, authorizing the removal of obstructions, permitting cooperation and contracting with the United States of America and its agencies and the acceptance of grants, loans and advancements, the cooperation with Harris County and adjacent political subdivisions; creating a Board of Directors, providing for their appointment, the term of office and qualifications, including an oath of office and bond, fixing the compensation of the directors, providing for a chairman, quorum; providing for a hearing on flood control projects and the desirability of absorbing the present drainage districts in the County and their outstanding indebtedness as a part of the general flood control plan of the District; authorizing an election, providing for the call thereof, the qualification of voters, notice to be given, the return of the election and the declaration of the result by the Commissioners' Court of the County; the fixing of a tax for the District, providing that the collector and assessor of taxes in the County shall be assessor and collector for the District; naming the county treasurer as treasurer for the District, providing for the handling of the District's funds, his bond, compensation; authorizing the appointment of a depository for the District fund; appointing an auditor, fixing his powers and compensation; empowering the District to pay the premiums on official bonds; providing for the issuance of improvement bonds for the District, fixing the amount, rate of interest, the term thereof, providing for the registration, sale, approval of the bonds, regulating the purchase of bonds and the investment of the sinking funds; providing for the letting of contracts by the District; the use of public property, granting the power of eminent domain; declaring the floods of Harris County to be a public calamity, authorizing a remission of one half of the state tax for ten years, and providing for the payment of that one half to the Flood Control District for improvement and maintenance purposes, specifying the reports thereon to be made by the tax collector, authorizing the issuance of bonds secured by a pledge of the funds granted by the State; providing that if any provision of the Act shall be held invalid the other provisions shall not be affected, and declaring an emergency.

I N S U P P O R T O F W H I C H

The afore named agencies all of Harris County, Texas, append hereto and make a part of said Petition, the following graphic pictorial delineation of typical conditions existing at Houston,

Texas, during and as a result of the overflow of Buffalo Bayou and its confluence with White Oak Bayou and other tributaries on May 31st, June 1st and 2nd, 1929, and again on December 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1935, and in addition do collectively declare that a

P U B L I C E M E R G E N C Y

Exists within the confines of said political subdivisions by virtue of the constant menace of threatened repetition of such overflows on the occasion of each heavy rainfall on the watershed of said streams; that thousands of human lives are endangered; that millions of dollars in private, municipal and other governmental capital investments depend solely upon the vagaries of nature; and that the traffic and commerce of all rail lines and the great Houston Ship Channel are constantly in danger of disruption, to the distress of all of the peoples of Texas,

W H E R E F O R E

Knowing same to be the will and pleasure of the majority of the qualified electorate of said political subdivisions, the designated officers of said political subdivisions and organizations join in this petition

I N W I T N E S S W H E R E O F

We hereunto set our hands and seals of office, this Fourth day of March, A. D. 1937, at Houston, Harris County, Texas.

Harris County Houston Ship Channel Navigation District,
By Jos. W. Evans, Chairman. (seal)

City of Houston, Texas,
By R. H. Fonville, Mayor. (seal)

County of Harris, Texas,
By Roy M. Hofheinz, County Judge. (seal)

Houston Chamber of Commerce,
By James Anderson, President. (seal)

Buffalo Bayou Property Owners Association,
By Frank C. Clemens, President. (seal)

VITAL STATISTICS

The devastating floods of May and June, 1929, and December, 1935, exacted a huge toll of human life and property damage. Almost without warning, the muddy waters swirled down upon unsuspecting families, separating mothers from their children, and leaving in the mucky wake seven drowned, including five children and two adults.

Victims of the 1935 calamity and their ages were:

Mary Louise Goree, 9.

Ethel Lee Goree, 6.

James White, 10.

Ora Pierson, 8.

Mary Hayes, 9.

Mary Hayes, adult.

Adolphus Brown, adult.

Bodies of three of the five children were found on the Capitol Avenue bridge after the flood waters had receded. The body of another child was found on Stanley Street floating in two feet of water, and the body of still another child was found lying in the mud on Houston Avenue. The bodies of the two adults were found floating in Buffalo Bayou and were recovered.

The fact that no greater loss of life was incurred is due solely to the heroic efforts of volunteer rescue squads recruited from the ranks of the Houston Fire and Police Departments, the National Guard, the Boy Scouts, and private citizens.

PROPERTY LOSSES STAGGERING

Losses sustained by property owners and business establishments at Houston, Texas, as a result of the overflow of Buffalo Bayou and its confluence with White Oak Bayou and other tributaries, on May 31st, June 1st and 2nd, 1929, and on December 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1935, as reported during a survey conducted by the Houston Chamber of Commerce immediately following those floods, revealed the following losses in Houston proper:

Total 1929 flood losses reported (incomplete)	\$1,392,442.76
Total 1935 flood losses reported (incomplete)	2,528,606.31
	<hr/>
	3,921,049.07

The above totals represent only a partial coverage of the total actual physical losses incurred as a direct result of the overflow cited, and in no wise take into consideration such intangible losses as loss of "use and occupancy," impaired property values, or permanent loss of trade. It has been conservatively estimated that such intangible losses approximated an additional amount of at least \$5,000,000.00.

The above totals do not include livestock losses or the irreparable damage to agricultural lands drained by the streams, nor do they touch upon the great damage to industrial establishments along the Houston Ship Channel and at Pasadena, Texas, and Baytown, Texas. Nor do they include any estimate of the resultant losses to shippers throughout the State of Texas and other states served by the Houston Ship Channel and railroads entering Houston. These additional losses probably brought the total to as much as \$20,000,000.00. In addition to the actual damage done, property valued at more than \$100,000,000.00 was seriously threatened.



Photo courtesy Houston Press

TEXAS' LARGEST CITY AT THE MERCY OF THE RELENTLESS WATERS

An aerial view showing the extent of the disastrous inundation of the commercial district of Houston from December 7th to 10th, 1935. Left center: M. K. & T. Railroad yards and passenger station completely submerged. Center: U. S. Parcel Post Station completely under water. All equipment washed away. Lower right: Farmers Market almost out of sight under surging torrent.



Photo courtesy Houston Post

CAPITOL AVENUE HIGH BRIDGE COMPLETELY SUBMERGED

Near the height of the flood, the photographer caught this dramatic scene of desolation depicting Houston's principal east and west thoroughfares blocked by the inundation of the Capitol Avenue bridge, which ordinarily stands forty feet above the stream. Note the desperate plight of the victim of the flood clinging to the submerged rail of the bridge, center. Heroic work on the part of volunteer rescue workers kept the loss of life at a minimum.

"WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE, AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK"

Houston's powerful central water station, completely inundated by the flood of December, 1935. In addition to the serious threat of epidemic with which this condition was fraught, a potential major conflagration was threatened. Thousands of dollars in damage to the expensive equipment resulted, and the water supply was limited for days after the flood waters had subsided. Great danger of contamination of the submerged wells was also threatened.

Photo courtesy Houston Post

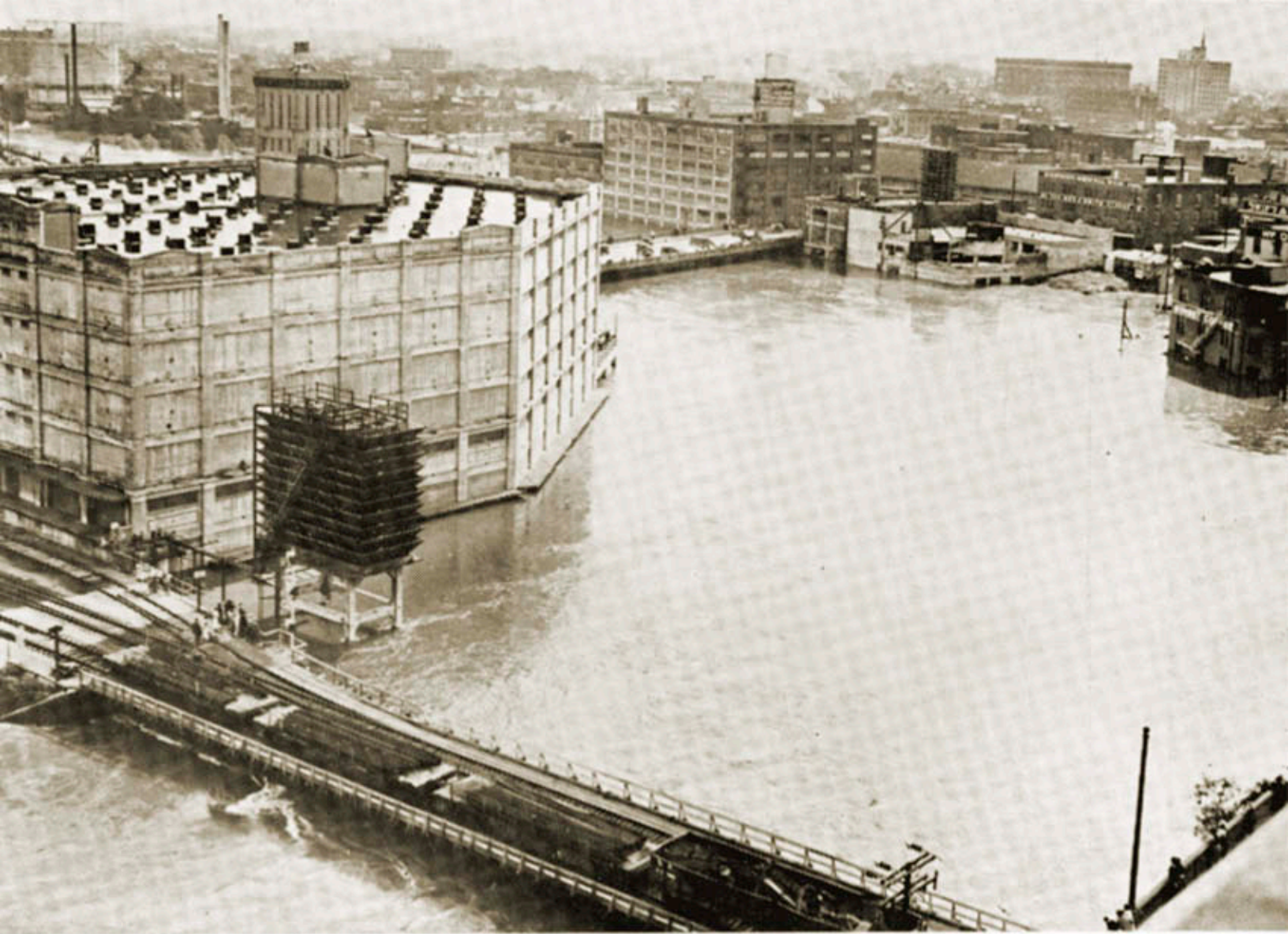


HOMES ENGULFED AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS THREATENED

A striking aerial view showing part of the submerged residential district in the foreground, and the encroachment of the flood waters on the giant Sam Houston Exposition Building, since razed, and the Criminal Courts Building. The waters rose more than six feet after this picture was made, and water entered both buildings. Note the broad extent of the inundated section shown in this view.

Photo courtesy Houston Press





WHITE OAK BAYOU EMPTIES ITS SWOLLEN WATERS INTO FLOODED BUFFALO BAYOU

This picture taken at an early stage in the flood shows the confluence of White Oak and Buffalo Bayous between Main and San Jacinto Streets. Note the heavily loaded cars which were switched onto the railroad bridge over White Oak Bayou in an effort to save the bridge, foreground. Flood waters subsequently submerged and damaged both bridges shown in the photograph.

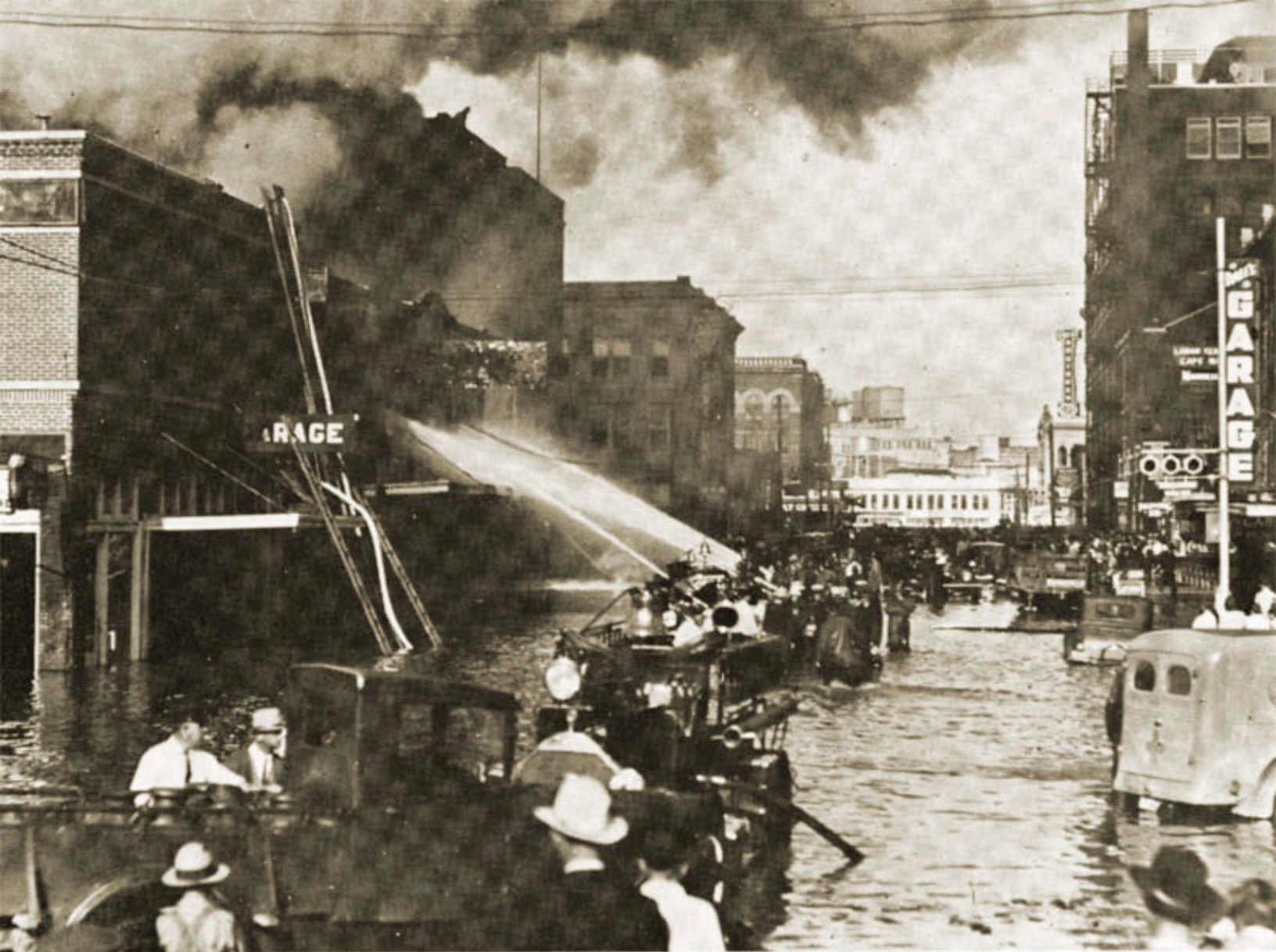


Photo courtesy Houston Post

DOWNTOWN FIRE THREATENS THE CITY AT HEIGHT OF THE FLOOD

This unusual photograph shows the Houston Fire Department fighting great odds to control the blaze which destroyed the garage and all equipment of the Yellow Cab Company at the height of the flood. With the Central Water Plant entirely out of commission, no water was available for fire fighting, and the entire downtown district was threatened. Note the pumper in the foreground sucking up the muddy waters of the flood. Several firemen were injured.

TRANSPORTATION TIED UP—TRAFFIC DEMORALIZED FOR DAYS

View from Main Street viaduct showing M. K. & T. passenger station and yards at an early stage in the flood. With the subsequent rise of the waters the cars shown in this picture were submerged, and the warehouses shown in the background suffered heavy losses. Practically every line entering this important rail center was affected, and the entire state suffered from delayed deliveries from the port as a result.

Photo courtesy Houston Chronicle



LOSSES TO RAILROADS AND SHIPPERS REACHED STAGGERING TOTAL

Losses resulting from Houston's great disasters of 1929 and 1935, were not confined to the city and county alone. Shippers throughout the state and nation suffered when flood waters of Buffalo and White Oak Bayous flooded railroad yards, hampering traffic and damaging shipments. Sights like the one below were common throughout the extensive railroad yards at Houston during both floods.

Photo courtesy Houston Chronicle





Photo courtesy Houston Post

HOUSTON'S GREAT FARMERS MARKET SWEEPED BY FLOOD WATERS

This striking view shows Houston's popular Farmers Market just before the flood waters engulfed it, during the 1935 flood. Left center: The city-owned Hampshaw Building which was rebuilt at an expense of thousands of dollars, after its collapse during the 1929 disaster. At the height of the flood, water entered the second floor of the buildings shown in the background causing damage totalling thousands of dollars.



Photo courtesy Houston Post

RAGING TORRENT SWEEPS DOWNTOWN MILAM STREET DURING FLOOD

Force of the surging flood which swept the commercial district of Houston in the December, 1935, flood, is clearly demonstrated in this remarkable photograph. As the crest was reached, flood waters lapped at the second story of the wholesale establishments shown in the background. Damage to property and merchandise stocks reached staggering totals.

SECOND FLOOR SALESROOM OF SEARS-ROEBUCK STORE GUTTED

Severely damaged in the flood of May, 1929, waters of the 1935 overflow entered the second floor of the Sears-Roebuck store, located at Buffalo Drive and Lincoln Street, on the edge of a densely populated residential section. Total flood losses to this establishment in the two floods totalled more than \$400,000.00. Damage to other individuals and establishments ran more than \$300,000.00 in a number of cases.

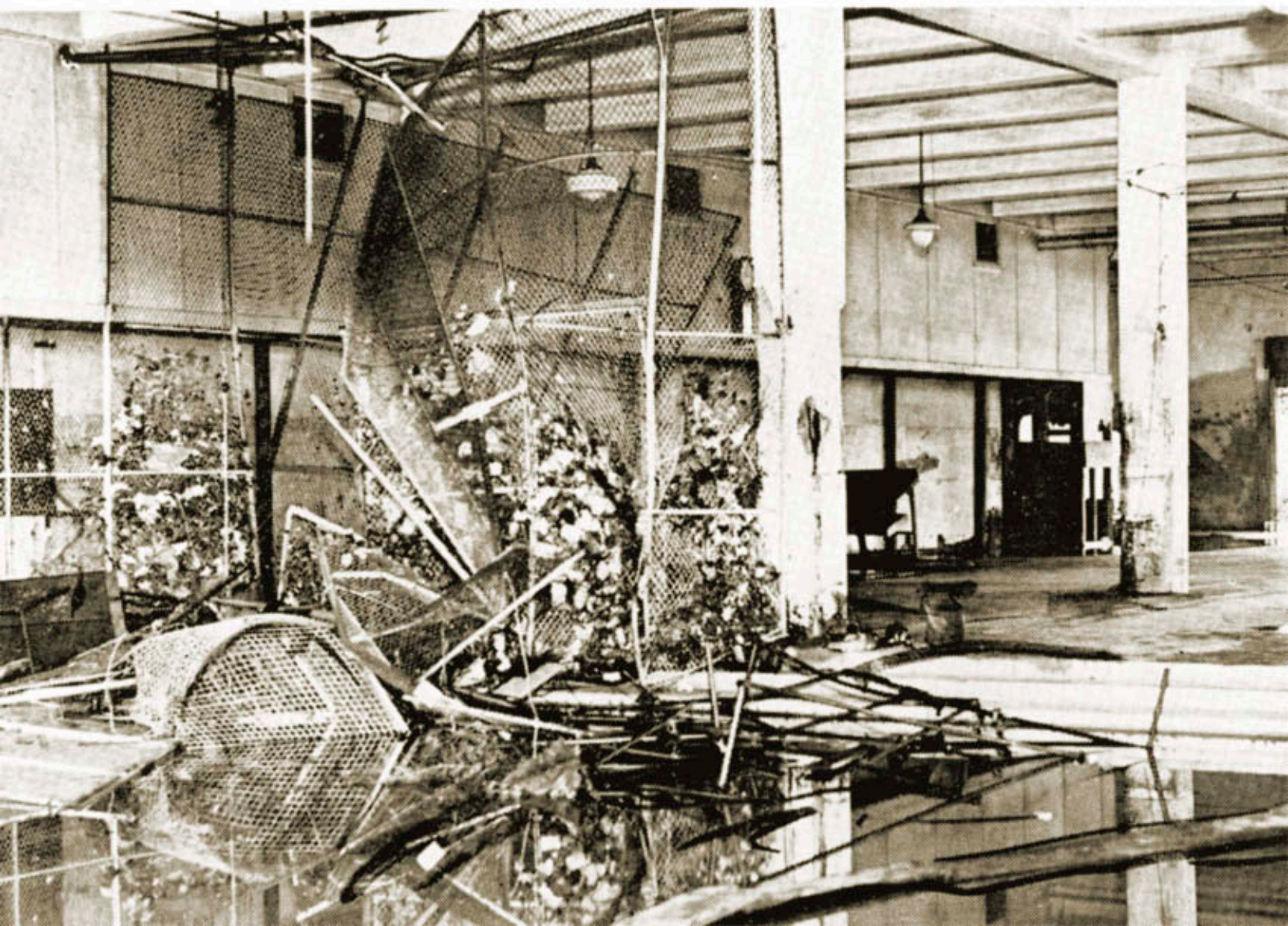
Photo courtesy Houston Press



U. S. POST OFFICE PARCEL POST STATION GUTTED BY FLOOD WATERS

This view of the U. S. Post Office Parcel Post Station on Franklin Avenue, taken after the flood waters had subsided, graphically portrays the ruthlessness of the torrent which swept through the city during the 1935 flood. The building was completely gutted, all equipment being a total loss. Similar damage was suffered by all establishments in the same neighborhood.

Photo courtesy Houston Press



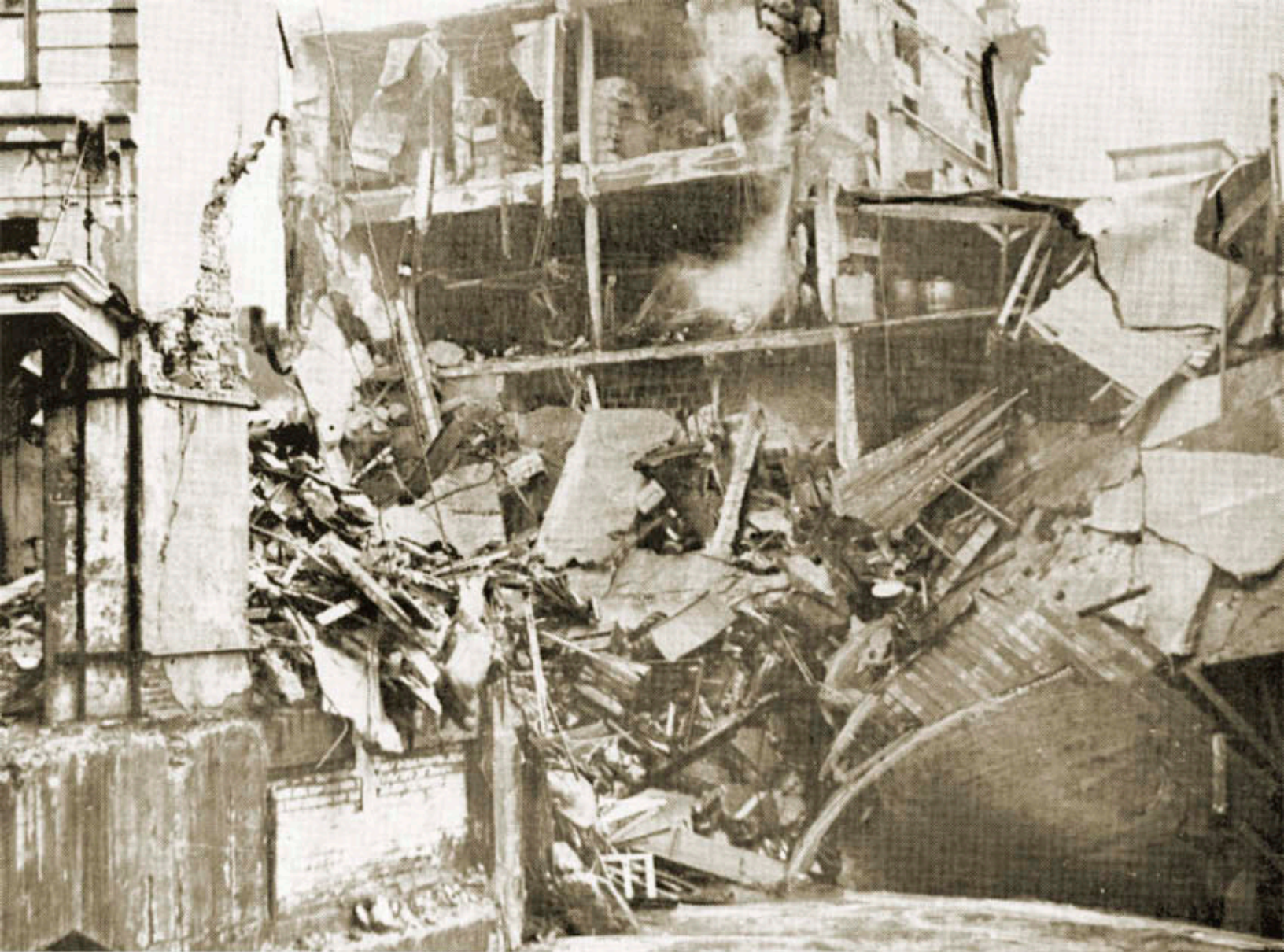


Photo courtesy Houston Press

COLLAPSE OF BUILDINGS REVEALED BY RECEDING WATERS

● The above photograph, showing three of the large buildings which collapsed as a result of the ravages of the flood waters, clearly demonstrates the mighty force of the torrent. During the 1929 flood city-owned property to the value of \$150,000 was destroyed. A like amount of damages was suffered during the 1935 overflow. Investments totalling millions of dollars were threatened with similar fates.



Photo courtesy Houston Chronicle

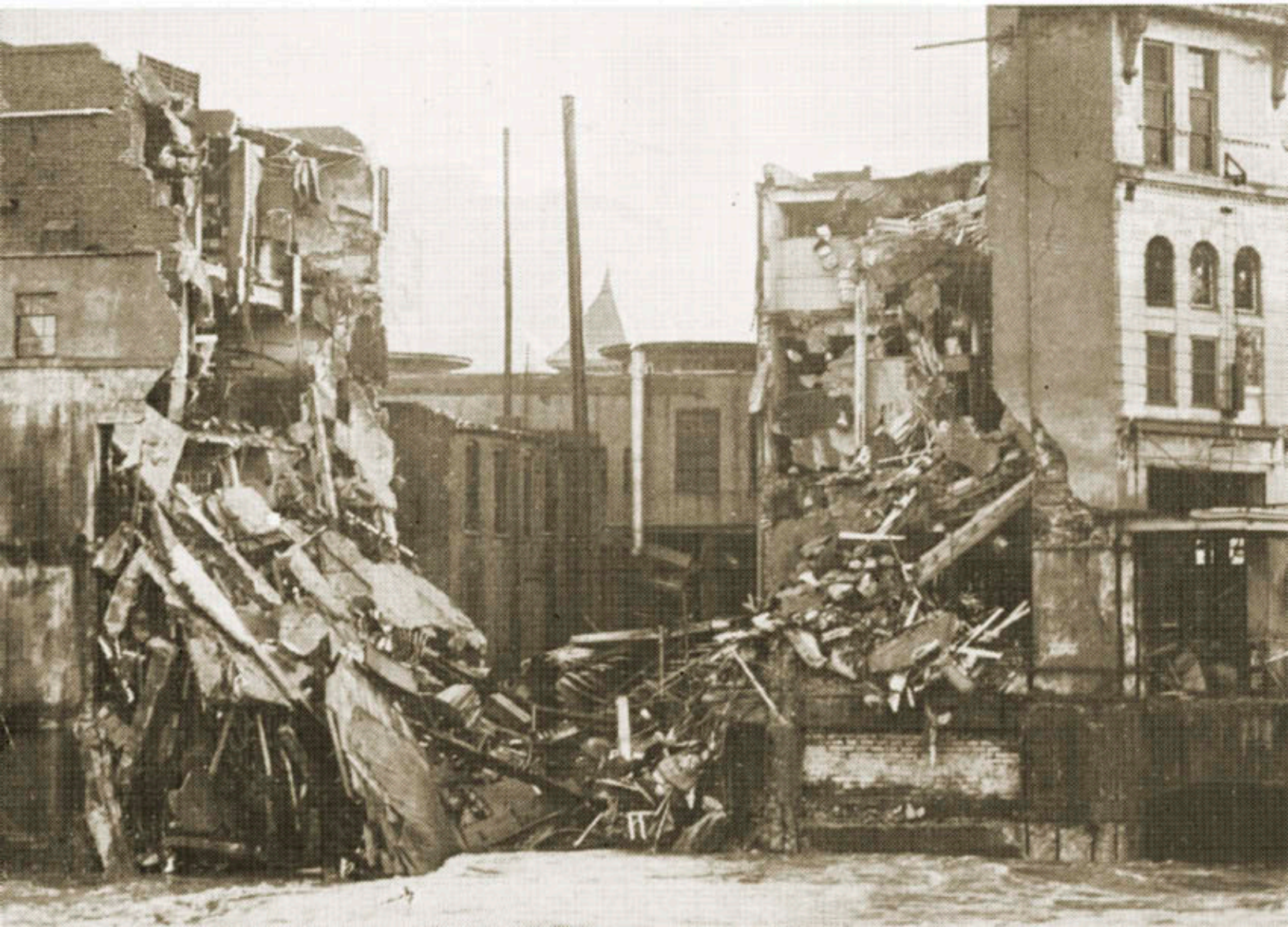
ANOTHER VIEW OF THE WRECKAGE LEFT IN THE WAKE OF THE FLOOD

The flood waters at their crest reached the second floor of this four-story concrete and steel structure with the disastrous results indicated. Not a building in the inundated area escaped serious damage, many of them being so badly damaged that they were razed to reduce the hazard to adjoining properties.

FLOOD WATERS REACH SECOND FLOORS IN WHOLESALE DISTRICT

The buildings shown in the above photograph were so badly damaged in the flood of December, 1935, that they could not be repaired, and were torn down, at a total loss to the property owners. Damage to merchandise in the flooded area amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Merchandise stored in the buildings shown above was a total loss, having washed away in the flood.

Photo courtesy Houston Post



RISING WATERS THREATEN CITY HALL LOCATED BLOCKS FROM BAYOU

This striking night scene was taken as thousands of anxious citizens, stranded in the downtown area, watched the rising waters encircle the City Hall, located several blocks from the raging streams. Flood damage to city-owned properties ran into thousands of dollars, and many valuable city and county records were destroyed.





HOUSTON'S MILLION DOLLAR AUDITORIUM FLOODED AS WATERS RISE

● Night scene of Houston's Million Dollar City Auditorium, located blocks from Buffalo Bayou, as the relentless waters of the swollen stream swept through the first floor, adding to the mounting toll of the 1935 flood. Across the street, one of the city's finest hotels suffered thousands of dollars in damage when the flood waters reached the mezzanine floor.



Photo courtesy Houston Chronicle

FLOOD CREST REACHES TURNING BASIN AT PORT HOUSTON

Thousands of dollars in damage resulted and investments totalling millions of dollars were threatened, when the crest of swollen Buffalo Bayou poured into the turning basin of Houston's famous inland port. Note the docks entirely under water in the above picture. Tons of mud and wreckage were dumped into the great deep-water channel, creating serious navigation hazards and hampering the maintenance work of the government dredges.

DOCKS AT PORT HOUSTON COMPLETELY SUBMERGED BY 1935 FLOOD

This view of Houston's famous inland port constructed at a cost of millions of dollars, to serve all of Texas, shows the surging waters as they engulfed the docks at the foot of 75th Street. Note the waiting freighters riding high above the roofs of the warehouses on the crest of the flood. The U. S. Customs office located in the warehouse on the left suffered heavy losses. Shipping was tied up for days, and all of Texas suffered as a result.

Photo courtesy Houston Chronicle



WHITE OAK BAYOU SWEEPS HOUSTON HEIGHTS— HIGHEST SECTION OF CITY

This unusual aerial view shows the rising waters of White Oak Bayou as they spread over the Heights section, highest in the city. These waters eventually joined those of Buffalo Bayou to wreak the havoc in the downtown section which the preceding pictures portray so vividly. Considering the extent, suddenness of the inundation, the loss of life was negligible. Such might not be the case in another such disaster.

Photo courtesy Houston Press



Respectfully submitted by

HARRIS COUNTY HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL NAVIGATION
DISTRICT

JOS. W. EVANS, Chairman.

CITY OF HOUSTON

R. H. FONVILLE, Mayor.

HARRIS COUNTY

ROY M. HOFHEINZ, County Judge.

HOUSTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

JAMES ANDERSON, President.

BUFFALO BAYOU PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

FRANK C. CLEMENS, President.

Grateful appreciation of the assistance of the following Houston firms in the preparation
of this brief is hereby acknowledged:

THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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THE HOUSTON PRESS

THE REIN COMPANY—PRINTERS

COVER BY JACK MILLER