

Excerpt from

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Storyteller: The Manchester Herald, 1907

THE FLOOD THAT CHANGED THE VALLEY—OCTOBER 1869

The October flood of 1869, which prevailed throughout a large part of New England, was exceptionally destructive in this locality. On Tuesday morning, the day after the town elections of October 4, there was not a waterwheel in motion in the town of Manchester. The roadways and bridges also the streams were devastated. Between the RR station in No. Manchester and Talcottville there was not a dam or bridge that remained. The Hudson mills, where bank note paper was made, were badly damaged. It was on what is now called "the Hartford Road", running from So. Manchester westward, that the principal destruction occurred. The paper industry, which had been founded by Chas. Bunce at the beginning of the century, was practically wiped out of existence. The old Cheney mills suffered severe loss. West of the Cheney works, the paper mill owned by Henry E. Rogers was more or less demolished. By the time the flood reached the mills owned by Lewis Bunce & Sons, its course was irresistible. The dam east of the mills was swept away by the torrent, the vast storage of water at that point adding to the work of destruction. The Lewis Bunce mills were the finest in the valley. They were equipped with the most modern machinery for the manufacture of paper.

These mills were crushed, as easily as an eggshell, by the volume of water. Further down were the mills of Walter Edwin Bunce. There, the valley spread out, widening the territory for the flood. The mills were inundated, but escaped destruction. The fine meadow lands in the vicinity were denuded. Situated on the main road,

between Manchester Center and East Hartford, was the mill founded by Charles Bunce, Jr. but owned at the time of the flood by Keeney & Fitzgerald. It was under water for hours but sustained no permanent loss.

There were hairbreadth escapes but no loss of life on the Hartford Road. Welles Forbes, who is now living in Manchester, was on the bridge near the Walter & Edwin Bunce mills when it was carried away. He was landed in the branches of a tree on the Olcott meadows half a mile from the bridge and was obliged to stay there through the night. William F. Hurd of this city, brother of Major Hurd of the Governor's Horse Guard, assisted in saving the books in the office of Lewis Bunce & Sons, wading through the flood almost to his armpits. The disaster was one of the severest that the town of Manchester has experienced.

The Lewis Bunce mills were not rebuilt. In fact, the flood was the death warrant for the paper industry that had been founded by Charles Bunce, who was the pioneer in paper making in Manchester. The whole territory along the Hartford Road that was familiar to him has been changed. The old scenery had been replaced and the valley has passed into new hands for the most part, being owned by the Cheney Bros. of So. Manchester. Like all property which they own, they have made it over giving it an air of eternal beauty undreamed of 50 years ago.