

THE GREAT FLOOD OF 1883



On the stairs leading to the second floor is a door with a high-water mark. It tells the story of the awesome power of nature and how tragedy can bring a community together.

The story begins during the winter of 1882-1883, which was one of the worst anyone could remember. There were stories of snowfall that was so deep it covered the fences and was frozen hard enough that horses could pull sleighs right over the fences. Naturally, the Creek next to the mill was covered with ice. In February the weather suddenly warmed with two days of warm weather followed by a torrential rain.

Anticipating the flood, Herman Huchendorf and his two employees Otto Kroeger and Mike Missel moved as much flour as possible to the second floor. After dark the workers decided they would take their chances and try to make it to higher ground. They were swept away but managed to grab onto the bridge and pull themselves out of the water. Making their way to a neighbor's house they weathered out the storm. Meanwhile, Huchendorf had climbed to the top floor, torn up a blanket, and tied himself to a post in the desperate hope that, even if the mill broke up, he could use it to stay afloat.

When the flood arrived it came with such force that it carried away the downstream side of the mill. The floodwaters rose almost to the second story. Windows were broken. Machinery was wrecked. Siding was ripped away. Over 100 bags of flour were scattered through the woods and out onto the Mississippi. Earth around the foundation was washed away.

Luckily the mill stood and Huchendorf was safe, but damage to the mill was devastating. Huchendorf would have been ruined if it weren't for his neighbors. The people of the community donated money and labor, enabling him to repair the damage and continue business.