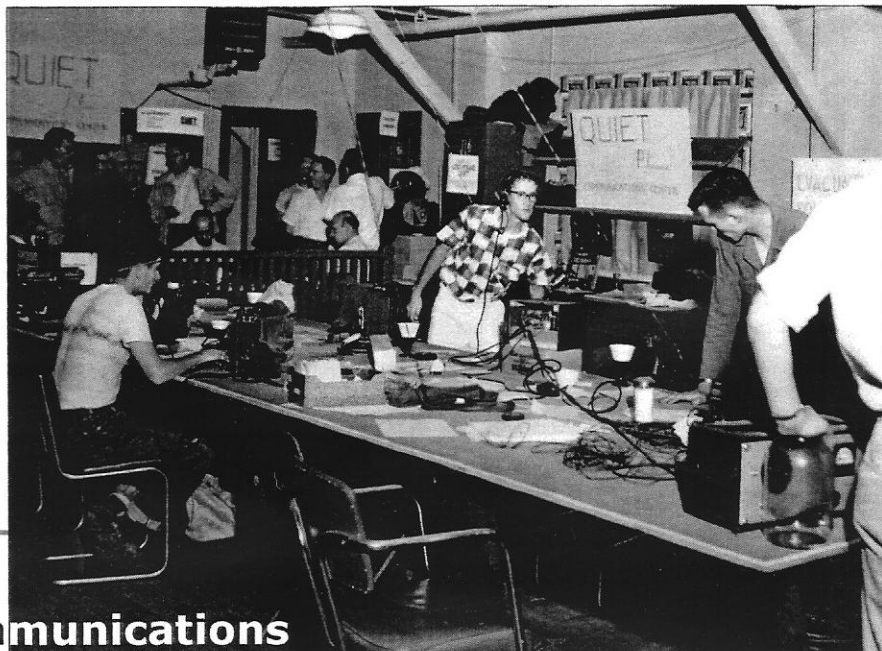


Flood of '51 Emergency Communications



Exceptionally heavy rains caused water from the Kansas River to overflow into Manhattan on July 11, 1951. By 4 p.m. rising water forced city officials to leave their downtown offices on North Third Street. Temporary headquarters, including radio communication equipment, was set up on the higher elevation offered by the Kansas State College campus, specifically in the student union building. Amateur radio operators, police radio, and highway patrol resources provided service until commercial communication services were once again available.

The Kansas State College Amateur Radio Club moved its equipment from the ROTC building to the student union. Their transmitter remained on continuously from July 11th to the evening of July 17th. An emergency power plant was positioned just outside a window for use during power failures.

Two other stations on campus were also in operation during the flood. One handled long distance traffic and one handled welfare messages. On July 11th one amateur radio operator actually provided a radio link from his car, parked at the edge of the flood water. Boats were dispatched and evacuations were coordinated by this means until around midnight when police radio was back in service.

KSAC, the college broadcast station, shared time with Topeka's commercial station WIBW. When WIBW went off the air due to flood waters, KSAC maintained communications with Topeka. It was KSAC that alerted the Topeka community of the need for volunteers to sandbag their water plant. Over 4,500 Topeka residents answered the call. The plant was saved. The amateur radio community up and down the Kaw River Valley performed admirably.

Jerome Hartke provided a reminiscence about the flood, shared here with his permission. "I was attending summer school during the summer of 1951. I, and others, operated ... from the old student union, handling continuous traffic between flood victims and their families, together with lots of other traffic. I also waded through parts of flooded Manhattan, carrying an Army handi-talkie, for the purpose of assuring that all residences had been evacuated. I recall worrying that hot power lines might be submerged nearby, but fortunately that was not the case...."

Manhattan's commercial AM station, KMAN, was located north of town in an area covered by the 1951 flood. An Army deuce-and-a-half (2.5 ton) truck was commandeered, driven through water to the transmitter site, backed through a wall, and the transmitter was loaded onto the truck. After emerging from the flood, the truck was parked on the K-State campus just outside KSAC's studio. Wire was strung between two nearby towers that had previously been used by KSAC, and the antenna was connected to the KMAN transmitter, still on the truck. Audio feed came from the KSAC studio that was one story above the truck, and KMAN was operational. The Kansas City FCC office requested organ music while they certified that the frequency was within tolerance, after which the community received news and notices from KMAN/Portable until the emergency ended."

More information on this topic is available at <https://www.k-state.edu/ksuarc/alumniletters.html>.

**Do you have a flood communication story to share with the Riley County Historical Society?
If so, please contact us at 785-565-6490 or at lglasgow@rileycountyks.gov.**

The historic images in this newsletter are from the collection of the Riley County Historical Society & Museum.