

MESABI DAILY NEWS

Virginia, Minn.

Friday, August 8, 1969



THE HORSE IS SAFE, but that discovery didn't do much to brighten the spirits of Linda and Stephen Hotal as they pushed the wreckage of their parents' Dark Lake home. The Hotal home, and those of several neighbors, were a total loss in Wednesday's storm which caused the loss of at least sixteen lives, as well as personal injury and undetermined property damage in Northern Minnesota. (MEM Photo)

Storm Damage Clean-up is Underway

The whine of chain saws, bulldozers, and power winches along with the ping of hand axes filled the air in Northern Minnesota's tornado band today as clean-up work from the devastating storm Wednesday evening continued.

Meanwhile assessment of the damages was underway.

The Northern Electric Cooperative Association, which serves large sections of the storm area, reported this morning that REA crews from Big Fork and Grand Rapids have joined the wearied local crews and three private contractors were called in Thursday to assist with the repair work. NECA crews worked steady through 24 hours before weariness forced let-up and they renewed their work this morning.

Private contractors called in include Malton Electric of Virginia; A&W Construction Co. Tower; and Don Larson Co., Grand Rapids. Some 15 miles of line in the Dark Lake-Clear Lake and Lake Leander area will have to be completely rebuilt, NECA officials said.

Wiring for this work, fortunately, was on hand in supply yards, but an order for replacement poles were placed as soon as the extent of the needed work could be determined.

With their round-the-clock operations, NECA repair crews were able to energize large sections of the REA line by early Thursday morning, but some sections are still off as repair work continues at top speed. The many trees down have hampered the work.

At late morning today NECA reported that a large area around Canyon was still without power and the Eagles Nest Lake is still out. Ely, Babbitt, and Embarrass areas also are still out.

Although it was hoped that most of the scattered lines would be restored by today some sections were certain to continue into another day.

More than 50 workers are manning trucks and equipment for NECA.

Tom Perrier, Northwestern Bell Telephone Company manager, said that toll lines connecting Virginia with Orr, Bear River and Greaney were the hardest hit, but that full service on those toll lines was restored by 9:30 o'clock last night.

The greatest disruption of phone service handled by the Virginia exchange, was in the Britt, Sand Lake and Florenton area. Perrier said, with 235 services reported out, twenty-five repairmen along with two line crews have been working in those areas and by mid-morning today all but 32 lines had been restored to service.

Physically, Perrier said the storm uprooted or broke 10 telephone poles and nine cross arms were broken off with the bulk of those on the Orr and Bear River toll lines.

Restoration work on the telephone lines began immediately after the storm swept through the area and crews worked past midnight, but they were forced to halt until daylight Thursday because of the dangers created by continuing adverse conditions.

Wayne Smetanka, ranger in charge of the US Forest Service headquarters in Virginia, said this morning that a preliminary estimate of damages indicated 2,000 acres of timber down within the "blowdown area" of USFS land and that another 1,000 acres of timber is down on land contiguous to forest land. He said that 50 percent of the land owned by the federal government within the main storm path sustained 100 percent of downed timber. The timber included all types - aspen, red pine, jack pine, some of it of commercial value and some not commercial.

The swath of forest land lost by the Forest Service extended from Dark Lake east northeast toward Little Sand Lake. Strong winds accompanying the tornadoes caused other damage beyond the downed trees as topping occasional trees close roads. The Lake Leander picnic grounds sustained moderate damage, Smetanka said, and there also was damage at the Rice Lake campground area. Damage at the Pfeifer Lake campground was light. The storm damage was unusual, Smetanka indicated, with trees being broken off at the 8 to 12 feet level.

All of the downed timber will be up for salvage sales as soon as actual assessment of the damage can be ascertained. He said, this will take some time.

Jacobson Man is Storm Casualty

Jacobson, Minn. (AP)

Aitken County authorities had to use chain saws to cut their way into a cabin home here Thursday and extract the body of a 75 year-old man killed in Wednesday night's tornado. The coroner identified the victim as John Dahl, Jr. Sheriff's deputies said that Dahl was apparently the only victim in this county. Ten were dead and two missing in adjacent Cass County. The Dahl cabin was lifted off its foundation and carried 150 feet by the twister.

2 Children Remain on Missing List

OUTING, Minn. (AP) Clean-up efforts continued today in the wake of northern Minnesota's worst ever tornado damage.

The eight tornadoes that rumbled through the central and eastern portions of the north half of the state Wednesday left at least 13 dead. Ten of those victims were dead near Outing in Cass County, one in Aitken County at Jacobson and the other two from the Island - Boulder Lakes area north of Duluth.

Thursday, vacationers and emergency workers tried to pick their way through the devastation looking for additional victims. Two children, 13 year-old Paul Brokke of Bloomington, Minn. and Sharon Dugan, 5, Huron, S.D., were missing near Outing and presumed dead.

Gov. Harold LeVander visited the stricken Outing area Thursday and said he would declare Cass and St. Louis counties disaster areas. The governor termed the damage "the most devastating I've ever seen." LeVander flew over the path of the Outing tornado and also traveled by car to scores of private cabins and resorts obliterated by the Wednesday night twisters.

From the air, the tornado path stretches as far as one can see. It appears as a gash of twisted and ripped trees, looking as though a monster eggbeater had chewed through the high pine forests.

The swath was a mile wide and some 30 miles in length.

Other twisters that struck at Floodwood, Dark Lake, and the Island-Boulder lakes areas recorded similar damage.

While the governor was touring, National Guardsmen ordered in by him were using a wrecker to winch cars out of Roosevelt Lake near the Bethany Fellowship Church camp where four died.

Workers from the Minnesota Conservation Department, Health Services, Para rescue teams, Red Cross, Salvation Army and others helped begin the major clean-up efforts that one man said would take his lifetime to complete.

Storm Victims

BIWABIK - Double funeral rites will be held at 2 o'clock Saturday in the United Church of Christ, Biwabik, for Mrs. Ellen Heitala, 57, of Route 1 Box 2068, Aurora, and her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Avis A. Heitala, 32, 3522 Hagberg Street, Duluth, who were killed instantly Wednesday evening when a tornado struck the cabin they were in at Boulder Lake north of Duluth. Ten persons were in the cabin which just disintegrated in the Twister. Other members of the family were injured and hospitalized.

Mrs. Ellen Heitala was born in Vermilion Township but had lived in the Aurora area most of her life. She is survived by her husband, Arthur; and two sons, Dennis of Duluth and Dan of Aurora; a daughter, Mrs. Dennis (Diane) Norrell of Duluth; two brothers, Karbo Peltonen of Aurora; and George Peltonen, Butte Mont.; and two sisters, Mrs. Agnes Heikkila and Mrs. Aili Maki, both of Tower; and five grandchildren. She was a member of the United Church of Christ at Biwabik

Mrs. Avis Heitala was born at Bagley, and had been a Duluth resident for the last two years. She is survived by her husband, Dennis; two daughters Cheryl and Cindy, both living at home; her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Alden Percy of Hibbing; a brother Robert Percy of Lakeland who operates Percy's Auto Service in Virginia; a sister, Mrs. Virgil (Fern) Jacobson, Star Prairie, Wis.

The Fred Olson Mortuary, Duluth is in charge of arrangements The Rev. H. Edward Otway will officiate at Saturday's rites and burial will be in the Palo Cemetery. Visitation at the funeral home in Duluth will be after 12 o'clock noon today and at the church in Biwabik on Saturday from 12 noon until the time of the service.

We Have No Choice! We Must Start All Over!

Among the devastated remains of Wednesday's storm, people throughout Mesabi Daily News land, from Ely to Buhl are digging in to repair and rebuild. For some in the Dark Lake area, as one young housewife said, "We have no choice! We gotta start over!" For some, it's just a matter of clearing a fallen tree or repairing a window, but for many, the fury of the storm took everything they owned. What wasn't twisted and smashed beyond recognition, was hopelessly lost in a maze of fallen brush to be plowed over by the heavy machinery called in to attempt to make order out of chaos. Friends, neighbors and relatives have been working feverishly to assist those in need, many working around the clock. The immediate impact of the storm is over, but it's scars will long remain.



SOMEWHERE THERE'S A DRIVEWAY, but neighbors working at the Kenneth A. Gibson home in Britt are not quite sure where it is. (MDN Photo)

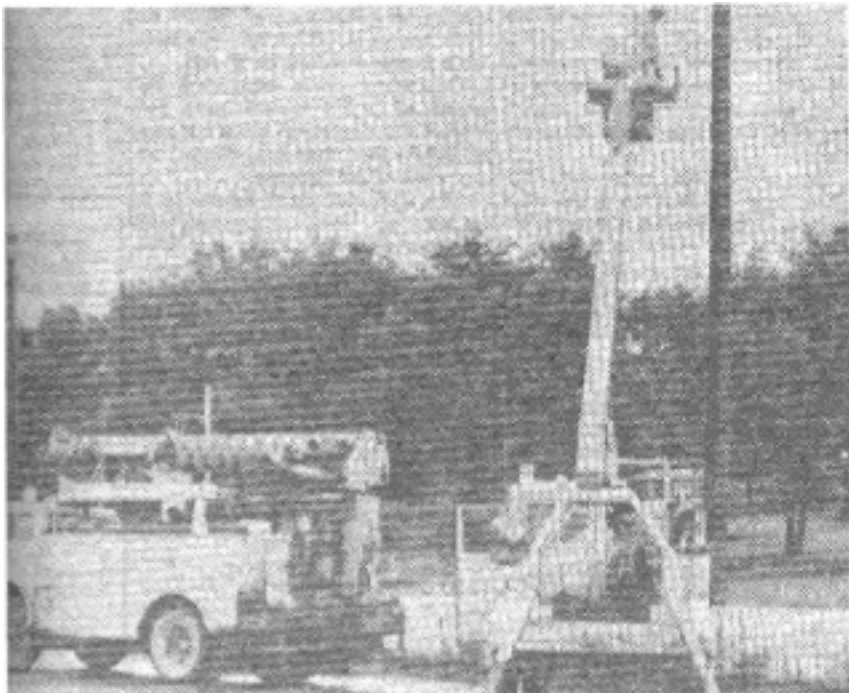


ALMOST FORGOTTEN was the damage done by the rain during the storm, as workmen from the Minnesota Highway Department repair a washout at the bridge north of Virginia on Highway 169. (MDN Photo)



DINGS on the Sand Lake property of Emerson
accessible only after many hours of cutting.

(BDN Photo)



Y PERCHED POWER POLE is reinforced by workers from Minnesota Power
tettering pole caused concern to Virginia residents on Ninth Avenue North.

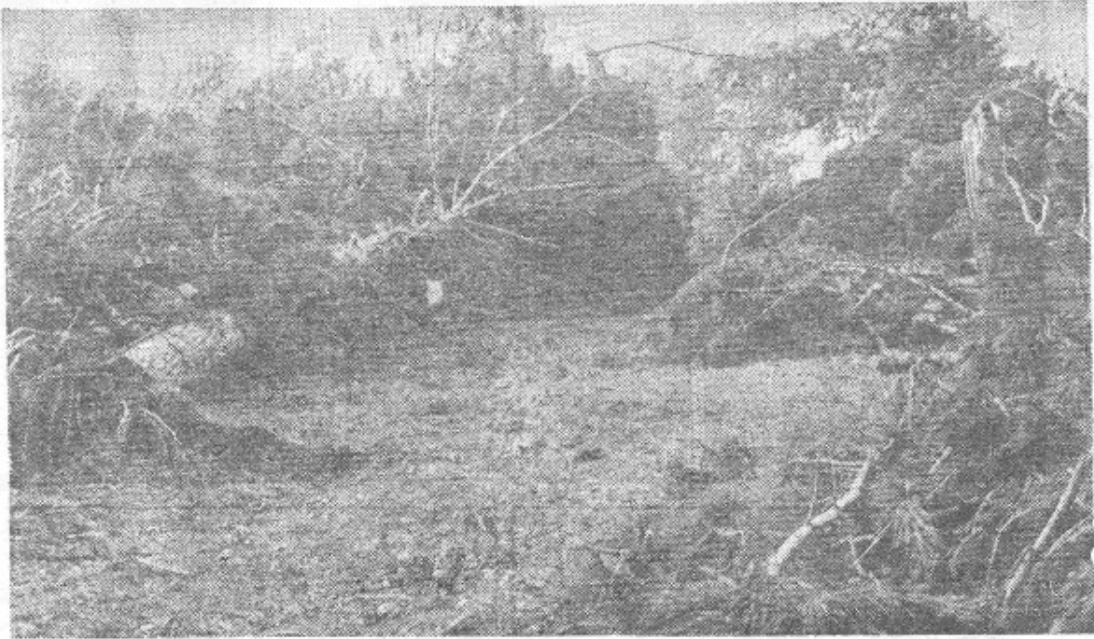
(MDN Photo)

(MDN Photo)



SIXTEEN HOUR SHIFTS begin to take their toll among the unsung heroes of the disaster, the workmen for the utility companies. In the above photo, Ron Westerburg, Virginia, from the Hibbing Garage of Bell Telephone, works on a telephone line in Britt far past dusk. He and his partner had been at work since daybreak.

(MDN Photo)



ACCESS PATHS WERE CUT through a 20 foot wall of wood
to reach the home of Emerson McNeil on Sand Lake.

(MDN Photo



USING A CAT was the only way to clear the rubble in parts of the hardest hit Dark Lake area.
(MDN Photo)



LOOKING FOR FAMILY POSSESSIONS amid the rubble of what was one Dark Lake homes, became a ritual for many families. (MDN Photo)



NO SHORTAGE OF CLOTHESLINE to dry rain-soaked bedding, as the fallen trees provide many branches for that purpose. (MDN Photo)



o) **LOST IN A SEA OF WOOD**, the task of cutting and hauling away the debris at the Peter Jurkovich home on Highway 169

Britt seems also insurmountable.

(MDN Photo)