

THE 1943 "FLOOD OF CONVICTION"

The flood of 1943, a disaster of monstrous proportions, came suddenly in a time of drought and changed the life of a new Oklahoma governor, Bob Kerr — and, through him, the lives of all citizens of the Tulsa District region.

It began, Kerr recalled, in sudden gusts of wind on Friday, May 7, 1943, that carried drops of rain. Drought-stricken farmers welcomed the rain until, as days wore on, it fell unceasingly. Kerr wrote:

"All day Sunday the rain fell, more than seven inches of it As waves of muddy water from creeks and streams and tiny rivulets rushed into the Arkansas, the river rose, and its sound changed from a gentle lapping to a roar. And still the rain came down.

"To the farmers around Webbers Falls, the steady beat of rain on their roofs and dripping from the eaves took on a new and ominous sound The bottom lands were filling. The invading waters swirled across the barnyards and against the houses themselves. The radio, turned on while the family sat quietly around the breakfast table, brought warnings. The Arkansas River was rising An earthen

dam near Siloam Springs was crumbling. A hundred and fifty soldiers were marooned in a small town upriver. Roads were flooded

"And still the rain fell. By late Monday night Webbers Falls was a deserted village There were desolate scenes all along the route of the swollen Arkansas — crops under water, rescue boats searching for marooned families, frightened farm animals huddled on high ground, streets awash, small bridges torn loose, debris frothing and bobbing in the river.

Twenty-three persons were reported lost Ninety per cent of the crops over hundreds of square miles in northeastern and eastern Oklahoma were destroyed"

It was only four days later, Kerr recalled, that "at first faint and far away, again came rumbles of thunder. The distant sky was lit with lightning." And then — "a great storm broke over the flood-tortured area of eastern Oklahoma. Farm buildings in some places were blown over like paper cups. The rains were so heavy they sounded like pebbles

The 1943 flood ranks among the worst ever recorded in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. From that disaster arose a new commitment to solve flooding problems, led by the likes of Gov. Bob Kerr.

