

Many homes were lost and streets flooded when Tropical Storm Agnes battered the Southern Tier in late June 1972, making it one of the hardest-hit areas in the eastern United States. File photo

Even 20 years later, flood remains vivid in Tier residents' memories

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Twenty years later, Tropical Storm Agnes' destruction still haunts Theodora Bragg.

"You just don't know what it's like to walk into your home and see it full of mud," the 83-year-old Bragg told the *Catholic Courier*. Bragg is a member of the city's East Side Catholic Parish, which consists of St. Cecilia, St. John the Baptist and Ss. Peter and Paul churches.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Robert Jerome, a merchant in Elmira, recalls water levels during the flood.

"Every time it rains, I still think about it," she added.

As Bragg addressed about 100 people who gathered to recall the events of late June, 1972, she had to fight back tears while reflecting upon the damage done to her Jay Street home.

"I just hate to talk about it," she told the congregation during "Remembrance and Renewal," held this past Sunday, June 21, to commemorate the flood's 20-year anniversary. The event featured several community members who gave their recollections of the flood. In addition, many musicians added to the remembrance by providing spiritual songs.

Originally scheduled to be held in Wisner Park, the ceremony was moved inside the First Baptist Church, 121 W. Church St., because of the threat of rain. The commemoration was sponsored by Chemung County's Council of Churches.

Many reminders of the flood are still evident today. Inside First Baptist Church, Joan Geldmacher, the Council of Churches' executive director, pointed from the pulpit to the two different colored carpets and wondered — correctly — if the point at which they met on the inclined floor served as the flood line.

Bonding together for a common cause was the theme that nearly every speaker touched upon. This community spirit was never more necessary than the period surrounding June 20-23, 1972, when Tropical Storm Agnes made the Southern Tier one of the hardest-hit areas in the eastern United States. The U.S. Department of

the Interior reported that damage in New York state totaled more than \$850,000,000.

Until the ice storm in March, 1991, the damage caused by Agnes was the most costly in state history.

Statistics provided by the Chemung County Historical Society state that more than 15,000 Elmira residents were driven from their homes by the effects of rainfall totaling 8.3 inches over a four-day period. While several hundred houses were destroyed, more than 2,000 more were severely damaged as water spilled over from the Chemung River and seeped onto the streets.

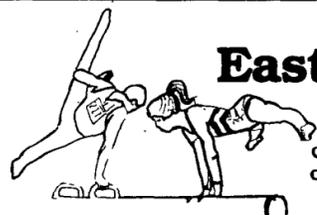
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Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Theodora Bragg reflects during the closing of 'Remembrance and Renewal,' a June 21 event commemorating the flood's 20th anniversary.



Although the U.S. Department of the Interior reported that damage in New York state totaled more than \$850,000,000, fortunately no lives were lost. File photo



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