

The Kennebec Floods



March 2, 1896, Laura E. Richards, Gardiner author, documented the flooding conditions in an unpublished manuscript. "The bridge still holds, and there is good hope of saving it. Going down about half-past seven a.m. we found a wild scene. The river was a white mass of rushing ice, heaving and grinding. The great ice-cakes flung themselves at the bridge piers and seemed like live things climbing up against them, trying to get over the top."



At 5pm she wrote: "the bridge seemed to cling desperately to its piers. But now logs came drifting down, not singly as heretofore, but in great bristling rafts and tumbled masses. A huge mass of logs struck the wreck of the bridge; it shook, rose for a moment, then fell with a crash; the draw swung free; the roof, as the timbers dropped like a child's jackstraws, turned round, and floated quietly away down the river."

The 1896 Flood



The 1936 Flood

In March, 1936 the ice laden Kennebec again over-flowed its banks causing extensive damage to downtown Gardiner. The waters rose to elevation 26.4 feet, higher than the 1896 flood. The situation was further worsened because the huge volume of water repeatedly broke through up-river ice jams. The flood inundated Main Street, Water Street, and the entire business section, as these photographs illustrate.



April Fool's Flood of 1987

The spring of 1987 could not have been worse for many Kennebec River communities. The April Fool's Day flood was totally unexpected and was the most devastating in Maine's history. Again Gardiner's downtown was completely inundated; damages were enormous. The flood was declared a Major Disaster by President Reagan.



This Coast Guard cutter, a 140 foot long ice-breaking tug, plows through ice on the Kennebec to help reduce the chances of spring flooding.