

Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No. 339

---- Good Friday: March 25, 2016 ----

**We Survived the Flood
...and now the Work Begins!**



It takes many hands: Ole Miss portages big canoe across Friars Point Road

In this issue: The Great Sunflower River Flood 2016:

- Volunteers Needed!** (*Every day this week and next. Report to CCHEC. See below for more*)
- How to Help** *victims of Flood Recovery*
- Flood Essay by Justin Riney**
- Juke Joint 2016: The Show Must Go On!**



The results of the Sunflower Flood in Quapaw Canoe Company Headquarters... Our beloved "Cave..." Now no More... Until its Re-Birth that is! We will rebuild!

We've always said "The River Connects Us All" and we found out last week just how intimate that connection sometimes is.

Not just us at Quapaw Canoe Company, but 300 other residences and businesses in Clarksdale/Coahoma County/Quitman County, and upwards of 1,000 statewide. The Clarksdale Press Register reported that less than 10% of those effected had flood insurance, a category we fall into.

When you camp long enough by the river eventually you're going to get wet. We know that from our adventures on the Mississippi River. We all hear about the 500 year flood, the 1,00 year flood. Now we know what one feels like. I have been feeling a lot of sympathy lately for those who suffered during Katrina, the 1993 Mississippi River Flood — even the 1927 Flood.



Flooded Homes in Clarksdale Duckwalk Neighborhood

But in usual Mississippi style, **neighbors are coming to the assistance of neighbors**, and helping hands are appearing from all around us, and words of encouragement and support, even some from far-away places like Australia, Sweden, Austria, and Norway. Thanks so much everyone! I can't tell you how much that means in our time of extreme challenge and duress. We are not alone. As our friend Allie Grant so thoughtfully pointed out, it is the children and elderly who are especially vulnerable in crisis times. Greenbough Nursing Home got flooded and had to be evacuated. In case you're wondering, see below for the many ways to help chip in. See below for how.

But **life will continue**, hopefully reinvigorated and renewed by the experience. Rebirth follows the flood just as sure as Spring follows Winter. This metaphor is particularly appropriate during the Easter season.



Charles & Fredean Langford enjoying highwater tour with guide Mark River on the Sunflower River in downtown Clarksdale

Please know **we are fully functional** and continuing our mission to share the wild beauty of the Lower Mississippi River with you. The past week we have led trips on the historic flooding of the Sunflower (highest waters anyone's ever seen) with volunteer groups from MSU, Ole Miss, Habitat volunteers from Champagne-Urbana, and continued our GRIOT ARTS youth after-school program, and others. We've got to keep moving! Like Tater the Music Maker always said "The show must go on!"

Downtown Clarksdale is untouched, in case any blues fans were wondering, the juke, clubs and museums are open and fully operational. Also: the 13th Annual Juke Joint Festival is gearing up for its 2016 celebration! See below or go to the Juke Joint website for more info about pre-festival wristbands now on sale.



Memphis River Warriors to the Rescue! Colton and Coleman Cockrum assist Mark River with safely disposing contaminated sandbags

How can you help out? There are many ways to help flood victims recover from this natural disaster. See below for a list of who to contact and where to send support. Quapaw Canoe Company will have its last major cleanup this weekend. Like other flood victims, we started the process as soon as we could (actually as the waters were still rising!). We will need to eventually rebuild our kitchen, offices, library and outfitting storage. We have set up our own recovery fund at [Quapaw Canoe Company Flood Relief](https://www.quapawcanoe.com/flood-relief) . Contact john@island63.com or zoe@island63.com for more info, or if you have any questions.

Volunteers needed! Every day for the next several weeks volunteers can easily get involved by simply showing up and dedicating a day (or more) to help in the cleanup. Your effort will be rewarded ten times over in the goodness you bring! Jen Waller At the Coahoma County Higher Education Center sent out the following information for community volunteers to help with cleaning up from the flood.

Volunteer Reception Center (VRC)

At the Coahoma County Higher Education Center (CCHEC)

Located Downstairs in the Viking Kitchen

109 Clark Street/ Next to the Cutrer Mansion

Hours: Mon-Sat 9am-4pm; Sun 1pm-4pm

Donation Reception Center (DRC)

Located at the Clarksdale Civic Auditorium

506 E. 2nd St, Clarksdale, MS 38614

Hours: Mon-Fri 10am-6pm; Sat-Sun 1pm-3pm

Note: Right now, the Donation Reception Center is only receiving donations. A day of disbursement for flood victims is being planned. Volunteers are needed for this big effort. Anyone wishing to volunteer at the donation center can report to the VRC.

For more information, go to <https://clarksdale.recovers.org/>

Or Call: [662-305-9055](tel:662-305-9055)

Or email: info@cgrecovery.org<<mailto:info@cgrecovery.org>>

For Monetary Donations

Online: Coahoma/Quitman Flood Relief

<https://www.gofundme.com/tku8y2uc>

Mail Checks to:

Coahoma/Quitman Recovery & Relief Fund

Po Box 1488

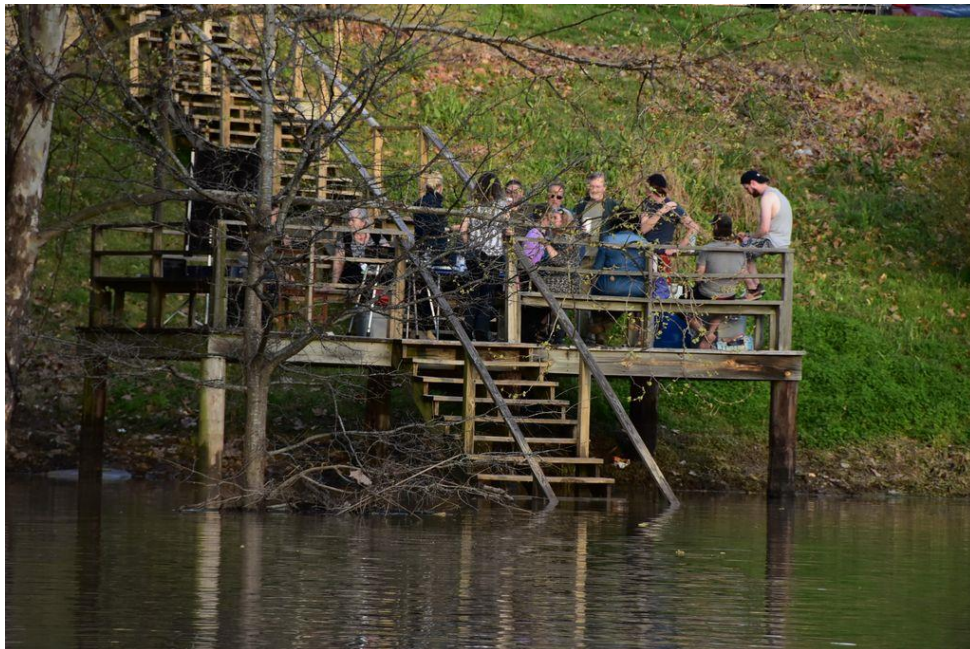
Batesville, MS 38606

Drop Off:

Any First National Bank location or First Security Bank

Facebook:

Go to the CPR Facebook site for up-to-date stories and info about the flood



We Survived! Sunflower River March 2016 -- Waters Higher than Ever Before

From our good friend Allie Grant:

“My heart aches for the city of Clarksdale and its amazing citizens. The water may no longer be rising, but the same cannot be said for the devastation; over 300 homes and business have been destroyed, emergency vaccines are being distributed, families and the city's most vulnerable, children and the elderly, are all clinging to their local Expo Center for shelter. Clarksdale has always been and always will be a remarkably resilient community, built of generous and faithful spirits, such as the amazing Anja Thiessen Bianca Zaharescu Joe Easley Rachel Bouer Matt Sutton Länna Von Mac Hui Veronica Kahaleua Shanelle D. Frazier John Ruskey and the countless volunteers who have given themselves to the recovery and restoration of this great city. Nothing is ever achieved without the strength and support of a thousand helping hands, and this is indeed a community that spreads joy by serving one another. If ever there were a time to show them the same selflessness, it is now. Please visit the city's relief site to donate, your time and/or dollar-every contribution counts. Angie Grant and I's prayers and love are with you, Clarksdale. <https://clarksdale.recovers.org>”



Justin Riney (center front, throwing branch into dumpster) saved our library one book at a time as the waters were rising

The River with the Blues

Justin Riney www.riney.earth

“Hey, JR. We’ve got a bit of an emergency here, brother. I’m gonna need all hands on deck.”

I’ve been conflicted about this beginnin. Been wrestlin with it all week. I suppose I didn’t wanna revisit these gut-wrenchin memories ever again, especially at the start of somethin new, somethin fresh. In the moment, I just wanted to do whatever I could to help physically, provide an extra set of hands and save anythin I could. My heart was heavy for John. I just hoped to ease the pain and disbelief that I knew my brother was sufferin from. Because I could feel it, every bit of it, crawlin up my skin as we waded slowly through waist-deep water. I could feel the numbness, the state of shock he was in. And his soul, the weight of his soul, sinkin like a rock while everythin else took afloat on top of that muddy water.

John Ruskey’s the founder of Quapaw Canoe Company, a small outfitter located on the banks of the Sunflower River in Clarksdale, Mississippi. I use the term ‘river’ loosely with the Sunflower, at least here locally where it’s fairly narrow. I’d call it a crick under normal circumstances, but it does flood on occasion as waters from the north flow downstream followin storms. And that’s no surprise to the locals; they’ve built high enough along the banks to account for that, or at least they’d thought. But on March 9th, a heavy system stalled over the Lower Mississippi Valley, dumpin rain on the surroundin farmlands and hills, and raisin water levels to record highs. A complete shock to everyone who woke up the next mornin to find water at their doorsteps. That little crick flexed its muscles, risin 25 feet in 24 hours.

I arrived at Quapaw as soon as I could that mornin to find John and Mark River at the basement door pictured above. It was the only entrance and exit to an area they call the Cave, and with water splashin at the steps, it was already at the highest point they'd ever seen it. We moved quickly to sandbag the doorway, although it appeared futile as that water continued to rise. John has a unique relationship with the Sunflower, and he could feel what was comin. With brilliant foresight, he called a contractor friend to cut a hole in the roof to the first floor. An escape route. Because we were suddenly racin the river, and she was floodin quickly. It was triage in a room full of treasure, and there would be loss, we all knew it. Just a matter of how much.

The Cave was one of the most unique spaces I've ever been in. It was John's imagination come to life. Part studio, part workspace, part library, part Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory. Everythin in the Cave was intriguin and had purpose; one could get lost for hours and still only scratch the surface of its offerins. But the Cave was bein consumed before our eyes by the hungry river. Old books, piles of sketches, John's original artwork, maps, and many cherished valuables both created and collected throughout his life, were now floatin in the water. Destroyed. John was workin on a paintin of the Mississippi River floodplain, floor-to-ceilin high, completely ruined. The water levels rose so high that the toilet started overflowin in the Cave's bathroom, and we were now floodin from the inside out, in addition to the Sunflower makin its way through the backdoor. The Cave was quickly fallin apart, and we simply couldn't move fast enough. Couches, four of em, began liftin off the ground and floatin around as we relayed boxes up the ladder into the hole. Paddles and life jackets and old cassette tapes and business documents and clothin and rugs, all takin on lives of their own, partially submerged and bobbin around in dark waters. It was eerie. And you could feel a presence of some sort, loomin all around us. Light peekin into windows through leafless trees, castin shadows and reflectin ripples on the walls. It was quiet...dead quiet...the occasional echo of someone talkin from the hole or on the ladder.

I was sick to my stomach the whole day. It was awful. Never seen anythin like it. Hell, I fought back tears several times, wadin out the backdoor to stare blankly at the Sunflower in disbelief of my own, so that John wouldn't see my weakness. If I couldn't relieve him of that weight he was carryin inside, I could be a rock in his moment of need. But all I could think about was loss...deep loss...and how irreplaceable John's work is. How much I admire and look up to him as a man. I felt as if his life's work was bein taken from him by the river he serves each day. A river he affectionally calls "The River with the Blues," because it's neglected in many ways. He wakes up each mornin to protect that river, to build it up as a source of pride for his community, and at the time, it was hard for me to understand how it could reach up and bite him like that. But even in the darkest hour, he handled it with the strength and resilience of a leader: "The river's just making herself at home, forcing us to do a little early spring cleaning."

The Cave was destroyed, and every minute of it was heartbreakin. We saved most of the priceless items in there, thanks to the hole that John cut and the many hands that helped, but a sacred space was lost. And when it was all over, when we stopped for the day and the adrenaline wore off, I wanted nothin more than to just let those hurtful memories go. Let em drift on out that backdoor with the river that brought em. The river giveth, and the river taketh away. That underestimated little Sunflower River rose up and claimed its turf, but nature wasn't to blame. As John later acknowledged himself, "When you camp along the river's edge, you'll eventually get wet."

All week I struggled about whether to include this tragedy as the beginnin of my personal documentation. At first I tried to pretend it wasn't part of my story; that I'd simply arrived a little early and was thankful I could help. In my head I convinced myself it was theirs. That

it belonged to the many wonderful people with years of vested interest in this work that came to John's aid that day. I was simply a guest, newly arrived, a very small part of the bigger picture. So I went back and forth, took a few paddlin trips out on the Sunflower this week, and I ultimately realized it was now part of my story, as well. And I made peace with that. I suppose I simply didn't wanna revisit these memories ever again. Even just typin these words, relivin the experience, I've been moved to tears. It was painful, deeply painful, for everyone. And I didn't wanna face that years from now here on these pages. I certainly didn't ever wanna relive it again.

But that's not how life works, is it? It's not reality. We don't get to pick and choose these moments in our lives. Sure, I can make decisions on what's included in my final product, but not the process. And the truth isn't always pleasant. Hardships and sufferin like this are part of our daily lives. We rebuild, learn from our mistakes, and move forward. It's part of the ever-shiftn balance between man and earth, and these are the moments that I wanna capture along the way.

And so before I jump into all the fun stuff – the canoe buildin process, the Mississippi River, the 50-states journey, and the many reasons why I'm here in the Delta – I'm gonna take this next week to share a few photos about the unprecedented flood that's devastated some 300 homes and family-owned businesses here in the small town of Clarksdale. No lives were lost, thankfully, but this was a natural disaster for this area, and I know a lot of other areas north and south of us were hit equally as hard. I wasn't carryin a camera with me or writin in the moment, so these words and photos are comin from the aftermath. The image you're lookin at of the Cave door, for example – if you look closely you can see the waterline on the brick wall about 3-4 feet higher, just above the doorknob, because I took this photo yesterday after the waters had receded significantly. And they continue to recede as I type these words; the messy, costly cleanup will soon begin for all those affected. I ask that you please keep these families in your thoughts, and be respectful with

any comments made. This is obviously a very sensitive time for the local community and those involved.

Want to help? Donate to flood victims here:

[Quapaw Canoe Company](#)

[American Red Cross of Mississippi](#)

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From: Jen Waller, Director

Coahoma County Higher Education Center (CCHEC)

Coahoma/Quitman Recovery & Relief effort

Dear Friends of the CCHEC:

We wanted to make sure that you are aware that the CCHEC is serving as the location for the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) for the Coahoma/Quitman Recovery & Relief effort.

Having a central volunteer center is important in order to communicate efforts and be efficient! We want all individual and group volunteers to check in with us at least once. Even if it is just a friend helping out a friend, recording the volunteer hours that are taking place throughout our community have the potential to expand monetary reimbursement which will go back into our community.

Please read through the following information below as well as the attached flyer. We would also love for you to spread the word about this through your email distribution lists, social media, your churches, civic clubs and any other community networks you may have. Working together will make this community effort a success for all of us!!

For Monetary Donations

Online: Coahoma/Quitman Flood Relief

<https://www.gofundme.com/tku8y2uc>

Mail Checks to:

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Po Box 1488

Batesville, MS 38606

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Or Call: [662-305-9055](tel:662-305-9055)

Or email: info@cgrecovery.org<<mailto:info@cgrecovery.org>>

Facebook: Go to the CPR Facebook site for up-to-date stories and info about the flood

Thank you for all of your efforts on behalf of the Coahoma and Quitman county residents who need your help rebounding from the flood. Together, we can make a stronger, better community.

A Special Thank-You to those who lent assistance to us at QCC in our recovery from the Great Sunflower River Flood of 2016. We Survived the Flood! At the top of the list is Greg Barefoot (who cut us out through the ceiling and opened our route for rescue), and Lanna Von Machui wh brought 15 volunteers to help rescue QCC), Isaiah Allen who dropped everything he was doing in Memphis to come help out, Justin Rinery who saved my books and some artwork, and the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board who braved the torrential rainfall and rising waters with an emergency delivery of sandbags.

Thank You Greg Barefoot, Lanna Von Machui, Clarksdale Habitat for Humanity, Pennsylvania High School, Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board, Justin Riney, Riney Earth, Isaiah Allen, Jennifer Ruskey, Dr. Patti Johnson, Layne Logue, Quapaw Vicksburg, John Gary, Colton Cockrum, Memphis River Warriors, Coleman Cockrum, Ellis Coleman, Debra Smith, Possum Cauthen,

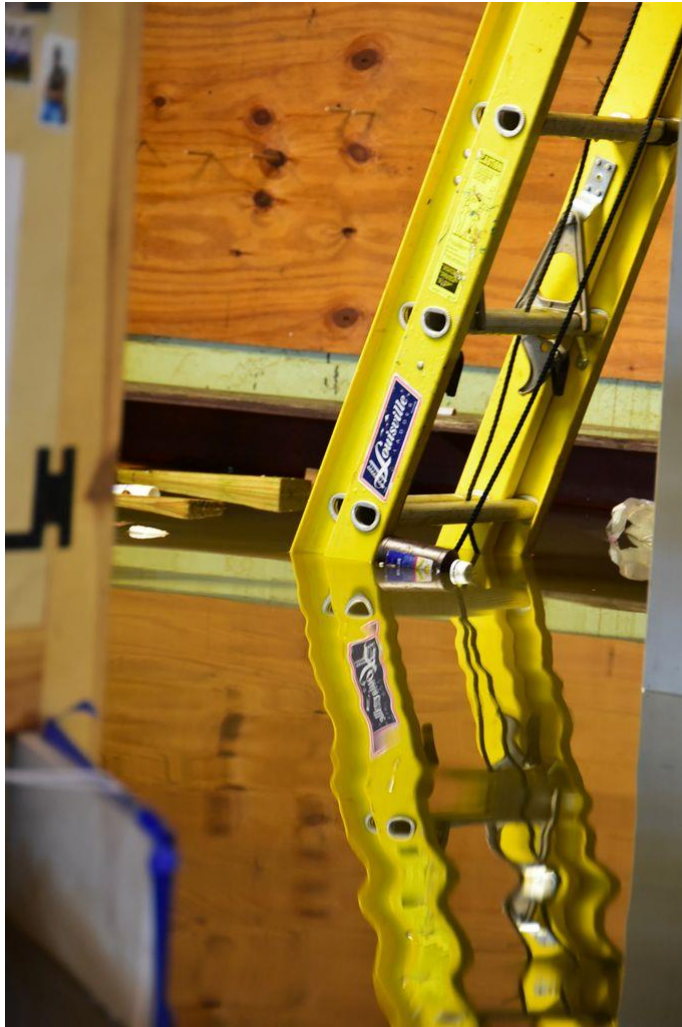
Matt Sutton, Lautaro Mantilla, Yazoo Pass Cafe, Levon's Ristorante, Oxbow Restaurant, New Roxy Theater, Charles & Fredean Langford, Billy & Madge Howell, Lee Quinby, Ping Wang, Marcheta Taylor, Jenny Ruskey, Sichendra Bista, C E Lawson, Greg Poleski, Gary & Lou Ruskey, Erin Lee, Chad Robinson, Julia K. Gill, Marilyn Sundra, Amy Lauterbach, Joey Dickinson, Edna Cooley, Paul B Cooley, Melissa Levy, Kathleen Quinlen, Michael Waters, Christine M Favilla, Marilue Maris, John & Lori Moore, Sandra Perry, Melinda Parkman, Charles Rutledge Jr., Mark Bix, Melanie Cheney, Steve Schnarr, Linnea Goderstad, Bill Branch, Kathryn Behm, Ellen Morris Prewitt, Snoop Dog & Tony, Margaret Pierrepont and Louise Loughran. Our paddles are up to y'all! We couldn't do it without friends like you. It takes many hands to paddle this canoe!



PRE-SALE WRISTBANDS ON SALE NOW FOR APRIL 16TH JUKE JOINT FESTIVAL!

Buy Sat-night wristbands online at

http://www.jukejointfestival.com/wristband_page.php



Our Rescue Route out of the Flood

The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch
is brought to you courtesy of
The Lower Mississippi River Foundation
www.rivergator.org
www.wildmiles.org