

"THE KICKAPOO RIVER IS LOOSE AGAIN"

Heroic Operator helps protect town from flood

**AWARDED VAIL MEDAL FOR COURAGE,
INITIATIVE AND DEVOTION TO DUTY.
HONORED AT CIVIC DINNER.**

It was a quiet Saturday morning in Gays Mills, Wisconsin. A steady rain had pretty thoroughly drenched the town and folks were staying indoors.

Then suddenly a flash came by telephone to Mrs. Wilma Gander, the town's chief operator. "The Kickapoo River is loose again, fifteen miles upstream."

Although Gays Mills did not appear in imminent danger, Mrs. Gander had been through floods before and she had the foresight to see what might happen. So she pressed the button on her switchboard that set off the village fire siren.

Immediately people began calling in and rushing in. "Where's the fire?" they asked.



High waters. The Kickapoo River, as it neared its crest, overflowed the bridge near Gays Mills. The water was nearly five feet deep outside the telephone office.



"No fire," answered Mrs. Gander. "It's a flood. The Kickapoo's over its banks and the flood is headed this way."

Quickly the word was passed. People collected such belongings as they could and made their way to safer places.

Mrs. Gander next alerted the Red Cross, the National Guard and the Army and called in a lineman to help prepare the telephone exchange for high water.

The doors were made as watertight as possible, the switchboard raised on concrete blocks, and an outside telephone line established on an upper floor. Mrs. Gander stuck to her post hours after the crest of the

flood had passed. By warning the town, and keeping telephone service going, she helped to protect the lives and property of hundreds of people.

The story has three other happy endings.

Mrs. Gander was honored by the grateful citizens of the town at a civic dinner. The Bell System awarded her the highly prized Theodore N. Vail Medal and presented a commemorative bronze plaque to the Utica Farmers Telephone Company.

Vail medals, accompanied by cash awards, have been given annually by the Bell System since 1920 for acts of noteworthy public service by telephone employees.

HELPING HANDS—This is one of the many stories of the skill, courage and resourcefulness of telephone men and women in times of emergency. . . . Not all of them tell of the saving of a town or a life. But there is scarcely a minute that someone in trouble or urgent need does not turn to the telephone for help. . . . **BELL TELEPHONE SYSTEM**

