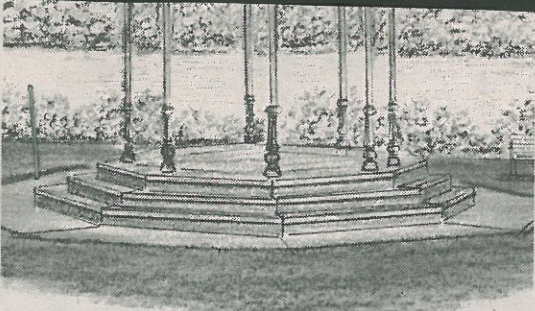


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## The Great Flood of 2006

*Cleanup will take weeks; residents displaced; millions of dollars in damage*

By **BOB BURGESS**  
and **LIZ JENNINGS**

MELROSE — On Mother's Day, May 14, Ell Pond was three to four feet higher than it should have been.

At the intersection of Lebanon and Sylvan streets, water went up to the wall of the Wyoming Cemetery.

Boats, jet skis and amphibious vehicles were used in a coordinated effort to get people out of the Melrose Towers.

Melrose Street resident John O'Neill had about four feet of water in his basement, as did thousands of others. Dozens of residents were reporting raw sewage coming into their homes.

A woman recuperating from injuries in the hospital had her car consumed by water on Heywood Avenue. Vehicles throughout Melrose were stranded in several foot-high puddles and instant ponds.

Youths were swimming in about six feet of water contaminated by raw sewage at the Roosevelt School field.

About 500 residents evacuated, many of them put up in hotels on Route 1 by the city.

The DPW lost its maintenance garage and operations center on

Tremont Street.

Pumps worked overtime, to no avail.

Firefighters raced around the city as water threatened both electric and gas burners in homes.

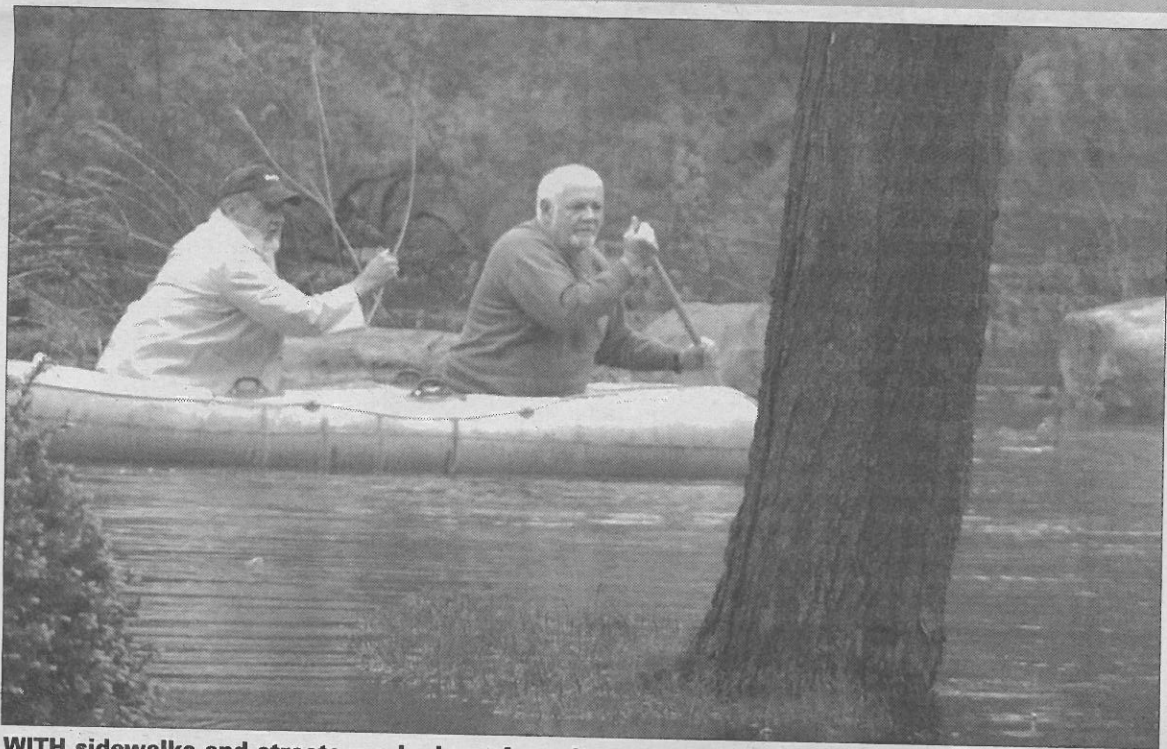
The damage caused in the city by the Great Flood of 2006 will reach into the millions of dollars. The federal government has a certain threshold states must reach in order to qualify for disaster assistance. Melrose will come close to qualifying all by itself.

The water simply had nowhere else to go.

The city received about 10 inches of sustained rain between Saturday and Monday, May 13-15, and with the ground already saturated from previous days of wet weather, water began backing up into streets and basements. Flooding throughout Melrose became significant Sunday, and the nine-story Julian Steele House on Nason Drive was mandatorily evacuated about noon. No elevators were working, so an emergency response squadron comprised of firefighters, Action Ambulance personnel, the MBTA and various state agencies carried



**AMONG THE HARDEST** hit sections of the city were the Hawes Avenue, Frost Avenue and Heywood Avenue neighborhoods, where the streets looked like a lake. This young girl kept dry with her bright pink umbrella and blue galoshes. (Liz Jennings Photo)



**WITH sidewalks and streets washed out from flood waters, these two Melrose men navigated down Bay State Road and the surrounding neighborhood via boat.** (Liz Jennings Photo)

senior citizens from the facility.

Fire Chief John J. O'Brien reported that evacuation as orderly, and Steele House residents as cooperative and very appreciative for the assistance.

At about 3 p.m. Sunday, the Towers complex off Melrose Street was evacuated, and the operation included State Police amphibious vehicles, Environmental Police boats and other equipment.

By Wednesday's deadline, residents were still a couple of days from being able to move back in.

About 70 or 80 Heywood Avenue residents were evacuated, many by boat, and a neighborhood that is a series of streets resembled a lake.

A line of drenched Melrose residents gathered outside Steve Trulli's Whittemore Hardware on Sunday in need of sump pumps, wet/dry vacuums and other supplies. Trulli explained that normally he keeps in stock between 60 and 70 pumps. Friday he had 75 pumps, by the end of Saturday he had 40 and by Sunday afternoon he was completely sold out.

Trulli stayed open late on Sunday and even traveled to New Hampshire to pick up an additional 150 pumps.

Though many people were reporting anywhere from a quarter inch to several feet of water in their homes, Trulli said that customers were very orderly and cooperative. They waited patiently in the rain and one customer even brought him cookies.

The situation was a bit more bleak elsewhere in the city as Melrosians struggled to bail water from their homes. Bay State Road,

Boardman Avenue, Damon Avenue, Frost Avenue, Hawes Avenue and Heywood Avenue were all submerged. Sump pumps and wet/dry vacuums were useless and only re-routed the water, explained neighbors, and after electricity to the area was turned off Sunday evening, there was no need for the devices. Furnaces and heating systems seized under the conditions, leaving families without heat.

Many basements and first floors were destroyed and DPW workers said that nothing could be done until the waters recede. "The pipes are old," one DPW worker explained, "and there is nowhere for the water to go."

Heywood Avenue drains eventually into the Saugus River, while the rest of the streets in the area drain into the Oak Grove Canal, where water would normally be deposited, was overflowing.

"Every storm is different," according to DPW Operations Director John Scenna. "We're going to have to look at some data" to determine why the areas north of Franklin Square flooded so badly.

A Frost Avenue resident said

that the "really scary thing" was how fast the water was moving. "It was so strong that there was actually a current," she explained.

A Heywood Avenue woman and her young son were among the many who had to be rescued by boat. One person lost a car in the flood and a neighbor said that this same homeowner had a house fire last week and is in the hospital recovering from injuries.

A Boardman Avenue family tried frantically to pump 3 1/2 feet of water from their home with no avail. There finished basement was completely ruined, and the water was so high that it collected in the underground garage filling up the driveway all the way to the sidewalk. The owner (who did not want his identity revealed) said the basement had never taken in water until now. The residents speculated that a construction project three streets over which was meant to end flooding a number of years back could be to blame.

A man on Hawes Avenue had sewage backing up into his basement through the shower, sink and toilet; he too was pumping water as fast as possible but threw his

hands up in the air saying "as fast as I pump the water out it comes back in."

This neighborhood has seen flood waters before, back in 1996, but homeowners Timothy and Christine Carlson of 92 Damon Ave. said that this is the worst it has ever been. The Carlsons had to have their pool replaced because previous flooding problems had left it full of cracks, and like all the residents in the area they said they thought the problem was fixed.

After the '96 flooding the surrounding streets were part of an elaborate construction project to replace sewer and pipe lines so that this magnitude flooding would not happen again. Residents conveyed their bewilderment and dismay that it had happened again. Covered from head to toe in raingear, neighbors congregated on street corners surveying the damage and trying to figure out what to do next.

Men floated in boats and waded through the water in galoshes trying to find a way to drain the water. In some cases water was coming right up to the front door of homes and the levels were so high they were reaching porch landings and tops of fences.

Other seriously affected areas of the city included the Lynn Fells Parkway; Lebanon Street near the cemetery; Swains Pond Road; Converse Lane, Shadow Road; Conant Park; Sanford, Cutter and Whittier streets.

Scenna, the DPW's Operations manager, said the past week's flooding is the worst seen in the city in at least 35 years. The major-

ity of callers seeking the DPW's help reported flood waters mixed with sewage coming into their homes. The city's system, and the larger MWRA system, was at such capacity that nothing could be discharged.

Much of the public works City Yard facility was damaged, and Scenna reported the maintenance garage suffered much loss of equipment — including about \$120,000 in lifts, pumps and tools.

Mayor Robert J. Dolan reported that just on the city's end, damage would be around \$2 million if not more. Melrose and Peabody were the first communities to contact the Mass. Emergency Management Agency, and the city has been declared in a state of emergency.

Gov. Mitt Romney was in the city Sunday night, reviewing some of the damage.

Cleanup from the storm will take about four to six weeks, Scenna said, and the full extent of the damage across Melrose — including the recreation areas off the Lynn Fells Parkway and Tremont Street — won't be known until the water recedes.

Crews have been working non-stop, and residents seem aware of the situation. At a Board of Aldermen's meeting May 15, Alderman-at-Large Donald L. Conn Jr. said he didn't receive one irate call because people realize the extent of the problem.

"We understand it's a traumatic experience when your home gets flooded," Scenna said, "and we're doing everything we can. Be patient. The pipes can only take so much water."