

Brown County Journal

November 15, 2013

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society Christmas Party
December 2

Brown County Genealogical
Society Christmas Party
December 10

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The Hundred Year Flood of 1913

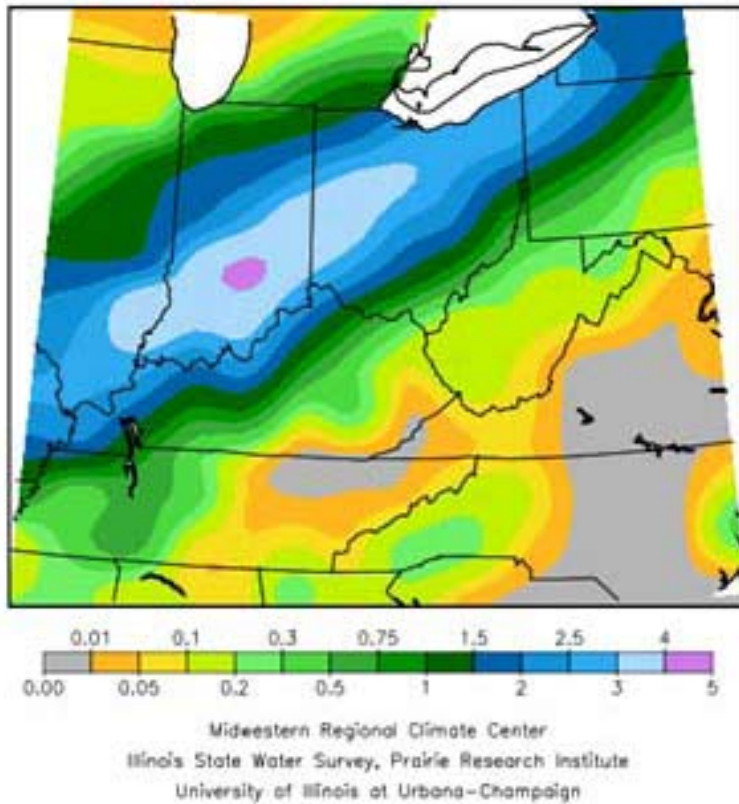
Weather is one the most important topics of all Americans. Weather affects our daily lives and sometimes our jobs. Most of us watch the morning news or listen to the radio to see how the weather is going to affect our morning commute or our jobs if we work outside. The weather helps to provide a way to start a conversation with new people or to pass the time when we are temporarily delayed from our daily routines. When major weather events affect our lives or the lives of others it is a topic of awe and it is kept alive in our collective memories.

The year 1913 saw one of the worst natural disasters that has ever been recorded in American history. Unlike the 2008 Midwest floods that killed 13 people and caused \$6 billion worth of damage there are no national statistics that can be found of the tornadoes and floods that hit the entire Midwest from Nebraska to New York and from Michigan down to Tennessee, over the Easter weekend of 1913. It has been estimated that the damage done would be roughly equivalent, in today's dollars, to the cost of the 2008 floods.

Usually referred to as the Great Dayton Flood, rather than what it should be called the Great Midwest Flood, it is more of an historical accident. Dayton being a larger town than most of the affected communities wasn't completely isolated by the loss of a single or even several telegraph wires, it was also one of the first communities to ask for help from the federal government and to send details of the damage it had sustained.

Among the tales of tragedy, death, flood, fire and destruction there are stories of true heroes - people who worked selflessly to save others less fortunate, people who risked their lives, and sometimes lost it, rescuing others. In late March of 1913 rain fell in such an

Accumulated Precipitation (in)
March 24, 1913



excess over the Ohio Valley that no river in Ohio and most of Indiana remained in its banks. Bridges, roads, railways, dams, and property were washed away. In its wake, at least 600 lost their lives, a quarter million people were left homeless, and damages were estimated in the hundreds of millions, making it at that time one of the worst natural disasters the United States had witnessed.

When disaster struck here starting Easter Sunday and lasting for weeks, it had a ripple effect across the entire nation. The damage to roads, railways, telephone and electrical lines paralyzed commerce in and out of the region. This affected people across the country, unlike previous disasters where impacts were primarily localized. As a result, there was a national outcry for state and federal governments

to re-evaluate their role in flood control. The Miami Conservancy District in Ohio, and the Tennessee Valley Authority were established as a result of this Flood.

The floods of March 1913 wrought such great devastation over the Midwest. An area of over a thousand miles long and several hundred miles wide saw devastating flooding after heavy rain fell over the Ohio Valley and to the northeaster between March 23rd to the 27th. Most rivers from Indiana to Connecticut were in flood, many of which reached stages never seen before or since. Every river community in Ohio and Indiana was inundated to some degree, and several considered devastated. The storm system that brought the torrential rain also brought tornadoes over the northern plains and over the south resulting in several hundred more fatalities. When the weather finally cleared, over a quarter million Americans were left homeless and over a thousand people had perished. It was a rare combination of meteorological conditions that brought about these series of disasters.

The Perfect Storm

The meteorological term, the perfect storm, is one that builds on itself and keeps on feeding

subsequent storms or other weather events. It is an expression that describes an event where a rare combination of circumstances will aggravate a situation drastically [from Wikipedia]. Prior to the flooding, violent storms had brought strong winds, blizzards, and tornadoes to parts of the Midwest from March 13-15th. A most unique event occurred on March 21st as hurricane force winds were observed for an extended duration at Detroit, Toledo, and Buffalo,



Postcard Created to Record the Historic Event

with strong gales across the entire lakes region. This wind storm resulted in widespread damage killing approximately half a dozen people mainly from collapsing chimneys and buildings. A series of tornadoes associated with this system tore through Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Louisiana killing at least fifty people. By Easter weekend, most residents in the Ohio Valley considered themselves lucky if they still had a roof over their heads and a working phone and electrical connections. Few realized that the next storm system was soon approaching. By Sunday March 23rd another area of low pressure moved out of the Rockies. This storm system brought the worst dust storm to Kansas prior to the dustbowl years, severe thunderstorms to Missouri, and tornadic storms to the northern plains including the hardest hit Omaha, Nebraska and Terre Haute, Indiana where 152 persons perished. As it moved into the Ohio Valley the storm system had transitioned more into a heavy rain maker. Before the rain from this storm system had completely pushed east, another storm system moved from Texas into the Ohio Valley. A front associated with this system stalled over southern Indiana and central Ohio for over 48 hours. Moisture from the Gulf of Mexico supported torrential rainfall during this period. The rain finally came to an end on the 27th when a cold front pushed its way east. When all was said and done, 1 to 6 inches of rain had fallen from Illinois to Maine and as far south as Missouri, with a bull's-eye of 6 to 11 inches of rain over Indiana, Ohio, northwest Pennsylvania, and western Kentucky.

[from research by Diana Biddle, County Historian in 2013]

Brown County's Great Flood of 1913

The headlines read: **"Most Frightful Flood in Brown County History."**

"Monday night and Tuesday morning, March 24 and 25, 1913, Nashville and Brown county were visited by the most disastrous flood in history. All the streams in the county overflowed, carrying away fencing, household furniture, corn, etc., and ruining many farms. Telephone and mail service were cut off. Nashville was completely isolated from the outside world.



The homeless at Nashville were being taken care of by friends and relatives. Aid societies were helping the unfortunate clean their furniture and household effects and otherwise extending aid. At Nashville the heavy rain was almost continuous all of Monday, the total fall for the 24 hours being 5.33 inches. The waters had reached a stage which the oldest inhabitants said was six feet higher than was ever known.

A band of young and middle-aged men formed a rescue party which kept watch over the

flooded district during the night, getting people from their flooded homes.

At the home of William "Buff" Brown on the bank of the creek, his mother-in-law, Mrs. Sarah Percifield, age 73 years, was bed-fast, seriously ill. Her physician asked that she not be moved until absolutely necessary, but at 9 o'clock Brown signaled to the watchers for aid. Otto Kelley and Lon Kennedy in a surrey drawn by a mule went after them. With her, the family, and a cow behind made their way back through 100 yards of water body deep to the mule. His home was carried away at midnight.

The rescue party then turned its attention to Elmer McDonald, who had been bedfast for the past 3 months. They loaded him up with family and took them to the home of William Bock. On the west side of town the waters were just creeping in at the doors of Mike Ferguson's home across Jackson Branch. Repeated calls finally brought Ferguson to the door where he grasped the perilous situation.



Word then came that the Ralph Lane family needed assistance and at 1 o'clock the family was taken out. Mrs. Lane being seriously ill was taken to the home of her daughter, Mrs. John Bond. The waters rose to within two feet of the ceiling of the Lane home. Mrs. Percifield had to be moved a second time to the home of Anthony Jones.

Meanwhile rescue of the Fergusons was still underway. A neighbor, James Allison, tried to wade to Ferguson's home but was unable. He instead went to William Winchester's to get

horses when Clyde McDonald appeared in a boat and said he had tried to find them but had given up. They were feared drowned. Then suddenly a call came from a barn near by. Mike Ferguson and his family had taken shelter in the barn loft. His horses had to be left in the barn that night where one of them drowned. Sam Bradley and John Bond finally reached the barn at 7 o'clock Tuesday morning and rescued the other horse, which had saved itself by getting its front feet up in the manger.

Ralph Gott and family with his aged mother were compelled to abandon their home during the night as did Everett Wilson who had been living on the Ralph property. Families of Bennie Petro, James Kennedy, Sylvester Barnes, J. T. McDonald, and J. M. Wilson were among those in the southern part of town who abandoned their homes. Lon Kennedy and Dr. Frank L. Tilton had to move also. Water stood five foot deep in Tilton's barn and he lost a large amount of feed. John McLeary's home west of town was 3 feet deep in water. John Wrightsman west of town lost a quantity of corn but saved his livestock. James Fry, southwest of town had to swim to save his livestock.

The iron bridge across Salt Creek went out at 3 o'clock Tuesday morning. An eight



passenger boat of William Quick's was doing service as a ferry boat. George McDonald's flour mill, the Wilson Telephone Company, and James Owens, Belmont merchant, and James Turner's store in Trevlac, all sustained considerable damage with heavy losses. Bridges across Plumb Creek and Bean Blossom Creek near Trevlac were washed out or carried away.

East of town in Gnawbone E.P. Jordan and family had to stay in their upstairs for 24 hours because their escape had been suddenly cut off from rapidly rising waters. The Milton White family had to be taken out by boat. Conner Ogle's home was flooded and wading waist deep he had to carry his family to safety. Benjamin Moore east of town lost two hogs and all his fencing. Can Clark lost two calves in the flood. Five head of hogs and one calf belonging to M. J. Eagan were carried away. All of the lumber and logs in the mill yard of John Voland on Greasy Creek were swept away.

The home of Theodore Rose on Lick Creek was flooded. At 10 o'clock Monday night Mr. Rose awakened by the squealing of hogs. Taking a lantern to the door he found a sow and five pigs swimming around in the yard. The hogs were saved except one of the pigs. The family was taken to the home of a neighbor.

Food was short following the flood and it was several days before transportation routes were opened back up and supplies were replenished. The flood was followed by drizzling rain til Wednesday when snow began to fall til Thursday morning. Sunshine came for the first time since Sunday."

[Abstracted from Brown County Democrat article of March 24, 1933 reprinted from a 1913 article.]



The curious come down to record the Historic 1913 Flood in a photo!