



# Great Dayton Flood of 1913

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

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## Introduction

In March 1913, a series of three winter storms descended on Ohio, dropping large amounts of rain and causing statewide flooding. The city of Dayton, located in the floodplains of the Great Miami River, suffered extensive flooding from the 8-11 inches of rain deposited on the frozen ground. The river crested at a record depth of 20 feet, causing the deaths of more than 360 people, destroying around 20,000 homes and leaving tens of thousands of people homeless. Property damage to homes and local businesses reached \$100 million (equivalent to \$2 billion today), and clean up and recovery took a full year. The disaster led to reforms to prevent similar disasters in the future, including the establishment of one of the first major flood control districts in Ohio and the United States, the Miami Conservancy District.

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## Important Dates

- March 21, 1913: The first of three winter storms arrives.
- March 22, 1913: The second of three winter storms lands and temperatures fall into the 20s.
- March 23, 1913: The third storm comes in, dropping more rain than the frozen land can absorb.
- March 24, 1913: The Great Miami River reaches a height of 11.6 feet, and continues to rise.
- March 25, 1913: Levees around the city start to fail early in the morning. Later in the day, the volume of water becomes too great to hold back, and the city of Dayton begins to flood.
- March 26, 1913: The Great Miami River crests at 20 feet. A gas explosion causes several fires, none of which can be reached by the fire department.
- May 2, 1913: Citizens' Relief Commission starts a 10-day fundraising campaign, raising \$2 million.
- February 17, 1914: The Vonderheide Act (Ohio Conservancy Act) is passed, allowing Ohio to establish watershed districts.
- 1918-1922: Five earthen dams are built as a part of the flood protection system (Germantown, Englewood, Huffman, Taylorsville, and Lockington).

## Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: Dayton, flood, Great Miami River, levee, relief commission, disaster.
  - Search for other cities' names to see how Ohioans outside of Dayton were affected by the disaster.
  - Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio. The Dayton Flood made national news. If searching all states, be sure to use "Ohio" as a search term.
  - Use specific date ranges if looking for articles on a particular event in order to narrow your results.
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## Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Levee at Dayton Twenty Feet High](#)" *Washington Times* (Washington [D.C.]), March 26, 1913, Image 2, col. 1.
- "[Thrilling Experience](#)" *Democratic Banner* (Mt. Vernon, OH), April 1, 1913, Image 3, col. 1.
- "[How The Times Got First Photos of Dayton Flood](#)" *Tacoma Times* (Tacoma, Wash.), April 1, 1913, Image 1, col. 7 & 8.
- "[Citizens Invade Flooded Section](#)" *Democratic Banner* (Mt. Vernon, OH), April 1, 1913, Image 2, col. 5.