

"Woodbine Flood in 1923"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Periodic floods are a natural occurrence for those living along Carroll's rivers, creeks and streams. Occasionally, a severe storm caused significant property damage as was the case in late July 1923 when the Patapsco River flooded. The story of the natural disaster was reported in the August 3rd issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"WOODBINE'S HEAVY LOSS BY FLOOD

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CATTLE DROWNED—B. & O. RAILROAD TRACKS WASHED AWAY AT WOODBINE AND SYKESVILLE—TRAINS ABANDONED—BRIDGES CARRIED AWAY AND DAMAGED IN CARROLL COUNTY, ESTIMATED AT \$50,000—FACTORIES, HOMES AND BUSINESS PLACES WERE FLOATED FROM THEIR FOUNDATIONS.

Carroll county towns and villages along the Patapsco river and its tributaries are recovering from the flood which Monday night rushed down from the northwest and is believed to have caused more property damage than the flood of 1868, when 38 lives were lost in the vicinity of Ellicott City.

Following a cloudburst and torrential rain that broke in the vicinity of Mt. Airy late Monday afternoon, the flood waters swept down the valleys, flooding hundreds of homes, forcing the occupants to flee for safety; carrying off hundreds of head of cattle and other livestock and causing great property damage.

Railroad traffic on the Baltimore and Ohio, crippled in the flood area is being slowly restored, with some sections still without service.

It is reported that it will cost this county \$50,000 for bridges that were washed away and damaged in Freedom and Berrett districts. So far 27 have been reported.

Sykesville, Watersville, Woodbine and Marriottsville suffered the greatest damage by the storm.

Mount Airy—Severe damage to crops and two cows drowned in pasture near river bank.

Watersville—One small bridge washed away, several homes abandoned, telegraph poles washed out. Tracks of Baltimore and Ohio Railroad washed away.

Morgan Railroad tracks washed out with box cars which had been standing on siding. Two houses on bank of river damaged.

Sykesville—Bridge over the little Patapsco river washed away. Motorists marooned on both sides of the river. Lumber piles in yard of the Maryland Milling and Supply Company washed away. Pipe line of the Springfield State Hospital, furnishing water to 1600 patients, damaged. Engineers tap river at another point to prevent a water famine at the institution. A cow washed into the river at Woodbine, rescued at Morgan by residents, who pulled the animal up the river bank.

Streams ran high and wild at Union Mills, Silver Run and other nearby places. Little Pipe Creek overflowed its banks and the lowlands adjoining were flooded. In some places potato and corn fields were badly washed and the crops practically ruined. Long Arm creek for a distance of about three miles swept away fences and other obstructions offered the water in a path many yards wide on either side of the creek. The creek just north of Silver Run ran high and wide of its course. The grist mill of Wesley J. Hahn, along the creek was considerably crippled by raging torrent, which tore a hole through the mill large enough for a team of horses and buggy to pass through.

Woodbine is said to have suffered the heaviest property damage. Fifteen minutes after the rainfall the streets and roads leading into the town was flooded.

An automobile parked before the store was crushed against a telegraph pole 150 feet away. Three small wooden bridges across streams running into the river were washed away.

Friends of Staley Weller, 17, Woodbine, who was reported to have been carried away by the stream, found the boy fishing in the waters that were supposed to have devoured him when he went to the rescue of his father's cows as the flood rose. Many others who had been missing when the flood surprised them were found.

Scores of homes along the river bank were abandoned by their occupants, some of whom were unable to remove their furniture before the on rushing water had completely covered the first floors of their homes.

All telephones in Marriottsville, Woodbine, and Watersville are out of order and efforts are being made to get into communication with them.

Passenger and freight service on the old main line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad between Woodstock and Mount Airy was abandoned. Shuttle service was operated.

A grain elevator belonging to J. M. DeLashmutt was flooded, causing damage which Mr. DeLashmutt says he conservatively estimates at \$10,000. Hundreds of bushels of wheat was ruined, while fertilizers were converted into a mush. Machinery in the basement of his establishment was inundated and probably ruined. More than 150 tons of coal in his yards was carried away.

Three other buildings used by Mr. DeLashmutt were swept from their foundation and moved several feet. In two of these he had stored his two Sedans, which were covered by the high water.

John H. Day, living at Morgan, near Woodbine, lost two horses and a cow.

Four fine Percheron horses belonging to Levi T. Haynes, a farmer of North Branch lowlands, were swept away, while a fifth broke through a fence and escaped to higher land and safety.

Walnut logs valued at several thousand dollars and several train loads of railway ties piled in the yards at Woodbine were carried out into the Bay or deposited along the banks of the stream. One flat car already loaded with ties was swept clear of the tracks while the tracks themselves were undermined and left suspended in midair.

Two sets of twins, six months and three years old, daughters of Robert L. Pickett, were rescued by friends of the family when water rose high in the first floor of their home a short distance above Woodbine.

David Grimm, Aaron Bartrell, E. L. Butler, Arthur Woodyard, Cloyd Lewis and Clifton Gossimer fought for four hours walking from Gorsuch switch, where their train had been forced to abandon the trip, to their homes in Woodbine. They walked the railway track most of the way, sometimes wading through water waist deep and sometime walking the ties that swung above the open water.

Mr. Butler arrived in time to see the water which had entered the first floor of his garage recede from the tops of several automobiles which it had covered.

More than 300 chickens valued at nearly \$1000 were swept from the yards of Mr. D. Ruby Hering, at the same time the steel bridge at Herrings Mill, over Piney Run, was carried away.

Piney Run, usually a stream 15 feet wide, rose and spread its turbid waters over meadows to a width in some places of more than half a mile. It swept through the Springfield State Hospital carrying all before it. The reservoir from which water for the insane asylum is furnished was filled with mud and the water supply main that runs in its bed was ripped loose.

Convicts who had been employed on the Frederick road carried away the mud that had collected to the depth of several feet in the streets of Sykesville.

Great holes have been washed by the water on the Frederick pike, while dirt roads all through Carroll county are badly washed.

Nine steers belonging to R. R. Bennett were found backed into a corner of the fence by the water by Engineer W. E. Crouse of one of the two trains that found themselves trapped by the washout. With the aid of the train crew the fence was cut and the steers allowed to seek the hills.

Mr. Benton Stoner, Warfieldsburg, had six pigs to drown in his barn.

Some of B. F. Shriver Company's buildings at Sykesville, on the Howard county side, were washed from their foundations."

Fortunately, missing persons eventually turned up and most property owners recovered from the flood.

Photo caption: Horse drawn vehicles and trucks loaded with corn await unloading at the Woodbine Cannery in this early twentieth-century image. The South Carroll town was severely flooded on July 30, 1923. Historical Society of Carroll County copy photograph collection.