

October 12-16, 1942

River Flood - October 1942 Washington Post, March 20, 1936.

The three biggest flood events of this century were the "Great Spring Flood" in March of 1936 and two tropical related rain events, October 1942 and Agnes in June of 1972.

A tropical storm moved in across eastern North Carolina into central Virginia on October 12, 1942 and Richmond had 3.21 inches of rain from October 12th to the 17th and torrential rains fell from October 12-16 in Northern Virginia and Maryland. It caused the worst river flood in the history of the Virginia and DC. The hardest hit was the mid portion of the Rappahannock River and the Shenandoah River. On the Rappahannock, damages came to \$2.5 million (1942 dollars) and most of that was in Fredericksburg, where the river rose to 41 feet (27 feet above flood stage). On the Shenandoah River, a stage of almost 50 feet was reached at Riverton on the morning of the 16th. Flood stage is 22 feet and it broke the record set by the March 1936 flood by 12 feet! Flood losses on the Potomac River were \$4.5 million. Water was 3.5 feet deep in downtown Cumberland and 8 feet deep on the main business street in Hancock. At Williamsport, the river expanded 4 miles from its normal banks. Two homes were swept away at Harpers Ferry where the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers meet. At Point of Rocks, more houses were lifted off their foundations. The Potomac at Washington reached 17.6 feet (flood stage is seven feet). Areas of Alexandria and Arlington were seriously flooded. The Anacostia River flooded as well as 6 feet of water was across the boulevard in Bladensburg. Ten to 12 inches of rain fell from Fredericksburg to Warrenton. Seventeen inches were recorded in Front Royal. In Shenandoah National Park, along Skyline Drive, rainfall totals reached 18 to 19 inches! To the south, Nelson County received 16 inches.

Another maxima of 12 to 16 inches fell from near Paw Paw, West Virginia south along the Shenandoah Mountains to west of Harrisonburg. About 6 to 8 inches fell over much of central and western Maryland. Highways and bridges were washed away across the region. Over 1,300 people were left homeless in Albemarle, Spotsylvania, Stafford and Warren Counties in Virginia. About 750 people were displaced from homes in Maryland. Hundreds of homes were flooded in Georgetown. Miraculously, only one person died. Transportation was interrupted for three days. Severe damage occurred to crops: peanuts, cotton, sweet potatoes, soybeans, shocked corn and late hay. The heavy rains caused a million bushels of apples to drop before they were picked.