THE GREAT DAYTON FLOOD OF 1913

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................... 11
LIST OF MAPS AND TABLE ............................................... iv

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1
II. THE APPROACH OF THE FLOOD ................................... 7
III. THE RISING WATERS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL ..... 16
IV. THE HEIGHT OF THE DELUGE ...................................... 59
V. THE WAINING OF THE WATERS .................................... 79
VI. IN RETROSPECT: THE CAUSES OF THE GREAT DAYTON FLOOD 91
VII. THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GREAT DAYTON FLOOD 96
VIII. THE FINAL OUTCOME OF DAYTON'S STRUGGLE WITH THE RIVERS 104

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................ 107
LIST OF MAPS AND TABLE

Map 1. Street Map of Dayton and Vicinity and Street Index Accompanying
Street Map of Dayton and Vicinity......................... (pocket)

Map 2. Street Map of Dayton and Vicinity,
Showing the Extent of the 1913 Flood, the Greatest Depths Reached
by the Water at Various Points, and the Locations of Buildings
Destroyed by Fire................................. 69

Table 1. Flood Stages, Highest River Levels
Recorded Prior to March, 1913, and
Highest River Levels of March, 1913, at Various Places in Ohio...... 4
I. INTRODUCTION

Dayton, Ohio, was, in 1913, a city of well over a hundred thousand people (In 1910 it had contained 116,577). It was a prosperous city. Arthur Morgan, early chief engineer of the Miami Conservancy District—which finally solved Dayton’s flood problems—points out that it “was a city of greatly varied home-owned industries, nearly all of which had originated and developed there.”

It was the largest city in the Miami Valley. Morgan says of the Valley: "When we consider the relatively few areas which combine so many conditions favorable to well-being or are free from so many which tend to detract from it, does it not seem that the Miami Valley of Ohio might well be termed 'The Fortunate Valley'?"

The Great Miami River flows through Dayton and, in fact, receives the flow of three tributaries within the city limits. These tributaries are Wolf Creek, the Mad River, and the Stillwater River. The latter two and the Great Miami above Dayton were viewed by Morgan as roughly

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3 Ibid.
equal forks from which the larger river emerges. Following a rainstorm water in each of the three channels arrives at Dayton after about the same length of time as that in the other two. The Great Miami's drainage area at Dayton (below which it runs southwestward another seventy-seven miles), is, including that of Wolf Creek, 2598 square miles in size.

Dayton and other parts of the Miami Valley frequently suffered from floods during the first century or so after the coming of the white man. In March, 1805, the pioneers of the Valley faced an inundation which was probably later surpassed in size only in 1913. Almost all of what was to become Dayton's business district lay under water. The flood of September, 1866 was the highest between 1805 and 1913.

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4 Ibid., 1.
5 Ibid., 1, 3.
6 Ibid., 1.
9 Ibid., 8.
10 Ibid., 9-10.
After 1898's flood, flood control plans were "made and remade" in Dayton.\textsuperscript{11} By the spring of 1913, financing plans and the letting of contracts had been completed, construction equipment had been erected, and the beginning of work was almost at hand.\textsuperscript{12} Then the awesome flood of that year left the equipment wrecked.\textsuperscript{13} More rapid action would not have saved Dayton from its greatest flood. The planned work was aimed at a flow of 90,000 cubic feet per second.\textsuperscript{14} The 1913 flood's peak flow was about 250,000 cubic feet per second.\textsuperscript{15}

The Dayton flood of 1913 came simultaneously with severe natural disasters elsewhere. If one narrows one's glance from the whole nation to the state of Ohio one gets a view of concentrated catastrophe by flood. River levels tell the tale. Flood stage on the Great Miami at Dayton was eighteen feet.\textsuperscript{16} The river's stage had stood as high

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
as 21.3 feet in 1866.\(^{17}\) It went to 29.0 feet on March 25, 1913,\(^{18}\) and the water rose still higher during the early hours of March 26.\(^{19}\) That this sort of thing happened elsewhere in Ohio is shown by Table 1.

### Table 1\(^ {20}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>River</th>
<th>Flood Stage</th>
<th>Prior March, 1913 (Feet)</th>
<th>High March, 1913 (Feet)</th>
<th>Date, 1913</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>Great Miami</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings Mills</td>
<td>Little Miami</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Scioto</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circleville</td>
<td>Scioto</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>26th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.


\(^{20}\) Table 1 has been constructed from information appearing in a table on pages 27 and 28 of Henry's *The Floods of 1913 in the Rivers of the Ohio and Lower Mississippi Valleys.* A footnote on page 27 of the Henry work reports that the twenty-foot figure listed as the March, 1913, high at Coshocton was "Obtained by survey." Another reports, in regard to Youngstown, "No record after the 26th."
Chillicothe  Scioto  14  28.3  37.8  26th
Coshocton  Muskingum  8  22.0  20.0  25th
Zanesville  Muskingum  25  36.8  51.8  27th
Beverly  Muskingum  25  35.0  46.5  27th
Canal Dover  Tuscarawas  8  12.0  16.1  28th
Youngstown  Mahoning  5  15.8  22.9  26th
Portsmouth  Ohio  50  66.3  67.9  31st
Cincinnati  Ohio  50  71.1  70.0  Apr. 1
Tiffin  Sandusky  7  18.5  19.4  26th
Fremont  Sandusky  10  16.5  21.5  26th
Napoleon  Maumee  13  18.8  25.0  27th

It is obvious from the above that Dayton was not alone in its plight. This paper does not, however, deal with the great calamity which befell places other than Dayton in Ohio (as well as many places elsewhere), but with the terrible agony experienced by Dayton on March 25-27 (a Tuesday-through-Thursday span), 1913, and the events leading up to the inundation.

The author of this work has not made a practise of comparing the varying versions of aspects of the story which are to be found in his sources. It is obvious that, in a situation such as the one with which this work concerns itself, not all accounts will agree. Two persons witnessing the same thing will describe it differently. "News" can turn out to be nothing more than a tale spread from one excited individual to another. The task of the researcher is to separate the true from the false. In most cases
the discrepancies which the author encountered were between versions, the truth of which other accounts affirmed or supported with evidence, and others, the incorrectness of which was obvious. Where conclusive evidence was lacking, the author was willing to decide which account should be followed on the basis of his considered judgment.
II. THE APPROACH OF THE FLOOD

It can be assumed that many Daytonians were quite disappointed when they arose on the morning of Sunday, March 23, 1913, to find that it was a rainy Easter Sunday. One day before had been, in the words of a later Dayton Daily News account, "a beautiful day, with happy Easter crowds everywhere."¹ There can be little doubt that hope had been widespread that there would be more of the same on the next day. There can also be little doubt that fear of flood had not been widespread. The river gauge had registered but 3.0 feet that Saturday² morning.³

Sunday, March 23, was not like the day preceding it. The Dayton Daily News later recalled it in the following manner:

Sunday morning, Easter Sunday, broke with the clouds pouring rain. It kept it up through the forenoon. There were no Easter bonnets worn to church that morning—they have not been worn since, many never will adorn the heads for which they were intended. It continued to rain at intervals during the afternoon

¹Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.


³"Observations of river stages are made as near 8 a.m., seventy-fifth meridian time, as the exigencies of the service will permit, except as otherwise indicated." (Ibid., 5.).
and night. The day was distinctly stormy. The wind was gusty, violent at times, the clouds queer looking. It was a condition which depresses those sensitive to weather conditions. 4

Above Dayton there was also rain that day. The portion of the Great Miami's watershed lying above Dayton averaged .92 inch during the 24-hour period ending at 7:00 P.M. 5

"That Monday it seemed as if the windows of heaven had been opened." 6 Time and again, following temporary lessenings in the sky's darkness, "there was lightning, and mad rain." 7

Rainfall was heavy above Dayton on March 24, 1913. At 7:00 P.M. that night, the part of the watershed above

4 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.

5 Alfred J. Henry, The Floods of 1913 in the Rivers of the Ohio and Lower Mississippi Valleys, U.S. Weather Bureau No. 520 (Washington, 1915), 64. The source is actually J. Warren Smith's accompanying paper, "Precipitation and Floods in Ohio, March, 1913." This paper occupies pages 45-69 of the volume. The area of the above-Dayton watershed is given as 2558 square miles, a figure which does not agree with either the 2598 including-Wolf Creek figure or the 2525 above-Wolf Creek one given by Arthur E. Morgan on page 29 of his The Miami Valley and the 1913 Flood (Dayton, 1917).

6 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.

7 Ibid.
the Gem City had averaged 1.94 inches during the previous twenty-four hours. 8

At 7:00 A.M., Monday, the river guage stood at seven feet. 9 By noon it had reached 11.6 feet, and by 2:00 P.M. it stood at twelve feet. 10 By noon the storm water sewers were being shut off. 11 Also, the electric pumps which were used to keep Dayton's lowlands dry when they had to rely upon levee protection because of the river level's being higher than their elevation, were being started. 12 The Dayton Daily News reported the weather bureau's prediction for the coming night of rain east, west, and north of the Gem City. 13 It stated that this would cause the river to approach "the unusually high stage" it had reached in the spring of 1912. 14 It pointed out that 1912's high water did not bring serious

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8 Henry, The Floods of 1913..., 64. Source is the Smith paper. The watershed area figure of 2558 square miles applies.

9 The Dayton Evening Herald, April 4, 1913.

10 Ibid.

11 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., March 24, 1913.

14 Ibid.
damage and that "there is no cause for uneasiness on the point of floods from the Miami at this time at least."\textsuperscript{15}

There was some flooding in Dayton that day. Despite pumping stations' efforts, "numbers of streets were inundated for a time."\textsuperscript{16} Also, "cellars and basements were flooded in all portions of the city."\textsuperscript{17}

Street railway service suffered from the situation. As early as 8:00 A.M., the City Railway Company suffered a tie-up of about twenty minutes on its Third Street and Fifth Street lines due to over two feet of water near Charter Street. At 9:00 A.M. it found it necessary to interrupt service on another route for about a half hour.\textsuperscript{18} During the late afternoon and evening the Dayton Street Railway Company's cars could not cross Lehman Street because of four feet of water.\textsuperscript{19} Passengers walked six blocks along the levee from cars operating on one side of the barrier to those operating on the other.\textsuperscript{20} Early in

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} The Dayton Journal, March 25, 1913.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
the evening the City Railway Company withdrew about half of its cars from service for fear of burning out motors having been run through water.\textsuperscript{21} Shortly after midnight the Oakwood line was breached by water of a depth of about two and one half feet on Monument Avenue between Stratford Avenue and Wilkinson Street.\textsuperscript{22}

The \textit{Dayton Journal} summed up the street railway difficulties when it reported: "During much of the afternoon and evening, service was either wholly suspended or was very irregular."\textsuperscript{23} March 24, 1913, was doubtless a trying day for Daytonians. The ones that were to follow were to be much more so.

Railroad service also suffered from the storm's assault. Washouts caused detours and delays of up to five and six hours.\textsuperscript{24} A Cincinnati, Hamilton and Dayton line train to Lima was cancelled because of the washing out of sixty-five feet of track in the North Dayton section.\textsuperscript{25}

Telephoned warnings from the weather bureau staff

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.
went out to over 400 people in and south of Dayton.  
These warnings began being sent early Monday afternoon.  
Busy lines hindered the operation.

By midnight there was definitely "cause for uneasiness on the point of floods." Catastrophe was on its way. "A number of families" had forsaken low ground during the evening. The river's stage had reached 14.2 feet four hours before and 15.3 feet two hours before. It now stood at 16.4 feet. At Riqua where flood stage was twelve feet, it had attained fourteen feet by 9:00 P.M. By 10:00 A.M. it was to reach twenty-four feet—eight feet higher than its previous highest stage—at that place. A 9:00 P.M. cloudburst had cast West Milton into

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26 The Dayton Evening Herald, April 4, 1913.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Henry, The Floods of 1913, 53. Source is the Smith paper.
30 Ibid., 51. Source is a report by F. Alps, Dayton forecaster, quoted in the Smith paper.
31 Ibid. Source is the Alps report quoted in the Smith paper.
32 Ibid., 65. Source is the Smith paper.
33 Ibid., 50. Source is the Smith paper.
34 Ibid., 65. Source is the Smith paper.
darkness.\textsuperscript{35} The Stillwater River had inundated land below the town.\textsuperscript{36} At least thirty-six additional hours of rain were predicted.\textsuperscript{37}

At about 2:00 A.M. the river attained the eighteen-foot flood stage.\textsuperscript{38} At 2:30 A.M. it stood at eighteen feet, eight inches.\textsuperscript{39} A rise to twenty-three feet would bring water over the levee.\textsuperscript{40}

At about 2:30 A.M. whistles and bells sounded forth a warning.\textsuperscript{41} At about 3:00 A.M. messengers began asking dwellers in the lower-lying residential sections to leave their homes.\textsuperscript{42} This type of warning was to continue until the streets were flooded.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{35}The Dayton Journal, March 25, 1913.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38}Henry, The Floods of 1913..., 53. Source is the Alps report quoted in the Smith paper.
\textsuperscript{39}The Dayton Journal, March 25, 1913.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41}Henry, The Floods of 1913..., 53. Source is the Smith paper.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid. Source is the Smith paper.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid. Source is the Smith paper.
"It poured almost incessantly through the night," later recalled the *Dayton Daily News*.\textsuperscript{44} Between 2:00 A.M. and 3:00 A.M. over a half inch of rain fell.\textsuperscript{45} That was only a fraction of the rainfall which March 25 brought to the Miami Valley. The average for the Valley's above-Dayton area for the 24-hour period ending at 7:00 P.M. was 3.82 inches.\textsuperscript{46}

Some were more alarmed than others during the early morning hours, when disaster was descending upon the city. A Mr. Fox, of 629 North Main Street, went, equipped with boots and a lantern, to the levee at the foot of Herman Avenue.\textsuperscript{47} Finding it weakening, he called the police and stated that the water would come through within the hour.\textsuperscript{48} By 4:00 A.M. he had retrieved his automobile from its garage and had it at hand for use in combatting the peril.\textsuperscript{49} Having removed some valuables to the second floor, he took his family to the home of a relative in Dayton View (a

\textsuperscript{44}*Dayton Daily News*, April 5, 1913.

\textsuperscript{45}Henry, *The Floods of 1913*..., 54. Source is the Smith paper.

\textsuperscript{46}*The Dayton Journal*, April 3, 1913.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid.
largely high-ground section of the city.\textsuperscript{50} Having done this he returned to his own neighborhood and drove about shouting warnings and, at some places, pounding on doors.\textsuperscript{51} In contrast to him and to others of foresight, there were the many whose disbelief and apathy lasted until the full impact of the flood was upon them.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
III. THE RISING WATERS
AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

The morning of Tuesday, March 25, 1913, was, for the Gem City, a time of ever-growing peril. The NCR Weekly's extra reported the next day: "The continual ringing of church and fire alarm bells, blowing of all sorts of steam whistles, etc., warned the citizens of Dayton early Tuesday morning that there was danger of a flood and to seek places of safety."

The Dayton Journal issued a 6:00 A.M. extra which

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1The NCR Weekly, March 26, 1913 ("Extra"). A few words ought to be said about newspaper extra editions cited in this paper. The Dayton Journal's March 25 extra was one telling of the most recent developments, a modified version of an earlier edition. Dayton Daily News "Flood Extra" editions were the regular (if anything about those days can be called that) editions of the paper for those days on which it was printed at the National Cash Register Company plant. The first of these was dated March 26, 1913, the last April 3, 1913. On some of the "Flood Extra" days (perhaps on all of them, with some editions missing from the collection of the Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library) more than one edition appeared. Differing editions differed in content, and did not differ in the "Flood Extra" designation. The N.C.R. plant was the scene of the publication of a newspaper before March 28. It was The NCR Weekly's extra of March 26, 1913. The author has come across no other extras of The NCR Weekly. The edition of April 12, 1913, was labelled "Flood Edition." The Dayton Daily News appeared prior to March 25. Editions for two days were published at the Springfield Daily News plant (Springfield Daily News, March 30, 1913.) The author has seen a copy of the March 27 edition. It is labelled "Extra Edition."
bore the one-word headline, "WARNING." It painted a picture of mounting trouble. Water was overflowing Dayton's levee protection in several places. A break in the levee at Stratford Avenue had come at 5:00 A.M. The need for the rescue of endangered people had led to the marshalling, at 5:00 A.M., of the police and fire departments. It had also brought the calling out of the Ohio National Guard, all companies. Boats had been pressed into service for the removal of people from homes in the Riverdale, Miami City, and North Dayton sections of the city. All of the last-named section, "save the extremely high points," was flooded. There were several inches of water at the Main Street-Third Street intersection. Telephone service was

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2The Dayton Journal, March 25, 1913 ("Extra 6 A.M.").
3Ibid.
4Ibid.
5Ibid.
6Ibid.
7Ibid.
8Ibid.
9Ibid.
being disrupted by flooded cable sewers.\textsuperscript{10}

A Bell telephone employee who was trapped in the main exchange (on North Ludlow Street just north of Third Street\textsuperscript{11}) by the flood and later related his experiences noted that by 6:00 A.M. water had begun to flow down Ludlow Street and was rising in the exchange basement, which contained the batteries and charging apparatus.\textsuperscript{12} He spoke of the "almost constant use of the telephone" during the early morning hours as people sought to warn and advise each other concerning the impending peril.\textsuperscript{13} He told of the end of telephone service at 9:20 A.M., when removal of the main fuse was carried out as an anti-fire precaution.\textsuperscript{14}

By about 6:00 A.M. water was coming into the streets of Riverdale through a break in the levees below Island

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11}Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913 (Cincinnati, 1913), 261. The location is listed as that of The Central Union Telephone Company. The Company was part of the Bell system.

\textsuperscript{12}Dayton Daily News, April 16, 1913.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
Park, as well as over the levee's top elsewhere. Not everyone in the section was like Mr. Fox. Morgan wrote:

the unconcern of the people of Riverdale was remarkable. Most of them stood watching the water come making little or no effort to get out. Nearly all those who were imprisoned in Riverdale had ample time to escape after the water began to rise. 16

When Gaylord Cummin, the city engineer, crossed the Dayton View bridge at about 5:30 or 5:45 A.M., he saw water near the levees' tops. 17 The flow he saw amounted to, according to Morgan, about 100,000 cubic feet of water per second 16 (which was only about two-fifths of what the highest flow was to be, but was more than the rate anticipated in pre-flood flood control planning).

At 7:00 A.M. the river gauge stood at twenty-four feet. 19 Shortly after that hour General George H. Wood was requested to mobilize available National Guard troops. 20

16 Ibid., 15.
17 Ibid., 14.
18 Ibid.
19 The Dayton Evening Herald, April 4, 1913.
Seeking information of the state of the crisis, he was told "that the river had been rising rapidly, that large portions of North Dayton and Riverdale were submerged, there were breaks in the levee along Had River which had let the water in over portions of the eastern and southern parts of the city of Dayton, and that the railroad bridge at Sixth Street was damming the river and threatening the levees on both its sides."\(^{21}\)

The first action General Wood reports himself to have taken was the ordering, at the police department's request, of a detachment of National Guard soldiers to proceed northward along the levee to the boats at the Y.M.C.A. Park and White City amusement park.\(^{22}\) Shortly after 8:00 A.M. he received a request from Safety Director Mays Dodds for the blowing up of the Sixth Street railroad bridge.\(^{23}\) This was not done because a search for dynamite located none.\(^{24}\)

Meanwhile Dayton's business district was falling before the onslaught of the deluge. The Great Miami went over the south bank levees at about 7:30 or 8:00 A.M.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Morgan, The Miami Conservancy District, 15.
It first overtopped those defenses at the north end of
Jefferson Street. 26

The enemy assailing the heart of the Gem City was
later described by the Dayton Daily News. The description
is significant as an explanation of the savagery of the
flood in that section:

The rush of water, sweeping down from the north,
joined by Stillwater and Mad rivers almost at
the same point, strikes with terrific impact
a sharp curve in the channel. If free to force
its way from this point, it would plough a course
through the vitals of the downtown section. It
would cross the present south bank a square or
two east of Main street, and sweep to the south-
est till it should meet the old channel again,
somewhere between Washington street and the Stewart
street bridge at the N. C. R. factory.

That is why, when the water came, it ran
across the city with such terrible swiftness.
That is why it was not safe to venture to wade
as the waters came to be knee deep. That is why
swimmers remained imprisoned, and why boatmen
could not bring aid to those imperiled. Most
cities subject to flood are not in the path of
such force. Backwater is unpleasant, very, and
expensive, but is not particularly dangerous.
The trouble in this flood was with the current. 27

The levee protection of the Main Street-Jefferson
Street area was, however, intact when a break to the east
allowed flood waters to flank the business district. 28

26 Ibid.
27 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
28 Morgan, The Miami Conservancy District, 15.
"Just what occurred" is, according to Morgan,²⁹ told in an account appearing in the April 6, 1913, New York Tribune which states:

C. R. Meyer, an employee of the National Cash Register Company, is one of the few persons who can explain the sudden destructive animation of the moribund Miami and Erie Canal. On the fatal Tuesday morning Meyer was standing in the "Big Four" freight yards, just south of the junction of the Miami and Mad rivers. The Mad River, swollen beyond all recognition as the peaceful, though eccentric, creek of former days, was having difficulty in pouring its burden into the Miami, whose savage current swept around the bend upon it and backed up its waters. Suddenly, Meyer said, the Mad River levee fifty feet from him crumbled with a roar, and a huge cataract swept the railroad yards, picking freight cars up as if they had been shoe boxes, depositing water and all in the canal, which at this point parallels the Mad River the distance of a block away.

A two story house stood a moment in the path of this inrush, and a woman and a child screamed inaudibly from a second story window. Then the house toppled over, mother and child disappeared from view, and within three minutes only a pile of loose wreckage remained. The lives of two carloads of cattle were snuffed out even more quickly. Meyer, fortunately for him, happened to be standing at one side of the flood's path, and therefore lived to tell about it.

The old canal, suddenly charged with this mighty torrent from the Mad River, became itself a terrifying spectacle. It rose up and assaulted savagely the factories and houses hugging its banks, dragged the less secure of these buildings off their pins and dammed itself up at every

²⁹Ibid.
bridge with their wreckage. The infuriated water then burst into every street which the canal intersected—Monument Avenue, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, all the principal east and west business and residential streets, in fact. It was this flank movement which more than anything else plunged Dayton into a panic. 30

The Mad River levee suffered the Dayton flood's largest breach, a break of some 350 feet. 31 The breach ranking next was the one at the Steele Dam's west end. 32 Although "very deep" it extended only about fifty feet. 33

There was, as a matter of fact, collaboration between water flanking the downtown section and water assailing it head-on in bringing panic to its people. That is borne out by the following:

Thousands of men, women, and children, who through curiosity risked their lives early Tuesday morning in watching the flood at Monument Avenue and Main streets, fled in terror south on Main street when the water suddenly poured over the levee in the rear of the Legler property on Monument avenue.

Only a small quantity of water came over the levee, but the cry of terror that arose caused the crowd to become panic stricken. Fearing that a wall of water, which would drown them if they were caught, was close behind them, they rushed pell mell down the street.

30Ibid., 15-17, quoting the New York Tribune, April 6, 1913.

31The Dayton Journal, April 5, 1913.

32Ibid.

33Ibid.
Women dragged little children and strong men trampled the weaker ones. Automobiles running at high speed through the crowd knocked many from their feet, but none were seriously injured.

A real danger met the fleeing thousands as they arrived at Third and Main streets where water rushing from a break in the levee at Webster street met them. Some were knee deep before they took refuge in office buildings along the street. As the flood reached the deep excavation for the Elder and Johnson building at Fourth and Main street it poured over the walls like a small Niagara.

Within ten minutes after the first warning cry had started the crowd rushing down the street there was fire feet of water over all of the streets in the center of the business district. Even then the people did not realize that any more water than could be carried off by the storm sewers was on the streets and many lost their lives trying to reach places where they thought they would be among friends.

The account of Mrs. H. L. Gaffney of her flood experiences spoke of the furious waters in the initial moments of their triumph over the downtown section. She related that she was in the Gem City restaurant (of which she and her husband were proprietors) at the corner of Sears Street and Monument Avenue when the water struck.

"Suddenly," she recalled, "there was a terrific rush and roar and down the street we saw outbuildings, houses, trucks and haystacks coming down with the water so fast

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34 Dayton Daily News, March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
that telephone poles were snapped off like sticks."\textsuperscript{36}  

"Several parts of the levee in the Miami river have gone out. The condition is serious."\textsuperscript{37} That telephone message from the office of the \textit{Dayton Daily News} to that of the \textit{Springfield Daily News} was transmitted at 9:00 A.M. and was the last passing between the newspapers before the descending disaster barred telephone contact between them.\textsuperscript{38} It was also at 9:00 A.M. that a Dayton-to-Cincinnati Western Union message was broken off, the operator saying, "Goodbye, the levee has broken."\textsuperscript{39}  

The business district was prepared for the flood in one sense. Due to the earliness of the hour, it contained only a few early arrivals in addition to hotel and apartment house occupants.\textsuperscript{40} But, of course, as the flood waters overwhelmed the business district, they assaulted the adjacent residential neighborhoods as well. Among these neighborhoods was the wealthy one just to the west of the business district.

The Tuesday morning onslaught overwhelmed huge areas

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., March 25, 1913.  
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Dayton Daily News}, April 5, 1913.
almost completely unprepared in the sense that they were largely made up of residences the inhabitants of which had taken no measures to meet the threat because they could not or would not believe that it threatened them. Such areas included a large district lying east and southeast of the business district ("It is safe to say that probably 90 per cent of the people living here never thought of themselves as being in an area within reach of a flood—unless it should be another deluge."); the higher portions of Riverdale and West Dayton, and the lower parts of Dayton View.⁴¹ Lieutenant Leatherman, National Guard surgeon who witnessed the flood in West Dayton, commented on this situation, "The flood came when thousands of persons were in the streets scoffing at the idea that a flood could come."⁴²

Recollections of Mrs. Earnest A. Grothjan of the flooding of Miami City, appearing in the Journal-Herald forty-five years later, tell of both the lack of comprehension of the danger and the flood's assault:

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⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²The Dayton Journal, March 30, 1913.
If things looked too serious, prudent housewives had the carpets taken up and the piano placed up on boxes. That was as far as the imagination could go, and by 1913 the people had become pretty used to the threat of floods. And so, on the morning of the 25th to be awakened by someone going through the streets shouting through a megaphone to take to the hills, even then we couldn't believe there would really be a serious flood and almost everyone remained in their homes.

Our brick house stood on a high stone foundation and it didn't seem possible the water could ever get that high. Not until it started to boil up out of the sewers and rush down the street in a wall five feet high—not until then did we think it could happen. The water rose on the bricks of the house next door to us at the rate of a brick a minute. It came into the house, and from the second floor we watched as it came up the stairs, step after step, covering our red Brussels carpet. On the second floor it covered the beds and we took refuge in the attic. 43

The Lehman Street levee, which had water nearly to its top on both sides, had to be cleared, at General Wood's order, of about fifty sightseers. 44 This occurred but minutes before it was cut off by water from Riverdale flowing over the drive-way just to the west of the bridge. 45 Escape westward would have been impossible

45 Ibid.
because of a levee break near the old hydraulic.46

After the breaking of the water over the drive-
way there was so severe a current over Main Street as to
render it impossible for boats doing rescue work in
Riverdale to get to the bridge.47 To provide a safe
port a rope was made fast near the Bellevue Apartments
(on the northeastern corner of the Main Street-Stillwater
Drive intersection48) and borne northwest across Main
Street by firemen and National Guardsmen going through
rapid and shoulder-deep water.49 Its other end having
been secured to a telegraph pole, all boats were ordered
to stay on its northeast side.50

Two men went under the rope in their boat, were
seized by the current, and were borne into the Great
Miami's main channel.51 While one did not reappear, the
other came to rest in a tree some twenty-five feet from
the bridge.52 There were two vain rescue attempts by

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 'Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913, 177.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
members of the National Guard, in the second of which
perished Battalion Sergeant Major Edward L. Harper,
Third Ohio Infantry. 53

When, at about 10:30 A.M., General Wood returned to
the south end of the Main Street bridge, he decided to
try to get to the City Hall (on the west side of Jeffer-
son Street between Third Street and Fourth Street—over
the Market House54) with the lieutenant and eight enlisted
men he had with him. 55 He later recalled that, "Single
file and holding hands," they tried to move down the west
side of Main Street. 56 They did not reach their destina-
tion. They were forced to take refuge in the residences
of Dr. C.W. King and Oswald Camann (223 and 225 North
Main Street, respectively57) shortly after 11:00 A.M. 58
Before doing so, they had almost lost one of their number.
Private Coble was seized by the current, but was saved by
being caught by General Wood, who was anchored by the
line. 59

53 Ibid.


56 Ibid.

57 Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913, 268, 705.


59 Ibid.
The flood waters made violent death a real threat to thousands and an actuality for some. Many of those who died fell victim while seeking escape. Among them were George Hawks' wife and daughter. Hawks left his home in a horse-drawn wagon, accompanied by his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law, and the latter's two children. The current having overturned the conveyance, Hawks' wife and daughter drowned despite the rescue efforts of the two men. The rest of the party took refuge in a tree from which its members were later rescued by means of a boat.

Also among those meeting death while seeking escape were Mrs. Elizabeth Bond and her mother. The boat bearing them toward safety was wrecked as a result of a collision with driftwood and two cows. Hurled into the water by the accident, they were drowned. Boats played a huge and vital role in the holding down of the Gem City's death toll, but the savage current rendered their occupancy extremely hazardous.

60 *Dayton Daily News*, April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., April 3, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
64 Ibid.
The rescuing of people by boat in the face of the raging current which was so much a part of the Gem City's flood caused gallant rescuers to be numbered with the dead. An example of those who died while seeking to aid their fellow citizens was George W. McClintock. A railroad employee, McClintock came home from an all-night Cincinnati, Hamilton and Dayton line run in time to help his mother and some neighbors remove possessions to safety. He then secured a boat and rescued more than fifty people, including ten small children who had endeavored to escape the flood by means of cutting their way through a roof. Making still another rescue effort, he drowned after his boat capsized as a result of someone's jumping into it. The jumper and one of the people McClintock was bearing toward safety at the time also drowned.

Tuesday morning's victims included a non-Daytonian family seeking safety in Dayton. The Porter family, which lived four miles north of the Gem City, was seeking to reach urban refuge by wagon. Its six members had reached only the edge of the city when the two cows tied

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69 *Ibid.*, March 30, 1913, ("Flood Extra").
behind the wagon were overtaken. They pulled sidewise, the wagon overturned, and all six perished by drowning.

The Dayton Journal reported that most of the drowned "were caught in the streets either while on their way to their places of business and employment, or while trying to get to places of safety when forced to flee from their houses." The citing of examples of the coming of violent death may provide illustration of the true nature of the dreadful calamity which smote the Gem City that March, but it is not likely to convey the whole horror of a major disaster. Some of the true death-dealing horror of the Dayton flood was conveyed by Lieutenant Leatherman when he spoke of scores of bodies going down the Miami and of many swimming but almost surely doomed.

Birth as well as death came during the flood. Children arrived even in the very midst of the raging waters. Mrs. Forrest Kuntz bore twins in a boat while being rescued from her Lehman Street home. Mrs. James Gebhart gave birth to her fourth child during the flood's first

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 The Dayton Journal, March 30, 1913.
73 Ibid.
74 Dayton Daily News, April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
night. Dr. W. G. Clagett gave directions to Mrs. Gebhart's husband from across a space of some 300 feet with the aid of a megaphone constructed from a piece of cardboard.

The flood brought terrible bereavement to some of its survivors. Cold, swirling death permanently separated husbands and wives and parents and children. Many, many families not broken by death were temporarily separated, and great was the anguish among those whose loved ones were not with them during the crisis and who could get no word from them to alleviate their worry. There were some, however, for whom the flood lent a hand to romance. The April 24, 1913, Dayton Daily News reported:

"Few if any nuptial ceremonies were postponed to any great length of time; on the other hand the experiences through which many of the love-stricken youths and maidens had passed were such as to reaffirm and strengthen the ties of affection and hasten many a wedding planned for a later date. There were others who through anxiety concerning the safety of "lovers bold and maidens fair" who divulged secrets of weddings which took place months ago and which perhaps would not yet have been told had not the high waters vistiied the city." 77

75 The Dayton Evening Herald, March 31, 1913.
76 Ibid.
77 Dayton Daily News, April 24, 1913.
It is to be doubted that the flood produced a romantic tale containing more storybook elements than did that of Casella Raynham and James B. Metcalf, Jr. Miss Raynham, the 19-year-old daughter of a member of a large British importing firm, had, five years previously, sailed to the United States—as a stowaway—in quest of a dancing career.78 In addition to a father angry enough to disinherit her, she left behind a childhood sweetheart, Metcalf.79 When it was already the latter part of 1912 and Miss Raynham had not revealed her whereabouts, Metcalf decided to set out in search for her.80 In New York while water was running rampant in Ohio, he came across her name in a list of missing individuals.81 He found her aiding Dayton flood victims.82 Having fainted and regained consciousness, she decided to return to England and marry him.83

78 Ibid., April 8, 1913.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
Many narrowly escaped death in the turbulent waters. One of the many escape efforts which nearly ended tragically was that of Evening Herald photographer Charles Moran and his wife and children. The boat which had taken them from their home was upset by a whirlpool. Moran and his wife, each holding a baby, were forced to battle the furious waters for a square before being rescued.

The escape of boiler inspector Alexander Bailey was by no means unusual in that it came close to failing, but was somewhat unusual in its details. He was caught by the flood waters at the corner of Sears Street and Monument Avenue and climbed a fence just in time to have it swept away with him. It bore him to the corner of Fifth Street and Wayne Avenue, where it was demolished in a collision with a pile of lumber. He climbed the lumber pile and was thrown a window cord. By means of the cord, which he fastened about his waist just before the lumber pile was carried away by the angry water, he reached safety.

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84 The Dayton Journal, April 2, 1913.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
Another somewhat unusual escape experience was that of William Layton. The house in which he and his family lived was torn from its foundations when the current drove another building against it.\(^90\) It ended up against the Erie freight house.\(^91\) He found his legs held between his house's eaves and the railroad building.\(^92\) To make himself available for rescue he had to use his pocket knife on shingles, rafter, and sheathing.\(^93\)

It should be pointed out that only the predicament from which cutting released Layton was unusual. Cutting—with a hatchet—proved itself a useful means of gaining rooftop refuge from the raging waters.\(^94\) Breaking was, of course, another one.

A hole punched through a ceiling, rather than through a roof, was part of the escape experience of Mayor Edward Phillips and his family. Through it the five people reached the attic of the Mayor's Mound Street residence, where they awaited rescue while water rose to

\(^90\) *The Dayton Evening Herald*, March 31, 1913.
\(^91\) *Ibid.*
\(^92\) *Ibid.*
\(^93\) *Ibid.*
within an inch of the upstairs rooms' ceiling.\footnote{Dayton Daily News, March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").}

Whereas Mayor Phillips' escape experience was hardly unusual, stenographer Flossie Lester's was strikingly so. She at first sought refuge from the flood in the Edgemont section on the top of a moving van.\footnote{The Dayton Evening Herald, March 31, 1913.} When the van overturned she and several men who were with her were cast into the water.\footnote{Ibid.} The van's horses broke loose.\footnote{Ibid.} Seizing a dangling strap on one of them, Miss Lester climbed to his back, put her arms around his neck, and reached safety by hanging on for over one-and-one-half miles as he fled the deluge.\footnote{Ibid.}

A number of stories featuring extremely precarious avenues of escape used as roads to safety emerged from the flood. Typical of those using such avenues of escape were the Cannon Street residents who used a boardway made of curtain stretcher poles to bridge the space separating them from the attic of a house standing higher
than those surrounding it. Also typical of them were Sergeant Homer Tupman and Patrolman W. P. Jenkins of Dayton's police force. They were doing rescue work on the West Side when six feet of water roared down on them, bore them four squares, and entangled them in a tree. Having remained seven hours in the tree, they swam to a Broadway residence, waded a distance, and completed their journey to safety by climbing a telephone pole and covering four blocks via the wires.

Electric wires not serving their usual purposes were, of course, a significant part of the flood period. The deluge struck hard at the city's utilities. Telephone and street car service and electric light gave way early. The loss of water and gas followed.

The escapes described above have been described because they are unusual. Countless odd and/or precarious escapes contributed to the prevention of a death toll of thousands in the Dayton Flood.

100* Dayton Daily News, April 8, 1913.
101* The Dayton Journal, April 2, 1913.
102* Ibid.
103* Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
104* Ibid.
Being marooned was, of course, a commonplace fate during the city's three terrible days. Instances of its occurrence cited below are certainly intended to be no more than examples of something which befell thousands.

Mrs. Anna Caise, ninety-six years old, was marooned in a Riverdale attic with three other people. For a period of fifty hours the four had neither food nor water. Among those marooned downtown on Tuesday were John Bonner and Amanda Eifert. They were forced to take refuge while on their way to the parsonage of the Reverend Father Charles Hickey, of Sacred Heart Church, to be married. They were married on Thursday.

Lucia Hall later recalled being one of six individuals who tried in vain to save the records kept on the first floor of Steele High School and were trapped in the building until Friday morning. Her recollections spoke in part of one occasion on which the six climbed out of the school and onto the roof of a dry cleaning establishment for fear that the school would collapse.

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105 *Springfield Daily News*, April 1, 1913.
106 Ibid.
107 *The Dayton Journal*, April 2, 1913.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., April 4, 1913.
110 Ibid.
the building had, in fact, collapsed at about 9:00 A.M. Wednesday, as a result of the furious current racing around it and washing out its foundations.\textsuperscript{111} Its demise came, Miss Hall related, with "a great noise" which told the captives "that some part of the building had fallen."\textsuperscript{112}

The telephone company employee whose account of the experiences of those trapped in the Bell main exchange was later published in the \textit{Dayton Daily News} related that the major source of food for the group during the flood's first two days was a cord.\textsuperscript{113} He told of its being flung to the Y.M.C.A. building and a basket being drawn back and forth upon it.\textsuperscript{114} Nor was this a unique occurrence. The method of conveying food relied upon by the Bell employees also served others during the Gem City's deluge. For example, a South Ludlow street woman, assisted by several men, transferred food for many people marooned in various buildings from the eighth floor of the Reibold Building (on the west side of Main Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets\textsuperscript{115}), which held the Elder and Johnston Company's grocery depart-

\textsuperscript{111}\textit{Wood, Annual Report....}, 348.
\textsuperscript{112}\textit{The Dayton Journal}, April 4, 1913.
\textsuperscript{113}\textit{Dayton Daily News}, April 16, 1913.
\textsuperscript{114}\textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{115}\textit{Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913}, 1010.
Transportation of the victuals was by basket on electric light and telephone wires.

At least one basket, incidentally, bore human cargo above the invading waters. Mrs. Dooley Donovan and her two-year-old son crossed Jefferson Street on Wednesday in a large basket connected to a pulley on a rope.

Hunger, thirst, cold, and other discomforts (not the least of which was fear that the place of safety would not remain safe from water and fire) were in many cases the lot of marooned persons who had roofs over their heads. The same were the lot of many marooned who had no such protection, but to their miseries the elements added greatly. Rain, cold, and some snow plagued them.

A very large number of Daytonians spent the flood period on rooftops. There were those who had reason to envy them, not having rooftops to stand on and having to cling to trees or whatever else was handy. For example, four people clung to a single telephone pole from Tuesday to Thursday.

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116 Dayton Daily News, April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
119 The Dayton Journal, April 2, 1913.
Extreme hardships brought some to the point of mental breakdown. The commitment papers of thirty-two people who were later committed to the Dayton State Hospital stated that the mental disability involved had resulted from flood experiences.\textsuperscript{120} The 1913 total number of commitments to the State Hospital from Montgomery County more than doubled the 1912 total number.\textsuperscript{121}

The rescue of thousands of people from rooftops, attics, upper floors, trees, and other places gaining special significance because of river mischief, often carried out under the most hazardous of conditions, was of inestimable importance in holding the death toll down to a fraction of what the magnitude of the disaster seemed to predict.

The \textit{Dayton Daily News} later sought to summarize the deeds of those who took boat to battle the flood for the lives of others. It related:

\begin{quote}
From the moment the danger of disastrous flood became imminent, the work of rescue commenced. Dozens, scores, finally hundreds were at the business of removing people from their houses. Boats were scarce at first, but soon the danger became so threatening that every man who knew where there was a boat of any sort found its hiding place and it was confiscated for use. In the neighborhood of Riverdale there are many
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{120} Arthur B. Morgan, \textit{The Miami Valley and the 1913 Flood} (Dayton, 1917), 114.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
boats and canoes and they were soon available for use. Some came in from other directions, from out of the city and each day saw an increasing number.

By Wednesday morning a motor boat or two had been found, and a little later the life boats of the Toledo naval reserves were launched on the torrential river. If they could have come sooner there would have been less suffering and fewer deaths.

In days gone by the Daily News has told of the deeds of heroism that were performed by men who took their lives in their hands. Carnegie hero eligibles, every one of them, and the only thing the tmay [sic] operate against their being so rewarded is the danger that their number might bankrupt the fund available for medals.

Glorious work they performed. The recitals of their heroism and bravery will be handed down to posterity [sic]. Not only their children and children's children will hear of their valiant deeds, but their praises will be sung by those whose lives they saved. In many cases there is no knowledge, on either side, of the identity of rescuer and rescued. Many heroes are nameless and hopelessly lost to those whom they brought ashore.

It was a labor of love in most instances. There are a few who accepted money, but very few indeed. None asked a stipend for rescue work, so far as is known, and none made charge for his services.

The rescuers came from every walk of life. The sturdy young factory hand, the roustabout who had not many previous good deeds to his credit on the ledgers of the recording angel, the athletic man of wealth—all who had confidence enough in their strength and skill to propel a boat were active in the work of rescue. Many worked until they were faint with exhaustion, until they became unconscious, and were revived only to plunge into the perilous work again. They were wet to the skin, forced to merciless muscular exertion, were weak from hunger because the urgency of their task was so great they could not bear to take time to refresh them—
selves while human lives were hanging in the balance. 122

Boats combatted the hardships of the marooned in more than the one way of rescuing the sufferers. Food and drink were borne to marooned people. The crisis was, however, too great to be readily alleviated. "Many people," later related Nellis R. Funk, "were without food and drink from forty-eight to sixty hours." 123 Rain water did alleviate the situation to some extent. Evidence that its role was significant is Funk's inclusion in a list of resolutions entitled "Resolved!--Since the Flood" one stating: "That rain water is better than no drink at all." 124

Bringing food and milk to distressed families was the principal objective of George Houck's canoe operations. 125 The Dayton Daily News spoke of the thirteen-year-old Oakwood boy as "probably the youngest lad engaged in the relief work," and stated that "brave men have trembled as they watched him glide over the water." 126

122 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
124 Ibid., 42.
125 Dayton Daily News, March 28, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
126 Ibid.
Although boats played the major role in rescue work, one must not overlook those individuals who rescued fellow citizens without boats. Without these rescuers Dayton's death toll would have been higher.

J. B. Smith was one of the boatless rescuers. He spent several Tuesday hours carrying people to safety, wading through rushing water which was up to his waist when he began. When the water became so deep as to halt his wading, he resorted to swimming to rescue several women and children.

Also among the boatless rescuers was Joseph Dowling, superintendent of Memorial Hall. He made himself into a human bridge over which crossed two elderly women who lived in a low house next to his home. Another among them was John Scott, a Montanan attending an N.C.R. salesmanship school. He used an electric light wire to reach a pile of drift on which twelve people were stranded and got them to safety by means of ropes only minutes before the pile parted and was borne off.

Those who, with or without boats, affected rescues, dramatic and vital as their work was, were but the front-
line troops in Dayton's struggle against the flood. This was brought out in the lengthy account of the flood contained in the April 5, 1913, *Dayton Daily News*:

Scarcely had the first refugees begun to troop up to the higher ground, when places of security were opening to them. Wherever there was a point of meeting of water and land, where people were brought to safety, there were willing hands, and nearby was a place of shelter.

Churches, schools, private homes, hospitals, factories, every available place was opened for the use of those in distress. In every section there sprang into life, relief organizations of the most effective character. Capable men and women naturally took over the direction of affairs at the various places where help was needed. Hurriedly formed committees were thrown together, volunteers put to work, and everything done with little lost motion. The effectiveness of these hasty organizations was marvelous.

By noon Tuesday, 12 hours before the water had reached its crest, these committees were at work at improvised relief stations. Through the afternoon the machinery was extended, more activities were planned, and the question of supplies was receiving attention.

There has been heroism in the relief business, too. There have been hundreds, yes, thousands, of devoted men and women who have sacrificed all personal comfort. They will not receive credit for their performance here on earth, but heaven holds rich reward for the man [sic]. It is going to be days yet before the relief can be abandoned. Tens of thousands are still being supplied with food and many must have shelter and more clothing than that with which they have already been supplied. 131

One cannot speak of flood relief work in Dayton with—

out taking up the role played by the N.C.R. and its president, John H. Patterson. That role began being played very early in the crisis. By 6:00 A.M. on March 25 Patterson had the N.C.R. trucks in the part of the city already flooded.\footnote{132} Soon "every available man at the factory was pressed into service, making boats and rendering assistance in every way possible."\footnote{133} That night the plant provided food and beds and had medical aid available for more than 1000 people.\footnote{134}

Arthur Ruhl, correspondent of \textit{The Outlook}, wrote of the role played by the N.C.R. and Patterson during and after the Gem City's great deluge. His account, which Morgan calls "perhaps the most intelligent and coherent" among the numerous accounts published,\footnote{135} reports:

As the city staggered up from the mire, helpless and for the moment almost hopeless, there was one rock to turn to, one thing which stood high and bright in its pride of strength above the general desolation. This was the plant of the National Cash Register Company on the southern edge of the town. What Dayton might have done without John H. Patterson and the highly trained and flexible organization, the keen, taut, loyal force which

\footnote{132}{\textit{The NCR Weekly}, March 26, 1913 ("Extra").}
\footnote{133}{Ibid.}
\footnote{134}{Ibid.}
\footnote{135}{Morgan, \textit{The Miami Conservancy District}, 76.}
surrounds him, can only be a matter of specula-
tion, inasmuch as "The Cash," as they familiar-
ly speak of it in Dayton, was for days the
stricken city's brain, nerves, almost its food
and drink.

This great plant—a city in itself—cover-
ing the equivalent of eight or ten city blocks
in what is practically a park, with asphalt
streets, lawns, trees, and buildings fitted with
every conceivable detail of the model factory,
with acres of workrooms as clean and light as
the reading-room of a public library—this
polished organism was turned in a twinkling, with-
out discord or hitch, into a vast, smoothy work-
ing executive headquarters, hotel, hospital, and
relief station. Here army, city, and State
officials, doctors, nurses, and correspondents,
came. Here, all day, was a bread line two
blocks long, here supplies were hurried as relief
trains brought them in, from here automobiles and
motor trucks, commandeered wherever they could
be found, went sputtering away day and night on
their errands of mercy.

The water had scarcely rolled over the city
before the National Cash Register carpenters
were pounding boats together. Boat-building was
not their regular work, but that seemed to make
no difference, and they turned out one every
five minutes until two hundred had been built,
manned, and sent out to rescue people from house-
tops and second-story windows. By Wednesday
night a special National Cash Register relief
train left New York, and two others followed on
Thursday and Friday. The President of the
company himself was made Chairman of the Relief
and Citizens' Committees and almost dictator of
the town.

There appeared to be nothing to which this
factory and the men connected with it could not
be effectively turned at a moment's notice.
There was a place for everything and a placard
to tell you where it was and how to get there.
Among the buildings is a huge ten-story struc-
ture used ordinarily for the executive and
clerical force and the company's welfare work.
This building has a large dining-room and
kitchen, bedrooms and bathrooms, rest-rooms, and gymnasium. Two thousand five hundred people were fed here for days exclusive of the ordinary relief work, and well fed, and served by waitresses in uniform without hurry or delay. As many slept in the building, the more fortunate as in the best city hotel.

The sight of the place, alight and humming, with scores of automobiles rumbling and smoking about it, was, to those coming up from the dismantled city, a constant wonder. On one floor newspaper correspondents were pounding out stories to all the world; on another, in the hospital quarters, babies were being born or flood sufferers fighting pneumonia; on another, heaps of clothing sorted out and sprayed with disinfectants before distribution; away up near the roof mothers with children and toothless old women dozed in rocking-chairs, while pianos pounded out rag-time or church hymns.

Just what such an oasis means is difficult to realize unless one has had the experience of a city literally without food, water, light, or the means of getting about. At the National Cash Register plant you might have thought you were at a political convention or in some jolly exposition hall. There was food for every one, coffee and sandwiches at every turn, distilled water in individual paper cups. Newspaper reporters, shot off by their city editors without time to get so much as a toothbrush or a collar, found themselves sleeping in brand-new brass bedsteads, under down quilts, and rattling round in tiled bathrooms, where everything was supplied them, even—if they had time to use them—with buffers to polish their finger-nails. When their clothes gave out they were given new ones—clean linen, overalls, pajamas, anything they needed. Hard-worked clerks and attendants at once acquired all the special knowledge of valets with the gracious manners of Southern gentlemen. Men smeared with mud were asked, as they went to bed, to send their clothes to be pressed, and there were large signs posted in the lower corridor stating that clothes-pressers and barbers worked all night and accepted neither pay nor tips. As I stepped into the
hall late last night a young man, serving as watchman outside the door, lifted his head from his arms, murmured, "Are you restin' pretty good?" and, satisfied of this, returned to his slumber. To step from the silent, sodden city into this humming Babel, where everything seemed to be had for the asking, was like stepping from the infernal regions to one of those sanitary socialistic Utopias pictured by Mr. H. G. Wells.

Only this—and here was the piquant interest of the thing—was the very apotheosis of centralized, one-man power. The National Cash Register is, in a peculiarly complete sense, an expression of the somewhat eccentric genius of one man—an industrial captain just come from being sentenced, along with a number of the keen, devoted, capable men working day and night here in relief work, to a term in prison for violating the anti-trust laws. No novelist or playwright trying to picture the drama of modern business ever devised anything more ingeniously dramatic—this heroic use of efficiency. It was almost a sort of throwing down of the gauntlet—"So this is what you are trying to punish!"—those great, bright, humming National Cash Register buildings seemed to say.

The president's son, a frank, hustling, unspoiled youth, worked day and night, first with the rescue boats, later with motor cars, and even in the morgue. His daughter, a bright-eyed girl of twenty-one perhaps, was at work with the other waitresses in the big dining-room. The town's feeling toward the moving spirit of this concentrated efficiency was almost religious enthusiasm. "Do you think," one man asked me—he was a worker away over in the Riverdale section, and nothing had been said of Patterson—"if God Almighty wasn't with him, that he wouldn't have a wet place out there!"—as if destiny itself had fixed the Cash Register buildings on high ground. The old gentleman who showed me his ruined library, also, quite of his own accord, broke out in a similar way against a government that would send such a man to prison. "I carried a musket fifty years ago," he cried, and then stopped as if at a
loss for a word. "And I'm ready to carry one again," he concluded, presently. 136

It should be noted that the N.C.R. plant had, during part of the flood, what, considering the situation, passed for contact with the outside world. Railroad access from the east on the Pennsylvania and from the south on the Dayton, Lebanon and Cincinnati lay open.137 Trains could go no further into the city.138 Telephone communication was also available during part of the flood. The Bell employee whose account has already been mentioned said: "The wonderful resources of that magnificent institution, the National Cash Register company, with its great, resourceful executive, President John H. Patterson, were aided very materially in its elegant and extensive relief work by the lines of the Bell long distance system being cut into its private branch exchange switchboard, giving them outside connection to Cincinnati and all other points as best as could be done."139

It would be difficult indeed to overstate the amount

136 Arthur Ruhl, "The Disaster at Dayton," The Outlook: A Weekly Newspaper, CIII (April 12, 1913), 808-809.
137 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid., April 16, 1913.
relief work in relation to the total relief picture. It is probably true, however, that the second has been done.

Morgan pointed out:

During and immediately after the flood nearly all newspaper correspondents, and all other sources of publicity, were centered at the National Cash Register plant in the southeast part of Dayton. As a result, so far as the world knew, all order and planning originated there.

Daytonians separated from the N.C.R. by inundated territory and having no outstanding leader or organization around which to build their relief efforts did a very good job of organizing themselves. The efforts in Dayton View, whose inhabitants were examples of such Daytonians, were later described by The Dayton Journal:

Within a few hours after the first alarm had sounded an organization which proved amply able to cope with the situation was being perfected.

Isolated, as they were, from the balance of the city and having in their section very few sources of supply, Dayton View residents quickly saw the need of immediate action in order to be able to care for the thousands who would be brought from the flooded section of the city.

At 9 a.m., Tuesday, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Reeder and Geo. B. Smith called a meeting of the citizens on the Dayton View side of the river for 1 p.m., at Longfellow school, Salem avenue.

Seventy-five were present. The meeting organized by selecting Geo. B. Smith, general chairman, and Mrs. C. H. Kumler, general secretary. The organization shown in the pyramid

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140 Morgan, The Miami Conservancy District, 66.
was then worked out.

Early in the morning boats were in action, messengers were warning residents in the threatened districts, and the work of rescue was well under way, bringing people across the Dayton View bridge at Monument avenue, and Wolf creek bridges at Williams street and Broadway, and at the Forest Avenue Presbyterian church.

About fifteen thousand persons sought refuge on the Dayton View side of the river, and every woman and child had a good bed to sleep in from the first night. The men, though not quite so fortunate the first night, were well taken care of after that time.

The work of rescuing and caring for the refugees was immediately taken up by the various committees. Food, water and sterilized milk were sent out in large quantities by boats to the flooded districts. The boat committees appointed ensigns to take charge at each of the four receiving stations, and the relief work followed in a systematic manner.

Throughout Tuesday afternoon and night, Wednesday all day and night, and Thursday the boats would load with food supplies and return with refugees.

On Wednesday, more than five thousand individual ration sacks, each sack containing sufficient food for 24 hours for one person, were sent out by the boats. Thursday more than 5,000 sacks were sent out. In addition to these, the milk and water supply was taken care of.

Three branch stations were used as bases of supplies for the boats, viz.: Williams street bridge, Dayton View bridge and Forest Avenue Presbyterian church. At these points coffee and soup were served to the people as they were brought in from the flooded homes.

On Friday the distribution of food to the residents of Dayton View began, there being no further demand for food in the flooded districts.
A "bread line" was established, and during Friday and Saturday approximately 20,000 single rations were given out.

At an early hour the housing committee found that it was facing a serious problem. Although many Dayton View homes were thrown open, they were soon filled and the steady stream of rescued continued to come.

Arrangements were made to use the Dayton View Baptist chapel and several vacant houses, and rooms were also fitted up at Longfellow and Fairview schools. It was then decided to appeal to the surrounding farmers, villages and cities with the result that persons were sent as far as Richmond, Ind., to be cared for.

Those of the refugees who were housed at Longfellow school and in vacant houses were served with meals at the school, and the women who looked after the cooking and serving of these meals deserve much credit for the splendid manner in which they handled the work.

The work of sanitation was entered into promptly by the sanitation committee. They immediately assigned as their first duty the furnishing of pure milk to the babies in the flooded district with the result that those in homes well into the center of the city received milk which they felt was perfectly safe to give to the babies.

Another effort on the part of this committee that is worthy of special mention was the establishment of four complete hospitals by noon Wednesday.

An emergency hospital at Longfellow school was operated in connection with a general hospital at the same place. Each case was sent to the emergency hospital and, if serious enough, was assigned to one of the other three.
A thoroughly equipped maternity hospital was established on Central avenue, and during the four days 29 cases were handled either at this hospital or by its staff of doctors.

A quarantine hospital was located on Salem avenue, near Yale.

While there were few cases of contagious diseases, there was a great need of medical attention at the emergency hospital.

The citizens of Dayton View responded quickly to the call for automobiles, thus enabling the automobile committee to provide quick and efficient service.

The rescuing stations at Broadway and Williams street bridges, Dayton View bridge and Forest Avenue Presbyterian church were each assigned automobiles, and the refugees were taken to homes immediately on coming from the boats.

The first railroad carload of supplies came from Brockville, followed quickly by others from Arcanum, Greenville, Eaton, West Alexandria, Eldorado, Union City and West Milton.

Several auto trucks that were stranded in the Dayton View district were also used to haul supplies from the surrounding towns and farms.

The residents of the surrounding country responded quickly to the appeals for aid, thus greatly relieving a serious situation.

The splendid work of the women did much to alleviate the suffering that so surely follows a disaster of this kind.

Many of them, with their homes full of flood sufferers, gave the whole of each day to relief work at the stations or at the water's edge and at night attended to home duties.

The Dayton View Improvement association took an active part in the early work of the flood. At a meeting of the executive commit-
tee it was decided to merge the efforts of this organization with those of the citizens' committee and co-operate in every way conceivable for the welfare of the flood sufferers.

The association agreed to canvass that part of Dayton View west of Broadway, and on Wednesday morning the committee took the various streets in that territory and solicited food, money, clothing, automobiles and volunteers for police duty.

Of the untiring efforts of George B. Smith, Mrs. A. H. Reeder and those of the house committee too much cannot be said. They were at work early and late providing relief in special cases, overseeing the general work and in every way facilitating the work of the various committees and departments.

On Wednesday morning Mr. Smith was successful in dispatching the first message to Governor Cox. In order to be sure that it would reach its destination he sent four copies in as many directions, and the following day received an answer from the governor. Following is a copy of the message:

Dayton, Ohio, March 26, 1913

Governor James R. Cox, Columbus, Ohio:

The need for troops to meet the appalling situation is imperative. City is submerged and at the mercy of looters and fire. Send also food supplies and boats at once. Impossible to get in communication with mayor.

George B. Smith,
President Chamber of Commerce and Committee of Citizens.

The work of the central station at Longfellow school was greatly facilitated by branch stations at Williams street bridge in charge of Mrs. George Herry, at the Dayton View Baptist chapel in charge of Rev. F. G. Detweiler and at Forest Avenue Presbyterian church in charge of Miss Jeanette Collins.

At Williams street and Forest Avenue church several thousand people were sent ra-
tions each day by the boats, and the fact that they had been assured in this manner that help was at hand, no doubt did much to lessen the terrors of their situation.141

The citizens of Dayton did not have to do it all alone. The Dayton Daily News of April 5, 1913, spoke of "the world-wide generosity that came to Dayton."142 Yet, although the wheels of outside-of-Ohio generosity began turning during the flood period itself, it was Dayton's immediate neighbors who were important for their aid to her at that stage of the crisis. The localities around Dayton not themselves in trouble "began collecting food and supplies and money long before the water had reached its greatest height."143 Farmers also went to the aid of the stricken Gem City. Morgan says:

Farmers butchered cattle and hogs to add to the relief supplies. Farmers' wives worked all day and into the night baking bread, boiling hams and eggs, and adding "trimmings" of doughnuts and apple butter. The farmers' root houses yielded potatoes and other vegetables, while their wives drew on their stores of canned vegetables and fruit. From their dairy houses came butter, cheese, and milk.144

By Wednesday, March 26, relief trains were in the pic-

141 The Dayton Journal, April 20, 1913.
142 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
143 Ibid.
144 Morgan, The Miami Conservancy District, 62.
ture. Dayton's neighbors contributed more than just material help. Volunteers came to help in person. Refugees from the deluge were removed to places where food and shelter awaited them.

Of course it cannot be said that everyone who was in or near Dayton during and immediately after the three terrible days of March, 1913, was a selfless hero. Some were cowardly. Some showed interest only in themselves. Some even sought to profit dishonestly from the misfortune of their fellow citizens. But surprisingly many displayed heroism and selfless devotion to the good of others.
IV. THE HEIGHT OF THE DELUGE

General Wood and his party sought refuge in the King and Camann residences not long after 11:00 A.M. on Tuesday, March 25, 1913. About 1:00 P.M. they were forced to the house's second story.\(^1\) The period was one of rapidly rising flood water. There had been hope in areas between the lowlands and the city's higher ground that the opportunity to spread itself which the flood had gained by its victory over the levees would check its rise.\(^2\) This hope proved vain. One observer later related that the 10:00 A.M.–to–noon rise proceeded at the rate of an inch every eight minutes.\(^3\)

The scene in downtown Dayton was appalling. J. L. Wilds, a Bostonian marooned by the flood in the Hotel Beckel (which stood on the northwestern corner of the Third Street–Jefferson Street intersection\(^4\)) later spoke vividly of it. He recalled:

Before mid-day Tuesday Jefferson and Third streets and all other streets that we

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\(^1\)George H. Wood, Annual Report of the Adjutant General to the Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year Ending November 15, 1913. (Springfield, 1914), 348.

\(^2\)Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Williams, Dayton Directory for 1912–1913 (Cincinnati, 1913), 627.

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could see were raging torrents 12 to 14 feet in depth. It seemed as if the current of the Miami River had changed its course and was pouring through the heart of Dayton. The stores opposite us filled to the ceiling. Down the streets poured a mass of drift, chairs, tables from restaurants and homes, set for dinner, desks with telephones and morning's mail, shelvings, barrels, boxes, crates of fruit, pianos, rafts of lumber from some lumber yard, and, worst of all, every few moments some struggling, drowning horse. The poor creatures would try to breast the current, only to be swept against broken posts and into plate glass windows, and here I might say that my respect for the sagacity of the mule was vastly increased by the performance of one old fellow that morning. While the horses were aimlessly wandering around, this particular mule was seen coming down Jefferson Street, one ear pointing to heaven, as if in mute appeal, the other straight ahead. He turned neither to the right nor to the left, but straight down the street he went. We softly hummed that familiar song, "Waiting on the Levee," as he swept by. He had formulated the right plan, and I only hope he reached the bank in safety. There was a continuous sound of breaking and cracking glass as show windows, one after the other, were crushed by the force of the current or shattered by some piece of wreckage.

The waters continued to rise after noon, though they rose less rapidly than they had before it. That afternoon dangerous drift ripped through even parts of the city far from the river channel, "small houses were toppling over here and there, stables were floating away,

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5 The Boston Herald, April 20, 1913.
6 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
outbuildings of various sorts were floating away from
their owners' premises, crashing into other buildings
and threatening a jam and the danger of destruction
that hourly grew more terribly vivid. 7

At about 3:00 p.m. the river's stage reached 28.9
feet. 8 At 4:00 p.m. came "a perceptible pause" in the
rise of the waters. 9 A cry of hope was heard in the
city. 10 The flood's rise had not, however, come to an
end. Nor, obviously, had Dayton's troubles. They had
only begun.

"It was from 4 o'clock till dark and later on,"
later reported the Dayton Daily News, "that the fury of
the water reached its most terrible power." 11 That
newspaper described the conduct of the water during that
period as follows:

Unbelievable was the rapidity and the force
of the current in the main channel. Drift
shot past with the speed of a limited train.
Timbers splintered against the solid concrete of
the bridges with the impact of a head-on collision.

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7 Ibid.

8 Alfred J. Henry, The Floods of 1913 in the Rivers
of the Ohio and Lower Mississippi Valleys, U.S. Weather
Bureau No. 520 (Washington, 1913), 51. Source is the
Alps report quoted in the Smith paper.

9 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
It was not only in mid-channel that the waters swept so perilously. In every part of the covered area were swift currents, running like mountain torrents, endangering the lives of the heroes, who sought to bring relief to those whose lives were threatened. 12

Some of the structures serving as places of refuge did not seem safe from being submerged or toppled by the raging deluge and, as night loomed, the cries for help which issued from them were redoubled. 13 Pistol reports "were abundant throughout the day and night, those held within their homes firing to attract attention, lest they might be passed by because of inability to make themselves heard above the storm and the rushing of many waters." 14

Many people in the city were, of course, not threatened by the flood waters because of their being on high ground. These could watch the catastrophe unfold. "Every eminence," later recalled the Dayton Daily News, "was crowded...." 15

The Stoddard hill and other Dayton View high ground furnished vantage points for thousands. 16 Appalling

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
was the scene before them. The Great Miami below them was an awesome torrent. McKinley Park had been transformed into "a boiling caldron." Beyond it water was up to the eaves of many houses, and rooftops bore those whose struggling had kept them from among the rescued, screaming for aid.

Part of the appalling sight which could be viewed by those on the Dayton View hills was comprised by people retreating to rooftops as the deluge advanced. The *Dayton Daily News* later provided a very graphic description of that part of the story:

As they watched, the people massed on the hills would hear a strange sound—a noise of pounding and the shattering of wood. Presently, before their gaze, shingles would splinter upward on a house in the lowlands, a gash appear between the rafters, and a human head and shoulder appear—some poor imprisoned, tortured victim of the flood, making his last stand against death, climbing to his last available height before he should be engulfed by the waves. One could think of nothing less vivid than the horribly fascinating pictures that they used to print in our childhood, of the poor wretches clinging to the treetops and the mountain pinnacles in the deluge of Bible story—terror-stricken faces, with the mark of death upon them.

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Dayton View onlookers' eyes were, however, assailed by an even more horrible sight than the ones described above. Before noon on Tuesday a frame house was borne toward the Dayton View bridge. 20 A door opened and people were seen inside. 21 Then, despite shouted warnings that he must jump, the man at the door closed it. 22 The house was smashed to bits against the bridge and nothing further was seen of its occupants. 23

The night of March 25-26 saw fire threaten to increase the miseries of water-tortured Dayton. General Wood later reported that four separate fires could be seen during that night. 24 The fire threat was indeed a fearful one to a city deprived by flood of its water supply and the use of so many of its streets for either fighting or escaping a conflagration. The Dayton Daily News later reported that "the falling rain saved the city Tuesday night." 25

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20 Ibid., March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
The Dayton Daily News of April 17, 1913, contains an eye-witness account of one segment of the horror that was the flood's first day which it calls "most realistic and accurate." The account, provided by H. W. Lindsey, is so graphic in its depiction of Dayton in the grip of current, explosion, fire, terror, and death as to deserve being quoted in full. It says:

As I was a resident of the district on South Main street which was destroyed by fire on the first day of the flood, and therefore an eye witness of most distressing scenes and terrible experiences, I thought my story might interest readers of The Dayton Daily News. Hundreds of persons who anxiously watched the rushing, surging and destructive current of water which swept across Main street on its way to the main channel, can corroborate the statement that it was beyond the power of the most skillful boatman to keep a boat "alive" in such a current. The mighty force, which was sufficient to turn the wheels of many of our great industrial corporations, carried houses, garages, barns and sheds down Vine street, and many of these floating structures lodged against the large brick home of T.C. Lindsey on the west side of Main street, and it was these buildings which later in the afternoon formed a floating bridge for the passage of the fire from the northeast corner of Main and Vine streets to the west side of Main street.

The fire originated on this corner from a gas explosion after the water had reached its crest. Seven persons were in the building at the time of the explosion, and by what appears to be a miracle, five of these unfortunates were literally blown

26 Ibid., April 17, 1913.
by the force of the explosion onto the
tops of porches and the roofs of houses
from which they were rescued by means of
ropes thrown from the building of the
Dayton Ice Cream company.

Mr. Saettel, an aged gentleman and
a favorite in the neighborhood, was tossed
by the concussion onto a shingled roof
held in the raging current by the trolley
wires. His plight was pitiful, and our
very helplessness nearly drove us to
distraction. As each bit of driftwood
shot by with terrific force it would
break off a small piece of his frail
raft as if it possessed a mind bent on
evil. Eventually the remnants of the roof
were insufficient to keep the old man
afloat. The lower he sank into the water
and the nearer the hand of death approached,
the more ghastly grew the horror-stricken
face of the man we could but pray for.
Finally he sank below the surface to know
pain no more, but who of us who witnessed
that scene will forget the death look on
his face or the dreadful screams for help
which filled us with a sickening feeling
and made us realize in our utter helplessness
our lack of power to rule the elements.

The death of a woman resulting from
the explosion is even more difficult to
relate, as it was so heart-rendering sic.
The awful tragedy will make those who saw
it shudder with horror whenever they
think of that fateful day. Torn, lacerated
and mutilated beyond recognition, she clung
chest deep in the water, to a spike in the
telegraph pole in front of the building.
Being not over fifty feet from the distressed
woman, we could see her wet one hand and
pass it over her face that she be somewhat
relieved of pain as her face was fairly
charred by fire. Crying for help only
in the way in which one cries when they
know that an awful death awaits them,
she looked beseechingly from one group of
helpless persons to another, while we stood
fairly shaking with pity. We watched the terribly struggle against certain death for nearly an hour, until only the waters silenced the screams, the moaning, the wailing and the distressed calls for help which still seemed to be ringing in my ears.

The rear portion of the burning building was of frame construction and this portion was torn from its foundation and proved to be a vehicle of ruin as it set on fire the house on the opposite corner and the debris lodged against the home of T.C. Lindsey. The writer with many others, some of whom were women and children, passed from the corner house by means of drift wood to several different houses and were taken from the rear of one of them into boats to a place of safety. As we stood waiting to be rescued we were in a most perilous position, as gas from an opened main threw the water high into the air like a fountain and we feared that a spark from the burning buildings would prove to be an agent of destruction.

When Mr. Lindsey saw his home begin to burn he realized that those in the house must make haste and escape if possible. Mrs. I. Osborn, the daughter of Mr. Lindsey, and her husband with their 4-months-old baby tied in a sheet to his back, crawled on floating timbers to a telegraph pole and made their way to Apple street on the telegraph cables. The journey at such a frightful height took nearly an hour, and though weak with exertion and suffering great mental pain, and physical agony from bruises sustained and lacerated members, the courage displayed by Mrs. Osborn was remarkable.

Mr. Lindsey with his wife and a number of friends passed to eight different houses by means of ropes, sheds, trees and wires. The way was lighted only
by the burning houses behind them, and one false step in that perilous retreat from the danger would have meant a horrible death. One of the eight houses was a cottage and just as the last of the party was pulled through the water by a rope about his waist, the cottage was ripped from its moorings and like a leaf carried down the river. 27

General Wood, mentioning no 4:00 P.M. pause in the flood's rise, states: "The water continued to raise until 12:00 o'clock midnight when it remained stationary for a time, and then slowly rose until 2:00 A.M. Wednesday morning, when it attained its greatest height." 28

At the flood's crest, some of Dayton's business district was under ten or more feet of water, and some parts of the city were under twenty or more. 29 The water stood high enough to leave a waterline on the Patterson Tool and Supply Company's building (on the canal between First and Second Streets) 7 1/4 feet above the line indicating the height of the 1866 flood. 30

27 Ibid.


29 Henry, The Floods of 1913, Chart 10. Chart 10 is located between page 52 and page 53, which pages are part of the Smith paper. A reproduction of it appears on page 69 of this work.

30 The Dayton Journal, April 30, 1913.
Map 1. Street Map of Dayton and Vicinity, showing the extent of the 1913 Flood, the greatest depth reached by the water at various points, and the location of buildings destroyed by fire.

This map is a reproduction (see page 66). The area flooded appears shaded rather than red. Black spots, rather than red ones, indicate fire locations.
Black figures show maximum depths of water in flooded districts.
Dark red spots show districts where buildings were destroyed by fire.
After it had crested, the flood slowly declined in height. This did not, however, mean that Wednesday, March 26, 1913, was to be a good day. Still the flood ruled the city. The food and drink deprivation suffered by so many grew, of course, more difficult to endure as time wore on.

At about 2:00 P.M. on Wednesday, Frederick Patterson and Nelson Talbott paddled a canoe up Main Street, rounded the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument at the Main Street–Monument Avenue intersection and made their way back southward. This event constituted, General Wood later reported, "the first sign of life on the main street of Dayton in twenty-four hours."  

General Wood speaks of the water as falling "steadily but slowly" on Wednesday, of the north-south current on Main Street being "noticeably less violent," and of the east-west current on First Street "running like a mill race." At 5:00 P.M. (at which time the water had been falling at the rate of about four inches per

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
hour since the crest\textsuperscript{35} he sought, with a fireman and a Dayton Fire Department captain, to reach the city's central area in a boat.\textsuperscript{36} The boat was caught by the First Street current and swept into a submerged hitching post, by which it was sunk.\textsuperscript{37} The three "with difficulty escaped by swimming" and ended their journey at the Dayton City Club (on the southwestern corner of the Main-First intersection\textsuperscript{38}).\textsuperscript{39}

At 12:00 P.M. General Wood waded to his home at 121 North Main Street.\textsuperscript{40} Until then he had not been able to learn his family's fate despite being marooned within but a square of his home.\textsuperscript{41}

The night of March 26-27, 1913, was an evil one indeed for Dayton. Fire raged in the striken city, consuming and terrorizing. The Dayton Daily News of April 5, 1913, spoke of that night as follows:

\textsuperscript{36}Wood, Annual Report....., 348.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 348-349.
\textsuperscript{38}Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913, 353.
\textsuperscript{39}Wood, Annual Report....., 349.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41}Ibid.
To those in safety, refugees on the hilltops and their kind hosts, it seemed that the entire city was doomed, that there would be a horrid holocaust. It was early in the night, while every man and women [sic] was awake, that the sky was lighted by the first blaze in the section that suffered so heavily. If any tried to sleep it was a vain effort. It seemed that there was no cessation of the flames, for once they seemed to die down, there was a later revival, and the sky again lurid with the terrifying light and rolling, really luminous clouds of smoke.

In the flooded district there were none who were not alive to the peril. The wind was roaring at the first, blowing the fire in such a way that it seemed that it would sweep acres upon acres of splendid buildings. Flaming torches flew across the town, blazing bits of wood that threatened to ignite every house on which they might fall. Men and women went to their housetops, with brooms and rakes, to push the fire from the roof to water. Doubtless, the spread of the fire was prevented in a hundred instances by this prompt work. No man who did not live through this jagged experience can appreciate the dangers men ran, the labor they did, to keep the fire from starting where it could destroy them and their families.

Not only did they work. They prayed. They prayed that the wind might drop. They prayed that it might shift to a quarter where there were fewer buildings to catch. They prayed that there might be a miraculous interposition of Providence in their behalf.

If there ever was earnestness in petitions to the throns [sic] of grace, it was embodied in those prayers. It must have been due to their fervency, and to the united strength of the frenzied appeal to God. For, while the fire was raging, and it seemed that nothing could save the doomed city, the wind did lie down, and the fire ate itself out. 42

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42 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
One of the fires raging in Dayton that night threatened the very heart of the city. It succeeded in becoming the flood period's chief fire in terms of property damage.\textsuperscript{43} This great downtown conflagration had its origin in the Burkhardt and Rottermann drug store (which stood on the northwest corner of Third and St. Clair Streets\textsuperscript{44}).\textsuperscript{45} It seems to have started, very quietly, well before it burst forth in all of its fury. An account furnished by an individual who was a refugee in the area falling victim to the flames and appearing in the April 1, 1913, \textit{Dayton Daily News} indicated that the drug store collapsed on Tuesday afternoon.\textsuperscript{46} It told of a smoldering fire being visible in the ruins early on Wednesday morning, and expressed the view that the fire's probable cause was the combustion of chemicals escaping from broken containers.\textsuperscript{47}

The fire reached major proportions Wednesday night. "Shortly after dark," reported General Wood, "a fire broke out at the corner of St. Clair and Third Streets,

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra").

\textsuperscript{44}Williams' \textit{Dayton Directory} for 1912-1913, 257.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{The Dayton Evening Herald}, March 31, 1913.

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Dayton Daily News}, April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra")

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid.
and from the roof of the Club we could see it rapidly spreading westward.\textsuperscript{48} The April 1 account pointed to the collapse of the drug store's adjoining building, which housed The Finke Company (Its address was 137 East Third Street.\textsuperscript{49}) and contained dry goods and notions in quantity, as the incident marking the fire's bursting into flames.\textsuperscript{50} It said that men marooned in the block rushed to the blaze, but were prevented from putting it out by the lack of water on the buildings' tops.\textsuperscript{51}

The flames headed westward in the direction of Jefferson Street and northward in the direction of Second Street. Their advance on St. Clair Street toward Second Street was halted, despite an auspicious start. They had already begun to burn the large amount of hay which was in the loft of a livery barn on the alley's south side.\textsuperscript{52} Human effort and courage halted them. A Mr. McCarty swam to the scene from Second Street, bringing a fire extinguisher, and quenched the blaze in the

\textsuperscript{48} Wood, \textit{Annual Report}...., 349.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913}, 442.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Dayton Daily News}, April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
An eight-man bucket brigade defended the alley in a one-and-one-half-hour battle against the fire. The fire fared better on Third Street than it did on St. Clair Street. It advanced noisily. "When a saloon was reached," J.L. Wilds later related, "one explosion followed another with sickening rapidity." It drove helpless people in its van. The April 1 account told of a building-to-building journey culminating in rope-aided escape across the alley to Second Street buildings. The March 31, 1913, Dayton Evening Herald told of the flight of a number of people to the Beckel Hotel, carried out by means of wading neck-deep along a line stretched across Jefferson Street.

The blaze moved westward to the Fourth National Bank building (which stood on the northeastern corner of the Third Street-Jefferson Street intersection).

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 The Boston Herald, April 20, 1913.
56 Dayton Daily News, April 1, 1913.
57 The Dayton Evening Herald, March 31, 1913.
58 Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913, 479.
59 The Dayton Evening Herald, April 9, 1913.
At the bank building it encountered a fireproof wall and was thwarted. But it did succeed in destroying nearly the entire north side of Third Street between St. Clair and Jefferson Streets.

The fire did not cross Jefferson Street. It did, however, succeed in terrorizing the people on the west side of that street. Judge Walter D. Jones of Troy, Ohio, wrote, in a letter appearing in the Troy Democrat, of the retreat before the fire which took place:

There was a hurried, whispered consultation, but only for a moment. We must get as far away as possible from the fire, if only to prolong life.

Then began a remarkable march of retreat. Some two or possibly three hundred persons clambered, climbed and crawled from one end of the square on Third street, from Jefferson to Main. Just how it was done, in every particular, probably no one can ever tell. We got out on the roof of the Beckel Annex. We went up and down fire escapes. We cautiously crossed frail-looking skylights. We scaled fire walls. We took ladders along, and from slippery roofs got to open windows, passed through buildings, and from windows to roofs again. We reached a ten-foot alley. A ladder was pushed across it to the next building and we crawled over, one at a time. This was done by men, women, and by one or two children. It was a journey for life, but it was not a mad flight. It was done quickly but quietly and each helped the other. Among those taken out safely was a woman with a broken arm, and Mr. Bennett, the proprietor of the hotel, was carried from his death-bed.

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60 Ibid.
A few hundred feet behind us, and moving steadily in our direction, was a roaring, leaping pillar of flame, devouring everything before it. In front of us was the black, hideous, drift-filled current in which it seemed hopeless for a stout swimmer to venture. 61

While the blaze did not cross Jefferson Street, fire did come to the south side of Third Street. The Dayton Evening Herald later reported that "within 40 minutes" after "the blaze seemed to die out" the Lowe Brothers paint store (which stood on the southeastern corner of the Third Street-Jefferson Street intersection 62) was "furiously" aflame. 63

J. L. Wilds later related that a "rain of burning brands" bombarded the south side of Third Street "for hours." 64 The Dayton Evening Herald of April 9, 1913, attributed the blaze on that side of the street to the ember which Ohio Electric Company claim agent John Clark saw entering a broken window. 65

62 Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913, 737.
63 The Dayton Evening Herald, March 31, 1913.
64 The Boston Herald, April 20, 1913.
65 The Dayton Evening Herald, April 9, 1913.
The south side of Third Street was swept by the conflagration.\textsuperscript{66} The flames advanced eastward as far as St. Clair Street.\textsuperscript{67} J. L. Wilds later said that "the sight caused by the explosion of combustible contents of tanks, although of grave significance to us, was magnificent."\textsuperscript{68}

The blaze did not, however, proceed to Fourth Street.\textsuperscript{69} The defense of the barrier constituted by the alley was a hard-fought struggle. It included the bringing from the basement of the Beaver Power Building (standing on the northwestern corner of the Fourth Street-St. Clair Street intersection\textsuperscript{70}) of "at least 10,000 pails of water."\textsuperscript{71} The water was used on the floors on the building's north side, where the heat grew so great that wired-glass windows were melted.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{66}Dayton Daily News, March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
\textsuperscript{67}The Dayton Evening Herald, April 9, 1913.
\textsuperscript{68}The Boston Herald, April 20, 1913.
\textsuperscript{69}Dayton Daily News, March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
\textsuperscript{70}Williams' Dayton Directory for 1912-1913, 171.
\textsuperscript{71}The Dayton Evening Herald, March 31, 1913.
\textsuperscript{72}Ibid.
V. THE WANING OF THE WATERS

Thursday, March 27, 1913, was a day which brought great improvement in the Dayton situation. It brought great improvement in the precipitation picture. It saw the end of a 7:00 P.M.-to-7:00 P.M. period bringing an average of only .48 inch of rain to the above-Dayton portion of the Great Miami's watershed. The preceding similar period, although certainly an improvement over the one preceding it, had brought an average of 1.42 inches.

The water level in the flooded city had lowered considerably by Thursday morning. By daybreak the segment of Main Street lying downtown and no farther south than Second Street was "practically dry." General Wood later noted that "the scene of desolation was terrible."

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2 *Ibid*. Source is the Smith paper. The watershed area figure of 2558 square miles applies.


4 *Ibid*. 

79
He described that scene as follows:

The asphalt paving on First Street had been torn from the foundation in sheets. The streets were covered with mud and huge bars of gravel and wreckage were everywhere. The plate glass windows had been swept from the stores and the picture of ruin was complete. 5

General Wood later reported the action he took that morning. He related that "all civil government had disappeared" and that, having conferred with Common Pleas Court Judge Carroll Sprigg and Probate Court Judge Roland Baggott and having been requested by them to do so, he declared martial law. 6 He then placed guards at the Rike-Kumler Company and ordered the closing of all out-of-water saloons. 7

The above tends to give the impression that the acute part of the disaster was virtually over. Such was not the case. "We were," Wood also related, "completely surrounded by torrents of water and the fire was still raging on East Third Street and threatening to spread to the west." 8 The physical distress of the marooned was greater than ever. The hardships these people were enduring were, of course, telling more and more as the

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
hours passed. They were added to by cold weather. Thursday was cold indeed. Although the falling of snow, which the night had brought, ended as daylight came, the cold did not. The high temperature that day was thirty-two degrees, the low twenty-three. Tuesday's high had been fifty-nine degrees, Wednesday's fifty-six. The lows had been forty-eight and thirty-two respectively. The heatless marooned were also to suffer a cold Friday (Many were marooned during part of Friday, some during all of it.). March 26 was to bring a low of twenty-three degrees, a high of thirty-seven.

Rescue work received a major boost on Thursday morning. A relief train brought naval reserves, who "immediately" committed boats to the furious waters. The reserves, coming from the U.S.S. Essex at Toledo, arrived at 9:00 A.M.

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9 Springfield Daily News, March 27, 1913.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 The Dayton Journal, March 30, 1913.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., April 2, 1913.
General Wood noted, after telling of his declaration of martial law, his placing of guards at the Rike-Kumler Company, and his order closing out-of-water saloons, that "the question of communication with the outside world was most important."\(^{17}\) In an effort to communicate, he entrusted to three volunteers messages to Governor Cox to be taken to the nearest telephone or telegraph facilities.\(^ {18}\) Two of the volunteers were firemen.\(^ {19}\) The third was First Sergeant William Harris, Company K, Third Infantry, Ohio National Guard.\(^ {20}\) Sergeant Harris, his boat having capsized, lost his life.\(^ {21}\)

Before that morning ended, General Wood succeeded in communicating with the Governor without the use of messengers struggling with the flood waters. He was informed that there was telephone contact between the Central Union Telephone Company's Ludlow Street office and Columbus.\(^ {22}\) The story of this connection is one of the worthy tales of the flood. An article in the *Bell Telephone News*


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
"Flood Edition" told it as follows:

John A. Bell, District Plant Chief of the Central Union Telephone Company at Dayton, has been placed on the hero list. He kept in touch with Governor Cox and the outside world over a lone Central Union wire to Phoneton and thence over an A. T. & T. Company (Bell System) wire to Columbus. The mechanical end of the Dayton plant was put out of business early but Mr. Bell and W. B. Stowell, toll wire chief, rigged up a test or magneto telephone which had been placed out of reach of rising waters. It was this instrument, in the hands of experts, that told the world of the calamity that overwhelmed Dayton.

Chief Bell was in constant touch with Governor Cox. The mechanical experts in the Dayton office saw to it that communication was kept up—and over the one wire Bell told of what went on about him. He reported that the water had risen ten feet in the buildings where floods had never been known; he told of the suffering—of the cold, the rain, the snow, the lack of food supplies and inability to get water for drinking purposes. He reported the fires that burned out big business houses. From different parts of Dayton information was carried from building to building by megaphone and then heralded to the world over Bell System wires.

The reports from Dayton aroused the world, and acting on those reports Governor Cox sent the National Guard into that and every other stricken district. Federal life saving crews from Lake Erie and the Ohio river, naval reserves from Toledo and Cleveland; yachtsmen with power boats from every point, were hurried towards the floods—but it took from twenty to fifty hours to get to the distressed points though the distances were only forty and fifty miles from unaffected centers.

The rescuers in many instances walked for miles through mud and water, pelted by incessant rains. They were burdened with boats, with medical and food supplies—but they went on and on and finally their herculean efforts were rewarded. They rescued the marooned; their presence made hopeful a situation that had been hopeless—and they buried the dead.
And it was from Bell that the first good news came out of Dayton. Governor Cox tells it this way:

"I got into touch with Dayton. Bell was on the wire.

'Good morning,' I said to Bell.

'And the answer was: 'Good morning, Governor; the sun is shining in Dayton.'"

Every newspaper in the land carried the news that the sun was shining in Dayton. A depressed nation straightened its shoulders and then buckled to the task of rushing supplies to the stricken communities.

Bell's range of information necessarily was small. He could not give the details the world wanted and it was lack of detail that made the situation all the more horrible. He told an appalled country of the misery, the suffering, the loss of life and the loss of property that came to his attention but he could not altogether lift the veil of mystery—and it was this lack of information that led a horrified people to believe that Dayton had been literally wiped out of existence. 23

Having learned of the available telephone connection, General Wood waded to the Central Union office. 24 Governor Cox gave him command of the troops in Dayton and instructed him to enforce martial law and to do all that could be done for Daytonians' lives and property. 25 Cox told him of the arrival of Colonel Charles X. Zimmerman,


25 Ibid.
parts of two National Guard regiments, and the Naval Militia in the southeastern part of the city.\textsuperscript{26} He informed him of Patterson's magnificent work.\textsuperscript{27}

At about 12:00 A.M. General Wood spoke to Patterson by telephone, telling him of the Governor's orders and instructing him to take command in Dayton's southern part.\textsuperscript{28} At about 9:00 A.M. he had sent Major R. L. Hubler to Dayton View to take command there.\textsuperscript{29} By 12:00 P.M. there were to be five district commanders, all out-of-water parts of the city having been divided into six districts (one of which was under General Wood's immediate command).\textsuperscript{30}

General Wood later reported that, after his telephone communication with Governor Cox he "at once went to the Hike-Kumler Company, bought the entire stock for the State of Ohio from Mr. I. G. Kumler, placed Captain William V. Knoll, Third Ohio Infantry, in charge, and directed him to issue such food, clothing, etc., as were necessary, taking a memorandum of every issue made by him."\textsuperscript{31} He also reports his having a conference with

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 349-350.  
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 349.  
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 350.  
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 349.
Director of Public Safety Dodds after which he, assuming the city's policing, instructed Dodds to devote himself to the Fire Department's rehabilitation.  

A Citizen's Committee was formed on Thursday, March 27, 1913. The next day's Dayton Daily News stated:

At a meeting of a number of citizens Thursday, a Citizens Committee was organized, and President John R. Patterson elected President, with W. F. Bippus, Secretary and Treasurer. Full authority was granted the President to act for and in behalf of the Committee in all matters pertaining to the welfare of Dayton.

Governor Cox immediately notified the militia of President Patterson's selection, and ordered it to comply fully with the general policy outlined by the Committee.

It will be the duty of this Committee to take entire charge of the relief work for the present and the future upbuilding of the city. It will accept and receipt for all donations of supplies and money, however they may be sent to this city.

The above words present the formation of the Citizens' Committee as a far more significant step than it was. General Wood mentioned nothing about either the committee or the Governor's having "immediately notified the militia" in his report. He reported the formation of the Citizens' Relief Committee without so much as hinting that any citizens' committee had preceded it. He stated:

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32 Ibid.

33 Dayton Daily News, March 28, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
At noon Friday I went to the National Cash Register where a conference was held with Hon. George Burba, Secretary to the Governor, and Colonel J. H. Patterson. You were communicated with and I was directed to appoint a Citizens' Relief Committee. At 2:00 PM a meeting was held in the Council Chamber, attended by Mayor Phillips, other city officials and members of the Council, and a committee from the Chamber of Commerce. I presided over the meeting and appointed as the Citizens' Relief Committee:

Colonel John H. Patterson, Chairman.
Mayor E. T. Phillips.
Colonel Frank T. Huffman.
Adam Schantz.
John R. Flotron, members.

I advised the Committee to organize at once, and stated that I would do all that lay in any power, as Military Governor of Dayton, to assist them.\textsuperscript{34}

The danger of a westward spread of fire in Dayton's downtown section caused much fear during the flood. The city's very heart was, on Thursday afternoon, finally rendered safe from such a course of events by the effect of the water's decline on the Fire Department's preventive ability.\textsuperscript{35}

As Thursday wore on, one could clearly see evidence of the waning of the flood in the city's downtown section. "By Thursday night," reported the next day's \textit{Dayton Daily News}, "the business district was cleared of most of those persons who wished to leave."\textsuperscript{36} Night brought a situation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Wood, \textit{Annual Report}...., 351.
\item \textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, 350.
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Dayton Daily News}, March 28, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
\end{itemize}
which, grim though it was, was part of the coming period of recovery. General Wood later reported:

By night fall, Thursday, the water had receded to the southern line of Third Street, but every inch of fall meant additional guard duty as every store and bank door had been forced open by the elements and their contents lay open to any marauder.

Between three and four o'clock Thursday afternoon, a corporal and three enlisted men of Company A, Fourth Ohio Infantry, reported to me, being the first troops to reach the central part of Dayton. My entire force Thursday evening consisted of this detachment and about ten of twelve local National Guardsmen and volunteers, part of whom were already on duty at the Hike-Kumler, Whitaker-Gwinner Co., etc.

As there was no street lighting of any kind, I cleared the streets before night fall, and permitted no one on the streets south of First or east of Ludlow Streets. At midnight a riot was reported at the Union Station and I sent Captain Gipperling, Third Ohio Infantry there with a small force, but the report was without foundation, as most of the reports, during those trying days were.

Between midnight and daylight, Friday morning, the water receded nearly to the line of the railway, and I followed the water and placed guards over the central banking and business sections bounded by Jefferson, Fifth and Ludlow Streets.

The amount of valuable property of all kind covered by our guards that night was very great. At the jewelry store of A. Newsalt, I should estimate that from $10,000 to $15,000 worth of jewelry and valuable merchandise was scattered on the sidewalk and in the gutter. I take great pride in saying for the National Guard of Ohio that not a single case of looting was reported as the result of this night's work, although the opportunities were limitless.

At 4:30 A.M. Friday, Lieutenant E. O. Clark, Third Ohio Infantry, reported to me at the cor-
ner of Fifth and Main Streets with seventeen men from Company A, Fourth Infantry, O.N.G. This was a most welcome assistance as it enabled me to strengthen and extend my guard line before daylight. 37

At about 10:00 P.M. Thursday the flood stage was reached by the declining water. 38 "At daylight," later related General Wood, "hundreds who had been marooned in the office buildings and stores began to pour out into the streets." 39

The *Dayton Daily News* spoke of the flood prisoners emerging from captivity Friday morning. It related:

Those who came out Friday morning were in bad conditions. Every face showed the traces of the terrible suspense and suffering. The lack of water to drink caused the greatest suffering, and the cold had been intense in the weakened condition of the survivors. 40

The downtown flood prisoners' emergence of Friday morning provides a good phase of the drama with which to conclude a description of the flood period. This is not to say that the flood was over throughout Dayton. Saturday's *Dayton Daily News* was to tell of two to six feet of water on North Main Street between Vincent Street and the

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40*Dayton Daily News*, March 28, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
bridge.\textsuperscript{41} It was to carry a Saturday morning report by rescuers that a considerable number of persons remained in North Dayton upper stories.\textsuperscript{42} Tuesday's \textit{Dayton Daily News} was to report some water yet present.\textsuperscript{43} Despite all this, however, Friday belongs primarily to the recovery period rather than to the flood period. Dayton was striding toward recovery on March 28, 1913.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}, April 1, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
VI. IN RETROSPECT: THE CAUSES OF THE GREAT DAYTON FLOOD

The primary cause of Dayton's terrible 1913 flood was the huge quantity of rain which fell in the Miami Valley. The 120 hours immediately preceding 7:00 P.M., March 27, 1913, brought to the part of the watershed of the Great Miami River lying above Dayton an average of 8.57 inches.\(^1\)

It must be noted that the Miami Valley is so structured as to make very heavy rainfall over a brief span of time very significant. This was brought out by Morgan in the following paragraph:

Because of the lay of the land, the Miami River lent itself to flood control by dams to an unusual degree. This exceptional character of the river is illustrated by the fact that whereas on March 25, 1913, the river at Dayton carried 250,000 cubic feet per second, on September 26, 1941, it carried only 78 cubic feet per second. Few rivers outside of semidesert areas show such extreme variation between high and low flow. The greatest recorded flow was more than 3000 times the least flow. The greatest Miami River flood lasted four days. In contrast, a great flood on the Seine at Paris will last a month or more. The Seine at Paris has more than six times the drainage area of the Miami at Dayton, but its maximum flood was only a third as great as the 1913 flood at Dayton.\(^2\)

While the heavy rainfall was the chief cause of the

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\(^1\) Alfred J. Henry, The Floods of 1913 in the Rivers of the Ohio and Lower Mississippi Valleys, U. S. Weather Bureau No. 520 (Washington, 1913), 64. Source is the Smith paper. The watershed area figure of 2558 square miles applies.

Dayton flood, there were definite contributing causes. These are very significant, since it is not the fact that Dayton was flooded in 1913, but rather the degree to which it was flooded, which is most significant.

Morgan got into the area of contributing causes when he pointed out that "the flood was greater because the rain came at the end of the winter season, when evaporation was slow and the ground too wet to take up readily a large amount of water. We realize the importance of evaporation when we know that in Ohio of the entire rainfall during an average year, only a third runs off into the rivers, while two thirds is evaporated into the air."³ Some eighty-seven per cent of the rainfall associated with the Miami Valley's 1913 flood and coming to the part of the Great Miami's drainage area lying above Dayton ran off.⁴

The geography of the Great Miami's channel was a contributing cause of the flood. The channel curved extensively within Dayton. It narrowed while adding tributaries within the city. A Pictorial History of the Great Dayton Flood: March 25, 26, 27, 1913 provides a set of figures which is instructive (even though the figures are seemingly rounded-off ones) on the subject of the width of the channel.


That set of figures puts the distance between the levees at the mouth of the Stillwater at 800 feet.\(^5\) It places the width of the channel at the Mad River's confluence at but 700 feet.\(^6\) It has the Wolf Creek entering a channel some 600 feet wide.\(^7\) It points to a 500-feet width south of the city.\(^8\)

There was, moreover, more wrong with the channel than curvature and narrowness. It was obstructed. Funk stated: "The river bottom has been gradually filled with deposits of gravel and islands are numerous with dense growths of underbrush and even trees."\(^9\) A Dayton Journal story spoke of "willows which grow up to a height of ten feet and more that impede the rapid flow of water."\(^10\)

Man-made obstruction also drew attention during the period after the flood. An example of this attention is the statement of United States Senator Theodore Burton: "Waterways that are not deep enough and bridges that are not properly elevated to permit free passage of the water,


\(^{6}\)Ibid.

\(^{7}\)Ibid.

\(^{8}\)Ibid.

\(^{9}\)Ibid.

\(^{10}\)The Dayton Journal, April 27, 1913.
caused the flood." Another example is furnished by a resolution calling for Federal funds for and supervision over the cutting of a new channel. Offered by Patterson and unanimously adopted at a meeting of the Real Estate and Building and Loan associations, it stated in part:

The Great Miami river is controlled as a navigable stream by the federal government. It is the duty of the government to examine plans for all bridges and to prevent the channel from being encroached upon by private interests. The government has failed to perform its obligations in regard to the inspection and supervision of our waterway and is thus directly responsible, in our opinion, to the people of Dayton for the great calamity from which they are now suffering. 12

It should be emphasized that any assertion that the condition of the river channel was more than a contributing cause of the flood is an overstatement. Neither channel obstruction, nor channel narrowness, nor channel curvature caused the flood.

Not to be included among the contributing causes of the Dayton flood are the Lewistown Reservoir in Logan County and the Loramie Reservoir in Shelby County. Morgan stated that "the very slight effect of these reservoirs tended to reduce rather than increase the flood." 13

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11 Dayton Daily News, April 5, 1913.
12 Ibid., April 8, 1913.
He also said that even their simultaneous breaking "at the most inopportune time" would not have caused a rise in stage large enough to be observable at Dayton.\textsuperscript{14}

The fact that the reservoirs posed no threat to Dayton did not prevent their existence from striking terror into the hearts of Daytonians. Panic impelled by rumors of reservoir water sweeping down toward the city caused widespread panic on Thursday, and thousands fled to high ground.\textsuperscript{15} Panic and flight also took place on Friday.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{15} Dayton Daily News, March 28, 29, 1913 (both "Flood Extra").

\textsuperscript{16} Morgan, The Miami Conservancy District, 26.
VII. THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES
OF THE GREAT DAYTON FLOOD

Virtually the only certainty about the Dayton flood death toll is that it did not turn out to be nearly as great as was early anticipated. An example of the high early estimates is that of Harry Miller, board of health secretary. He called 5000 dead a conservative figure and 10,000 a possibly accurate one.\(^1\)

Morgan, in *The Miami Valley and the 1913 Flood*, provided what he called "the best data available as to loss of life."\(^2\) The data lists Miami Valley drowning deaths as follows:\(^3\):

- Piqua.................................49
- Troy.................................16
- Dayton and Harrison Townships.....73
- Clark County........................1
- Franklin.............................7
- Lemon Township, Butler County....3
- Hamilton............................106

In addition to the 255 deaths by drowning, Morgan listed 106 deaths under the heading "Other Loss of Life."\(^4\)

\(^1\) *Dayton Daily News*, March 27, 1913 ("Extra Edition").


\(^3\) Ibid., 117.

\(^4\) Ibid.
These appear as follows:

Troy........................................ 3
Dayton and Harrison Townships......... 50
Hamilton.................................... 53

Having listed the above 361 deaths Morgan explained what the figures included and what they did not include. He stated:

The above is the total of known deaths, as ascertained by the bodies recovered and careful investigation as to the resultant deaths. There were undoubtedly many more who were drowned but their bodies never recovered. For instance, the relief committee of Hamilton, after a careful investigation, estimated that not less than 200 were drowned there and in the immediate vicinity. In Dayton, likewise, there was a large number missing—never accounted for.

Certain comments made by Morgan on earlier pages are also worthy of notice. They are as follows:

The loss of life is not definitely known. About 360 bodies were recovered. Hundreds of persons disappeared, never to be heard from again, in some cases the bodies probably being carried to the Ohio River or buried in the shifting sandbars of the Miami....

Many deaths resulted during the following months as a result of the extreme exposure, and in other cases health was permanently broken.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 113-114.
Morgan's statements point out the incompleteness of his own statistics and any others dealing with the numbers of known dead. Such statistics are necessarily incomplete because of the factor constituted by the missing. Furthermore, arrival at such statistics would be a complex matter even if the fate of every individual who was in Dayton during the flood were known. This is true because of the deaths caused by flood hardships occurring later and the question of what standards of time lapse and directness of causation to apply.

Morgan cannot be criticized for not guessing how many of the missing lost their lives. His guess would not have been any better than one by any of many other persons.

The March 25, 1953, Journal Herald said: "After the flood waters subsided, Dayton counted more than 300 of its citizens dead...."8 This may not constitute an estimate of the total death toll. It may easily constitute the confusion of Dayton's death toll with that of the Miami Valley. The March 26, 1957, Journal Herald stated: "Cost: some 300 lives in the area...."9

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8 Dayton Journal Herald, March 25, 1953.
9 Ibid., March 26, 1957.
An estimate placing the number of Gem City deaths due to the 1913 flood at 300 or more seems too high, even if based upon a calculation including all deaths in which the deluge played a major role regardless of time lapse. It may not be.

"The most authentic data," stated J. Warren Smith, "as to the losses sustained were secured by the Dayton citizens' relief committee after a careful investigation of all interests and personal inspection of 2,164 residences in the flooded zone." These data present the monetary loss picture as follows:\footnote{10}{Alfred J. Henry, The Floods of 1913 in the Rivers of the Ohio and Lower Mississippi Valleys, U. S. Weather Bureau No. 520 (Washington, 1915), 53. Source is the Smith paper.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loss to public property</th>
<th>$2,068,100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss to public utilities, steam, street, and interurban, gas and electric lighting companies, telephone and telegraph companies</td>
<td>5,884,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss to public utilities, account of loss of business</td>
<td>838,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire loss over insurance</td>
<td>975,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to buildings</td>
<td>15,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to household furniture and furnishings</td>
<td>9,440,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss to merchants on stock and fixtures</td>
<td>18,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss on live stock, automobiles, and vehicles</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory losses:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>4,045,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock and machinery</td>
<td>8,747,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business loss</td>
<td>1,900,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\footnote{11}{Ibid. Source is the Smith paper.}
Loss on contracts, rents, etc............. 3,450,000
Pianos in homes........................... 800,000
Leaf tobacco in warehouses.............. 900,000

73,249,040

A loss of such magnitude was appalling. When one examines the $73,000,000 in one’s mind in terms of what it meant to individuals, it becomes even more appalling. The destruction of personal fortunes and hopes is likely to seem more real than the total figure.

One did not, however, have to think in terms of loss of money, or in terms of loss of life, to be appalled at Dayton’s fate in March, 1913. The flood left the city a shambles. A list of tasks “abstracted from the report of Major Rhoads to the Secretary of War”\(^\text{12}\) contains the following ones executed during the period extending from March 29 to April 25:\(^\text{13}\):

- 133,600 wagon loads of debris hauled away.
- 580,000 Government rations distributed.
- 12,131 houses, cellars and premises cleaned and disinfected.
- 1,860 houses, cellars and premises cleaned and disinfected by property owners under supervision of Sanitary Department.
- 98 dead bodies recovered and embalmed.
- 1,420 dead horses removed.

\(^\text{12}\) Arthur E. Morgan, *The Miami Valley and the 1913 Flood* (Dayton, 1917), 106. Major Thomas L. Rhoads of the U. S. Army’s Medical Corps was placed in charge of sanitary work on March 30.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 108.
2,000 other dead animals removed.
4,177 privy vaults disinfected in flooded district.
84,325 house inspections made.
60,000 sanitary notices distributed.
2,100 emergency cases given medical aid.
56 car loads of disinfectants used.
2,200 catch basins cleaned.
102 comfort stations erected.

Statistics are certainly inadequate for the description of a city in a state beyond description, a once-beautiful city reduced to a shattered, defaced wreck. They are most inadequate for the description of the mud which marred that city. Arthur Ruhl wrote of the mud, saying:

This mud—fine, black, slimy river silt—was in and over everything. It was as if the first story of all the houses and shops and office buildings—and there were eight or ten square miles submerged in the heart of Dayton—were a mold into which had been poured so much of this infinitely penetrating thin plaster. When the water left, everything that it had touched—walls, furniture, pictures, books, carpets, the goods on merchants' shelves—was coated with this uniform filth. It lay three or four inches deep on all floors—black, sloppy, evil-smelling.

From every door, up and down miles of streets, this fair spring morning, they were shoveling it forth. With snow-shovels, pans, pails, they pushed it across carpets to the front door, and thence, slopping and splashing, down the steps over the sidewalk into the street. Through these open front doors you could see it smeared over stairways, dripping from chandeliers. On the sodden lawns in front of these houses; arm chairs, upholstered seats, tables, lamps, soaked and solid with
it, were drying in the sun. Everywhere they were struggling with it—the poor, whose one-story frame houses were smeared to the eaves; in the more well-to-do neighborhoods, women whose spring hats contrasted oddly with their plastered boots and skirts, alongside their husbands and sons and Negroes hired from the street:

I saw one woman in knickerbockers and rubber boots calmly shoveling the black paste from her parlor window. An elderly gentleman in one of the finer houses asked me to stop in and look round. The whole house had been covered up to the second story. The dining-room fireplace was still half full of straw swept there by the current. Outside the window was the muddy heap of what had once been his library. "I've been collecting those for fifty years," he said. There, too, was a large steel engraving of the kind much valued a generation ago. "There were only five of those in the State," he said. A little further down the street a huge Oriental rug lay over the front lawn like so much rhinoceros hide. At another house near-by, where a lady kept watch while her silver was carried into the yard, the lower floor was covered four inches deep.

The sight of this unexpected, reptilian substance, burying soft carpets and the usually inviolate household goods, brought home to the outsider the inhuman ruthlessness of such a flood even more, perhaps, than crushed houses or the poor, still figures in the morgue. One is prepared for smashed and overturned houses, for the sight of death. But about this black and glistening slime, mordant as dye, unescapable as a volatile gas, soaked into the fiber of cloth, worked into the pages of books, there was something malignant and strange. It struck one like a personal indignity, as if smeared on one's own flesh.

If its effects were disheartening here, they were even more so in the business part
of the town. People who can afford fine houses can probably refurbish them, but it is not so easy to restock a dry-goods store or a grocery. There is almost no insurance in our country for damage by flood, and nearly every store in Dayton was a mere black, dripping cavern. Bolts of cloth were heaped in the gutter, and piles of shoes like so much coal or potatoes. Here was a big iron works, with all its rolling machinery rusted and clogged with mud. 14

VIII. THE FINAL OUTCOME OF DAYTON'S STRUGGLE WITH THE RIVERS

A banker, having come home to a wrecked home after spending the flood period in his bank, stated: "Dayton is bankrupt--it will not recover."\(^1\) The March 29, 1913, Dayton Daily News proved a better prophet. It proclaimed:

Yesterday the catastrophe; today relief; tomorrow restoration. Dayton unconquerable sill will rise incomparable more splendid than ever. \(^2\)

Daytonians brought about their city's recovery. They had, admittedly, outside help, but without their magnificent effort, what came to pass could not have come to pass. Charlotte Reeve Conover later wrote descriptively of the clean-up period, stating:

Little by little, the thoroughfares were cleared of grand pianos, drowned horses, chicken-coops, and oil paintings—the varied donations of the Miami to our precincts—and we began once more to know ourselves. Military orders emptied cellars of refuse that had lain untouched for years. Never was there a more drastic city clean-up, the result being a pointed lesson in sanitation, for, instead of the Dayton death rate going up as a result of the flood, it went down; and instead of the spirits of our citizens going down as a result of the flood, they went up. The fatigue and depression of the first week over, hopefulness and helpfulness animated all alike. While the world abroad was pitying us, we were never for one minute sorry for ourselves. The work was too pressing—

\(^1\)Dayton Journal Herald, March 25, 1953.

\(^2\)Dayton Daily News, March 29, 1913 ("Flood Extra").
we were too interested—and, in fact, too tired.  

Daytonians not only brought about their city's recovery, but also moved to prevent any repetition of the disaster, to make the city's worst flood its last. As of June 14, 1913, a sum of $2,152,952.70 had been subscribed to a flood-prevention fund. There were 20,203 subscribers. Forty years after the deluge, coming the Journal Herald carried the following description of the campaign:

It was a colorful campaign. A highlight was a meeting at the Dayton City club on Thursday, May 15, 1913, when Adam Schantz made a stirring appeal for funds. He told the people he could still hear the cries of "help!" and personally pledged $120,000 to the campaign.

The campaign took on the aspects of a revival. Dayton would not be a doomed city, the campaign leaders shouted. Slogans, some of them ominous, were used throughout the drive.

"Remember the promises you made in the attic," a huge sign on the courthouse read. Cards were passed out reading, "Shrouds have no pockets." A striking appeal was, "For the love of Dayton!" while still another slogan urged, "Make Dayton safe for your children."

A relief boat used to rescue flood victims was mounted on a wagon and paraded throughout

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4The Dayton Evening Herald, June 21, 1913.

5Ibid.
the city with signs bearing the inscription: "No more of this for Dayton."

John H. Patterson, the late president of the National Cash Register company, doubled the gift of his firm from $250,000 to $500,000 during the campaign.

On Sunday night cheering throngs gathered at the courthouse. They waited to greet the news that the city had gone over the top in its campaign.

They set up a roar of whoops and hurrahs when officials announced total collections of $2,150,000. The campaign ended exactly two months and one day after the flood. The people at the courthouse on that Sunday night in May knew that Dayton would live again. 6

The fund was, of course, only a beginning. But the rest came. The Miami Conservancy District became a reality. The five dams—Englewood, Germantown, Huffman, Lockington, and Taylorsville—came. The Journal Herald's forty-years-later story reported that Miami Conservancy District officials asserted the safety of Dayton from a flood 1.4 times as great as that of 1913. 7 Mrs. Conover said it more vividly when she wrote that "Dayton is as safe from loss by water as if she were situated in the middle of the Sahara Desert." 8

6 Dayton Journal Herald, March 25, 1953.
7 Ibid.
8 Charlotte Reeve Conover, Dayton, Ohio: An Intimate History (New York, 1952), 274.
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Miscellaneous

Street Map of the City of Dayton, Ohio and Vicinity.

By Frederica J. Cellasius, C.E.

Price 25c
## STREET INDEX

To find the location of any street on the map refer to the letter and figure on the right of the name, which are duplicates of those on the margin of the map and indicate the cross lines at the intersection of which the street sought for can be found. The Lanes, Places and Courts are indexed separately from the streets and avenues. * indicates that the street is outside of the city limits.

### STREET NUMBERS

The numbers in each square on the principle streets refer to the house numbers to be found in that square. On all streets running east and west house numbers begin from Main Street or from the point nearest Main Street. On all streets running north and south house numbers begin from Third Street or from the point nearest Third Street. Main and Third Streets are respectively the dividing lines of all streets crossing them.

The circles drawn on the map are one-half mile distant, the Court House being the center. The colored portions show the political wards of the city.