

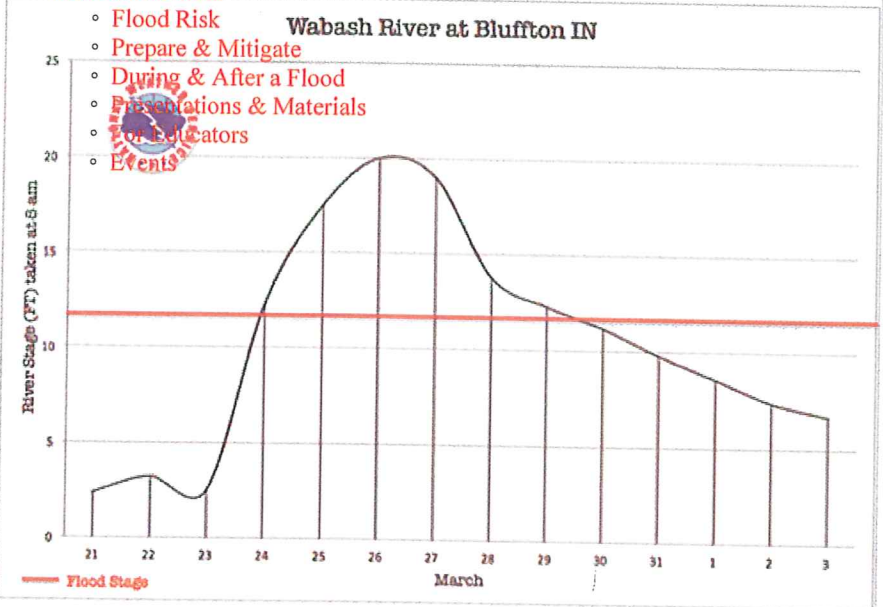
The Great Flood of 1913

100 Years Later



Silver
Jackets

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Early on Sunday, March 23 at Bluffton, the Wabash River was at a normal level for March with a 2.5 foot reading and the river falling. A heavy rain fell on March 23 over the entire area and by Monday morning nearly four inches had fallen at Bluffton. The Wabash River had risen above flood stage and was rising at a record rate. The heavy rain continued Monday, and the amounts on Tuesday morning were equally as large and ranged from 2 to 3 inches.

A break in the rainfall occurred during the day on Tuesday, and only slight amounts of rain were reported on Wednesday, March 26. The Wabash River was at a record level in Bluffton with a crest of 20 feet occurring this day. About half of an inch of rain fell during the 24 hours ending March 27, but the river continued to fall. ("Flood on the Wabash River in March 1913" by W.R. Cade, U.S. Weather Bureau Observer)

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Flood of 1913 - Cincinnati, Bluffton & Chicago RR bridge washed out at 8:30am, March.
The only one of Bluffton's three RR bridges to wash out during the flood. Looking north.

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Flood Protection Measures

There are no Corps of Engineers reservoirs upstream of Bluffton. There is a levee around the wastewater facility, and after 2003 a much smaller levee was built on the east side of Bluffton and on the south side of the river to provide "protection" for some residential lots that were susceptible to the 1-in-100 flood event. The main flood control by the City has been to restore as much of the floodplain to either open green space (buying out 17 houses built on top of a filled-in creek bed and creating an open green space in the heart of the City) or a native habitat waterway (i.e., restoring bottomland woodlands as we have done on 150 acres of former farmland in the floodplain on the east edge of the City upstream on the north side of the Wabash River).

To add information about the March 1913 flooding at Bluffton, e-mail Al Shipe at al.shipe@noaa.gov.

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Impacts

Residences in Bluffton were flooding and the river continued to rise very rapidly. The Cincinnati, Bluffton and Chicago railroad bridge washed out at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday. At the flood's height, the water extended up to the 700 block on North Main Street in Bluffton. Water was more than two feet deep in houses on the north side of the 400 and 500 blocks of E. Washington Street in Bluffton. (Please note: Bluffton flooding deduced from the following pictures.) Also note the snow in photos below; the snow and freezing weather during the height of the flood added to the misery of those affected.

WELLS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM PHOTOCARD COLLECTION · BLUFFTON, INDIANA

FLOOD-1913-002

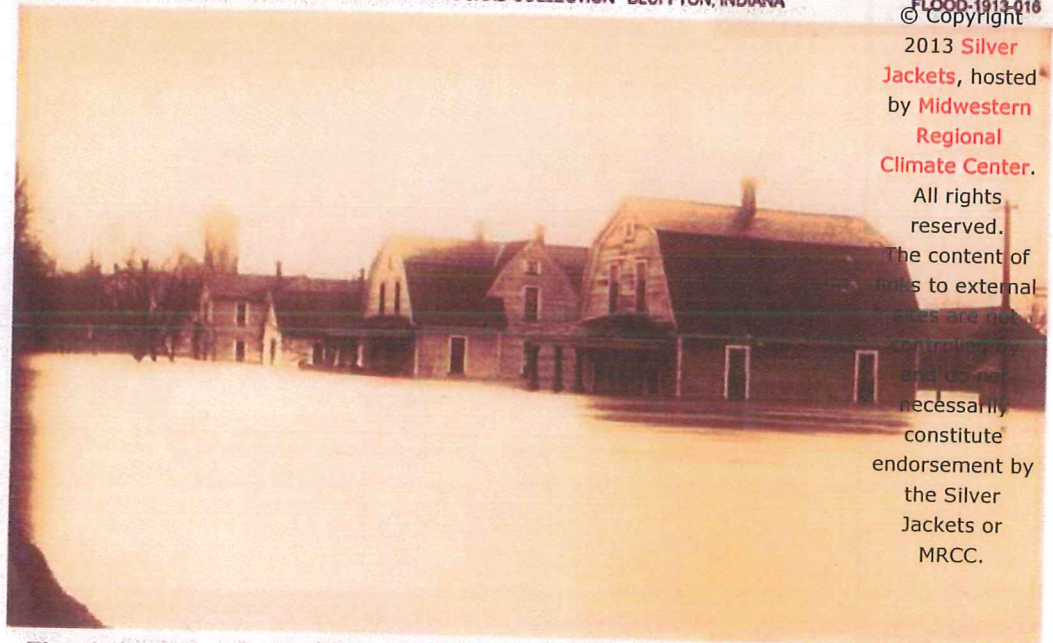


Flood of 1913 - View looking north from the Courthouse Tower. Shows water up to Main St. & Interurban bridges. Water north on Ft. Wayne Pike (N Main) to 700 block.

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Flood of 1913 - View looking northwest up E. Washington Street from the 500 block. Shows houses on north side of 400 and 500 blocks engulfed in water.

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1913 Wabash River flooding, Bluffton, Indiana

1913 postcard view of flooding at Bluffton, Indiana during the Great Flood. This view is looking north on North Main Street. The iron wagon and traction bridges span the Wabash River. The buildings at the lower left-hand corner of the postcard were located on the northwest corner of Main and East Perry Streets. The 1912 Sanborn™ fire insurance map set shows a grocery on that corner and a harness business in the next building north. The third building had a REED & CO. HARDWARE sign. The Sanborn™ map set shows a hardware store at that location (120 North Main Street). A BARBER SHOP sign was posted at the southwest corner of Main and Wabash Streets. The Sanborn™ map set shows a barber located on that corner (128 North Main Street). The map set identifies the structures on the north side of Wabash Street as dwellings. The long single-story building at the left edge near the river's edge is on the north side of Water Street. The Sanborn™ map set identifies it as a feed barn (127 Water Street). A 1908 directory published by The Bluffton Banner lists the Reinhart Brothers with a feed business at this address.

The structure on the east side of Main Street at the river is identified in the map set as Bluffton Milling Company (H. E. Stafford, proprietor). The other structures in that block from north to south included a livery (215 North Main Street), a dwelling (209 North Main Street), an implements business (205 North Main Street) and a hardware business (201 North Main Street). The sign on the building at the corner advertised BUGGIES, HARNESS, FARM IMPLEMENTS, PAINTS and OILS. Part of a name was also painted on that building. It was probably H. H. GROH, who had a harness and repairing business in Bluffton according to a 1906 Indiana Bureau of Statistics report. The 1908 directory listed Henry Groh & Co. as an agricultural implements dealer at 205 North Main Street and the Hiester Furniture Store at 201 North Main Street.

The building on the southeast corner of Main and Wabash Streets (125 North Main Street) was another very business according to the Sanborn™ map set. The 1908 directory lists T. M. Soudera as the owner of this business. A GARAGE sign on the next building south (123 North Main Street) matches the information in the map set. The map set shows three businesses in the three-story building in that block: a pool hall (119 North Main Street); a restaurant (117 North Main Street); and a grocery (115 North Main Street). The sign at 117 North Main Street appears to include the words RESTAURANT and BAKERY. The 1908 directory lists Merriman restaurant and bakery businesses at this address. That directory lists Frank and Sam as the owners of the grocery on the corner. One of the signs on the side of the grocery advertised COCA COLA.

The building at the lower right-hand corner was on the southeast corner of Main and Perry Streets. The Sanborn™ map set shows a traction station at that location (113 North Main Street). The 1908 directory lists the Marion, Bluffton & Eastern Traction Co. at that address. The Sanborn™ map set shows a drug store in the south half of the building (111 North Main Street). The 1908 directory lists W. A. Gutelius as the druggist doing business at that location.

The Toledo, St. Louis & Western Railroad track enters this view from the center of the left edge. It crossed the traction line a short distance beyond the river.



1913 Wabash River flooding, Bluffton, Indiana section 3

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