

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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## The Flood of 1913

By: Sarah Hays, Local History Librarian



The Barberton Railroad after the flood of 1913.

There are many jokes about Northeastern Ohio weather. For example, "Welcome to Ohio where the weather is made up and the seasons do not matter," and there is plenty of legitimacy to the jokes since Ohio's weather can change quickly and frequently; one major cause being lake-effect weather patterns.

Lake-effect is only found in four areas of the planet: southeast of the Great Lakes, the southeast of Hudson Bay, the east side of the Great Salt Lake, and the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido. It results from a combination of topography, air temperature, and wind direction. When cold air blows over warm water, water vapor is absorbed and turns into snow. The wind then carries it over land where it falls heavily.

Despite our luck at being among the rare few to experience lake-effect snow, there are other weather events that have happened in Ohio and in Barberton.

Among these events are earthquakes, the Year Without a Summer, blizzards, cyclones, and floods.

The Flood of 1913 is considered to be Ohio's worst weather disaster on record due to the extent of death and destruction. The flood was caused by an unusual combination of weather conditions. First, heavy January rains soaked into the ground and froze. February remained cold, but in late March, the temperatures rose into the 70s. On March 20 and 21, a storm blew into the area accompanied by winds as high as 60-70 miles per hour.

On Sunday March 23, it started raining and continued for the next five days until a cold wave set in causing the temperatures to drop, water to freeze, and rivers and creeks to recede. Throughout the state of Ohio, damages exceeded \$300 million and 467 people died, including five in Akron and two in Barberton.

In Barberton, the total rainfall was 9.65 inches. Wolf Creek was over four feet higher than it had ever been. The Tuscarawas River and Mud Run overflowed their banks. The Ohio Canal became a part of the swiftly flowing Tuscarawas River, which was a quarter of a mile wide. Fences, trees, and buildings went down the stream. Word came to city officials that the reservoir was going to break its banks and completely flood the city, so boats were rushed to help residents to safety. In total, about 100 families were rescued in boats along Wolf Creek in West Barberton and Snydertown.

Many businesses and factories were closed because they could not receive supplies or they were flooded too badly to operate. Among the businesses impacted was Columbia Chemical, Babcock and Wilcox, and O.C. Barber's greenhouses. The city water supply was shut off when the municipal pumping station was flooded and schools closed for sanitary reasons.

