

# Flood of 1912 worse than Sherman's freshet in 1865

A heavy rain began to fall in the early hours of March 15, 1912. By 10 a.m. all of this area's rainfall records were broken.

The old-timers declared this to be even more than Sherman's freshet, when weeks of rain in February 1865 halted Sherman's troops on the west side of the Catawba River and delayed him to the extent that the courthouse towns of Chester, Lancaster and York counties escaped being burned to the ground.

R.J. Davis, owner of Davis' Mill near Bethel Church in York County, remembered the flood of 1865: "I was but a small boy; but was big enough to go down and look at the creek, and I have been familiar with the high water marks ever since. When I built my new mill house, I was careful to put the floor as high as the crest of the flood of 1865. I should have put it a little higher; but I didn't. The water was 4, 4½ feet on the mill floor."

R.B. Riddle, who operated a combination cotton gin, saw mill and grist mill on Crowder's Creek in York County, reported the water rose at the rate of 18 inches to the hour and the fall was as rapid as the rise. His mill dam was 12 feet high and the water rose above the dam 6 or 7 feet.

Riddle had bales of cotton on the side of the hill along with a large stack of lumber. With his boys helping him, the cotton was moved out of reach of the raging water but some 6,000 or 7,000 feet of timber went down the creek. Still, Riddle said he would not complain about his \$500 loss in lumber because the freshet turned out to be a blessing. The mill pond, which was only 4 or 5 feet deep before the flood, was cleaned out

to the clay and rocks and left 12-15 feet deep. Elsewhere, many of the bridges were washed out, especially those crossing the smaller streams. Even though a bridge might survive the estimated 5 to 6 inches of hard rain, the approaches to the bridges (there were no paved roads) were likely to be washed out.

The only bridge on the S.C. section of the Catawba River was between Fort Mill and Ebenezer. It was considerably damaged.

A Clover mail carrier, John M. Smith, reported to the U.S. Post Office that "There is not a bridge on my route that I can cross. The new steel bridge that was recently erected at Davis' mill is lying on its side in a sandbar about 100 yards down the creek . . ." The water was 6½ feet higher than the big creek of 1865.

However, he delivered the mail the next day by crossing the creeks in a boat.

Because the freshet was in March and spring plowing, seeding and fertilizing had not been done by the farmers, the losses were not nearly so great as they might have been.

It took much hard work but several weeks later most of the bridges were back in place and the roads had been scraped by mule-pulled blades. Farmers were hauling fertilizer from the train depots and were starting to break up the ground in preparation for seeding.

It would have been a different story if the "freshet of 1912" had occurred later in the summer. As it turned out, the harvest of 1912 was as good or better than most years.

Memories of the 1912 flood were to be buried by the "Great Flood of 1916," which paralyzed this region by washing away every single cotton mill, grist mill and saw mill on the Catawba River along with every bridge and railway trestle.

Louise Pettus



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