

## Newsworthy Floods in the Watershed (draft)

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*The following time line presents the floods to strike the watershed area since 1890. Where possible, a short description of the flood event is provided, most often culled from newspaper articles. Many floods however are of such a limited nature and area that they were ignored by papers and news broadcasts and smaller flood events that occur every year went completely unnoticed. (References for quotations and pictures are available on request)*

### **June 6, 1890**

On Thursday June 6, 1890, the city of Barrie fell victim to one of the worse flood events in its history. Three separate thunderstorms tore through the area delivering an unprecedented amount of rainfall in a mere two hours. "Disaster was its sure companion..." read the Barrie Examiner.

### **April 9, 1912**

In April 1912, "The Nottawasaga, Mad and Pine Rivers all went on the rampage". The spring thaw added vast volumes of melt waters to the rivers, and reports indicated that the water level in the three rivers rose fourteen feet. Vast areas were flooded and at least six bridges were destroyed, including two new steel bridges. Ironically, an old wooden bridge that had been condemned survived the flood. Serious damage to the City of Barrie was avoided by the efforts of: "Engineer Macdonnell and a gang of men (who) worked till midnight on Saturday and forced the water back into the sewer."

### **May 24, 1912**

After experiencing one of the worst thunderstorms in memory, the Underwood, G.T.R. and Pretty River overflowed their banks flooding the Town of Collingwood. The thunderstorm "broke shortly after one o'clock and for three and a half (hours) the heavens were one lurid blaze of white, while the thunder

rolled and re-rolled, becoming louder and louder as the hours dragged on". Several bridges were destroyed or damaged by the flood as were many streets in Collingwood. The mill owner, Mr Brackenridge, escaped death as he was rescued by several spectators after his mill pond dam gave way.



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### **Feb. 22, 1937**

Heavy rains and frozen ground were to blame for the flood event of 1937 when "the town of Barrie was hard-hit by the swollen waters of several of the old-time creeks whose water-courses had been interrupted by the march of progress in the up-building of the municipality". Prince of Wales School's basement was flooded and classes cancelled and "joy reigned for the pupils on receiving such an unexpected holiday, brought on by the vagaries of nature". The C.P.R. rail lines were washed out at both Midhurst and near Craighurst. In Barrie, Elizabeth, Toronto, Mary and Bradford Street were flooded with up to fifteen inches of water. Eccles Street was perhaps hardest hit, described as a "raging torrent, and angry waters rushing headlong on their way to lower levels". This "raging torrent" caused considerable damage to the street uncovering watermains and at one point gouging a ditch ten feet deep in the middle of the street.

### **April 4,6 1950**

Flooding on the Pine River resulted in the destruction of a CNR bridge spanning it.

Both approaches of Hwy 90 bridge at the Nottawasaga River were washed out.

### **April 11, 1950**

"Mad River Is High, Creemore Flooded, School Surrounded" read the title of the article detailing the Mad River Flood. "Every cellar in the flooded area had from two to four feet of water in it" resulting in many furnaces being extinguished. Further damage was prevented when the weather turned cold. The village of Dunedin was also flooded when the dam gave way allowing the water to flow down the main street.

Seven bridges and miles of concession roads were ruined in Mulmur by the force of the Pine River. The floodwaters carried a steel bridge 200 yards downstream of the 7<sup>th</sup> line.

### **October 18, 1954**

In the wake of Hurricane Hazel, a couple returning from Toronto had quite the adventure. They tried three different routes home, only to find them all impassable due to bridges being washed out. They decided to spend the night in a motel, but were forced to flee for their lives in waist deep water as the motel flooded.

Four people lost their lives on Pennville Creek and the reported damage within the watershed was enormous.

### **July 5, 1958**

The evening of July 5, 1958 saw a cloudburst above the town of Collingwood. By 11:00 P.M., the Pretty River "burst loose for a Saturday night in town". At the peak of the flood, Collingwood was flooded with up to two feet of water. Barrie was also struck by flooding during this event. Dunlop, Gunn, Clapperton and Peel street were all damaged by the flood waters as they raced through the city.

### **March 25, 1963**

Meltwaters were the main instigator of major flooding between Alliston and Cookstown. Hundreds of acres of farmland lay under water at the Village limits and the Westbound lane of Highway 89 was washed out.

### **June 29, 1967**

Thousands of acres of potatoes in the Beeton area, corn and grain fields in North Simcoe were wiped out in this flood, the worst since Hurricane Hazel.

### **February 20, 1981**

This flood event of 1981 proved to be one of the worst in the past 45 years. Nearly every part of Southern Ontario experienced some degree of flooding. Unseasonable warmth was a major contributing factor to this event as six days with temperatures between 6° and 10° Celsius melted a large quantity of ice and snow. This meltwater entered the Mad and Nottawasaga Rivers, causing both to swell dangerously. The flooding began in Creemore with it being flooded by the Mad River, though this flood quickly abated. By February 23, the threat of severe flooding had moved northwards to Wasaga Beach, where two families were evacuated. The flooding at Wasaga was made worse by the presence of a massive ice jam, five miles long at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River. After an attempt to free the ice jam with dynamite failed, a demolitions expert was called. By February 26, an estimated 15 families had been evacuated from the area. The demolition expert's attempt to destroy the ice jam with dynamite proved only moderately successful, due to the softness of the ice.

### **February 15, 1984**

February 14, 1984 saw a combination of heavy rain, melting snow and mild temperatures. Families were evacuated in Collingwood and from near the Batteaux River, where an ice jam had collected. The next day saw three families

evacuate from Avening when an ice jam on the Mad River caused their homes to be flooded. At the Batteaux River, a further 15 to 20 families evacuated the area as the flooding behind the ice jam grew worse.

**February 24, 1985**

Major flooding was avoided this year along the Batteaux River as crews were able to clear a potential ice jam in time to prevent flooding.

**March 12, 1990**

Once again the combination of heavy rains, mild temperatures and melting snow resulted in flooding along the Nottawasaga and Pine Rivers. The area hardest hit was Angus, where close to a foot of water flooded the Plaza when the Pine river escaped its banks.

**June 3, 1995**

Immense thunderstorms were the culprits behind the June 3 flood event of 1995. Over a period of 24 hours the storms dumped 95 millimetres into the watershed. In Barrie, creeks overflowed flooding parts of Dunlop, Grove, Ross and Porritt Streets as well as Lakeshore Drive. In some places the water was reported nearly three feet deep. In the Everett area, the heavy rains did serious damage to the spring crops freshly planted by many farmers.



Avening Bridge over the Mad R.

(U of M Archives)

