

The Great Flood of 1937

The Ohio River Great Flood of January 1937 surpassed all previous floods during the 175 years of civilized occupancy of the lower Ohio Valley. Exceeding the floods of 1884 and 1773, geological evidence suggests that the lower Ohio Valley flood of 1937 outmatched ANY previous flood. The whole city of Paducah was inundated; 35,000 people were evacuated. Seventy percent of Louisville was submerged, forcing 175,000 residents to flee. One estimate of damage, in 1937 dollars, was 250 million!

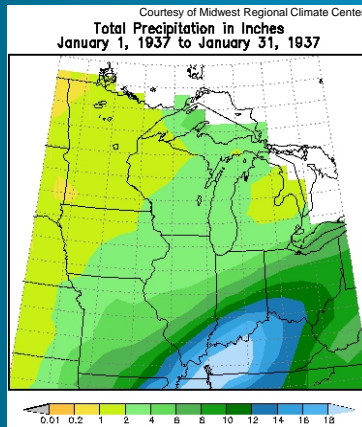


Looking east down Main Street.



Houses flipped in a Louisville neighborhood.

COMPARISON TO OTHER FLOODS				
Station	Flood Stage	1937 Crest	Second Highest Crest	Year
Louisville	51 ft	85.4 ft	74.4 ft	1945
Cincinnati	52 ft	80.0 ft	71.1 ft	1884
Evansville	35 ft	53.8 ft	48.4 ft	1884
Paducah	39 ft	60.6 ft	54.3 ft	1913



Location	January 1937 Rainfall
Louisville	19.2 in
Lexington	15.1 in
Bowling Green	20.7 in
Cincinnati	13.7 in
Evansville	14.8 in
Earlington, Kentucky	23.0 in



Horse caught in branches of a tree several weeks after flood crest.

At midnight their worst fears were realized. The whistles began to blow, warning everyone to leave the city. Sirens at the fire stations screamed out into the night. The Branham family, and thousands of others were forced to flee for their lives.

— Personal memoir of Rev. Branham, Jeffersonville Resident.



Widespread flooding at and around Churchill Downs.



Inundation of western Louisville looking east toward downtown.

Much of the excessive rains across the lower Ohio Valley came in the 11 day period from January 13-24. Over 16 inches of rain fell along and south of the Ohio River from Cairo, Illinois to Louisville. In Louisville, the river rose 6.3 feet on the 21st of the month. Ninety percent of the homes in Jeffersonville, Indiana were flooded. Perhaps the most completely damaged town on the river was Portsmouth, Ohio. Many homes there were damaged by the force of rushing water topping the town's floodwall. Flood waters exceeded the town's 60 foot wall by 14 feet! Cairo, Illinois, on the other hand, stayed safe behind its new 60 foot wall as the crest of the river rose to 59.6 feet, a rise to a mere 0.4 feet below the wall's top.