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Flood of 1927 damages county, state

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

Ninety years ago, what was arguably the nation's greatest natural disaster wreaked havoc on Arkansas and the entire Mississippi River Valley.

The Flood of 1927 brought tremendous destruction to the region, taking hundreds of lives and inundating over sixteen million acres of land. Water covered more than 13 percent of the state Arkansas, damaging approximately 162,000 homes. About 700,000 people were displaced as water inundated the land to depths of up to thirty feet.

While damage in Clark County did not rival that of locations in Arkansas's Delta, this area did indeed feel the effects of the high waters.

The great flood of 1927 actually began in 1926. Heavy rains in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and northern Louisiana during December 1926 resulted in the filling of the Arkansas and Red rivers to capacity. By February of 1927, most all area rivers were near flood stage.

Then, in March, heavy rains continued across the entire mid-Mississippi River drainage system. In April, torrential rains in Arkansas brought record floods to most streams, including the Ouachita River. The month's rainfall total of 11.87



High water east of the Ouachita River across from Arkadelphia.

was one of the heaviest one-month amounts ever recorded for Clark County.

With the heavy rains, came reports of overflows. A stage of 20 feet at Arkadelphia was predicted on April 14 as the Ouachita's tributaries grew "out of their banks." The Caddo River was expected to be over the Hot Springs highway by the morning of April 15, when the Ouachita stood at 21.7 feet. Travel to Malvern was blocked by several feet of water over the highway. The water continued to rise, and by noon, predictions of 22.5 to 23.2 feet would make this overflow a record.

According to the April 15 Siftings Herald, "Arkadelphia is practically marooned as far as auto travel is concerned. Wa-

ter backed up near the Arkadelphia Milling Company, and Mill Creek was "out of banks and spread across the road." Streams between Arkadelphia and Delight resulted in travel there as being "at a standstill."

Ultimately, the river rose to 22.8 feet before the waters began to recede. Reports of delayed agricultural activity and soil erosion were common. But just as it seemed conditions would improve, "A cloudburst in the Benton section last night (April 19) washed out half a mile of the roadbed of both the Missouri Pacific and Rock Island railroads." This interrupted rail service into Clark County, along with mail and telephone service, since telephone poles had been washed away as well.

By April 21, the Southern



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Standard observed that "the floods are the severest in the history of Arkansas. The Ouachita River at Arkadelphia has set a new record, and is still rising." The river reached 23 feet by that afternoon and continued to rise.

Arkadelphia Mayor W.H. Allison reported to Arkansas Governor J.E. Martineau that while no lives were lost in the flood in the area, there were 200 refugees, and damages amounted to \$50,000. Red Cross statistics reported 180,000 acres flooded in Clark County; 2,000 individuals affected by the waters; and fifty people cared for by the Red Cross during the emergency period.

While Clark County's damage from the flood of 1927 did not rival that of locations in

Arkansas's Delta region, the high water served as a reminder of how extreme weather conditions can result in disaster. Frequent flooding continued to plague parts of Clark County until the construction of three dams on the upper Ouachita River (Remmel, Carpenter, and Blakely) combined with DeGray Dam on the Caddo River to help alleviate the problem in the latter half of the twentieth century.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clark-countyhistory.org or 230.1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245.5332).