

Environment - Floods

1937

One year after a record flood of March 1936, another major flood struck Virginia on April 26, 1937. Heavy rains caused widespread flooding over all but southwest Virginia. The Rappahannock Basin was hit hardest. Falmouth and Fredericksburg saw its worst flood since 1889 when the river swelled to 30 feet above normal. Three bridge spans were lost, homes in low areas were partially submerged, and a score of gasoline storage tanks were swept away. The water level rose 39.1 feet above its normal level. This flood destroyed the steel Free Bridge. Its modern replacement is called the Chatham Bridge.

1942

The worst flood in Stafford history happened on October 15-16, 1942. 10 to 12 inches of rain fell an hour, causing the Rappahannock River to rise to an historic level of 44 feet above normal. Damages were more than \$2.5 million (in 1942 dollars). Over 1,300 people were left homeless in a 4 county area, and severe damages occurred to Virginia agricultural products, including millions of apples which dropped before they could be picked.



Downtown Falmouth



*Men punting on West Cambridge Street. Present-day Amy's Café in background.
Residents tried to save their belongings.*



Stafford County Historian, Marion Brooks Robinson said, “Everything up to Washington Street had water up to the second floor. Ernestine Payne Hart’s house actually came off the foundation and floated down the Rappahannock River until it hit the Chatham Bridge.”



Chatham Bridge



Falmouth Bridge – Gracie Berry's Home

“Both automobile bridges, Falmouth and Chatham, were torn up and were impassible. Aquia Creek Bridge (There was a bridge on Highway 1 by the present day Saint William

of York Church – going over Aquia Creek) had also washed away. Quantico Marines were wonderful. They put floating pontoons where the Aquia Creek Bridge went out and they would carry food and clothing and get truckers to haul it to Falmouth Church and Union Church. At the churches they distributed to people in need.”

Marion Brooks Robinson continues, “I was going to college at Mary Washington, so I had no clothes, only clothes I had on my back. I went through the generous offerings from the Marines and selected some much needed clothes. A month later I was able to get to school, because the State Highway Department put up a walking pontoon bridge over the Rappahannock River. Prior to that, the only way to get to Fredericksburg was over the railroad bridge.”

Speaking of bridges, Barbara Decatur, Stafford’s Clerk of the Court, says that her father-in-law recalled being paid to look after the bridges in northern Stafford. As a boy he would crawl on the Aquia Creek Bridge on Highway 1 and a bridge going into Quantico on Onville Road which passed over Aquia Creek too. He would check to make sure that the wooden slats were safe for travel.

Oral histories of many Fredericksburg citizens tell of the Fredericksburg flood of 1942. These histories and other information on file may be found in the Virginiana Room of the Central Rappahannock Regional Library.

1972

Hurricane Agnes blew in on June 21, 1972 and brought another flood to our area. The water level was 39.1 feet above normal. President Nixon declared Fredericksburg and Stafford a disaster area.

1996

Hurricane Fran (Sept. 6, 1996) was our fifth worst flood since 1889.

From: Waymarking.com