



Taylor flood of 1921 deadliest in Texas

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Written by Susan Komandosky Friday, 08 August 2008



With most of the Central Texas area experiencing extreme drought conditions, it is hard to imagine more than 20 inches of rain falling in a 24-hour period. That is what happened on Sept. 9-10, 1921, when Taylor received 23.11 inches of rain, a national single day rainfall record second only to Thrall's 38.21 inches.

Every railway entry to the city of Taylor was cut off. Some bridges were washed away, and others were too damaged to use, according to Ruth Mantor in her book, "Our Town: Taylor." Bull Branch Creek carried away five houses and put the Texas Power and Light substation out of operation. Another normally quiet stream, Mustang Creek, rose with such force that several steel rails of the International and Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) were curled around a large cottonwood tree.

Mantor, who was 14 years old at the time of the flood, is quoted by Linda Scarbrough in her book "Road, River, and Ol' Boy Politics" as saying, "It didn't sound like rain. It was a roar. It sounded like fire hoses turned on."

Even with all of the destruction caused by the small streams swollen to many times their usual size, the San Gabriel River was the biggest problem. Miles wide, it carried people, livestock, houses and everything else in its path downstream. Mantor reported that the county death toll was 92 (some sources say 93); 25 of those bodies were recovered near Taylor.

Among the bridges washed away was the Circleville Bridge on Hwy. 95. The contract for rebuilding it was given to Brown and Root, Inc. Engineers and Constructors, which was the predecessor of contractor KBR. (KBR, formerly Kellogg, Brown and Root, holds many contracts with the military in Iraq.) Taylor-area residents Herman Brown and his brother-in-law, Dan Root, founded Brown and Root. Rebuilding the bridge was one of their first contracts.

Media coverage of the event started immediately. Despite the flooding, The Taylor Daily Press still managed to print an edition of the paper on Sept. 10, and explained it was only able to do so because of the efforts of a Texas Power and Light employee, who hooked up a special power generator for the press run.

Coverage of the flood did not end with those 1921 stories. KXXV-TV, Channel 25 in Waco, recently included information about the 1921 Taylor flood in a story on flood safety. "On Sept. 9-10, 1921, South Central Texas saw a flood event that still holds the national 24-hour rainfall record ... Two hundred fifteen people drowned in Texas with 93 of those in Williamson County alone. This remains the deadliest flood in Texas history."

A 2001 U.S. Geological Survey report summary of the 1921 flood showed that 38.2 inches of rain fell in 24 hours in Thrall. Rainfall amounts were recorded at a U.S. Weather Bureau station at Thrall ending at 7 a.m. Sept. 10, 1921.

Death tolls:

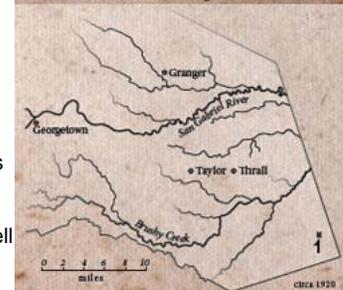
- Statewide - 215
- Taylor - 87
- Williamson County - 93



24-hour precipitation records		
United States		
Alvin, Texas	43.00"	July 25-26, 1979
Thrall, Texas*	38.21"	Sept. 9-10, 1921
West Indies		
Bowden Pen, Jamaica	41.06"	Jan. 22-23, 1960
Canada		
Ucuelet, British Columbia	19.26"	Oct. 6, 1967

*The 38.21 inches of rain that fell in Thrall during the 1921 flood still comes close to the record currently held by another Texas city.

Source: www.extremeweatherguide.com



The confluence of the San Gabriel River and Brushy Creek was 10 miles wide.

Komandosky is the chairman of the Moody Museum board, a 33-year Taylor resident and a retired journalism teacher.

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