

Historic Floods In the Southern Tier Central Region of New York

- 1784** – “Ice Flood” did much damage.
- 1786** – “The Pumpkin Flood” caused heavy property loss.
- 1794** – Waters of the Chemung River were 15-19 feet above normal.
- 1816** – The Chemung River flooded the lowlands at all points.
- 1817** – “Pumpkin Flood” washed hundreds of thousands of pumpkins down the rivers when water overflowed the banks and swept off all early produce.
- May 1833** – “The Great Inundation” caused heavy destruction in the Cohocton and Tioga Valleys. Although peak water levels were 12 inches lower than in the 1817 flood, it was much more disastrous. Water swept away cattle, sheep, swine, bridges, mills, dwellings, lumber, and factories.
- 1840** – Knoxville bridge over the Chemung River was carried away.
- 1846** – Knoxville bridge was washed away again.
- January 1857** – Severe rain and railroad obstruction caused flooding in Painted Post.
- June 1857** – Rains day and night caused great damage to Painted Post and surrounding areas. Fields, crops, farm animals, and many buildings were lost. Landslides washed out train tracks between Corning and Addison.
- July 2, 1857** – More landslides and washed out train tracks.
- November 10, 1857** – During the “Big Flood,” boats took people right from the lobby of the hotel at Painted Post to the mountains on the west side of the Tioga River. Much livestock and property were lost. Many people were hard put to survive until spring.
- March 24-25, 1859** – Monkey Run Creek in Corning overflowed resulting in vast damage to the village.
- October 1860** – There was another Pumpkin Flood with hundreds of thousands of pumpkins going down the Chemung River. The Cohocton, Tioga, Canisteo, and Chemung Valleys were swept with flooding waters, destroying property and crops. Monkey Run Creek flooded flat lands in every direction.
- September 27-28, 1861** – “The Tremendous Flood” washed away large stocks of lumber and over 1200 tons of coal. Homes had from one to six feet of water.
- May 14, 1864** – Many families moved to their second floors to escape the flood waters. Vast amounts of lumber were carried away.
- March 17, 1865** – Extensive rains and melting snow resulted in a new high water mark for the Chemung River. Heavy damage was experienced throughout the entire Chemung watershed, with very great loss in livestock, homes, property, and lumber. Three saw mills suffered heavy damage. “The Rebel Prison” was evacuated and barracks were washed away. Elmira lost two bridges. For nearly a week there was no news on the progress of the war.
- February 15, 1867** – A very sudden rise in the Chemung River formed an ice jam that took out a bridge.

April 18, 1870 – Monkey Run Creek rampaged, despite the prior building of Prichard’s Canal. Over \$40,000 worth of lumber was lost in Gang Mills. No train reached Corning for over three days. The Blossburg Railroad was out for over a week.

1872 – Flood of record for Keuka Lake, which rose to 720.7 feet (MSL) at Penn Yan.

January 3-4, 1886 – The Tioga, Cohocton and Chemung Rivers flooded all of Painted Post, Centerville, and most of Corning, with flood waters extending from hill to hill.

June 1, 1889 – The “Big Flood of 1889” was very destructive throughout the Tioga, Canisteo, Cohocton, and Chemung River valleys. The crest of this flood was 21 feet 2 inches above normal. Damage exceeded a million dollars. Houses were swept off of their foundations and lives were lost.

November 1889 – Another flood destroyed crops.

May 20-21, 1894 – Another flood damaged many crops. The Chemung River was 4 feet short of the high water mark of the Big Flood of 1889.

November 24, 1900 – Large sections of Corning were flooded by Monkey Run Creek. The Chemung River rose within 36 inches of the high water mark of 1889. The highway from Painted Post to Gang Mills was under 5 feet of water.

April 21, 1901 – Lowlands were flooded, but newly constructed dikes saved the City of Corning.¹

February 1902 – More flooding.

July 3-4, 1902 – Heavy property damage and nearly all the crops were destroyed.

August 29, 1903 – All river flatlands were again flooded by the Chemung River.

June 1916 – Flooding in Addison from the Canisteo River.

September 1916 – Monkey Run Creek was blamed for another destructive flood in the city of Corning.

March 13-14, 1918 – Chemung River and feeder streams flooded lowlands in every direction.

August 17, 1920 – Extensive damage in the Corning area. Centerville Bridge was washed away. The Chemung River was a foot below the bottom of the Bridge Street bridge.

July 7-8, 1935 – “Finger Lakes Flood” caused extensive damage throughout south central New York and northern Pennsylvania. More than forty deaths were recorded. Damages ran in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Refugee centers were everywhere. This was a severe storm and it developed very rapidly. An estimated 12 inches of rain fell in the upper Meads Creek watershed in 9 hours, flooding the valley from hill to hill. It is the flood of record (highest recorded on the existing gauges) for the Cohocton River at Campbell, Canacadea Creek near Hornell, and Canisteo River at Arkport. A wall of water washed through the Village of Watkins Glen when debris lodged on a railroad trestle and then broke loose. Mud filled the basement of the Schuyler County Courthouse to within 6 inches of the floor joists. A large area of the City of Hornell was underwater. The dikes in Corning were overtopped.²

¹ In 1892, when citizens of Corning sought financial assistance for the construction of dikes, state officials advised them to “drill some holes in the bottom of the river so the water could run out.” Construction of the levee system started in 1896.

² The dikes in Corning were raised two feet following the 1935 flood. Upon completion of this project an Army Corps of Engineers officer remarked that “nothing as bad as that can ever in any way happen to the City of Corning again.” But it did.

February 1939 – Ice jam flooding of the Canisteo River in Arkport.

May 28, 1946 – The Chemung River crested at an all time high, causing very heavy livestock and farm losses throughout the watershed. Many people lost all of their possessions. Corning Glass Works Factories were damaged. Water was 8 inches from the top of the dike system in Corning. Damages were in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

1956 – Flooding of Meads Creek.

March 5, 1964 - Spring melt caused high water in Mill Creek at Patchinville.

June 23, 1972 – During the Hurricane Agnes Flood, the Tioga, Canisteo, and Chemung Rivers all carried more water than they had ever carried before, resulting in complete chaos. Water rolled over dikes and flood walls; retaining walls were hurled out of the way. Many areas were demolished, bridges were lost, trailers floated down the rivers, and buildings disappeared. 30 feet of water covered the village of Painted Post. The force of the water was so great that the walls of buildings were literally hurled inward. Approximately 2% of the entire land area in the region was under water. Property damage in the three counties was about three quarters of a billion dollars. There were 23 fatalities in Steuben County.

September 22-28, 1975 – Hurricane Eloise caused another big river flood with over 700 buildings damaged and some destroyed.

January 27, 1976 – Ice jams in Gang Mills, Addison, and Chemung.

February 17, 1976 – Flooding in Big Flats; River Road closed in South Corning.

June 19-20, 1976 – “Fathers’ Day Flood” (caused by severe thunderstorms) resulted in \$6 million of damage in Chemung and Steuben Counties.

February 26, 1977 – Ice jams caused localized flooding in Bath, Cameron, and Rathbone, with water in streets and basements.

September 25, 1977 – 7.34 inches of rain caused flooding in Kanona, Bath, and Prattsburg, with flooded cellars throughout the region.

March 21, 1978 – Roads flooded in South Corning, Erwin, Cameron Mills, Big Flats, and Ashland.

August 11, 1978 – Flash flooding in northern Steuben County and Yates County washed out a road and a bridge.

January 24-25, 1979 – Ice jams in streams caused scattered road closings and washouts. Residents were evacuated near Meads Creek in the Town of Erwin.

March 4-6, 1979 – Roads closed due to flooding.

February 10, 1981 – Ice jam in the Town of Campbell.

February 19-24, 1981 – Ice jam in the Town of Campbell.

March 13-14, 1982 – Ice jams caused evacuations in Tuscarora, threatened Campbell, flooded yards and basements in Big Flats, and closed roads.

December 13-14, 1983 – Flooded basements; road closed at Lowman Crossing.

February 14-16, 1984 – Flooding in Big Flats; scattered road closings.

June 1984 – Severe thunderstorms caused flooding in western Steuben County.

- August 13-14, 1984** – Thunderstorms caused widespread and severe flooding in western Steuben County (also Allegany and Yates Counties), with 483 damaged structures, 62 people displaced, and 1 death.
- May 14, 1992** – Flash flooding in Hammondsport.
- March 1993** – Spring thaw caused road closings and widespread basement flooding; evacuations in Atlanta, Cohocton, Avoca, and Kanona.
- April 1993** – Rapid melting of the “blizzard of 1993” caused historic high water levels in Seneca Lake (448.95 feet msl), with high water lasting more than a week. Flooding in Schuyler County damaged 675 homes and affected 40 businesses. Other parts of the region also had localized flooding.
- February 1994** – Residential flooding from Bird Creek in Southport.
- August 18, 1994** – Heavy rain associated with Hurricane Beryl caused flash flooding in Chemung and southeastern Steuben Counties. Flooding in Ashland resulted in a hazardous material spill. A “wall of water” in Erin was attributed to failure of a beaver dam.
- November 1994** – Heavy rains cause flash flooding in southeast Steuben County.
- January 19, 1996** – Heavy rain and melting snow caused flooding in river valley communities not protected by dikes and along many streams. Hundreds of residents were evacuated from Wellsburg, Big Flats, Campbell, Erwin, Addison, and Kanona. Businesses flooded in Kanona, Erwin (Victory Highway), Big Flats (Consumer Square), and Wellsburg. Routes 17 and 415 were closed at Coopers Plains.
- June 1996** – Residents in Erin were evacuated due to fast-rising water diverted from the channel by beaver dams and a railroad embankment.
- November 8, 1996** – Flash flooding paralyzed many communities in Schuyler, Chemung, and eastern Steuben Counties and necessitated evacuations in Erwin and Campbell. Dozens of roads were washed out and traffic was backed up for miles due to flooding of Highway 17 (at Consumer Square and Coopers Plains) and alternate routes. Many urban problems were caused by autumn leaves clogging ditches and storm sewers. Stream banks eroded (up to 60 feet in Webb Mills), bridges and culverts washed out, and pipelines were exposed.
- December 1996** – Localized rainfall caused flooding in Southport.
- 1997** – Localized flooding washed out a private bridge in Southport. Homes and yards in Bath flooded when a berm along Stocking Creek failed.
- January 1998** – Scattered flooding due to winter rain.
- June 30, 1998** – The Chapel Park neighborhood (in Southport) was threatened when a flap gate on the Route 328 culvert stuck closed.
- July 1998** – Localized thunderstorms caused flash flooding of small streams and road washouts in northern Steuben and Chemung Counties.
- January 1999** – Heavy rain, melting snow, and ice jams caused minor flooding across the region. An ice jam diverted flow through a residential area near Wallace. Another ice jam occurred in Campbell.

- Summer 2000** – A series of severe storms caused over \$1 million in damage in Steuben County. In June, flash flooding of small streams flooded and eroded roads in southern Steuben County and caused basement flooding in Greenwood. July storms washed out roads in Pulteney and Dansville.
- June 27, 2002** – Severe thunderstorms caused flooding of roadways, shoulder damage, and accumulation of debris in the Canisteo, Howard, and Hornell areas.
- July 22, 2003** – Severe thunderstorms caused flash flooding in eastern Steuben County and southwestern Schuyler County, resulting in more than \$6 million in damage to roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. Two Schuyler county bridges were washed away. Both Interstate 86 and Route 415 were closed near Coopers Plains. A normally small stream in Rathbone blanketed an area with gravel so deep that it covered the hoods of cars and washed through first floor windows. More than 100 homes were damaged.
- August 9, 2003** – As much as 5 inches of rain fell in a few hours in Southport, Elmira, and parts of Steuben County. Homes, businesses, and roads were flooded.
- May 21-24, 2004** – A series of severe storms caused erosion and flood damage in western Steuben County, with \$2.5 million in damage to roads and infrastructure.
- August 30, 2004** – Tropical Storm Gaston stalled over the Steuben County, flooding areas previously damaged in July 2003 and May 2004. Two trailer parks and several residences were evacuated.
- September 9-10, 2004** – The remnants of Tropical Storm Francis caused historic high water levels on Tuscarora Creek, destroyed a bridge, washed out roads, and flooded homes. Infrastructure damage in Steuben County from the August 30 and September 9 floods was estimated at \$10 million, with 75 residents requesting disaster assistance. There was also minor flooding in Chemung County.
- September 18-19, 2004** – Tropical storm Ivan caused road closings and minor flooding.
- April 2-3, 2005** – High water closed roads in Big Flats and parts of Steuben County, but caused only minor damage.
- June 10, 2005** – An isolated, extremely intense downpour caused flooding in Orange, causing more than \$200,000 in damage to town and county roads, bridges, and culverts. Several houses were flooded and one moved off its foundation.
- November 30, 2005** – A steady deluge of rain caused widespread street and small creek flooding problems.
- June 1, 2006** – Two swimmers lost their lives above the flume in Hammondsport when runoff from an upstream thunderstorm washed down the gorge. The rainfall amount was only 1 ½ inches.
- June 2006** – Steuben County had flash flooding three days in a row.
- July 24, 2008** – 5 ½ - 6 inches of rain caused flooding in the Cohocton-Dansville area.
- September 28, 2008** – Heavy rainfall caused localized flood damage in Orange.

Sources: Most of the descriptions of events prior to and including the 1972 Hurricane Agnes flood are from Floods of the Chemung Watershed 1794-1972, "A Day to Remember," June 23, 1972, by Marvin W. Copp, 1975. Additional information is from newspaper accounts, US Geological Survey gauge records, and the stories people tell.