

## Staunton's Great Flood - September 29, 1896

On September 29, 1896 the Shenandoah Valley was hit by a significant flood event. According to hurricane data, this flood most likely occurred as a result of a tropical storm that was tracking through Virginia at the time. The rain which fell steadily all day, increased in volume through the evening, and culminated in torrential flooding that night.

For the City of Staunton, this was the worst flood in its history. Lewis Creek and its tributaries overflowed their banks devastating residential neighborhoods and the downtown business district. Houses, sheds, and stables were washed off their foundations and swept away, causing piles of debris to come crashing down streets. Six people died in Staunton as a result of the flood. Homes in the downtown residential area received four feet of water. Twenty-two businesses were heavily damaged or destroyed. Damages were estimated at over \$15 million dollars (2019 dollars).

Residents of Staunton compared the Flood of 1896 to the Great Flood of 1889 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The heavy, localized flooding was swift and its damage difficult for people to grasp. The Flood of 1896 would become the flood of record for the City of Staunton.

### Staunton Flood Events:

September 28 - 30, 1870 Tropical System

September 29, 1896 Tropical System

March 16 - 17, 1936

June 19, 1972 Hurricane Agnes

November 4, 1985 Hurricane Juan

June 22 - 28, 1995

September 6, 1996 Hurricane Fran

August 8, 2003



Staunton: 1896 Flood Damage

### Newspapers Reports About the Flood:

"Augusta Street from Frederick to the county jail became a Niagara. No woman could have lived in its torrent a moment...When the torrent struck against telephone poles, it leaped ten feet in the air. Central Avenue was likewise a cataract, and from the corner of the Crowle building to Thornburg's stable, it pitched with a force that was awful. Great abysses were dug by it in the street."

"... toward the arch bridge over the Middlebrook road, nothing but the broken roofs and sides of houses, lumber, machinery and smaller houses standing at all conceivable angles can be seen."

"M. Erskine Miller & Bro. had their coal yards cleaned out, all their shedding carried away, 1,500 tons of coal swept off, fifteen horses and mules drowned, a large amount of lumber, sash, doors, and other property gone."

"Up Lewis Street the water came about four feet deep in the floors of many of the residents, and their carpets, parlor, and dining room furniture are ruined with water and slime, many lost their canned fruit, and winter supplies of every character."

"Rhea was playing at the opera house and many persons had gone there and they did not realize the fury of the storm. Toward the last act one of the company announced that 'the village' was submerged, and this caused a rush for the door, but only for the audience to find that they had no chance of reaching home, as neither the Virginia Hotel nor the Eakleton could then be reached."

Sources:

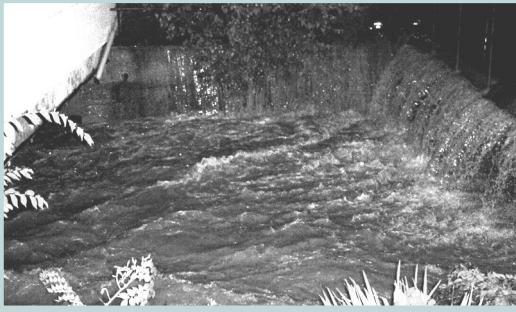
Staunton Spectator, September 30, 1896

Yosts Weekly, October 2, 1896

Rockingham Register, October 2, 1896

Unisys Tropical Cyclone Data

## Downtown Staunton's Flood - August 8, 2003

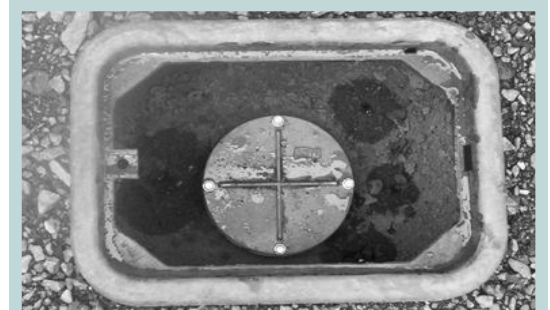


The Night Of The 2003 Flood

Staunton's most recent significant flood event occurred on August 8, 2003, after a thunderstorm cell stalled out over the downtown area, dropping between four to six inches of rain in an hour. This heavy rainfall caused structures downtown to fill with two to seven feet of water. Floodwaters receded within several hours leaving \$1.7 million dollars (2019 dollars) in damages to 55 businesses and up to 70 homes. Gypsy Hill Park and the Johnson Street Parking Garage also sustained damage. This severe flood event was not given a presidential disaster declaration because the flooding was so localized.

Because of a disaster declaration that occurred for the State of Virginia in September 2003 as a result of Hurricane Isabel, the City received grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Virginia Department of Management (VDEM) to implement a mitigation project in the downtown area. The City of Staunton contributed funding and in-kind resources to this project as well.

Through the City of Staunton Downtown Floodproofing Project, ten commercial properties implemented floodproofing measures in the Byers Street, Lewis Street, and Central Avenue areas of the commercial district. Installation of flood shields for window and door openings, retrofitting check valves on water and sewer lines, and raising applicable outdoor air conditioning units were measures implemented through this project. The construction phase of this project occurred from May to September 2009. Downtown Staunton is more resilient as a result of this floodproofing project.



Downtown Flood Mitigation Project