

# The 1927 Flood

As you read, look for:

- the impact of the 1927 flood on Louisiana, and
- vocabulary term **crevasse**.

New Year's Day 1927 was not a day for celebration. Heavy rains and melting winter snow had filled the Mississippi River with rushing water. On January 1, the river reached flood stage in Illinois. The raging water soon threatened the great river valley.

Breaks in the levees—called **crevasses**—sent water roaring out over the land. The water carried roofs of houses, dead cows, snake-filled tree branches, and almost anything else that blocked its path. Before the flood ended, more than 70 crevasses had sent flood waters over 16 million acres of land. More than 200 people were killed, and more than 700,000 were left homeless in the Mississippi River Valley.

**Below:** The Great 1927 Flood was the worst in the state's history. This locomotive is trying to get through the flood waters at Bayou Sara in West Feliciana Parish.



Armed guards patrolled the levee at places like St. Joseph in Tensas Parish. They were protecting the levee because some property owners tried to dynamite the levee below their property to save their own land from flooding. The flood waters would rush through any break in the levee, relieving the pressure on the land upriver.

After the levee broke at Cabin Teele (about ten miles east of Tallulah in northeast Louisiana), more than 6 million acres were flooded. A person could use a boat to travel from Vicksburg to Monroe, which lay more than 75 miles from the river.

The flood spread in Louisiana. Pointe Coupee Parish received floodwaters from both the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya Rivers. Other crevasses in the levees along Bayou des Glaises and the Atchafalaya River brought the flood to the Acadiana region.

## Relief Efforts

The flood forced more than 275,000 people from their homes in Louisiana. People crowded the levees and the few spots of high ground. They brought along their animals and a few of their most important possessions.

The Red Cross set up refugee camps for the people who were forced from their homes. The Red Cross funded the camps; local citizens provided volunteer labor and supervision. Volunteers came from other states to help. The

## Lagniappe

On Good Friday, April 15, 1927, fifteen inches of rain fell in New Orleans in eighteen hours.

## Map 38 The 1927 Flood

**Map Skill:** Name the Louisiana cities shown on the map that were flooded.





**Above:** These refugees of the flood waited anxiously for news of friends and relatives.

## Lagniappe

At a time when the federal budget barely exceeded \$3 billion, the flood caused an estimated \$1 billion in direct and indirect property damage.

refugees were fed, housed in tent cities, and given basic medical care. Some of the camps served up to 10,000 people. The camps were located in Iberia and Caldwell parishes, among other places. Boatloads of people and cattle were brought to Baton Rouge and moved to camps in the area.

To keep up the spirits of the people, the Tallulah Orchestra, a group of black musicians, played at the levee. At the Lafayette camp, Cajun fiddles tempted the refugees to dance for a while.

President Calvin Coolidge did not visit the flooded Mississippi Valley, instead sending Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. Hoover described the flood as “the greatest peacetime disaster in our history.” A *National Geographic* writer described his trip on a relief boat as it floated past the treetops in the floodwaters.

### Flood Waters Near New Orleans

New Orleans waited nervously as the water headed down the river. Would the levees hold? The city had been built below sea level on drained swamps. In 1913, a pump was designed to remove water from the low-lying areas. When more swamp land was drained, the city grew. A system of pumps and canals kept the city dry. If the pumps failed or the water came in too fast, the city would be under water.



City government and business leaders in New Orleans decided the city could be protected if the water was diverted. The parishes downriver would have to take the flood to save the city. Federal officials agreed to allow the levee to be dynamited below New Orleans. Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes were flooded, but New Orleans was saved.

### The Effects of the Flood

The flood of 1927 left that region of Louisiana in ruins; much more of the state was severely damaged. The federal government acted to protect the country from another flood like this. Millions of dollars were spent to build stronger levees. About twenty-eight miles of spillways above New Orleans were built to drain flood waters into Lake Pontchartrain.

**Above:** U.S. Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis (right) and Secretary of Commerce and future president Herbert Hoover (left) visited one of the tent camps in the devastated Mississippi Valley.

### Check for Understanding ✓

1. What happened when the levee broke?
2. What volunteer group came to help the flood refugees?
3. Why was the levee dynamited below New Orleans?