



IN TOMPKINS COUNTY



It has been incredible to see Traverse Tompkins grow for the third consecutive year! Our entire team of folks at The History Center – staff, board members, and hundreds of volunteers – are incredibly grateful for all the ways folks participated in exploring past and present floods in our home here in Upstate New York. I’m always impressed by the outpouring of support for The History Center in Tompkins County, which is the strongest testament that our preservation work matters.

Our 2022 Facing Floods theme was purposefully picked, and the topic could not have been timelier. This year, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released updated flood maps for Tompkins County, highlighting the expansion of at-risk neighborhoods. The expanding risk at a local level mirrors increasing threats across communities in the United States. Shortly after *Traverse Tompkins: Facing Floods*, Hurricane Ian caused massive flooding and damage across the southeastern United States. The message is clear – our communities can expect to face more frequent and more intense flooding events.

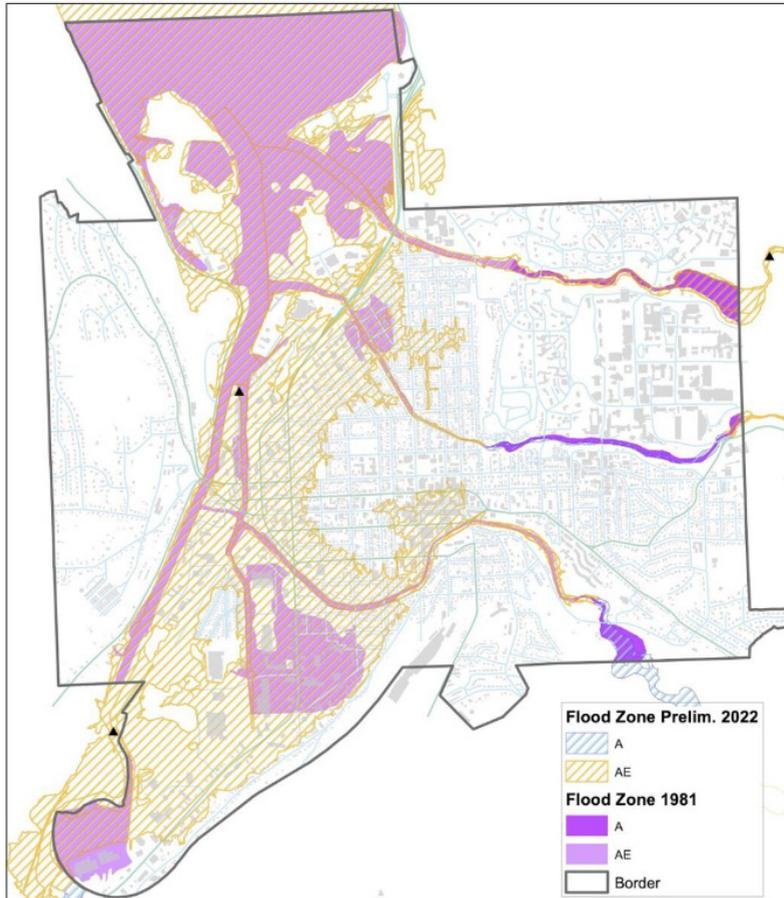
This historical look back at floods made SERVPRO of Broome, Tompkins, and Tioga a natural partner for *Traverse Tompkins: Facing Floods*. Their team works all over New York State to prepare and rebuild communities after disasters like major flooding events. Their community support was critical in making Traverse Tompkins a success this year, but more importantly, the work that they do in our communities will become more and more important as we face more intense weather impacts.

They often have to show up on people’s worst day, when catastrophes like floods and fires have destroyed people’s homes and neighborhoods. Beyond preparation and mitigation, community-focused businesses like SERVPRO of Broome, Tompkins, and Tioga Counties will be integral to our ongoing resilience to disastrous climate events. Thank you for all of your impact on The History Center in Tompkins County, and in our community.

As we faced floods this year, the look back at historic floods was a powerful example of the importance of local history. Although we must grapple with and prepare for future flooding events, we don’t have to do so blindly. Learning about how floods have impacted our communities in the past will equip us to make more informed decisions today to impact the shape of our future. Each past major flood offers an opportunity to learn what went wrong, and what we can do to prepare for the future. We can’t learn these past lessons if we don’t preserve relevant historical records. Materials like newspapers, public records, photographs, and physical objects tell an important story about our collective experiences, and offer a wealth of important information whenever we make decisions today. Your support – as a rider, as a citizen archivist, as a donor – for Traverse Tompkins invested in this preservation work. Thank you!

Wherever you call home, and whatever your passions are, there is a local history there. I hope you can find an opportunity to explore it – whether with us in Tompkins County, or with another repository working on preserving our shared past.

**2022 Preliminary FEMA Flood Zone Boundaries Comparison with 1981
Approximate Boundaries, City of Ithaca, NY**



While we were exploring the past, present, and future of floods, FEMA released the 2022 Preliminary FEMA Flood Zone Boundaries. The last time these boundaries were drawn was in 1981! The comparison map, prepared by the City of Ithaca Department of Planning in February 2022, juxtaposes the 1981 and 2022 flood zones. The expansion – represented by the yellow hatched areas – offer a stark message about the increased flood risks we face today in the City of Ithaca. It underscores the importance of preserving the experiences of past flooding events so that we might learn from them and implement plans for responding to future events. We preserve the history of our community so that today we can make more informed decisions about the future.



Tompkins County has suffered several major floods throughout its history. Situated in New York's Finger Lakes region, its many creeks and streams, (and Cayuga Lake itself), pose considerable threats during and after heavy rainfalls. In 1857, 1901, 1935, 1956, 1972, and 1981 the area was devastated by floods that destroyed property and threatened (and took) lives and livelihoods. In 1857 every bridge over Six Mile Creek in Ithaca was destroyed. In 1935 the small village of Trumansburg suffered five deaths and more than \$700,000 in damages, a horrific toll that required state and federal relief assistance and took months to recover from. These and other devastating flood sites from around Tompkins County are included on this tour.



Main Street, 1935 Flood

A torrential rainfall started on Sunday July 7th, 1935, and fell throughout the day and into the night. By 3:00 A.M. Monday morning Trumansburg Creek had swelled into terrifying proportions, and an angry wall of water 12 feet high roared through the village, smashing buildings into splinters, and carrying off five people to their deaths. Every single store on Main Street in the heart of the village was damaged, and five homes were completely destroyed. Two stores were washed away, with nothing left of them but the gaping holes made by their basements. One of them collapsed with a tenant who lived above it, and she was hurled to her death in the wreckage.

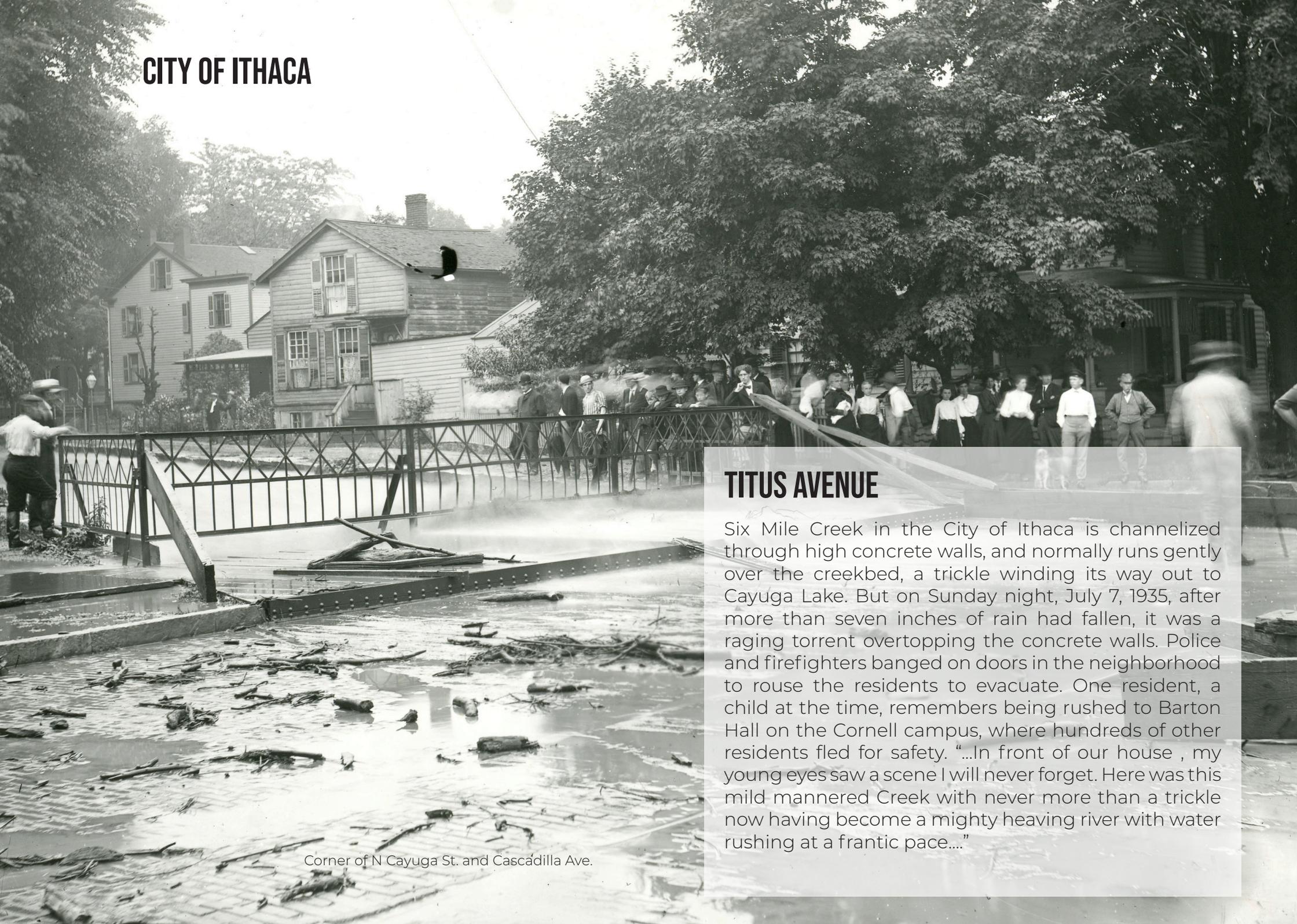
TRUMANSBURG



CAROLINE

In 1972 Hurricane Agnes became one of the most destructive hurricanes in US history, with 117 lives lost and more than \$3 billion in damages across 12 states. Some of the worst damage was in New York's Southern Tier, especially in Corning and Elmira. In Brooktondale the flooding was so severe that it broke through an old railroad grade above Middaugh Road and created a 60-foot deep chasm.

CITY OF ITHACA



TITUS AVENUE

Six Mile Creek in the City of Ithaca is channelized through high concrete walls, and normally runs gently over the creekbed, a trickle winding its way out to Cayuga Lake. But on Sunday night, July 7, 1935, after more than seven inches of rain had fallen, it was a raging torrent overtopping the concrete walls. Police and firefighters banged on doors in the neighborhood to rouse the residents to evacuate. One resident, a child at the time, remembers being rushed to Barton Hall on the Cornell campus, where hundreds of other residents fled for safety. "...In front of our house , my young eyes saw a scene I will never forget. Here was this mild mannered Creek with never more than a trickle now having become a mighty heaving river with water rushing at a frantic pace...."

Corner of N Cayuga St. and Cascádilla Ave.



Main Street, Village of Dryden

In December 1901 an unusual combination of rain, sleet and snow caused an unprecedented rise in local creeks and caused devastating flooding throughout the eastern part of the county. More than a quarter of a million dollars in damage was reported throughout the county, but thankfully no lives were lost. In Dryden a dam burst on Dryden Lake, sending roaring waters through Fall Creek and destroying bridges near the village. On the second day of flooding, in the Dryden Herald Office water was reported to be three feet deep.

DRYDEN



Damaged Bathhouse, Enfield Glen near Ithaca

ENFIELD

Enfield Glen State Park, now Robert H. Treman State Park, suffered extensive damage during horrific flooding in the heavy rains of July 1935. Beginning in 1933, young men from the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps program worked at the park, doing masonry work, planting trees, shrubs and grass, building roads, bridges, and water systems, and erecting park buildings. After the disastrous flooding in 1935, they were brought back to repair the damaged facilities that had only just been recently completed.

TOWN OF ITHACA

Hurricane Agnes in June 1972 was one of the most destructive hurricanes in US history, with more than \$3 billion in damages in 12 states and more than 100 dead. The greatest impact was felt in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, with New York's Southern Tier suffering the worst flooding. Over the four-to-five day rain event more than seven inches of rain fell in Tompkins County. Buttermilk Creek was one of the many local creeks that overflowed its banks, and three feet of water was recorded flowing past the entrance to Buttermilk Falls State Park.



Buttermilk Falls

GROTON



VILLAGE STREET

Owasco Inlet runs near the village of Groton, and during the devastating rains of July 1935 it overflowed its banks, flooding the village streets. Most of Main Street and Cayuga Street were under water, and people sometimes used a rope and pulley to safely move from inundated buildings to safety.



LANSING-MYERS

Salmon Creek runs westward through the hills of Lansing to Cayuga Lake, and beginning on the night of July 7th, 1935, after more than eight inches of heavy rain, it became a raging torrent that overflowed its banks. It destroyed a bridge with four people on it, sending them to their deaths. The force of the water was so strong that it moved a railroad bridge off its abutments and carried the railroad tracks almost 200 feet out of line with the bridge.

DANBY



Photo courtesy of NYS Parks

Jennings Pond was originally created in 1895 as a reservoir for the City of Ithaca's water supply, (although it was never used for that function), and has been used for recreational purposes for many years. In the 1930s the New York State Park Commission created an earthen and flashboard dam on the pond to control the flow of water into Buttermilk Creek. In 1987 state engineers were doing repair work on the dam and spring rains created pressure on it, causing it to collapse, "sending a wall of water 25 to 30 feet high coursing through Danby, causing property damage and near loss of life," according to *The Towns of Tompkins County*.

NEWFIELD

Hurricane Agnes was one of the largest June hurricanes on record, according to the National Weather Service. As it moved north from the Gulf of Mexico up to the Carolinas it combined with another weather system to bring very heavy rain for an extended period. Parts of the Southern Tier, such as Corning and Elmira were inundated, and while Tompkins County didn't suffer quite as badly, flooding was still severe. Newfield Depot Road had to be closed due to high water.



THANK YOU FOR ALL WHO SUPPORTED TRAVERSE TOMPKINS: FACING FLOODS



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