

Lancaster County Records Flash Flood Damage

MOUNT JOY — Too much rain or too little rain has been a persistent problem in Pennsylvania this year. The northwest sections of the state records record rainfall while the southeast suffers a record drought.

Rainfall in inadequate proportions was magnified last Saturday in Lancaster County where the northern portion was hit with flash floods that were more severe than those that Hurricane Agnes deposited on the area. Up to eight inches of rain fell in the county according to the weather station at WGAL television station, Lancaster.

John Yocum at Penn State's Research Lab in Landisville reported over five inches fell at his post. The normal rainfall for July is 23.67 inches. With Saturday's storm, 26.5 inches of rain have fallen in July this year, Yocum said. Normal rainfall for July stands at 4.04 inches, with the weekend rain, 9.06 inches have fallen this July, he added.

While crop damage was limited at the Landisville lab, high winds, ranging up to 50 mph at the Lancaster Airport, hail and flooding caused some crop damage throughout the county, especially in low lying areas.

The farms of Mel Metzler and Harry Hershey suffered the most storm damage. Metzler, East Petersburg, lost 125 pigs when lightning ignited his two-story barn.

Harry and Joan Hershey, Mount Joy, lost their entire flock when flood waters collapsed their laying house.

Both farms were victims of a storm that dropped eight inches and lasted from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Saturday. Harry Hershey explained that it was a very heavy electrical storm that didn't go away. At approximately 10 p.m. Saturday a siren, which goes off when something is wrong in the laying house, began sounding the alarm. Harry went out to investigate and check on the generator.

While he was in the egg room, the laying house collapsed. Rain water had risen over the 40 inch wall that the tri-deck, high-rise house set on. Without warning, the pressure of the water collapsed the foundation and the entire 44-by-500 building caved in. "It was a nightmare, I saw my whole life swept away in a matter of minutes," Hershey said.

The water rose swiftly which prevented any preparation. Joan Hershey explained that the flood came with such a force and volume in a concentrated area that preventative measures would have been difficult. A waterway did surround the building, but the volume of water was too much for it to handle.

This was the first time the area has ever flooded. There are no streams in the near vicinity and the ground surrounding the farm is relatively flat.

Following the collapse decisions had to be made promptly. By 4:30 a.m. Sunday morning crews to haul surviving chickens away were contacted as well as a crane operator to aid in removal of the roof trusses to get to the surviving birds.

Approximately one-third of the 54,000 birds that were in the house at the time of the cave in drowned. The first order of business on Sunday morning was to get out as many live birds as possible. To get to the birds the roof and then the roof trusses had to be removed.

The birds that survived the ordeal were sent off to be processed, tallying a total flock loss for the Hersheys.

The Hersheys only contacted family members about the disaster, however, over 150 friends, relative, church people,

and fellow farmers showed up to help with the clean-up on Sunday. "It was a overwhelming, tremendous response," Joan said. "They were concerned people who wanted to help. Word-of-mouth started the process," she added.

Presently their main concern is clean-up. They are looking at many options and are leaning in the direction of rebuilding.

The storm which caused a large amount of damage throughout the county was termed worse than Hurricane Agnes because of the swiftness that the water level rose near marks set by Agnes in 1972. Saturday's storm was not coupled

by any hurricanes, it was not uncommon either. According to Paul Knight, Penn State meteorologist, approximately six storms such as last Saturday's occur per year.

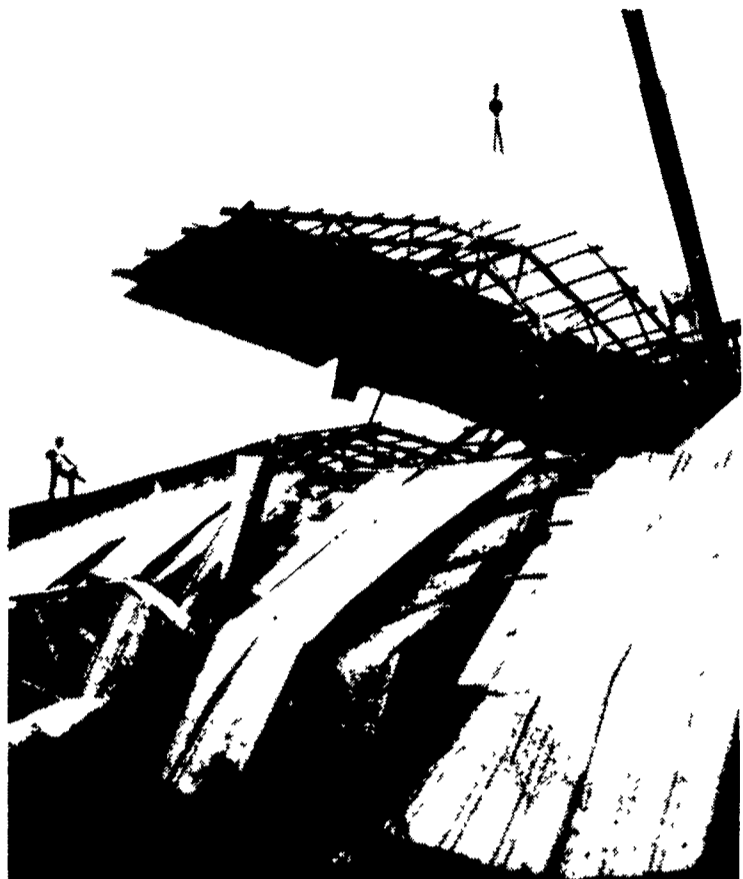
What happens during these storms is a slowing or stopping of strong upper level winds that normally push a thunderstorm along. The thunderstorm which normally dumps its rainload along a 20 to 30 mile route, rains the entire amount on one locality, Knight explains.

Last weekend that locality happened to be Lancaster County. He added that no area of Penn-

sylvania is prone to these storms, however, thunderstorms without strong upper level winds are common in the deep south. A similar storm deposited three inches on the parched Georgia soil earlier this week. No rain of any substantial amount is predicted for early next week.



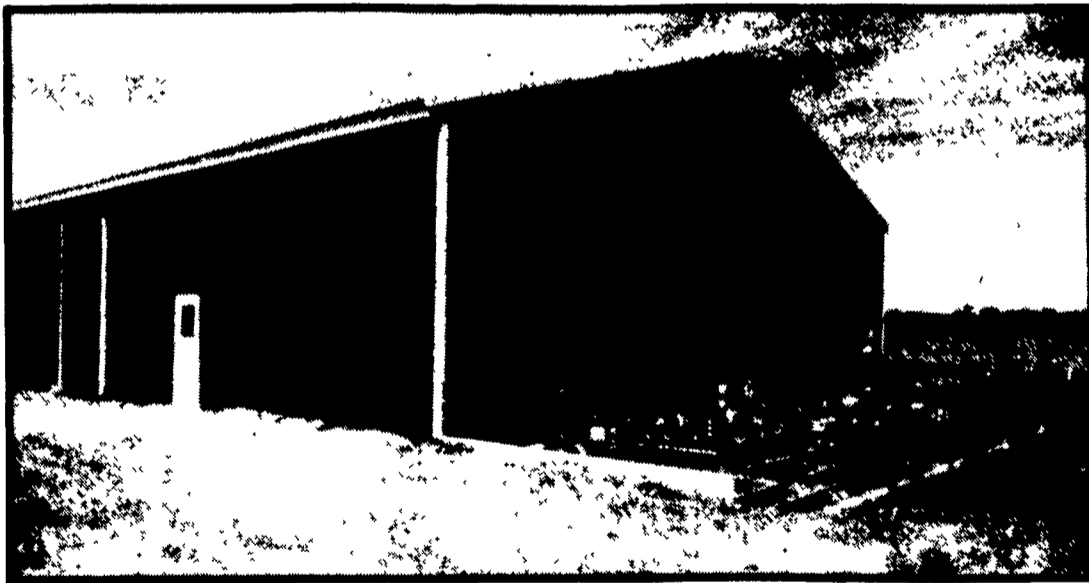
Flood waters collapsed the foundation of the high-rise laying house owned by Harry and Joan Hershey. The roof of the 44-by-500 house was removed to get to surviving birds.



A crane was brought in to safely and quickly remove roof trusses. Following the removal of the trusses live birds were evacuated from the flattened laying house.

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