

“Lake Erie Fury”

Northeast Ohio Snowbelt

Trivia: *East of Cleveland to Northwest Pennsylvania*

Lake County Snow average - 67.7” (U.S. average - 27.8”)

Average temperature in Lake County

Below 0°F. - 1.25 days

Below 32°F. - 20-32 days

Measurable Snow in Lake County - 10-12 days annually

On ground - 20 days

Fast Facts - *Chardon averages 107” per year. All time high was 161.5” in 1959-60. One day record 60” fell in Hamden Township in Nov. 1996.*

Jan. 17, 2022 storm - 25” for portions of Lake County



It seems that Lake County’s greatest resource is also responsible for some of our winters’ worst storm disasters. Heavy snowfall in Northeastern Ohio is uncommon in early November, though mid- October exceptions have occurred. Lake Effect Storms are usually the main reason for these early seasonal blasts. Lake Erie surface temperature may be in the 50°-60° F. range, while inland surface temperatures fall well below freezing. The cold Canadian air and points northwest are moisture starved. The heat and water vapor mix, and the wild temperature contrasts produce turbulence resulting in clouds and varying precipitation. Damaging winds with wet, heavy snow are not uncommon. In fact, snowcap accumulation on car roofs or in

truck beds are worn with some pride by many Lake County snowbelt dwellers.

Today we share **three of the most notable winter snowstorms.**

The Big Storm of 1913

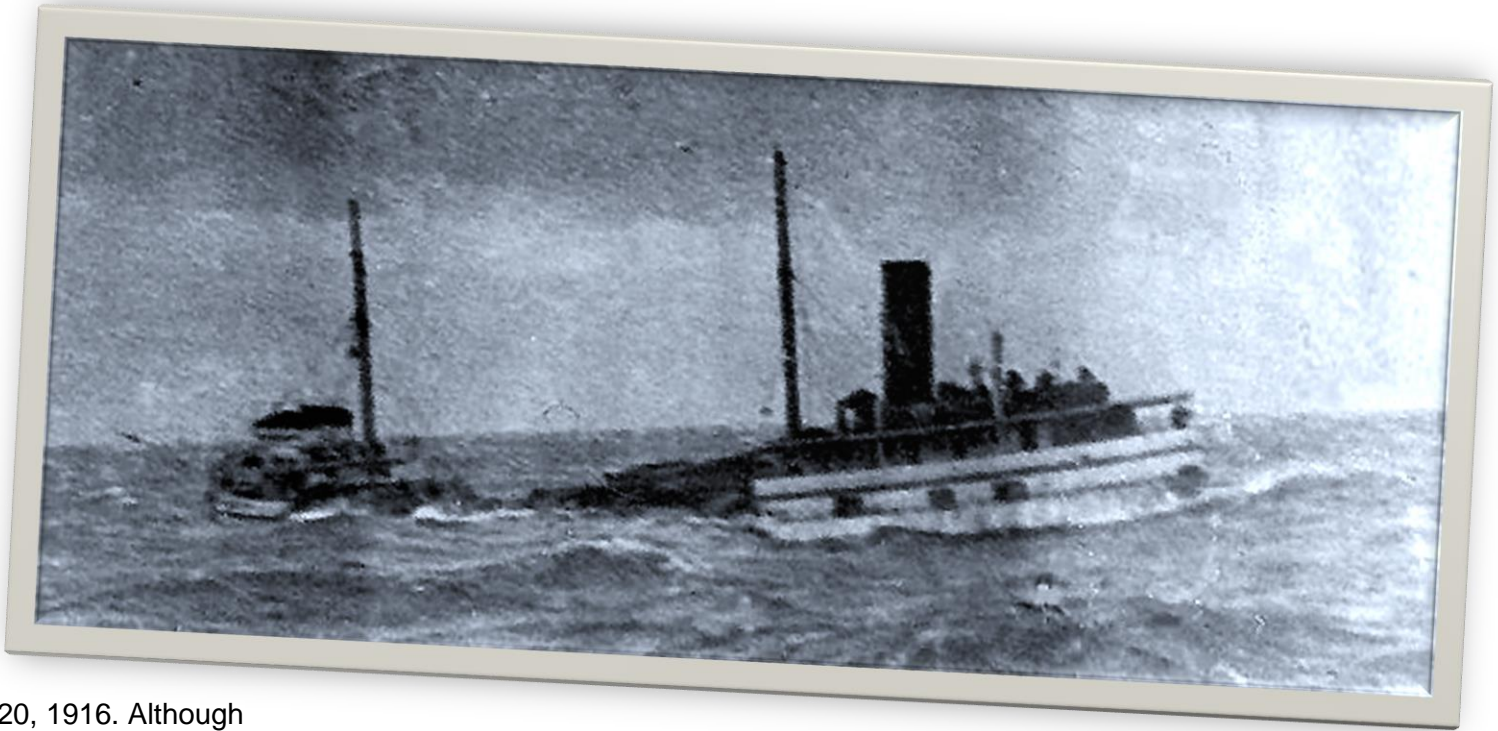
The Great Lakes Storm of 1913 was a blizzard with hurricane-force winds that devastated the Great Lakes Basin in the Midwestern United States and Southwestern Ontario, Canada, from November 7-10, 1913. A pre-storm hit Lake Superior and Lake Michigan on November 7th. After these November gales, the “White Hurricane” followed. Winds gusted to 90 mph while lake waves crested at 35 feet. After four days, at least 12 ships were lost while many others were stranded or smashed on rocky shorelines. 250 lives were lost, 187 lost in just a four-hour window. This Big Storm resulted in \$5 million in damages. This memorable event was a precursor of



another to follow in 1975. You may recall those “Gales of November” and the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. Aboard the ill-fated ore carrier was Fairport Harbor native Edward F. Bindon (1928-1975).

The Great Lake Storm of 1916

The deadliest winds known on Lake Erie took the lives of 58 sailors on four vessels on Friday evening, October



20, 1916. Although no longer a hurricane, it remained a very strong low pressure storm center and gave several hours of winds of 60 to 75 mph over Lake Erie. This Black Friday Storm resulted in the loss of four ships and 58 sailors. Most ironic about this famous storm was the fact that two captains came ashore as the sole survivors. *James Colgate*, a whaleback freighter was lost but *Cleveland* and ship's Captain Walter Grshaw survived. The *DI Filer's* crew found refuge in the ship's mast, but when rescuers finally arrived on the scene, only Captain John Mattison remained. On the third ship, the entire crew of the steamer *Merida* was lost. Steamer *Marshall Butters*, the fourth ship lost that night, sank but luckily all 13 crew members were rescued.



The Veteran's Day Storm of 1996

November 9-14, 1996 may be the most severe early season lake effect storm the Great Lakes has witnessed in the past 50 years. This storm produced isolated snowfall tallies approaching 70". Nearby Geauga neighbor Chardon led the way with 68.9", while Lake County neighbor Thompson Township tallied 60.8". Kirtland was on the low end with 28.3", while parts of Mentor-Concord pushed 40". 160,000 customers lost power for days. To this fact I can attest as

I was without power for over 3 days. Lake County was also particularly hard hit with tree damage as the falling snow was perhaps the wettest/heaviest found in the storm front. Personal experience was the loss of many trees in my yard. At the height of the storm, trees everywhere snapped due to the alarming weight on their branches. The snowbelt communities downwind of this storm were ravaged, while many communities elsewhere went unscathed.



The Coast Guard Station at Fairport (at the mouth of the Grand River) plays an active role year-round by conducting services in search and rescue, maritime safety and security, environmental protection, maritime law enforcement, Homeland Security, aids to navigation, ice rescue and icebreaking in Lake Erie (as seen in the photo above). The Station patrols from the Chagrin River, just outside of Cleveland, to Geneva, to the international border with Canada. The original station building was constructed in 1925.

Another tradition used to occur at the mouth of the **Chagrin River in Eastlake** each winter-into-spring. As temperatures rose, ice would begin to thaw along the 80-mile river, flowing downstream in great chunks and collecting near the mouth north of Lake Shore Boulevard. It blocked the flow of water and caused flooding in low-lying neighborhoods nearby. A special team of experts would attack the problem with dynamite, costing the community thousands of dollars each season. There was risk to life and limb and damaged





some property. About 20 years ago, dredging alleviated the most serious jams so that the explosives were no longer necessary

One would be remiss to not mention the **Blizzard of 1978** called by some as “The Storm of the Century.” From January 19-21, subarctic cold engulfed Northeast Ohio in its icy grips. More than 21” of snow blanketed the land. Drifts doubled or tripled the depth of the snowfall averages. Fifty deaths and over \$100 million in damages were tragic reminders of nature’s fury.

Lake Erie, the shallowest of the Great Lakes, is Lake County’s greatest resource. It is the source of much of our history and commerce and also the catalyst to some of our darkest winter weather-related moments. The hearty longtime residents take most of it in stride. Its sometimes-horrible beauty affects all things great and small, but with the change of seasons, our Lake Erie love affair continues.

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