

The Mudcat

The Mississippi History Newsletter for Students

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The Great Flood of 1927

The Mississippi River is a natural wonder that stretches nearly 2,500 miles from its origin at Lake Itasca in Minnesota, through ten states, and into the Gulf of Mexico. Called the “Father of Waters” or the “Mighty Miss,” the river offers more than just a convenient mode of transportation. The river also provides fertile soil along its banks and recreation areas for tourists, and has inspired a wealth of literature, music, and films.

The Mississippi River has also caused great destruction. At 7:45 a.m. on April 21, 1927, a **levee** broke at Mound Landing, near Scott

north of Greenville. The river rushed through the **breach**, flooding not only the Delta, but also over 2.7 million acres of land, much of which was used for farming. The lives of 246 people were lost as were crops, farm animals, and homes.

This disaster caused the U.S. Congress to take action to ensure that something similar did not happen again. The following May Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1928. This charged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with repairing, building, and managing protective **dams** and levees along the Mississippi River. Today the



USACE continues civil works programs including flood risk management, environmental protection, recreation, and emergency response.

People, horses, cattle, and wagons take refuge on the railroad tracks at the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad Station, Egremont, Mississippi, May 2, 1927. 1927 Flood Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



The Pascagoula River. Image courtesy of the Pascagoula River Audubon Center.

The Protected Pascagoula

The Pascagoula River is part of Mississippi’s second largest river basin. It is also the last **unregulated** river system in the lower United States. This means that nothing stops the natural flow of the river, such as a dam. In total, the Pascagoula River

Basin drains about 9,600 square miles. That area stretches from Simpson and Jefferson Davis counties in the west to Kemper and Neshoba counties in the north and Alabama in the east all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. The river basin is heavily forested

with lower-lying flatlands near the Gulf Coast and 50,000 acres of protected lands along the river. These areas provide sanctuary for 17 **endangered** or threatened species and over 300 types of birds.

Mississippi's Man-Made River

In the late 1700s a French explorer first suggested connecting the Tennessee and Tombigbee Rivers. The result would have been a shortened distance to New Orleans and other Gulf of Mexico ports of trade. Not until 1972 did construction begin on what would become the largest earth moving project in history, removing as much soil as the Suez and Panama Canal projects combined. When completed in 1985, the Tenn-Tom stretched 234

miles and connected not only the Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers but also additional waterways, highways, airports, and railways throughout northeast Mississippi and western Alabama. The Tenn-Tom has proven important for the local economy by providing jobs on and alongside the waterway. It allows for the easier, faster, and safer transport of **trade goods** en-route to other countries, boosting our national economy.

The Tenn-Tom was also the first large water resource project built after the institution of the National Environmental Policy Act, meaning the natural beauty and wildlife along the route were safeguarded during and after construction. Today the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway attracts tourists and vacationers to its campgrounds, picnic sites, and environmental centers.

Button commemorating the opening of the Tenn-Tom. Museum Division, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



Rollin' Down the River



A variety of river craft has been used over the years to transport people and goods up and down the Mississippi River. **Flatboats** were large raft-like boats with flat bottoms and square ends that were steered with long oars. Because flatboats traveled with the current they could only be used when going downstream (south). When a boatman had reached his destination he sold his freight, dismantled his boat to sell the lum-

View on the Upper Reaches of Some Midwestern American River. WPA Subject File (top). River Boat Belle of the Bends, Vicksburg, Mississippi. Cooper Postcard Collection (bottom). Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

ber, and returned north on foot or horseback. **Steamboats** came into popularity in the early 1800s. They were a faster means of transportation prior to the development of the railroad. Author Mark Twain worked as a steamboat pilot in the 1850s. He wrote about his experience in *Life on the Mississippi*, published in 1883. Both of these river craft are still in use today. Flatboats or barges, used to transport trade items, and steamboats (also known as riverboats or paddle steamers) are used in the tourism industry.

Investigate More

Visit sites and museums across the state to learn more about Mississippi's rivers!

Tunica Riverpark and Museum

Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, the Tunica Riverpark offers a museum with exhibits on Mississippi history, a giant animated map showing the geology of the state, and four aquariums filled with lowland and aquatic life. A 1.9 mile nature trail winds through a wetlands forest. Plus, explore the upper Mississippi River on the Tunica Queen, a riverboat offering cruises highlighting local points of interest. Plan your visit at <http://temp.tunicariverpark.com/>

The Tunica Queen docked at the Riverpark Museum (below); kids enjoying one of the four aquariums inside the Museum (right). Images courtesy of the Tunica Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB) www.tunicatravel.com



Lower Mississippi River Museum, Vicksburg

Visit and discover the benefits and risks of living on the banks of the Mississippi River and how communities have used or been affected by it. Understand how the river has been used as a highway, decide how to protect the Mississippi River Valley from flooding, and interact with an outdoor scale model of the river. Then, board the *Mississippi IV* and explore the state rooms to the engine room. Take a pilot's test, practice your navigation skills through locks and at docks, send messages using Morse Code, and develop a menu for the ship's guests. See what else you can investigate at <http://www.lmrn.org/>



Kids and parents experiment with indoor and outdoor models of river floods (left and center); the *Mississippi IV* located outside the Vicksburg Museum.

Audubon Centers

The mission of the National Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems with a focus on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Two Audubon sanctuaries and education centers are located in the state of Mississippi.



Pascagoula River Audubon Center, Moss Point. Image courtesy of Pascagoula River Audubon Center.

At the Strawberry Plains Center in Holly Springs, you can visit observation rooms overlooking the Center's hummingbird and butterfly garden and explore forests and grasslands within 15 miles of trails. Or catch a program on topics ranging from grass and tree identification to deer management and bird behavior.

The Pascagoula River Audubon Center in Moss Point offers swamp and marsh tours to learn about wetland conservation and storm water management. Volunteer to be a Citizen Scientist and help monitor coastal birds and their habitats.

Learn more about each of these sanctuary centers at <http://strawberryplains.audubon.org/> and <http://pascagoula.audubon.org/>.

Show What You Know!

Vocabulary

Breach: break or rupture.

Conservation: to preserve and protect natural resources and wildlife.

Dam: a barrier built across a stream or river to obstruct the flow of water.

Ecosystem: a system formed when organisms interact with each other and their environment.

Endangered: in danger of becoming extinct or, of dying out.

Flatboat: a large, flat-bottomed boat used in shallow water.

Habitat: the natural environment of an organism.

Levee: an embankment designed to prevent the flooding of a river.

River basin: an area of land drained by a river and its branches.

The Singing River:

Nickname for the Pascagoula River. According to legend, the Pascagoula Indian tribe joined hands and walked into the river singing rather than go to war with a neighboring tribe. Today people still claim to hear mysterious music coming from the waters on quiet evenings.

Steamboat: a steam-driven vessel.

Trade goods: supplies or services willingly exchanged.

Unregulated: not controlled by method or rule.

Watershed: a region or area drained by a river or stream.

Wetland: land with wet, spongy soil such as a marsh, swamp, or bog.

Draw a River Habitat!

Be sure to include plants, animals, and of course, water!

Create a Catfish Competition

How would you like to see a catfish of your own creation on the cover of the *Mudcat*? If you're an artist – or even if you're not! – craft a cool catfish graphic, send it in to the *Mudcat*, and YOUR catfish could win a coveted spot on the cover of the next issue! Send all entries via mail or email to:

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Congratulations to Matthew G. of Southaven for creating this issue's winning *Mudcat*!

Mix and Match

Match the words that have similar meanings.

Dam	Marsh
Steamboat	Environment
Wetland	Barge
Flatboat	Levee
Habitat	River basin
Watershed	Paddle steamer