As rain fell all day Tuesday and waters rose, many became trapped in downtown buildings and the homes of the city’s residential areas. Although water crested late Tuesday evening, explosions and subsequent fires followed on Wednesday. Refugees found themselves moving from rooftop to rooftop to escape. Some sought dry ground by dangerously walking telephone, telegraph and electric wires to safety.

The NCR headquarters, located on a hill overlooking the city, was one such destination. NCR, per John Patterson’s orders, became a place of refuge for thousands of flood victims.

Thursday morning the Ohio National Guard and NCR employees were out in boats coordinating rescue efforts and saving those still trapped by the flood. At this time waters began receding almost as fast as they rose.

By Friday, Dayton was the biggest news story in the country. Patterson, Deeds, and others formed the Dayton Citizens Relief Committee to aid relief efforts. Amazingly, within two months of the flood, most clean-up work was complete and focus shifted from relief to prevention.

A fund-drive was initiated for the citizens of Dayton to function as a down-payment on a future flood protection project. After only ten days, the fund had pledges for more than two million dollars, enough to finance surveys, plans, and construction contracts for a flood control system.

Noted Civil Engineer Arthur E. Morgan was hired to prepare a flood prevention plan. He proposed straightening river channels, raising the height of levees, and creating a system of dams and reservoirs throughout the Miami Valley.

With the support of fellow Daytonian and Dayton Daily News owner Governor James M. Cox, the Vonderheide Act, or what became known as the Ohio Conservancy Law, passed in 1914. The act allowed local governments broad powers in defining land to be used for flood control, the right to raise taxes to fund these projects, and eminent domain to appropriate land for flood control. Soon after the act was signed into law, the Miami Conservancy District was created with Morgan its first president.

Today the Conservancy District still maintains the Miami Valley dams and reservoirs, and watches its rivers. And the organization continues to succeed in its mission. Heavy rains have come and gone, but never again has a flood damaged the region like the Great Dayton Flood of 1913.

This brochure contains some text and images not used in the exhibit.
The Wright brothers, after years of legal battles and trips throughout the U.S. and abroad, returned to Dayton as heroes in 1909. In May of 1912, Wilbur Wright passed away and Orville settled into a life of semi-retirement. Their boyhood home and Orville’s laboratory were both severely damaged by the flood.

Charles F. Kettering, inventor of the electric starter for automobiles, revolutionized man’s relationship to the auto. With Edward Deeds, he owned Delco and later went on to become a Vice-President for General Motors.

Jane Reece was a highly acclaimed Dayton pictorial photographer of the early 20th century. She was recognized internationally in the art photography movement of the early 20th century.

Daytiant Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of the first African-American poets to garner critical acclaim on a national level.

One of Dayton’s greatest blessings, however, was also its greatest curse. Located at the convergence of four large bodies of water - the Great Miami River to the north, the Stillwater River to the northwest, the Mad River to the northeast, and Wolf Creek due west of the city - Dayton was well situated to use these waterways as a source of transportation, industry and recreation. Each spring, however, the rivers were prone to flooding and had done so many times throughout the city’s 100-year history.

Most Daytonians looked at the flooding as a seasonal inconvenience and few thought seriously about flood control — that is until the spring of 1913.

After an Easter weekend of sporadic rain and vicious weather elsewhere throughout the Midwest, the downpour began in Dayton at approximately 5:00 am Monday, March 24, 1913.

Two days earlier the Great Miami River in the city was at two feet deep. By 7:00 am Monday morning, it was at seven feet and soon rose by approximately one foot per hour for the next day.

As the Great Miami reached flood stage at 18 feet during the early morning hours of Tuesday, March 25, many Daytonians slept unaware of the dangerous rising waters.

Awaking to the warning sounds of church bells, many found that by Tuesday morning, notice had come too late, especially in the low-lying regions around the river levees and other areas.

By 6:30 am North Dayton was flooded, and at 7:00 am the earthen levee near the Main Street Bridge broke. Water poured into downtown streets.

Aware early of the situation’s severity, John H. Patterson, owner of NCR, closed his business and set the entire company to relief efforts, baking bread, procuring food and medicine, and building flat-bottomed boats. Without these labors, the coming destruction would have been much worse.