

1964 flood

The current exhibit at the Clarke Museum is Humboldt County Remembers the 1960s. While many aspects of this decade are examined, today we're going to talk about the 1964 Christmas Flood, with the following information from excellent book The 1964 Flood of Humboldt and Del Norte by Greg Rumney and Dave Stockton.

The 1964 flood was one of those perfect storms. All the weather events lined up in a sequence that maximized the runoff of rivers and streams over five states. Northern California and Southern Oregon were the hardest hit and were directly in the path of the brunt of the storms. There were three main components to this perfect storm, which focused on the Eel River and its tributaries and along the Klamath River drainage.

The first part of the storm began around December 13, 1964, with a cold front from the north moving in and dropping a few feet of snow. After this storm was spent, a warm storm from the south, locally called the "pineapple connection," moved in and dropped 22-37 inches of rain in three days. The volume was so intense that drivers who turned their windshield wipers on high speed still could not keep the water off long enough to see. As if this were not enough, the third component of this perfect storm was the highest tide of the year that came during the peak hours of the flood crest. This caused a damming effect on some of the bridges that raised water levels to record highs.