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The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

Hot, Cold, Wet or Dry:

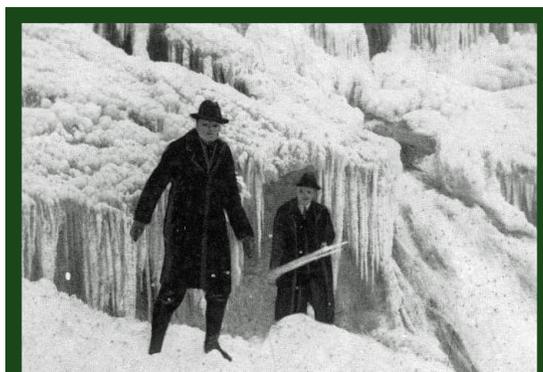
Weather Makes

Everyone is interested in the weather to some extent, farmers and gardeners more than most to be sure. It is also safe to say that not everyone is interested in statistics. Official weather records have been kept in Rabun since 1893, and they certainly offer a bonanza of statistical data. This overview will offer some of the most interesting facts in Rabun's weather history.

Is our climate becoming more dry?

Precipitation in Rabun varies widely from year to year and has done so for more than a century. The five wettest years were 1929, 1964, 1973 at over 93 inches, 1975 at 94 inches, and the all-time record of 103.5 inches of precipitation in 1979.

Keep in mind that the "official" record may vary greatly from other records. For example in 1973, the official precipitation record was 93 inches, but a record keeper in Warwoman reported more than 108 inches. That same year, an



Estatoah Falls near Sky Valley, completely frozen over in January, 1928.

observer in Wolffork recorded 116 inches or almost ten feet of rainfall!

The record dry year of 2016 that resulted in massive wildfires was officially 36.8 inches. Only 74 days that year recorded any precipitation whatsoever.

Records show several years with annual rain/snow in the low fifties, with the recent past showing only 46 inches in 1988, but nothing approaches the record dryness of last year.

Average annual precipitation in Rabun in recent decades has ranged from the low seventy-inches from the 1960s through the 1990s to 73.6 inches by 2010. In other words, although we certainly experience drought years, our average precipitation

seems not to have altered significantly over the past sixty years. Rabun is on average the wettest location in Georgia and one of the top twelve wet locations in the continental United States.

What are Rabun's record hot and cold temperatures?

Rabun's average hottest day of the year is July 19, and the coldest is January 11. The average temperature (highs and lows averaged) on July 19 has been 76 degrees since 1941. The hottest official temperature recorded is 98 degrees, but the Clayton Tribune reported unofficial highs of 102 degrees in 1930 and 100 degrees in 1931.

In the seventy years between 1941 and 2011, the coolest year on average was 1950. February of 2010 was the coldest month since 1941, and the average temperature that month was just over 34 degrees. January is Rabun's coldest month on average, but since 1990, there have been no temperatures in January at or below zero officially. It did reach zero in January of 1985. In November of 1950, it reached zero, a record for November. In

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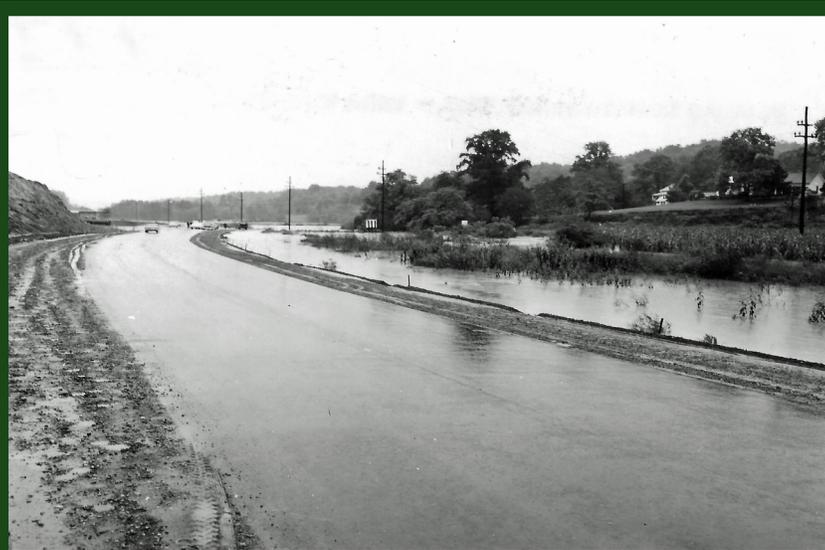
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January of 1924, a low of six below zero was reported.

Is snow less frequent?

Snow has been reported in Rabun as early in the season as October 20 in 1913. In 1927, weather observer W.F. Holden reported fifteen inches of snow in twenty-four hours in Clayton. In January of 1940, the Tallulah Falls Railroad trains “did not even attempt to run and that is a record breaker” with snow twelve to fifteen inches deep. Of course, the “Great Blizzard” of March, 1993 probably broke all snow records in Rabun, with two feet of wind-blown snow in many locations and temperatures dipping to zero. On the other hand, there were many years with little or no snow, for example one inch in 1928 and four inches total in 1932. It seems that, like Rabun’s rainfall records, snowfall over the last century has varied widely. Although recent winters have seen little snow, there can be no prediction that this is a trend for our future winters.

What is Rabun’s most common



Looking south on the “new” highway near today’s McDonald’s. Stekoa Creek flooding in October, 1964.



Main Street in Clayton, March, 1960. A series of snow and ice storms kept schools closed for weeks.

extreme weather?

Flooding is by far the most common weather disaster, with significant damage in 1949, 1964, 1976, 1998 and 2004. In 1949, three steel bridges across the Tallulah River were destroyed along with more than twenty homes. Crops and sawmills along the river were also a complete loss.

The worst flood of the twentieth century may have been 1976, with more than two million dollars in damage. Eleven inches of rain fell in two days at the end of May, and 95 percent of the corn crop was destroyed. Three feet of water inside Clayton Elementary School wiped out ninety percent of the textbooks, all the flooring and one thousand pounds of food in the kitchen.

Ten inches of rainfall in one day in October of 1964 damaged roads and 32 bridges throughout the county and closed schools. Silt from Scott’s Creek covered the Rabun County High School football field, and all games were played away from home for the remainder of the season.

Thirty-nine inches of rain fell in 2004 in July and August alone, followed by a se-

ries of tropical storms in late summer, including Hurricane Ivan. Two county bridges were destroyed and took years to rebuild. Wind and rain caused power outages that lasted for days.

How often have tornadoes and hurricanes hit Rabun?

Two tornadoes in Rabun have caused fatalities, March of 1932 and April of 2011. Interestingly, both storms followed similar paths across Lake Burton, Germany Mountain and Black Rock Mountain, dissipating north of Mountain City. The 1932 tornado destroyed barns, timber and the Mountain Grove Church in Germany. A home was blown into the Sylvan Falls Lake and the water wheel was destroyed at the grist mill. In one of the homes destroyed, the homeowners died. The path of this 10:00 p.m. storm was one to three hundred yards wide and moved almost directly west to east.



The Grist home in the Wolffork Valley, destroyed in the

Smaller tornadoes hit the Rabun Beach campground and surrounding forest areas in 1983 and Tallulah Falls in 1994. There were no injuries in either storm, but the March 29, 1994 incident did uncover a piece of history. Glenbrook Cottage, built in the 1890s as a private home and serving as an elegant hotel for decades, had been covered by ivy and other vegetation and was in a state of disrepair. The tornado blew away enough trees and debris to expose the old hotel again.

The April 26, 2011 tornado damaged more than four hundred homes, said the Red Cross. One elderly man was killed in the one-half mile wide path of destruction. Rabun was named a federal disaster area, and damage estimates were in the tens of millions of dollars. The hardest hit areas were around Moccasin Creek and Meeting House Mountain Roads near Lake Burton. So much timber was destroyed from Lake Burton to Black Rock Mountain to Mountain City that many years would be required to replace it. Fires, roadways blocked

with debris and widespread power outages were also part of the disaster.

As for hurricanes in Rabun, by the time the storm is this far inland, it has generally been downgraded to tropical storm status. Nevertheless, many of these storms have caused significant wind and flooding damage, with Ivan, Opal and Alberto being just three of them.

Despite the appearance of heat, cold, drought, flooding and occasional storms in Rabun's weather patterns, our climate is the envy of many in the United States. Both our winters and summers are relatively mild. Our precipitation enables the growth of beautiful forests, and storms are rare enough to make all of us grateful.

Everyone likes to talk about the weather. No one can do anything about it, as the saying goes, but we can record it for history.

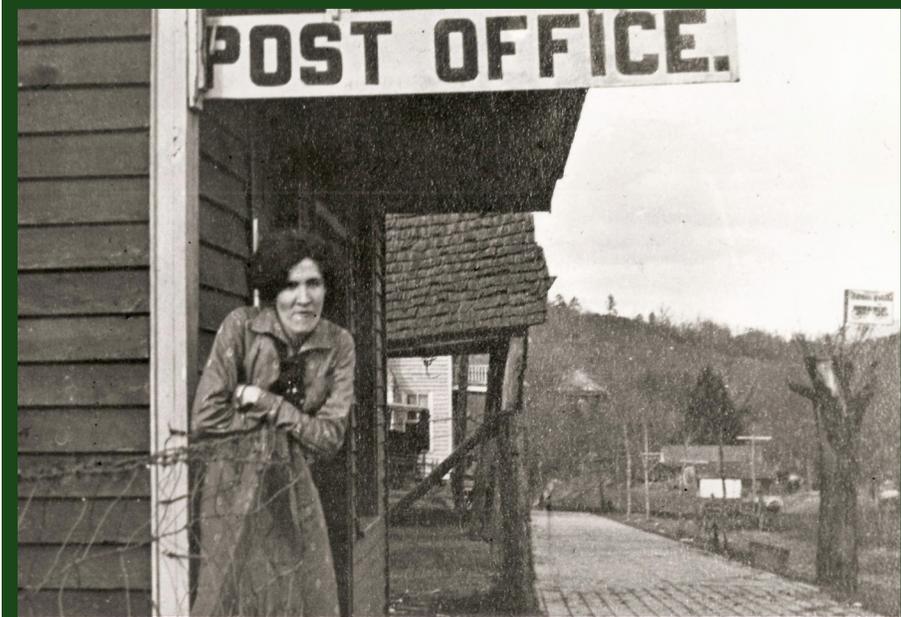
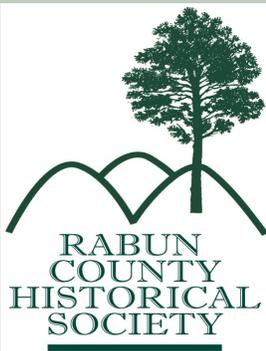


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- Please visit our museum and research library on Mondays and Fridays from 10:00 until 2:00 and on Wednesdays from 12:30 until 4:30.
- Group tours by appointment



The keeper of weather records in Clayton was W.F. Holden from 1921 to 1937. From 1938 to 1961, there were eleven different observers, all within 1.2 miles of the Clayton Post Office. From 1961 to 1968, the records were kept in the County Agent's office, followed by the radio station on Highway 76 West for several years. Photo: 1925