

December is the traditional month for snowflakes to finally reach Richmond, but winter usually stores its worst storms until after New Year's.

Recently, early season snows have been hard to come by. There was no snow accumulation in Richmond during the month of December for five consecutive years, from 2011 to 2015. Through the long-term records, 14 percent of Decembers were snow-free, or about one out of every seven years.

Nature only managed to bring a trace of snow in 30 percent of Decembers past. A trace means a brief or non-accumulating occurrence of snow, usually caused by flurries or snowflakes mixed with rain.

That leaves 56 percent of years, slightly more than half, with some kind of accumulation measured during December. Usually it's the light variety. The climatological average for the month is 2.1 inches, but the median amount from the past century is a modest 1.3 inches.

Epic snowstorms are mostly found in January, February and March. Of the 10 all-time biggest snowfalls in Richmond, only one was in the month of December.

Here are Richmond's biggest December snowstorms since official records began in 1897.

17.2 inches, Dec. 22–23, 1908: The new electric technology of the day was no match for the heaviest December snowfall on record.

As The Times–Dispatch reported: “Reports from different parts of the city showed that many frail structures had toppled in: giant trees, loaded with tons of snow, crashed in: electric wires, unable to stand the strain and burden, snapped, more than 1,300 telephones being thrown out of commission. Telegraph wires followed, the service being interrupted early in the day, and all trains were thrown out of gear, coming in several hours behind schedule time.”

9.9 inches, Dec. 12–13, 1917: The snow cover from this storm lasted for more than a week. After another, smaller snowstorm near Christmas, temperatures plunged to the lowest levels ever recorded in December. On Dec. 30, Richmond woke up to a low of –2.

8.8 inches, Dec. 23–24, 1966: The snow stayed on the ground long enough to provide a rare white Christmas. It was the biggest of three snowstorms that hit the commonwealth that month.

7.5 inches, Dec. 17–18, 1932: The heavy snow throughout the middle of Virginia tied up traffic for three days. By the end of the month, the above-normal rainfall and snowmelt led to flooding in the lower James River.

7.4 inches, Dec. 29–30, 1935: Weather observers of the day noted that the blanket of snow ultimately helped grain crops, but single-digit temperatures harmed kale and peanut production.

7.4 inches, Dec. 18–19, 2009: Snow covered almost all of Virginia except for Hampton Roads. The storm produced a significant range of totals across the Richmond metro area, from 14 inches near Short Pump to nearly a foot downtown to 5 inches in southern Chesterfield County.

The Staunton area received the highest amounts in the state, with more than 2 feet of snow. The snow lingered on to bring Richmond a white Christmas, which was repeated the following year.

JBoyer@timesdispatch.com