

THE JOHNSTOWN FLOOD OF 1889

A history of the history...

The Johnstown Flood of 1889 was an event that shocked a nation and one that was covered extensively by every existing form of media. It was certainly the biggest news story since Lee's surrender at Appomattox and the murder of Abraham Lincoln, both of which happened a generation earlier in 1865.

Indeed, by the end of 1889, millions of words had been written on the Great Flood, in newspapers and magazines, as well as in over a dozen books. What follows is an attempt to make sense of the written "literature" of the Johnstown Flood. It was quite an amazing time. Queen Victoria was sovereign of the United Kingdom, Benjamin Harrison was President of the United States, and the nation has recently commemorated the 100th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration.

Some items listed below are available digitally. You can cut and paste the address in your Internet browser.

Some General Histories

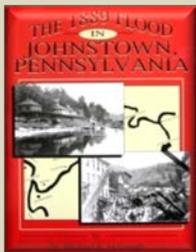
The definitive history of pre-Flood Johnstown, as well as the Flood itself, is Nathan D. Shappee's [A History of Johnstown and the Great Flood of 1889: A Story of Destruction and Rehabilitation](#). Mr. Shappee wrote this as a requirement for his dissertation in 1940, and never had it published commercially. Not only is it well written, the documentation is immaculate. Although it can be somewhat hard to find outside of Pittsburgh or Johnstown, it is well worth the effort.

One of the first attempts to write an objective, commercial narrative history of the Flood was by the late Richard O'Connor. His [Johnstown: The Day the Dam Broke](#) was published by Lippincott in 1957. Excerpts appeared in [Reader's Digest](#). O'Connor had the good fortune of speaking to many Flood survivors and made heavy use of their memories, as well as the numerous newspaper accounts from 1889. There are, however, several errors in the book, and O'Connor did not provide source notes. Nonetheless, it's a gripping read and had the reading public talking about the Great Flood again. The book was likely inspired by the "rediscovery" of the Titanic story, following the publication of Walter Lord's [A Night to Remember](#). [Johnstown: The Day the Dam Broke](#) is no longer in print, but is easy to find.



Those who tell the 1889 Flood story always have a copy of David G. McCullough's The Johnstown Flood within reach. McCullough was reared in Pittsburgh and chose the Flood as his first book after being unable to find a book on the subject to quench his curiosity. A first "draft" of the book appeared in American Heritage magazine in 1966. Surprisingly, the book proposal itself was turned down by some publishing houses, but found a home at Simon and Schuster. It was published by that company in 1968 and quickly achieved commercial and critical success. Since then it has sold tens of thousands of copies and is still in print. As with all of McCullough's books, the writing is masterful, and almost poetic. Unfortunately, while there is a good bibliography at the end, source notes are not provided. McCullough, too, made excellent use of interviews with survivors, as well as forgotten transcripts from the Pennsylvania Railroad's own investigation into the Flood. The Johnstown Flood is also available on CD and several ebook formats. The book remains a masterpiece of narrative history.

There have been numerous attempts to incorporate new information in recent years. In 1997, the Johnstown Area Heritage Association published Anwei Law's The Great Flood, a general history of the disaster, incorporating the then-recently discovered photographs of Louis Semple Clarke. Mr. Clarke, in the late 1880s, took most of the only extant photographs of Lake Conemaugh. As of April, 2010, this book is out of print but can be found used.



After nearly eight years of research, Dr. Michael R. McGough published his book The 1889 Flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 2002. McGough has done an excellent job of separating the spin from the truth. In many cases, he has found that the "spin" wasn't the "truth" at all. McGough's efforts have, in many

ways, changed the ways we tell this story. The book makes outstanding use of the wealth of primary documents available. It was published by Thomas Publications in April, 2002. This book is a marvelous achievement in the telling of the history of the Flood.

The Johnstown Flood was perhaps the most photographed story of the time; yet, amazingly, no true photographic history of the Flood was compiled into book form until the 1960s. Irving London was considered one of the world's experts on the Flood, and his photographic collection was unparalleled. In 1964, he teamed with Harold Strayer to produce A Photographic Story of the 1889 Johnstown Flood. Although the text is slightly dated today, the photographs still capture the horrors of 1889. Historians of today are in the debt of Irving London for helping to preserve the photographic record of the Flood. The book is currently printed by the Johnstown Area Heritage Association.

In the early 1980s, Carl and Paula Degen, employees of the National Park Service at the time, endeavored to create another photographic history of the Flood. The Degens examined the London collection, as well as photographic collections in the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. The result is the terrific The Johnstown Flood of 1889: The Tragedy of the Conemaugh. The text is tightly written, and the photos and captions are well chosen. The book was first published in 1984 by Eastern National Park and Monument Association and can still be purchased today.

Non-fiction histories of the Flood for juveniles are few, but there are some excellent ones to be found. In 1965, as part of the famous "Landmark" series, Hildegard Dolson's Disaster at Johnstown: The Great Flood was published by Random House. The story is told hour-by-hour, in a way easy to understand by its target audience, middle school and older.

A few years ago, Chelsea House publishers released Jim Gallagher's The Johnstown Flood. It's a solidly written book for fourth grade and up, with well-chosen photographs. The Great Flood is a tough story for youths sometimes, but Mr. Gallagher did a good job with his book.

For younger readers, R. Conrad Steins's book on the Flood, sadly not in print, is a good choice if you can find it. Some of the most amazing stories from the Flood are told, and the illustrations are powerful. It was published by the Children's Press in Chicago in 1984 under the title The Story of the Johnstown Flood.

Still used by schools today, Paul Robert Walker's Head for the Hills, part of Random House's 'Read it to Believe It!' series, is a terrific little book. Perhaps the strength of the book is that it reminds kids that the story of the Flood is a story about people, and is still relevant today.

Another reference choice for almost all ages is M. Margaret Green's From Trail Dust to Star Dust: The Story of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a City Resulting from Its Environment. The book was published for the first time in 1960 in a limited run of 777 copies.

For younger readers, The Johnstown Flood, by Marc Tyler Nobleman, is a solid choice. It is published by Compass Point books. The text and illustrations are well done.

Sources from those who went through the Flood

Those who share the Johnstown Flood story firmly believe that the story is best told through the words of those who experienced it. Fortunately, many survivors shared their experiences, some wrote them for posterity's sake.



Perhaps the best of them all is Rev. Dr. David Beale's Through the Johnstown Flood by a Survivor, published by Hubbard Brothers in 1890. Beale, a well-regarded man in town, was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church on Main Street. Beale exhausted himself helping others the night of May 31, 1889, and in the months that followed had one of the most important jobs in town, being one of the caretakers of the morgue records. His book was intended to be a truthful account of what happened to him and his fellow townspeople. It succeeds. Beale and his book were targets of criticism at the time of its writing. Some felt that it was inappropriate for him to profit from the Flood and the morgue records. (In the book the records of each morgue are reprinted.) Nonetheless, we're glad the book was written...it remains the definitive contemporary history of the Flood. Beale died in 1900. The book was reprinted in October, 2009, by Eastern National.

A close second is J. J. McLaurin's The Story of Johnstown. McLaurin, an employee of the Harrisburg Telegram newspaper, was near Johnstown at the

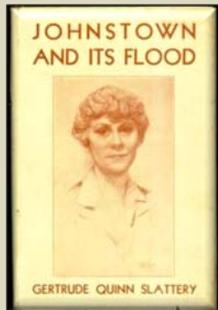
time of the Flood, wrote what can be considered the best of the books written by journalists in 1889. The book was published in Johnstown by the Johnstown Journal Publishers and in Harrisburg by James M. Place. Depending on the edition, it was printed in 1889, 1890, and in 1891. It has recently reprinted. It is a very sentimental book, and will tug at your heartstrings. The illustrations are simply incredible.



Tom L. Johnson, who, along with Arthur Moxham, was building a streetcar empire in Johnstown, did not go through the Flood, but was a tireless worker in the months after. The Flood helped change his political philosophy, as it did for many. Johnson later became a Congressman from Ohio and later a progressive mayor of Cleveland. His autobiography, published posthumously in 1911 by B.W. Huebsch, tells a great story. My Story can be relatively easy to find and is well worth the search, especially for those interested in the progressive movement of the turn of the century. My Story is available digitally here:

http://books.google.com/books?id=j-CFAAAAIAAJ&dq=johnson%20my%20story&lr=&as_brr=4&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

On May 31, 1889, Victor Heiser's world was almost completely destroyed. His parents were both killed in the Flood, as was the family's dry goods store, their only income. Young Victor found his way out of Johnstown, abandoning plumbing and engineering for a career in medicine. By 1900, Heiser had made a name for himself. Later serving for the Rockefeller Foundation, Heiser battled disease in many third-world nations. He is credited for saving over two million lives by helping develop a treatment for leprosy. Heiser penned his memoirs, An American Doctor's Odyssey, in 1936, published by W.W.Norton. The book is still used in medical schools all over the world. While only the first few pages of the book tell of his experience with the Flood, the whole book is an exhilarating read. It was a bestseller when published. Heiser died in 1972.



In 1889, at the age of six, Gertrude Quinn experienced horrors that few other children could imagine in their worst nightmares. Like almost all families in town, the Quinns suffered terribly. Later, Gertrude Quinn married a prominent attorney and lived in Wilkes-Barre, PA. One of her sons was a well-respected mayor of that town. While written mostly for her children, Gertrude Quinn Slattery's Johnstown and its Flood was published by the Dorrance Press in 1936. It is relatively hard to find. Mrs. Slattery lived a long, rich life, dying in 1974 at the age of 92. Her book presents a terrific look at the Johnstown of her day and is a very compelling memoir, and one that we're fortunate to have.

The Reverend H. L. Chapman was the pastor at the Franklin Street United Methodist Church in 1889. Chapman, along with his friend and colleague David Beale, was in charge of the morgues after the Flood. Chapman left his charge in Johnstown a few years after the Flood. He later published an autobiography, Memoirs of an Itinerant. Unfortunately, we do not know when or where it was published, and it is increasingly difficult to find-but is well worth the search. Chapman died in 1915.

Like all towns, Johnstown at the time was run by a select group of individuals. In 1889, one member of that group was John Fulton. Fulton, at the time, was the general manager of Cambria Iron and Steel. It was Fulton who evaluated the South Fork Dam in November of 1880 and found it, basically, to be an accident waiting to happen. (This story is well told by David McCullough.) Although Fulton did not pen his memoirs, per se, he did keep a meticulous set of diaries, copies of which are at the Johnstown Flood Museum.

Many other survivors shared their stories with anybody who would listen. Their stories appeared in most of the Flood books published in 1889, as well as countless newspapers. We'll never know how many are true, but remember that this is a story where the seemingly impossible is frequently the truth.

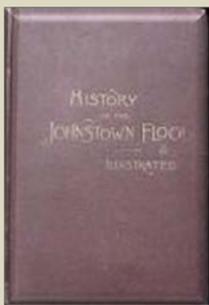


One of the scarcest of the Flood books, the Reverend C.N. Field's After the Flood was published by the Guild of the Iron Cross in 1889. Father Field was an Episcopal priest from Philadelphia who spent time in Johnstown after the Flood. Field wanted to take many of the orphans back to families in Philadelphia, but this idea did not work out the way he planned. This book is difficult to find.

Flood "Histories" from 1889

There's been debate, among those who discuss such things, as to who the first reporter was on the scene after the Flood. No matter who it was, what is without question is that the Flood received unprecedented coverage. Not long after the Flood, reports were being written and wired, and the presses were soon running. Newspapers sold as quickly as they could be printed.

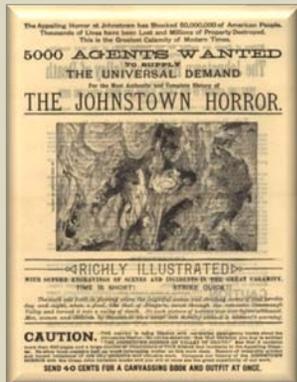
The first of what we call today the "quickie" books was entered into the Library of Congress by the end of the first week of June, 1889. Over a dozen, fiction and nonfiction would follow by the end of the year, of varying quality. Most sold for about \$1.25 - \$2.00 and many seem to have done well, based on the number that survive. Some were published in multiple languages. Some were sold door-to-door by subscription, creating a Johnstown Flood publishing sensation.



Perhaps the most well-known and accessible is Willis Fletcher Johnson's History of the Johnstown Flood. Johnson was a current events writer who produced many of these types of books into the 1920's. Most copies of this book were published by Edgewood Publishing, although some

copies have different imprints. Surviving salesman's samples show that the book sold for \$1.50. Since so many survive today, we can assume that the book did well. Many of these books contain some outrageous exaggerations, and Johnson's is no exception. He includes, as fact, some absurd stories later discredited. This book has been reprinted and is available digitally at

http://books.google.com/books?id=xxgVAAAAYAAJ&dq=johnstown%20flood%20johnson&lr=&as_brr=4&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q=&f=false



James Herbert Walker's The Johnstown Horror...or Valley of Death! was another best seller. It started its life as a small 30-page pamphlet and grew into book form. It had many different publishers across the country and was printed in at least three different languages. The book is full of "eyewitness" accounts...the reader has to place faith in their veracity. The wood engraving illustrations are quite Victorian and astonishing. We don't know exactly when the book was published, but this particular book was on sale in Johnstown itself by mid-summer. It is available digitally at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=5m5txpWL_owC&dq=johnstown%20horror&lr=&as_brr=4&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

Beware of the word "official" in a book title. There was no completed authorized "official" history of the Flood published. Two gentlemen from Pittsburgh, however, called their book The Official History of the Johnstown Flood. The authors were Frank Connelly and George Jenks. This book was likely published before autumn, 1889. Curiously, the book features an endorsement by Adjutant General Daniel Hastings. This particular book is notable for its soft treatment of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. (It was published in Pittsburgh.) Like almost all of these books, sales figures do not survive, but it's likely this book did well, at least in western Pennsylvania. It is available digitally at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=QQYMAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=official+johnstown+flood&lr=&as_brr=4&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

One of the most fascinating reads is George Ferris' The Complete History of the Johnstown and Conemaugh Valley Flood (like many of these books, the titles, in Victorian Fashion, go on for a full page). The word "complete" belongs with "official." This book, too, contains hundreds of first person accounts. Whether they are true or not, they are all quite compelling. Ferris' book can be found today, although many surviving copies are in rather poor shape. As in other books, the illustrations are awe-inspiring and heartbreaking. The book was published by H.S. Goodspeed and Company, and must have been quite a purchase at the time. It is available digitally here:

<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=pitttext;view=toc;idno=00aee6473m>

A slim volume, Herman Dieck's The Johnstown Flood was likely published in 1889. This particular book features photographs and some truly compelling stories. Some sources say this book was a later publication, circa 1900, but there's no indication of that...although there's no date in the book itself. It is available digitally here:

<http://www.archive.org/details/johnstownfloodth00dieciala>

Others include J.S. Ogilvie's History of the Great Flood in Johnstown, Pa, May 31, 1889, published by Ogilvie himself.

A few other books and pamphlets were written on the Flood in 1889. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, some do not appear to survive.

Clara Barton and the American Red Cross

Five days after the Flood, Clara Barton and her crew of doctors, nurses, and workers arrived in Johnstown. This started an experience that would change their lives, and would help shape the American Red Cross as we know it.

For a solid history of the International Red Cross, consult Caroline Moorehead's Dunant's Dream. This is a thorough and lengthy tome about the Red Cross' founder and the organization he founded.



For Miss Barton's memories on her efforts with the Red Cross, you can find her 1899 autobiography The Red Cross in Peace and War, published by the American Historical Press. The book has several publication years and imprints. Sometimes her memory is incorrect with the Flood story, yet you can tell that Barton is very proud of her work in Johnstown.

Miss Barton's book is presently available digitally at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=k4naAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=baron+red+cross&lr=&as_brr=4&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

The Life of Clara Barton, by William E. Barton, is an exemplary biography. It's an exhaustive two-volume life of Barton and story of the American Red Cross.

This book is available digitally at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=HiYKAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=baron+life+of+clara&lr=&as_brr=4&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

One of the earlier biographies of Ms. Barton was published by the MacMillan Company. Percy Epler's The Life of Clara Barton was published only two years after her death in 1912, when she was still present in everybody's mind. It is available digitally at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=nfERAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=epler+clara&lr=&as_brr=4&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

One of the most recent works, Elizabeth Pryor's Clara Barton, Professional Angel, stands out as one of the best, if not the standard. The source notes are outstanding. Pryor also contributed to the official handbook of Clara Barton National Historic Site, a handbook available through the Government Printing Office and the National Park Service.

For a good understanding of Barton's role in the Civil War, try Stephen Oates' A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War. To understand the

compassion that Barton showed in Johnstown, it is necessary to understand what she experienced during the Civil War.

Among titles about Barton for kids, Leni Hamilton's Clara Barton: Founder, American Red Cross is a good choice. It's published by Chelsea House.

Historical Fiction

Perhaps the first attempt to create historical fiction from the Flood, aside from some over-eager journalists, was Duke Bailie's Through Mighty Waters Saved: A Romance of Johnstown, published in the summer of 1889, and sold at \$3.00. It's a love story you would expect in a romance, plus a tragic twist that only the Johnstown Flood could provide.

Readers of the late Catherine Marshall have doubtlessly read her last novel, Julie, published in 1984. This is a novel that thinly veils Johnstown as a town called Alderton, with the year changed from 1889 to 1934. The novel remains popular with Mrs. Marshall's devoted readers today.

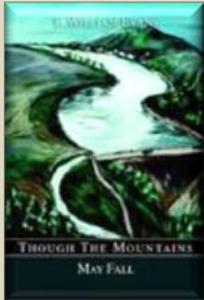


It can be quite rare when the historical fiction is completely accurate...yet Elva Knavel succeeds admirably in her Run for the Hills, published by www.iuniverse.com. The book nearly-perfectly portrays the family unit in 1889, and how the people coped with the aftermath of the Flood. Run for the Hills is a terrific achievement in historical fiction.

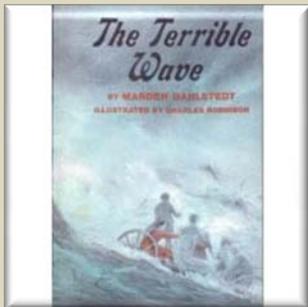


One of the most discussed books in the world of popular fiction in 2001 was Kathleen Cambor's In Sunlight, in a Beautiful

Garden, published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. The book is a wonderful result of several years of solid research. It, too, is a love story, between the daughter of a member of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club and a working class, socially aware fellow from Johnstown. The novel paints an almost perfect portrait of what the Conemaugh Valley must have been like then. The writing is exceptional. The book perfectly portrays the joys and sorrows that existed on both sides of the valley. Cambor creates characters that stay with you long after you finish the book. For reasons we may never understand, the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club remains a mystery and well kept secret. Cambor, through solid research, penetrates the secrecy of the Club, and helps paint a picture of life at Lake Conemaugh that the Club members would likely not want us to have.



T. William Evans' Through the Mountains May Fall is another intriguing attempt to understand the complex relationship between the families of Pittsburgh and those of the Johnstown area.

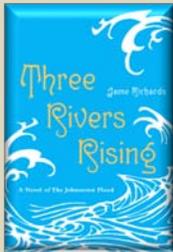


For kids, there are some splendid examples of historical fiction. Perhaps the most successful has been Marden Dahlstedt's The Terrible Wave, first published in 1972. It tells the story of Megan Maxwell, whose fictional life is loosely based on Gertrude Quinn's. Dahlstedt's grandparents survived the Flood, which makes her writing effort all the more special.

Virginia Gross' The Day it Rained Forever is the story of the family of Christina Berwind and their experiences in the Flood. The author was inspired by the stories that she heard during the Flood Centennial in 1989.

Jane Louise Curry's terrific little novel, The Great Flood Disaster, is sadly currently out of print. It's the story of some golden coins supposedly lost in the Flood, found about 100 years later. It is a thrilling read for younger readers.

A more recent effort is Peg Kehret's The Flood Disaster (1999). Two students travel back in time to 1889 to save a young girl and any others they can. It may seem farfetched, yet the book has made many young readers enthusiastic about the Flood story.



An enchanting and unique novel aimed at young adults was published in April of 2010. Jame Richards' Three Rivers Rising, told in free verse, explores the relationships of young adults coming from different economic and social backgrounds.

The South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club



Relatively few items survive of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. Some of their old buildings stand, and some fascinating documents survive, including some membership certificates and miscellaneous membership papers.

Perhaps the best history of the Club can be found in Michael McGough's book, The Great Flood of 1889 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. McCullough's book also gives a good account of the brief life of the organization.

A few years ago, Dr. McGough released a companion book, The Club and the 1889 Flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The book was published through the generosity of the Friends of Johnstown Flood National Memorial. It's the most thorough history of the Club ever written, and incorporates almost all of the Louis Semple Clarke photographs of the Club, discovered in 1989 by Mr. Clarke's grand-daughter, the late Virginia A. Soule.

Most sources say that by 1889 there were over 60 members in the South Fork Club, yet few talked publicly about the disaster. Many of these important men would be the subject of biographies...yet their association with the Club is rarely mentioned.

Andrew Carnegie's name is perhaps the most famous on the membership list. He was a prolific author himself and has been the subject of many books. The best is perhaps Joseph F. Wall's Andrew Carnegie, originally published by Oxford in 1970. The book is really a benchmark of biography. A companion book, The Andrew Carnegie Reader, expertly picks some of Carnegie's best and most important writings.

A more recent effort, David Nasaw's masterful Andrew Carnegie, introduced us to some previously unknown South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club documents found in the Pittsburgh area. This is narrative biography at its finest.

Few men have been despised by so many as Henry Clay Frick. Throughout his life, Frick shunned publicity...that's why it's no surprise no real biography appeared in his lifetime. The first to appear after Frick's 1919 death was Colonel George Harvey's Henry Clay Frick: The Man, a quite sympathetic book. In the mid 1990's, Frick was the topic of Samuel Schreiner's Henry Clay Frick and the Gospel of Greed, an often critical book. Frick's great-granddaughter recently published two fascinating titles. Henry Clay Frick: An Intimate Portrait tries to understand the man. The Henry Clay Frick Houses provides a history of Frick's homes in Pittsburgh and New York. Martha Frick Symington Sanger is remarkably objective as to her subject.

For both Carnegie and Frick, highly recommended is Burton J. Hendrick's two-volume The Life of Andrew Carnegie (1932), which is also a good history of the times in which they lived.

Carnegie, for many years, worked on his memoirs, but abandoned the project at the start of World War I. Published after his death, The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie is useful in understanding Carnegie's personality. As with

almost all autobiographies however, do not rely on it for factual correctness. Carnegie is the only Club member believed to have penned his memoirs, although nothing related to the 1889 Flood is mentioned. Carnegie's autobiography is digitally available here:

http://books.google.com/books?id=40gFAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=carnegie+autobiography&lr=&as_brr=4&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

The Mellon financial dynasty has also been the subject of much research. Mellon, too, resisted publicity. He is most known for being one of the most important Treasury Secretaries in American History.

Andrew's son, William L., wrote a book about the family, called Judge Mellon's Sons, which recounted the family's earlier history. Only about 1,000 copies were printed.

It wasn't until recently that a good biography of Secretary Mellon was published, despite his significance. David Cannadine's Mellon fills this need nicely. Harvey O'Connor's Mellon's Millions (1933) is often too prejudicial, and Philip Love's Andrew W. Mellon: The Man and His Work is perhaps too flattering but fascinating.

Many people rely on Matthew Josephson's The Robber Barons as a history of the Gilded Age. It's gripping reading, with a slightly socialistic bent.

Despite the power and wealth the members of the Club represented, there is little written about most of these fellows. Among what is written, you will find next to nothing about May 31, 1889...even the positive, such as their contributions to the relief effort.

Some Other Sources

There are two other sources worth mentioning. A few years back, several Johnstownians penned pieces dealing with various aspects of Johnstown's past. The result was Johnstown: The Story of a Unique Valley, and is a terrific history of the town. It is sadly not in print.

Richard Burkert's masterful recent photographic history of Johnstown, Pictures from the Past: A Visual History of Johnstown, is a terrific achievement...and one of the best publications the Johnstown Area Heritage Association has done. It was done specifically for the bicentennial of Johnstown.

Some Final Sources

One final source needs to be recommended to those studying the 1889 Flood...for any reason.

On Franklin Street, above the post office, worked the staff of the Johnstown Tribune, which had both daily and weekly editions. Their boss, an old newspaper pro, George T. Swank, was a genius in his profession.

Swank had squeezed more into his life than most of us today could ever imagine in ours. For a time, he worked for the all time great in his trade, Horace Greeley, and served notably in the Civil War. The wound Swank received at Gettysburg would bother him for the rest of his life. He was a newsman of the best sort...it ran in his blood.

The Tribune was the best paper in town, in terms of sales and quality, although Johnstown had other papers, including the Democrat and the Freie Presse.

The staff of the Tribune watched the events of May 31st, 1889, with horror. The building they were in was almost washed out from under them. The town did without the paper for several days, until June 14th, when the presses of the Tribune fired up again. On that date, the definitive history of the Johnstown Flood started. For the next several months and years, the town's experiences would be told in the Tribune.

Quite honestly, it is possible that most of what we need to know and understand about the Flood comes from the pages of Swank's Tribune.

People around the world helped raise almost \$4,000,000 for the people of Johnstown. Of course, this was a tremendous undertaking. The commonwealth of Pennsylvania tried to account for every penny. The Report of the Secretary of the Flood Relief Commission is available here:

<http://www.archive.org/details/reportofsecretar00penn>

Conclusion

There have been, quite literally, millions of words written on the Great Flood of 1889. Some of it is ludicrous, some right on target, and almost all of it is heartbreaking.

The Flood story is one of the most compelling in American history, and in so many ways, richly documented. Like all research topics, there are traps that you must avoid. Yet whether you are using an 1889 newspaper, an 1889 book, or a book or article from today, prepare to be enthralled by what you will read. It's that type of story. You will feel every emotion possible, from sadness to anger, and all those in-between. It's that type of story. And, you'll never forget what you'll learn. It's that type of story.

