



# The Johnstown Flood of 1889: The Story of the Deadliest Flood in American History

*Charles River Editors*

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- \*Includes pictures
- \*Includes accounts of the flood written by survivors
- \*Includes a bibliography for further reading
- \*Includes a table of contents

"The deluge released by the dam's collapse carried more than 12,000 cubic meters of debris-filled water each second. Flow rates in the Mississippi River typically vary between 7,000 and 20,000 cubic meters per second." – Sid Perkins, Science News, Vol.176

In 2005, the world watched in horror as Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans, and the calamity seemed all the worse because many felt that technology had advanced far enough to prevent such tragedies, whether through advanced warning or engineering. However, the failure of human engineering like that seen in New Orleans was nothing new, and it had previously had even deadlier consequences in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Although floods rarely get as much coverage as other kinds of natural disasters like volcanic explosions, the Johnstown Flood of 1889 has remained an exception due to the sheer destruction and magnitude of the disaster. On May 31, 1889, Johnstown became a casualty of a combination of heavy rains and the failure of the South Fork Dam to stem the rising water levels of Lake Conemaugh about 15 miles away. The dam's inability to contain the water and its subsequent collapse resulted in a catastrophic flood that swept through the town with virtually no warning. With water flowing at a rate equivalent to the Mississippi River, a tide of water and debris 60 feet high and traveling 40 miles per hour in some places surged through Johnstown and swept away people and property alike. The flood ultimately resulted in the deaths of over 2,000 people and destroyed thousands of buildings, wreaking damages estimated to be the equivalent of nearly half a billion dollars today.

In 1889, the Johnstown Flood was the deadliest natural disaster in American history, and though it was later surpassed by other events, the unprecedented nature of the flood led to relief efforts never before seen, including by the Red Cross. The Johnstown Flood also led to a change in laws as people tried and failed to recoup damages caused by the collapse of the dam and the subsequent flood.

The Johnstown Flood of 1889 chronicles the story America's deadliest natural disaster during the 19th century. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Johnstown Flood like never before, in no time at all.

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