



The 1889 Flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania

By Michael R. McGough

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In May of 1889, a tragic combination of human and natural factors collided to result in the greatest flood ever to result from the bursting of a dam. In the wake of the flood, which brought 20,000,000 tons of water and countless tons of debris down the valley to Johnstown, 99 entire families were lost, 396 children under the age of ten perished, while 568 children lost one or both parents. On June 1, 1889, Johnstown had an additional 198 widowers and 124 widows. Property losses topped the \$30,000,000 mark. The flood and the events surrounding it have been the subject of study, research and investigation for more than one hundred years. No single cause or explanation has been identified, and no specific combination of events or occurrences is generally accepted as the irrefutable explanation. Instead, the prevailing theory holds that this flood was the result of a tragic combination of human error and natural occurrence that converged with devastating consequences.

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The 1889 Flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania By Michael R. McGough Bibliography

- Rank: #703086 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Thomas Pubns
- Published on: 2002-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 11.00" h x 8.75" w x .50" l, 1.20 pounds
- Binding: Paperback

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