

THE FLOOD

The Most Appalling Disaster in
American History.

TOWNS WIPED OUT

A Mountain of Water Sweeps
Through a Valley.

10,000 LIVES LOST

Escaping the Flood to be Roas-
ted in the Wreckage.

JOHNSTOWN IS OBLITERATED

\$25,000,000 Worth of Property
Destroyed in a Day.

THE FATAL RESERVOIR

Houses, Bridges, Locomotives and Railroad
Trains Swept Away—The Plant of the
Mammoth Cambria Iron Works in
Ruins—Losses in Other Parts of
Pennsylvania—Miles of Rail-
road Track Destroyed.

BACK IN TIME

LANSDALE AIDS FLOOD VICTIMS

By DICK SHEARER

The anniversary was went largely unnoticed by the media, but 125 years ago one of the greatest catastrophes in American history took place when a poorly-maintained dam on the Conemaugh River burst, sending a massive wall of water over the mill town of Johnstown, PA.

The Johnstown Flood has its own special place among the nation's deadliest disasters. The city of 30,000 was a bustling community dangerously situated at the base of surrounding mountains. Home to the Cambria Iron Works, it was a blue collar town through and through.

When the dam let go, the powerful wall of water swept away everything in its path – trees, roads, even steam engines and entire towns as it raced toward Johnstown. The wave hit the city with brutal force, knocking down many of the solidest buildings in town, reducing the weak ones to kindling.

Tons of debris collected at the stone bridge, which survived the initial assault only to become a dam of its own. The mass of wreckage behind it caught fire, adding to the toll of death and destruction.

In the end, the death toll was set 2,209 souls although the exact number will never be known. So great was the carnage that early estimates reached 10,000, as noted in the *Lansdale Reporter's* June 6, 1889 edition. Among the casualties were Charles Wilson, 45, and Mrs. J.L. Smith, 34, both of Quakertown, and Mrs. Smith's children, Florence, 9, Frank, 7, and a four-month-old infant. Apparently they were staying at a boarding house in Johnstown.

To put the loss of life in perspective, it was comparable to the 2,752 who died at the World Trade Towers.

As a result of improved journalistic skills learned during the Civil War and the many technological advances of the late 1800s, the details of the Johnstown Flood were carried in great detail into homes across the nation. The news spurred a tremendous outpouring of relief money from as far away as Paris that totaled \$2.9 million in a few short days.

Lansdale got on board. Burgess Jacob Geller called a public meeting at Freed's Hall for the purpose of raising funds. "Let the generous people of Lansdale not turn a deaf ear to the cries for assistance from our distressed and suffering countrymen." A week later, *The Reporter* announced that Lansdale residents contributed \$629.92 to the cause.