

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

## Table of Contents

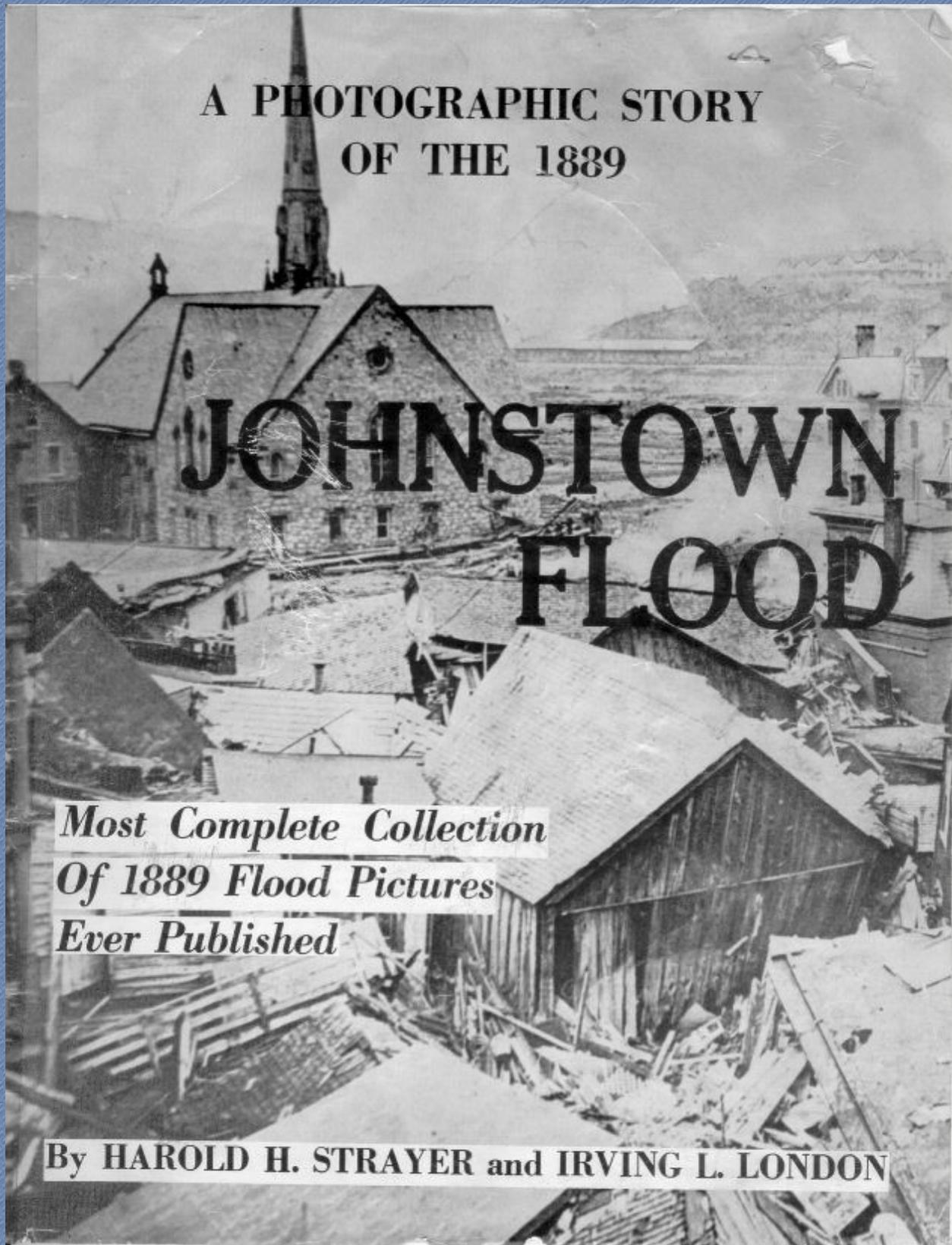
---

	<u>Front Cover</u>					<u>Inside Front Cover</u>				
<u>Title Page</u>	<u>Page 2</u>	<u>Page 3</u>	<u>Page 4</u>	<u>Page 5</u>	<u>Page 6</u>	<u>Page 7</u>	<u>Page 8</u>	<u>Page 9</u>	<u>Page 10</u>	
<u>Page 11</u>	<u>Page 12</u>	<u>Page 13</u>	<u>Page 14</u>	<u>Page 15</u>	<u>Page 16</u>	<u>Page 17</u>	<u>Page 18</u>	<u>Page 19</u>	<u>Page 20</u>	
<u>Page 21</u>	<u>Page 22</u>	<u>Page 23</u>	<u>Page 24</u>	<u>Page 25</u>	<u>Page 26</u>	<u>Page 27</u>	<u>Page 28</u>	<u>Page 29</u>	<u>Page 30</u>	
<u>Page 31</u>	<u>Page 32</u>	<u>Page 33</u>	<u>Page 34</u>	<u>Page 35</u>	<u>Page 36</u>	<u>Page 37</u>	<u>Page 38</u>	<u>Page 39</u>	<u>Page 40</u>	
	<u>Inside Back Cover</u>					<u>Back Cover</u>				

---

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

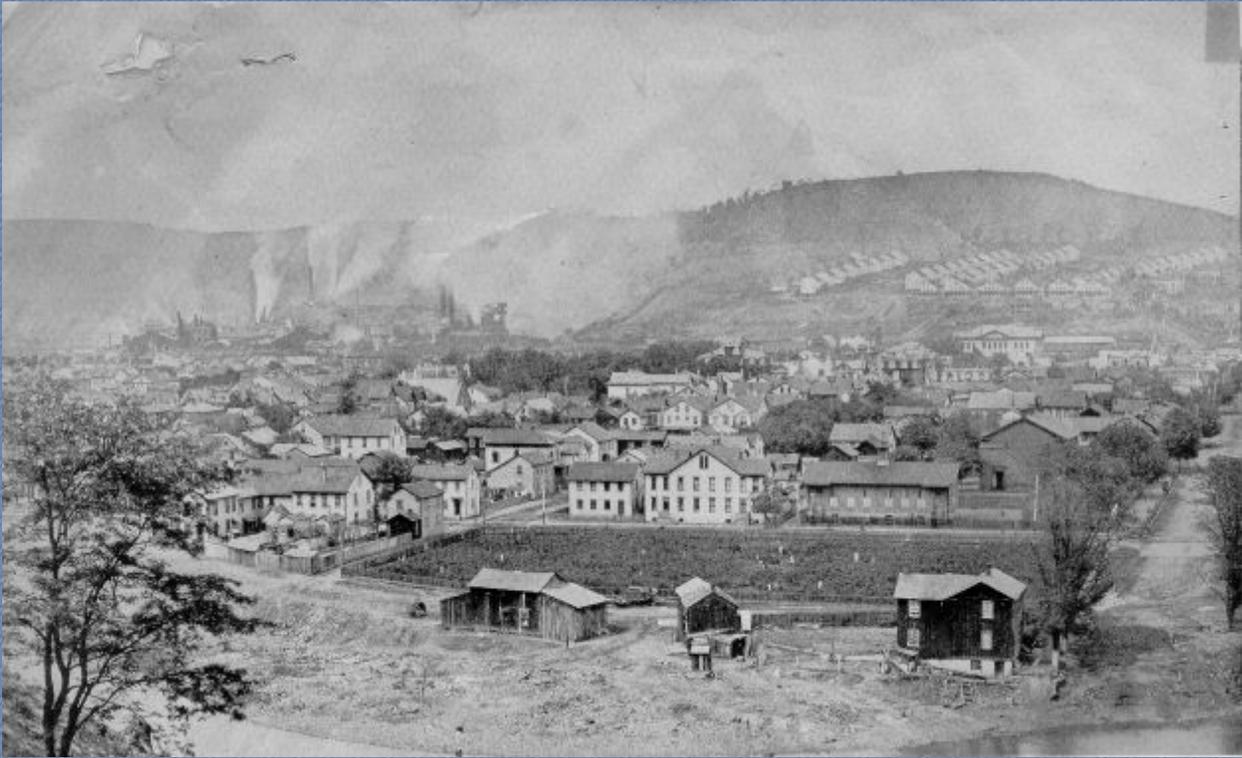


---

Front Cover

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Market Street Area. Union Cemetery is now the site of the Cambria County War Memorial.



---

Inside Front Cover

A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY  
OF THE 1889

# JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

Library of Congress  
Catalogue Number F159.J7S8

**89 Authentic Photographs**  
Representing the Most Complete Collection of  
1889 Flood Pictures ever Published.

*By*  
**Harold H. Strayer**  
and  
**Irving L. London**

**Photographs in this Book are also available as 35mm Slides**

*Published by*  
**THE CAMERA SHOP**  
Johnstown, Pa.

*Photo offset printing by*  
**WEIGEL & BARBER, INC.**  
Johnstown, Pa.

4th Printing 1972



Copyright 1964

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

### THE SOUTH FORK DAM

The dam was built during the period of 1838 to 1853 by the State of Pennsylvania to supply water for the Canal Basin in Johnstown. This was an important part of the Pennsylvania Canal System which provided transportation from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. Located about ten miles above Johnstown it was reported to be the largest artificial lake on the continent—the breast was more than 70 feet high and about 850 feet wide. At normal depth it covered more than 400 acres and was estimated to hold five hundred million cubic feet of water.



In 1857 the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased the Pennsylvania Canal System and Allegheny Portage Railroad from the State of Pennsylvania. Having no use for it, it was abandoned and the gates and machinery rusted away from standing idle. The dam broke in 1862 but it caused little damage since the water level in the dam was low.

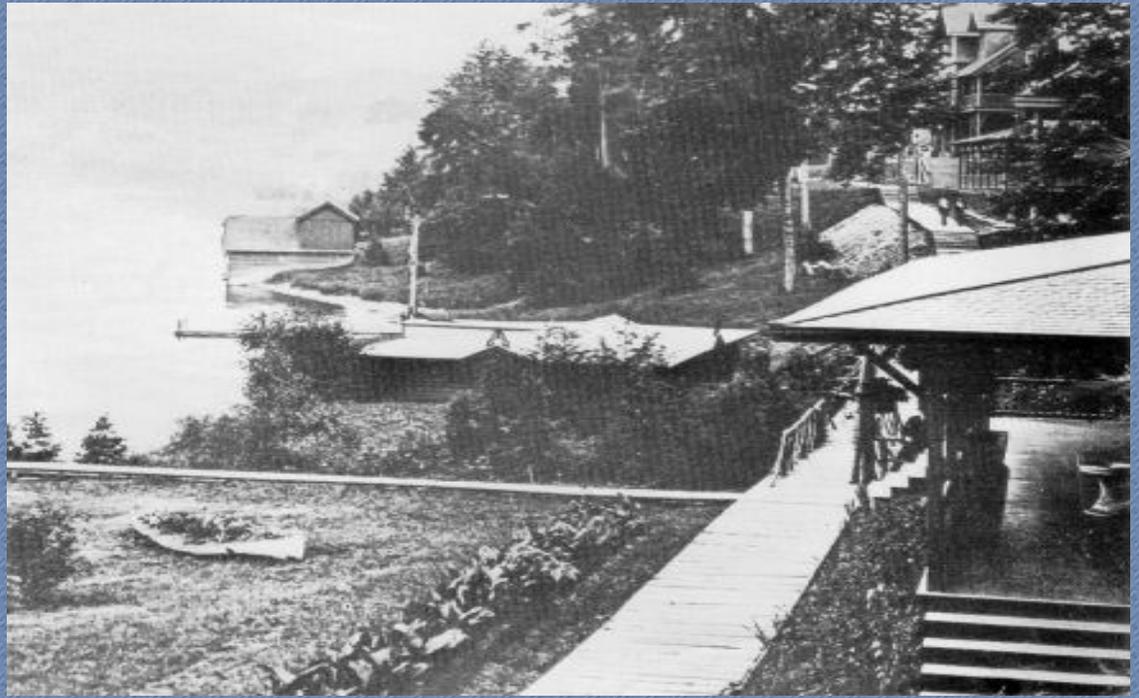


On May 19, 1879 the South Fork Hunting and Fishing Club was organized by a group of wealthy business men from Pittsburgh and they purchased the Dam for their own private use. They spent two years in repairing the dam — increasing the height of the breast so the dam would hold more water. Now it was three miles long and almost one mile wide. It was commonly called Lake Conemaugh. The picture above and at the left show the breast of the dam as it existed in 1889.

A large Club House was erected for the members but many desired the privacy of their own quarters and built what were known as Queen Anne cottages. In the picture below can be seen some of these cottages, several boat houses and a section of the lake. Some of these cottages are still standing in St. Michael.



Two steam yachts sailed the lake and provided excursions for the members and their guests. The most popular sport was fishing. The lake was well stocked and it was reported that the sluice gate and spillway were covered with wire to keep the fish from escaping!



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Franklin Street at Central Park looking toward Main Street  
on the day of the Great Flood.

In 1889 Johnstown was a thriving and industrious city having a population of about 30,000 which included the surrounding boroughs. It was a city surrounded by mountains and was reached by the great lines of the Pennsylvania and Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Every inch of available ground was studded with dwelling houses, up to date business establishments, the immense manufacturing establishment of the world famous Cambria Iron Company, the Johnson Street Railway Company and the homes of workmen.

On the morning of May 31st Johnstown was already under two to seven feet of water as it had been raining steadily for a week and historians reported that it was the heaviest rainfall of the century. By 11:00 A.M. the rivers had overflowed their banks, the Poplar Street bridge had been washed away and many persons were busy carrying their household goods to the second floor. Rafts and boats were taking women to higher ground. This happened regularly because spring floods were common in Johnstown and the residents did not seem worried about the dam. Every year since the dam was built the city had been warned that the dam might break. The warning so often proved unnecessary that little attention was paid to it on May 31, 1889. Most of the people of Johnstown and the Conemaugh Valley felt that if the dam did break it would do no more damage than to add two or three feet of water to the already flooded city.

At about 4:00 P.M. the flood water struck the town. In little more than ten minutes its worst work was done. More than 2,200 lives were lost and the thriving and industrious city lay in ruin.



# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The heavy rainfall caused the water in the dam to rise higher and higher and by Thursday night the water was within seven feet of the top. It rained all Thursday night and at about 1:00 P.M. Friday the water was running over the breast. This caused the earthen surface to wear away and at 3:00 P.M. the breast finally gave way. The gap grew wider and wider and the lake went roaring down the valley. In just 45 minutes the Dam was emptied and 60 million tons of water was headed for South Fork, Mineral Point, Conemaugh, Woodvale and Johnstown.

## WOODVALE

In 1889 Woodvale was a residential community with over 350 homes, wide streets, horse drawn street cars and a population of 1,247 persons. It was named after Charles S. Woods. The borough was the Cambria Iron Company's model town in the valley. In only 15 minutes Woodvale was wiped from the map. Every home except those on the hillside was completely carried away.

The only buildings left standing were the woolen and flour mill of the Cambria Iron Company and a bridge over the railroad tracks. The woolen mill stood near the center of the borough and employed over 300 girls. Because of the high water they were forced to quit work at noon. Thousands of tons of flotsam dealt the mill a staggering blow and water splashed the third floor but the building stood and checked the ferocious attack. The street car shed and 68 horses were buried beneath the flood mass.

This picture was taken from Prospect. Conemaugh and Franklin Borough are at the top of the picture.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



From Woodvale the water rushed over what is now the Gautier Works, cutting a clean swath. Rolands feed store on Railroad Street, a two story brick structure (still standing in 1964) withstood the current and helped divide the flood waters. One wave went down Washington Street and headed for the Stone Bridge while the other wave raged down Clinton Street to Bedford Street and the Stonycreek River.

This view from Green Hill clearly shows the path of destruction. No. 1 is the Wood, Morrell Company on Washington Street. No. Z is the MO Passenger Station while No. 3 is the Franklin Street Methodist Church. St. Joseph's Church on Railroad Street is No. 4.

The famous stone bridge built in 1887—was the main obstacle in the path of the flood. The bridge failed to move—even with debris piled 50 feet high. This caused a counter-current which rushed up the Stonycreek, taking with it many buildings that had come down the Conemaugh River a few minutes earlier. This counter-current was responsible for the great destruction and loss of life in Kernville.

This mass of debris included many humans and covered more than 60 acres. On the night of May 31st a fire broke out—cremating many of the victims. The fire burned for five days until it was extinguished by fire companies from Pittsburgh.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The tremendous force of the water coming down Clinton Street not only destroyed many buildings but took many lives. The Louther - Green building at the corner of Main and Clinton Street was severely damaged with one corner torn out from pavement to roof. This building was repaired, went through the 1936 flood, and is still standing today. Three doors away stood the Merchant's Hotel. It was famous all over the East as a first-class hotel. Built of brick and four stories high, two persons lost their lives when part of the rear collapsed. It had to be torn down and a new hotel erected. Today, the J. C. Penny Store occupies this site.

The road to South Fork was closed on May 31, 1889! With lumber, houses, railroad cars and general debris piled three stories high it was impossible to get through. Animals and humans were also uncovered from the wreckage. This view from in front of the Johnstown Bank and Trust Company shows the Merchant's Hotel on the extreme left and the Louther - Green building the fourth building from the left. Green Hill and Frankstown road are in the background.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

Locust Street, from Clinton to Franklin was jammed with houses of all descriptions. This view from the Merchant's Hotel shows the Methodist Church at top left, the Kress home on Locust Street at the center. Prospect shows in the background. The school building was Johnstown's first high school but at the time of the flood it served as the B&O Railroad passenger station.



The Gautier Wire Mill and Steel Works were located in both Woodvale and Conemaugh Borough. Their six or eight departments were completely demolished and heaps of sand and debris buried what machinery was left. Large rolls of barbed wire entangled with the rubbish and wound tightly about scores of the four hundred men, women and children who by this time were fighting for life in the swift current. Held in the grip of the wire, fastened by timbers or sinking from exhaustion, young and old met death in forms that were horrible. 314 lost their lives in this area. On the left is St. John's Convent which is still standing. Next to it is Roland's Feed Store (on Railroad Street and also still standing) and the large building on the right is St. Joseph's Church on Railroad Street. This picture was taken from Clinton Street and the Woodvale woolen and flour mill can be seen in the background.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



This was the 500 block of Main Street on June 1, 1889! Debris was piled three stories high. Sidewalks ceased to exist and to get from one building to another, you would have to crawl from the second story of one building to the other. The brick building behind the leaning telegraph pole was the Bantly Block. It was finished in March of 1889 and housed the Geis and Schry's store which was destroyed. This brick building and the Mueller building next to it still stands today and is the home of such popular establishments as the Cookie Jar, Richmans Clothes, Sherwin - Williams Paints and Thom McCann shoes. On the right is John Thomas and L. M. Woolf stores. Sears, Roebuck and Company occupied this building from 1936 to 1964.

The flood wave that rushed down Clinton Street continued its journey to meet the Stonycreek River. Houses were washed away or tossed about like match sticks. The house in the foreground stood at Main and Bedford Street where five bodies were found about three weeks after the flood. Levergood Street, running diagonally from left to right no longer existed! The church shown in the upper right hand corner still stands on Somerset Street and is a



house of worship for St. Mary's Hellenic Orthodox  
congregation.

---

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

This was Johnstown's main business district. Here stood its greatest stores—and its opera house. In front of the John Thomas store on Main Street — now occupied by Sears, Roebuck and Company destruction was beyond description. 120 persons spent the night in this building many pulled to safety as they floated by on roof tops.



During the time of the flood, St. John's Church was located at the corner of Jackson and Locust Street. It was a spacious structure with a large congregation and elegantly furnished. During the height of the flood the house occupied by the M. L. Woolf family collided with the church. Mrs. Woolf was baking at the time and had a hot fire in the stove. The stove overturned and the church caught fire and presented a peculiar scene. With water surging half way to the roof the fire consumed the church, the brick house of Andrew Foster and the remains of the Woolf dwelling. The flames raged until midnight. Two walls fell and later two were destroyed by dynamite. A temporary frame church was erected in the rear of the lot and the first service was held the third Sunday in June.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

St. John's Convent—at Clinton St. near Locust—was a large brick building, easily identified by the large cross on its roof. It also housed the school that was attended by about 600 pupils and was in charge of the Sisters of Charity. The Convent was almost demolished and the only part left standing was a large wing in which the chapel was located. The building was rebuilt and is standing today in the same location. The school house at right center was Johnstown's first high school building at Franklin and Washington Street. At the time of the flood it served as the B&O Railroad passenger station. It served in this capacity until it was torn down after the 1936 flood.



A close up view of the damage on Clinton Street beside St. John's Convent. The people were engaged in searching for bodies. The church spire to the right is the Franklin Street Methodist Church.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

When the stone bridge failed to move, the water was forced up the Stonycreek River, and it carried many buildings that had come down from Conemaugh and Woodvale just moments before. In this picture, only the residence of Col. J. P. Linton (see picture below) is in its original location. This view was taken from Walnut Street toward Main and Union Street.



This was the residence of Col. John P. Linton on lower main Street near Union. Five feet of sand covered the street and the span of a bridge was deposited in Linton's yard. Many bodies were found in the wreckage. On the left is the Armory and to the right of the Linton house can be seen a corner of the Union Street School.



# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Immediately after the flood waters receded, the first task was to search for possible survivors. Here at the stone bridge hundreds of workers are searching through the debris.

Every available man was immediately put to work — to clean up the tremendous accumulation of debris, and to search for any possible survivors.





## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Most of the buildings on Clinton and Bedford Street at the Main Street intersection were swept away. The Adam St. School in the foreground, above the water level, became the principal morgue. The Swank block just disappeared (at center of picture). The Hulbert House — a leading hotel on Clinton Street — disintegrated and more than 50 persons lost their lives.

When a body was found it was taken to the nearest morgue. The Adam Street School was beyond reach of the flood waters and it was the principal morgue. Here a recovered body is taken to the Adam Street School building. The gentleman with the derby and his hand on his hip is Mr. Henderson, founder of the John Henderson Funeral Home. In the picture at right, are shown coffins at the Adams St. School Morgue.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The search for flood victims went on day by day and continued for many months. This picture was taken from Clinton Street near Locust and shows the B&O Passenger Station at the right.



The Millvale School was designated as another morgue. It withstood the flood waters and being located near the stone bridge many victims were brought here. The coffins were placed under tents because of the continued rain.



The B&O Passenger Station had been Johnstown's first high school building. One of the few buildings left standing on Washington Street, it served as a morgue during the flood. The upper floors contained the offices of the Johnstown Democrat. The editor, L. D. Woodruff and his force was working when a box car crashed against the building. Woodruff, his two sons and staff spent the night in the ruined building. This building was used by the B&O Railroad until it was torn down after the flood of 1936.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



With their homes swept away, many families built temporary shelters on the hillside. They were hastily constructed shacks but served until permanent quarters could be erected.



# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Debris near Walnut Street.



Cambria Iron Company



Wreckage on Union Street

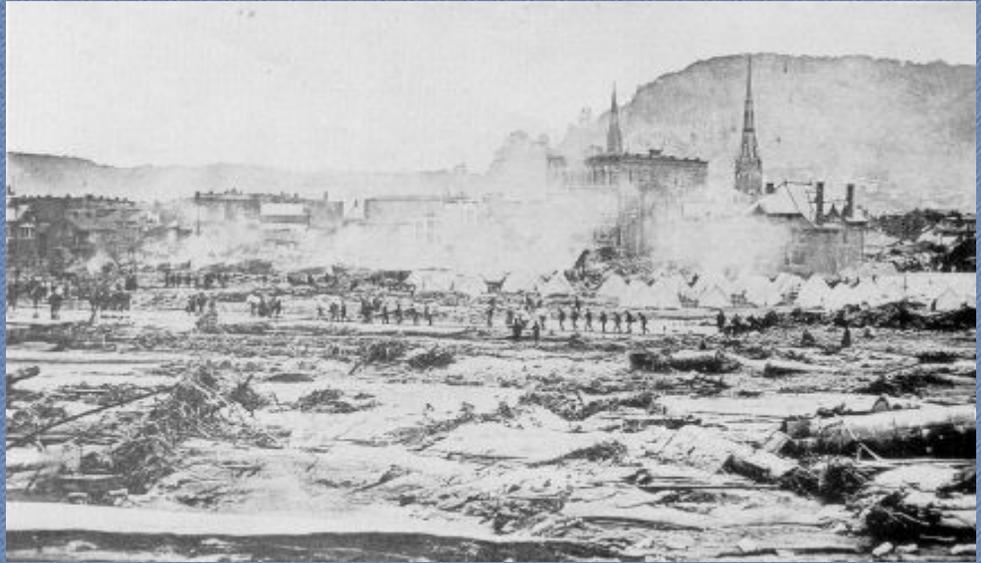


Central Park—as viewed from Franklin Street. Dr. Lowman's house in background.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

The area around Central Park was covered by tents of the militia. Commanded by Gen. Hastings they provided protection from looting. The church steeples (left to right) belong to the English Lutheran and Baptist Churches on Franklin St. near Vine. Also shown is the home of Dr. Lowman that stood at Park Place on Main, and Alma Hall where many per sons were rescued and spent the night.



The Presbyterian Church on Main Street (now the Embassy Theater) had a large congregation and many prominent residents attended regularly. It was severely damaged but served as a m o r g u e. The minister was Rev. Beale who later published a book called "The Johnstown Story."



# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



One of the oddities and much photographed subjects was the home of John Schultz. It stood on Union Street and the family consisted of nine persons. Six were in the building at the time when it moved off but all were saved. A large tree hit the house and the building turned over—carrying the tree with it—the roots sticking 30 feet in the air. In this shape it was stranded on the point.

The house was a great attraction for the photographers of the day and many families posed in front of it to record the scene for posterity. This scene was reproduced in newspapers all over the world.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



When a section at the east end of the stone bridge embankment gave way, the water and debris struck Cambria City and continued to wreck homes and cause greater damage.

A footbridge was built on the present location of the Walnut Street bridge so that bodies could be taken to Prospect for temporary burial. The coffins were shipped in from the west and covered the area around the railroad station. At right center can be seen the Club House which later became the Capitol Hotel. At left is the general office of the Cambria Iron Company.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The home of the Tribune in 1889 was on Franklin Street near Main. The post office occupied the first floor of the building with the Tribune plant on the second. Editor George T. Swank watched the oncoming tragedy from his front window and was writing an article describing the activities of the people shut in by the rising waters. Prominent residents kept Mr. Swank informed of the floods progress during the day by telephone. The Frazer drug store — in the Frazer building at Main and Franklin Sts. — lost its front wall. It was rebuilt and is still standing today — now occupied by Diamond Drug. Behind it rises the steeple of the Franklin St. Methodist Church.



In Kernville five of every eight houses were destroyed by the back current from the stone bridge. Hundreds of homes were removed from their foundation and streets were blocked with rubbish and displaced buildings, some of them from as far away as Conemaugh. The two buildings at right center were located on Napoleon St. near Dibert. Taken from the Westmont hillside, this picture shows Green Hill in the background.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



After the fire at the stone bridge, the authorities decided to dynamite the jam. On June 5th explosives were used to break the drift. Arthur Kirk of Pittsburgh was in charge of the job and on June 8th he outraged the residents by putting off a 450 lb. charge by placing nine boxes of dynamite about 30 ft. apart across the drift and fired with one charge. By June 10th an area 300 x 100 feet had been cleared and finally the debris was loosened and the river channel opened.



One of the unusual sights was the tremendous number of huge trees and logs that covered the town.



One path of the water swept down Feeder Street and moved every house. This view of upper Main Street—the 600 block—shows almost every man with a pick and shovel. The Frankstown Road appears at the top of the picture.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The Pennsylvania Railroad Station was probably the busiest place in town. Here, relief and help arrived from east and west. The station served as a commissary immediately after the flood. Tents of the militia were pitched nearby, and General Hastings, Commander of the units had his headquarters here. In the background can be seen fires caused by burning of the debris.

The office of the Cambria Iron Company (now Bethlehem Steel's dispensary and employment office) was the lone survivor in this section. Directly behind it stood the Wood, Morrell & Company store (now Penn Traffic Co.) At right center stood the Cambria Library which was completely demolished. The church steeple visible is that of the Franklin St. Methodist Church.





Mrs. Hettie M. Ogle, telegraph operator for Western Union, had her office in her home on Washington St. beside the library. With the water rising around her she was forced to move her instruments to the second floor shortly after noon. By 3:00 P.M. the flood waters had pulled the telegraph poles into the river channels and no more messages could be sent. Her home was destroyed as shown in the photo at left, and Mrs. Ogle was washed away. Her body was never identified, although a corpse was found with a telegraph instrument on it.

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Most of the homes that were built of brick were demolished — but many frame houses floated around the town and landed a great distance from their original location. After the waters receded, some of the houses were brought back to their old foundations and are still standing.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



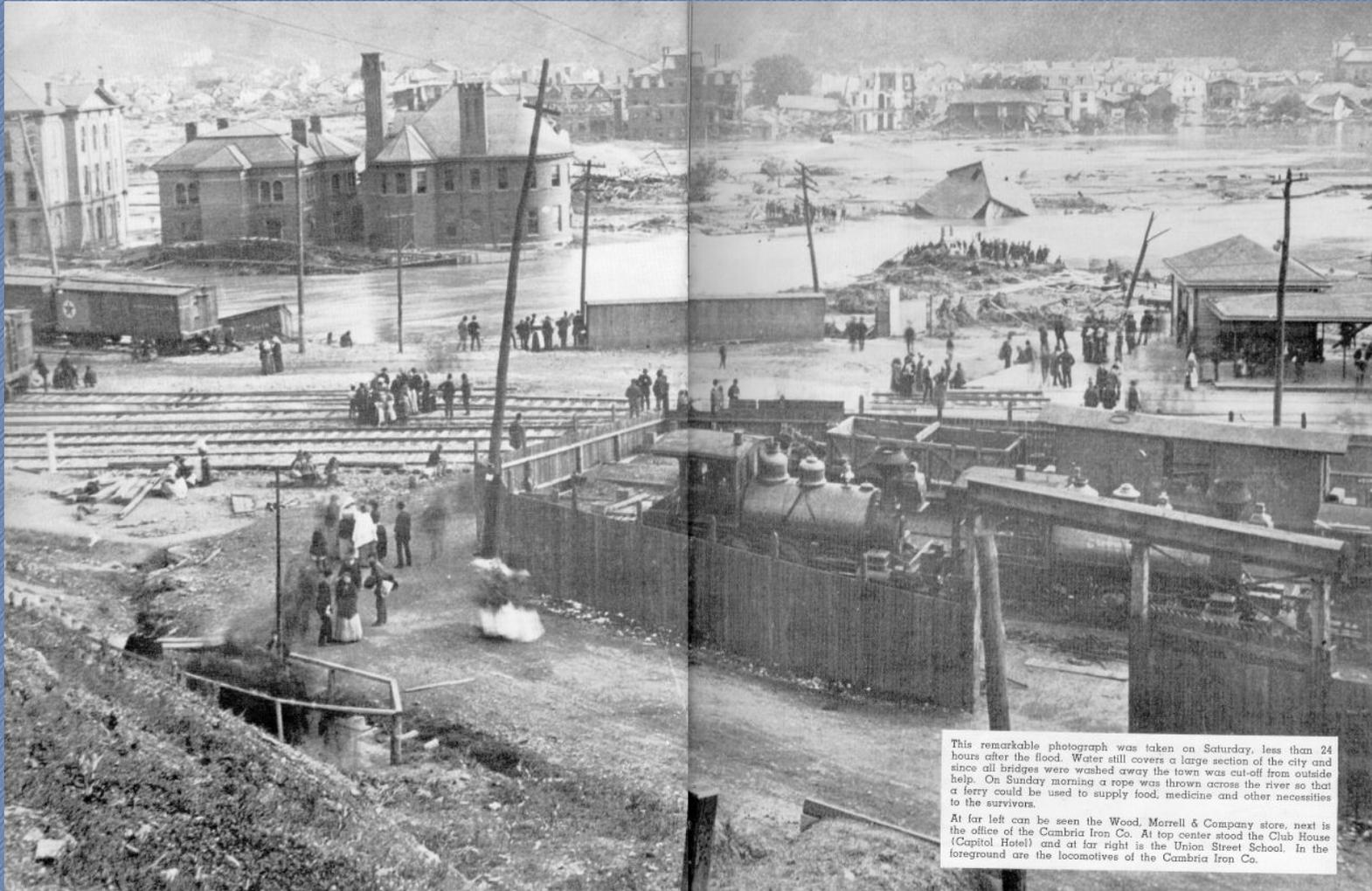
The Cambria Iron Company mills were greatly damaged. The Gautier mills were completely destroyed. In the upper photo the Woodvale woolen and flour mill is shown in the background while the tents belong to the militia. The lower photo shows the damage to the Cambria Iron Company's works below the stone bridge.



To provide shelter for the thousands left homeless, pre-fabricated houses were shipped in by various relief committees. They were known as "Hughes" and "Oklahoma" homes and sold for about \$250. The authorities planned to furnish each house with a stove, six chairs, two beds, blankets, table and tableware.

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



One of the many commissaries was established at Bedford and Baumer Street. Food and clothing—arriving by the B&O Railroad—was given to the survivors who had no other source of supply. This station was manned and sponsored by the local Masonic lodges.



Immediately after the waters receded, many people came from near and far to view the disaster.



In the center of the city relief was supervised by the Militia. Here a survivor signs up to receive rations.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The American Red Cross had just been organized by Clara Barton and she arrived in Johnstown on June 5. This was the first major disaster in which the Red Cross participated. She established headquarters in a mammoth tent on Prospect Hill. The Red Cross workers began a canvass of the area to determine who needed help and what kind of aid they needed. Miss Barton performed her most important work in supplying needs for the sufferers. Clara Barton remained in Johnstown until October. A farewell reception was held for her at the Morrell Institute on the eve of her departure. She was presented a gold pin and a locket, set with diamonds and amethysts. These are now at Red Cross headquarters in Washington, D. C. Miss Barton is identified in the photo at left by X.

Clara Barton decided to build "Red Cross Hotels" to provide shelter to the many persons who had lost their homes. A 2-story wooden building—50' x 116' was erected on the site of St. Mark's Church on Locust St. This was completed on July 27th and contained 34 bedrooms on the second floor with sitting room and dining room on the first floor. A second "hotel" was completed on Somerset Street in August and in September four buildings called "Woodvale House" were erected in that borough. It was a hollow square — composed of four buildings, each 40' x 100'.



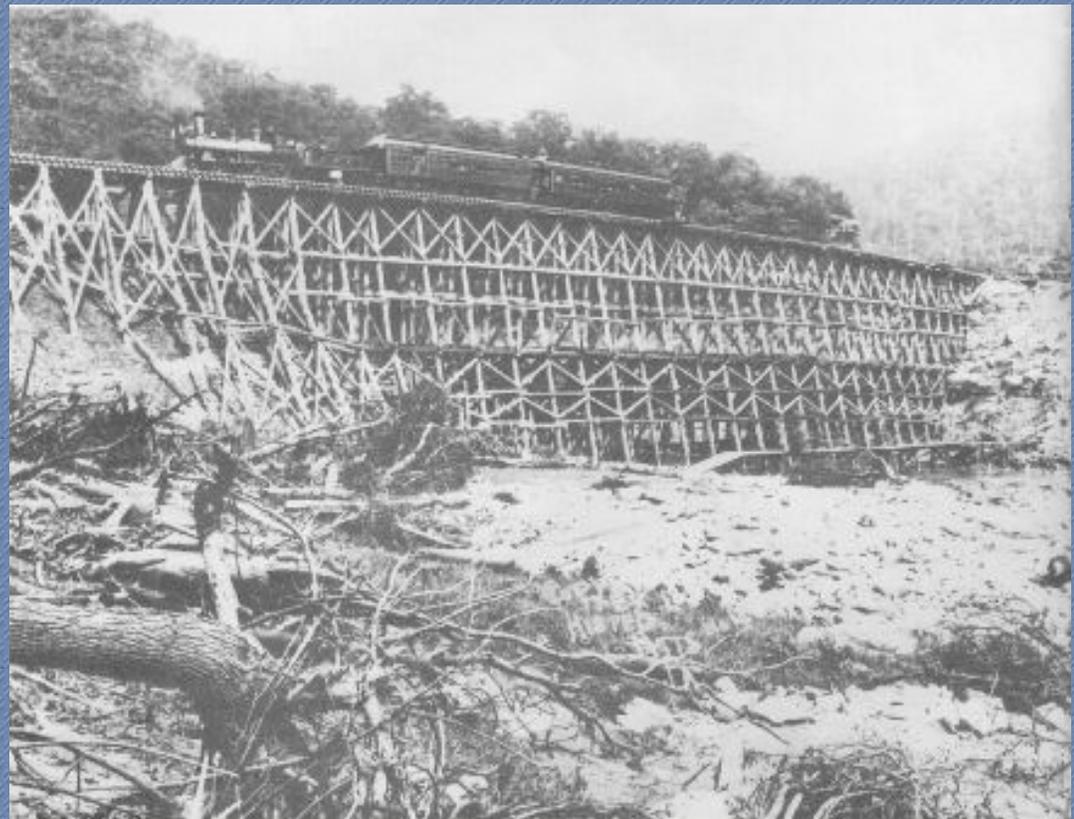
## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



This was the Conemaugh Viaduct—built for the Allegheny Portage Railroad. It was a massive stone structure about seventy feet high and a semi-circular arch of about eighty feet. The Viaduct was often described as the most beautiful railroad bridge in the United States. It was the first big obstacle in the path of the flood waters and it was so well constructed that it momentarily held back the surging currents until the water was about ninety feet high.

It was essential that this bridge be replaced so that help could arrive from the east. Railroad workers arrived from New York and eastern Pennsylvania and erected this temporary trestle in only two and one half working days. They worked around the clock and on June 14th service was restored on the Pennsylvania Railroad.





Two of the wrecked and burned P.R.R. engines destroyed at Conemaugh

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



On May 31, 1889, 32 engines of the great Pennsylvania Railroad had been ordered to stand by at Conemaugh because of the high water in Johnstown and a wash-out at Lilly.

At the eastern end of the Conemaugh yards stood the train of Engineer John Hess who was waiting for orders. When he heard the roar as the flood sped toward Conemaugh he realized that the dam had broken. Quickly he tied down the whistle of his engine and drove the train westward until he reached Conemaugh. The residents of East Conemaugh, Franklin, Woodvale and Conemaugh heard the steady scream of the engine and fled to the hills.

Two sections of the Day Express left Pittsburgh as usual. They were ordered to Conemaugh because of the high water and the sections were run on separate tracks with a freight train between them. A mail train was placed in the rear of the first section of the Day Express. When it was realized that the dam had broken the conductor told everyone to run for the hillside. Frantic exertions were made to escape — some terrified passengers jumped or fell into the water and drowned.



Some who could not leave the train survived with painful bruises—a drenching—and a paralyzing fright. The water rose almost to the car roof and twenty two passengers lost their lives. Rescued passengers were driven to Ebensburg where they continued their journey to Altoona via railroad. The railroad company quartered them with 600 other



passengers from different trains.

It was reported that one body was not identified until November 4 when it was disinterred from Prospect Hill for removal to Grandview, when it was identified by a relative. Some bodies were found at the stone bridge — others were found as late as September in a cellar in Millvale. Other victims were found among the heaps of 200 unclaimed dead bodies about to be buried on Prospect Hill.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



One of the many P.R.R. trains that was caught in the flood waters. This train came to rest in Woodvale — which is shown in the background.



One car of the mail train and the first section of the Day Express was forced off the track and fell on their sides.



A house was piled against one train. A crew of workmen spent one day removing the wreckage. Other engines were destroyed by fire.

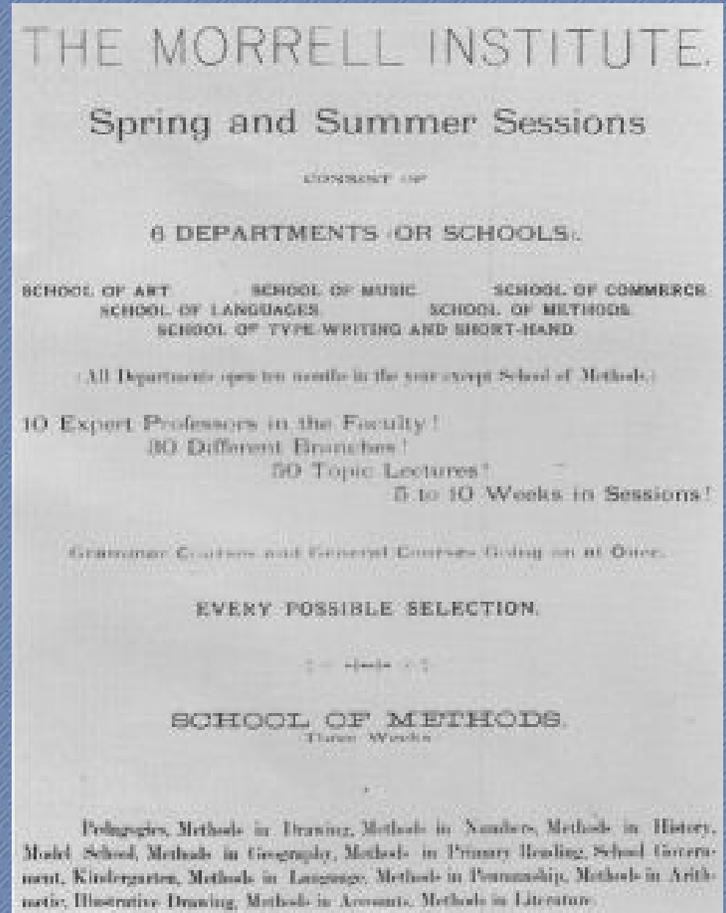


# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The Morrell Institute was located on Main Street below Walnut. It had been the residence of Daniel J. Morrell, one of Johnstown's most prominent citizens. Coming from Philadelphia in 1855 he was a partner in the Wood, Morrell and Company and was active in the operation of the Cambria Iron Company. Twice he was elected to Congress and in 1879 he was elected President of the American Iron and Steel Association. He also had been appointed a Commissioner to the Paris Exposition in 1878. Mr. Morrell died in 1884 and is buried in Grandview cemetery.



After his death the Morrell Institute was established as a private school and continued to operate up to the time of the flood. A directory of its curriculum is shown at the right.



P. L. Carpenter's restaurant originally stood on Franklin Street beside the Methodist Church. After floating around the town it landed on Walnut Street.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



The First E.U.B. Church on Vine Street at Franklin withstood the flood but was torn down and a new building erected in the early 1900's.

There were no church services held on Sunday, June 2, 1889. Main Street—the 400 block—was the home of the Christian Church on the left, and the Presbyterian Church on the right. Debris was more than 25 feet high in this area.



The "Miracle" at St. Mary's Catholic Church A service in worship for the Virgin Mary had just concluded at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Cambria City when the water rushed into the church. The floor was submerged and pews were upset, yet the statue, which had been decorated



with flowers, wreaths and lace was not marred even though the water had risen several feet above the height of the statue. The explanation was rather simple. The statue and pedestal were made of wood. Consequently it floated. The pedestal, being the heavier portion, kept the statue in a perpendicular position above the water, and when the water subsided the statue settled down, showing little effects of the flood.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

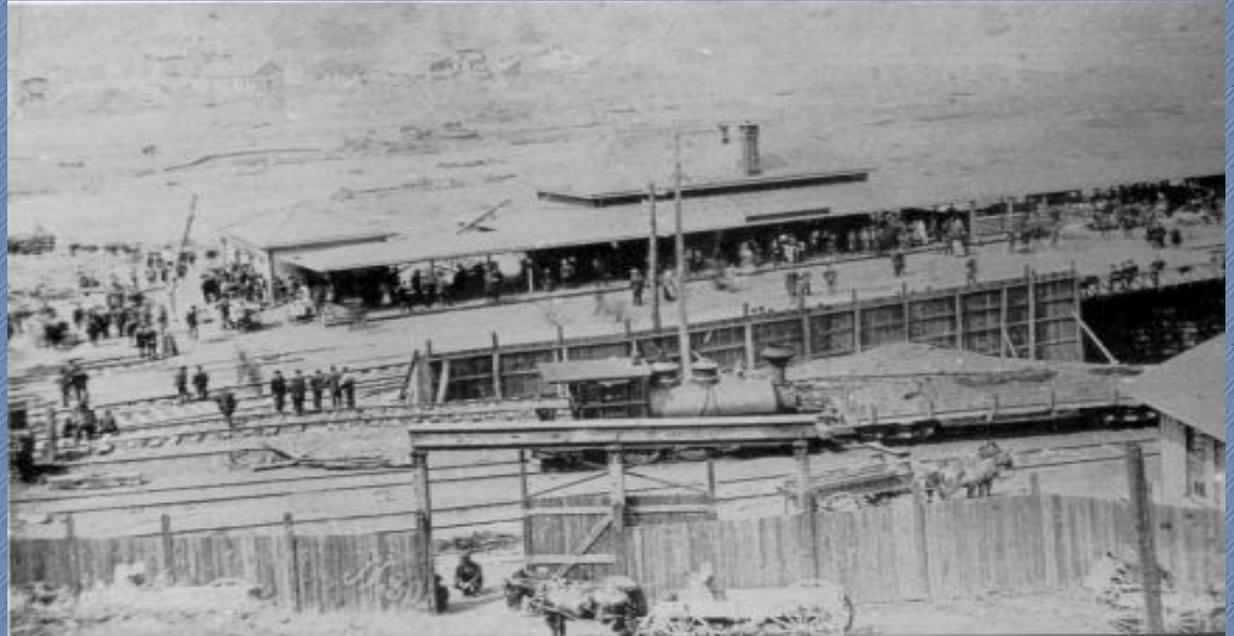
By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

With all bridges washed away, it was urgent that temporary bridges be constructed to supply food, restore communications and to evacuate the dead and injured. This bridge was erected from pontoons that were used at Harpers Ferry during the Civil War. It was built near the present Franklin St. bridge, and shows Somerset Street near Franklin. The house at left center is still standing.





The pontoon bridge connected Kernville with the city. The First E.U.B. Church at right center withstood the flood and continued to serve its large congregation. Many frame houses removed from their foundation were later moved to their original locations.



The Pennsylvania Rail-road Station before the Flood Relief Center was established.

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



This is the remains of what was called McMillens Row. It stood on Main Street just below Walnut. The Millvale School in the background was located near the railroad station.

The large home of Gen. J. M. Campbell was located at the corner of Walnut and Lincoln Street and was one of the few houses left standing in the area. Many persons floating by were rescued and more than 40 spent the night on the top floor. Note the high water mark on the building. The first Presbyterian Church, erected in 1912, now stands on this site.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London

Baumer Street (right) would not have been in the path of the flood waters, but the counter current from the stone bridge carried debris and floating houses all the way to Hornerstown and Moxham. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad suffered heavy damage—with tracks torn up and the right-of-way clogged with debris. Bedford Street and Green Hill are shown in the background.



One of the most difficult tasks was the disposing of the dead and preparing them for burial. This wagon is loaded with barrels of embalming fluid for delivery to one of the numerous morgues that were hastily established.



While many of the houses were demolished household furniture was able to be salvaged.





## A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



THE UNKNOWN PLOT—777 MARKERS

The final dramatic role that the great flood played in the lives of Johnstown people took place in 1892 when the Monument to the Unknown Dead was unveiled. This impressive ceremony satisfied both the residents of the new and rising city as well as the world at large. It culminated nearly two years of planning and preparation to give a noble and lofty sentiment to the victims of the disaster.

The plan to rebury the dead was the idea of Herman Baumer who thought that reinternment would probably result in many more corpses being identified. The Pennsylvania Flood Relief Commission liked the idea and purchased 20,000 square feet in Grandview for the burial plot. On October 21, 1889 reinternment began and funerals were held over the graves of people whose bodies were recognized during the transfer. The task was completed on November 28.

In 1890 777 white marble markers were sunk into the ground at the head of each grave. These shafts were buried 27 inches deep in cement in order to give them a firm and upright position.

The Flood Relief Commission gave \$8,000 for the Monument for the Unknown Dead. The design was a sarcophagus surmounted by three life-size figures representing Faith, Hope and Charity. Made from Vermont granite, the monument stands 21 feet high and weighs 35 tons.

The unveiling of the monument and the dedication of the plot took place on May 31, 1892. Ex Governor Beaver and Governor Pattison came to Johnstown for the services. A long procession, containing all the prominent people of Johnstown, and all orders, followed the Mineral City Band to Grandview. Company H, the City Guard, stood at attention near the veiled statue. The band marched around the monument, playing a dirge. The officials and guests for the day stood at the foot of the statue, surrounded by the thousands who came to witness the great event. When the ripcord pulled the veils from the beautiful memorial, all people bowed their heads, women wept and the band played again. After the speeches the impressed throng followed the winding road down into the valley. There was little levity in the city that night because the scene which they had witnessed was an intimate link with the tragic past.

On May 30, 1964 more than 250 survivors attended a banquet in their honor at the Cambria County War Memorial. The highlight of the program was a 35mm slide presentation and commentary of "THE JOHNSTOWN FLOOD." It was given by the authors of this book from their vast collection.

On May 31 a 75th Commemoration Service was held at Grandview Cemetery. In what was probably the last official gathering of this aged group, an impressive ceremony was conducted and witnessed by all the survivors who were able to attend, along with their relatives and friends.

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Central part of town with Stonycreek St. on the left and Somerset St. on the right.



---

Inside Back Cover

# A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY OF THE 1889 JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

By Harold H. Strayer and Irving L. London



Kernville section before and after the GREAT FLOOD.



---

Back Cover