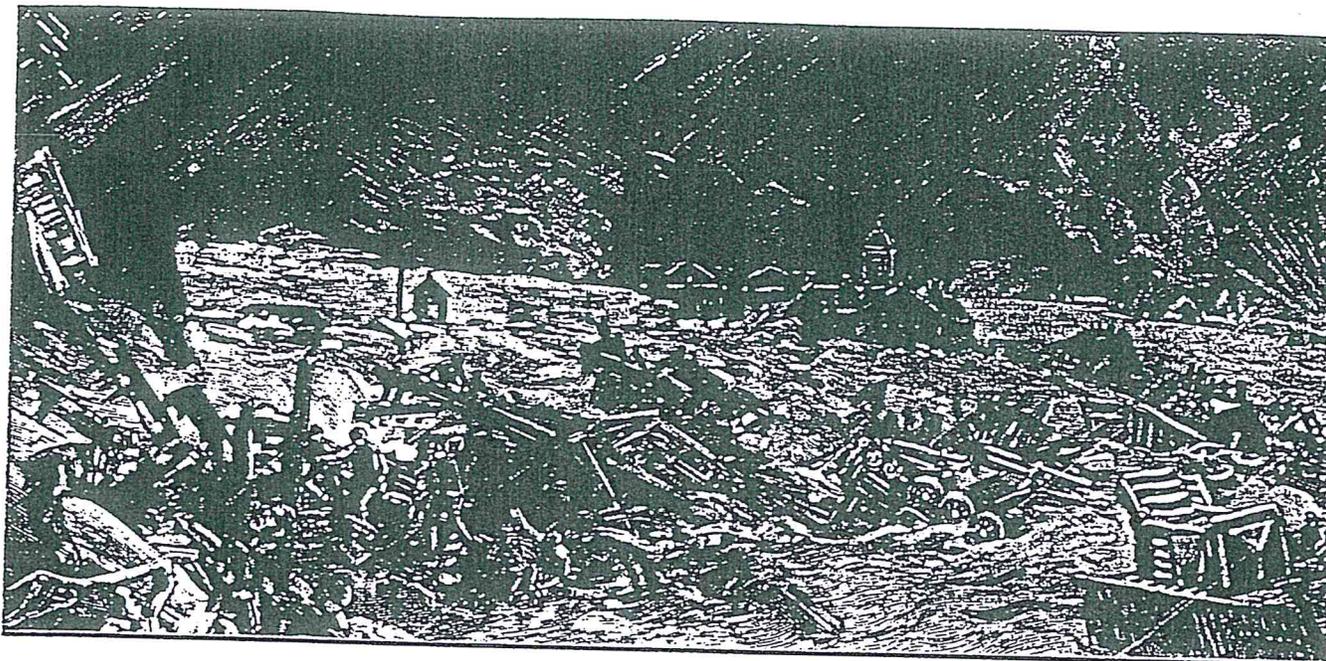


Washed Away!

The rain poured down all night. Rivers flowed over their banks. Main Street was already underwater. By noon on May 31, 1889, some of the people of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, had seen enough. They left for higher ground. Most, however, stayed put. They had been through flood scares before.



A Dam Made of Dirt

Fourteen miles up the valley from Johnstown, stood the South Fork **Dam**. It was built with dirt in the 1840's, and it held back a huge lake. A break in the dam would flood the whole valley. This worried some people. After all, how long could a dam made of dirt last?

Daniel Morrell was one of the most important people in Johnstown. Morrell sent an engineer to look at the dam. The engineer reported a big leak and said the dam needed to be repaired.

Morrell wrote letters to the dam's owners, begging them to fix the dam. But the owners lived far away, in Pittsburgh. They were not worried about the dam. One owner wrote to Morrell, "You and your people are in no danger from our **enterprise**." Morrell wrote back that the dam was dangerous to the lives and property of all those living in the valley.

Morrell died in 1885. Four years later, his worst **nightmare** came true.

Disaster Strikes

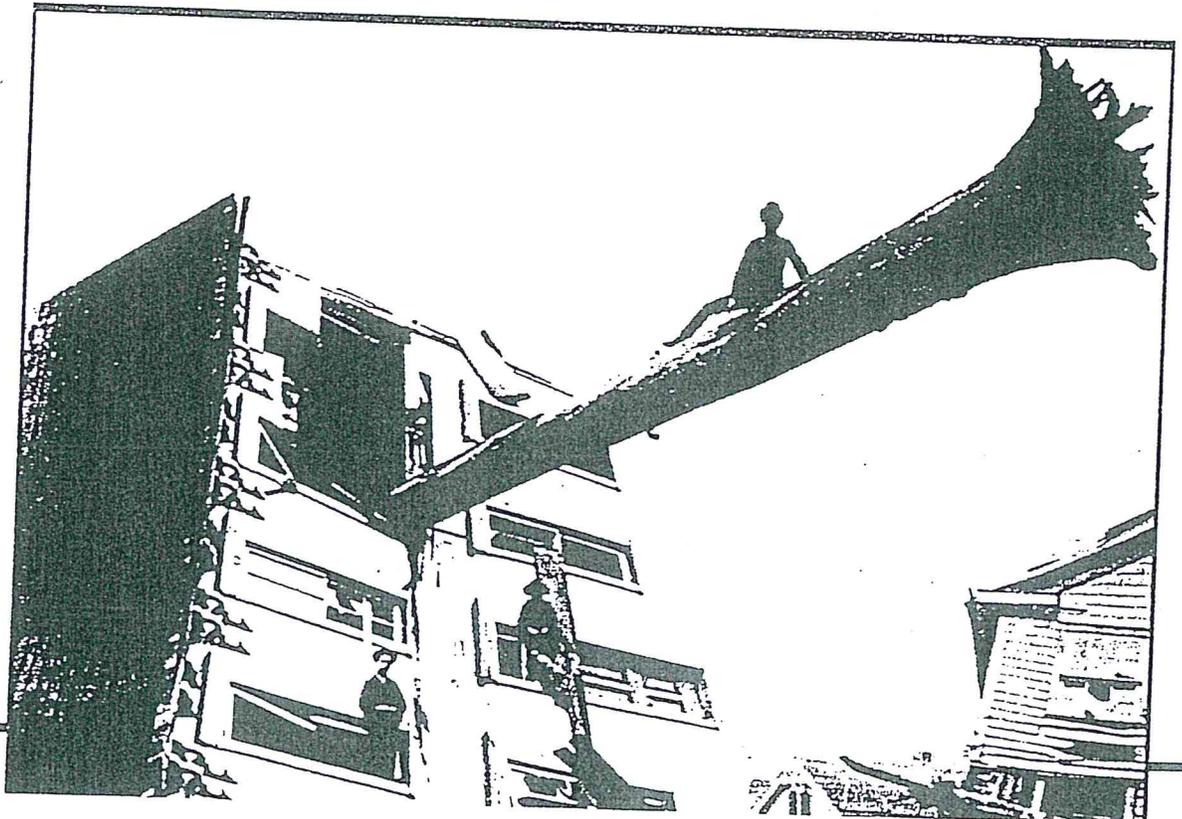
The heavy rains had filled the lake. At 3:10 P.M. on May 31, it happened. The dam gave way.

Twenty million **tons** of water exploded down the valley, wiping out everything in its path. Along the way, the flood picked up hundreds of trees, houses, and boulders. The flood crashed through the small town of Woodvale in five minutes, killing 314 people. Only one building was left standing.

Johnstown was next in the flood's path. It took about ten minutes for the **raging** waters to destroy the town. People did what they could to save themselves. Some ran for higher ground. Others **clung** to floating rooftops. Still others ran for the strongest-looking building they could find.

Help Arrives

Six-year-old Gertrude Quinn was on the third floor of her house when the flood struck. The house trembled as the water pounded against the walls.



Gertrude managed to climb up on the roof. She jumped onto a mattress that was floating by just as her house was swept away.

Luckily, **debris** beneath the mattress kept it floating. Night was approaching. Gertrude was **terrified**. A dead horse slammed into her raft.

The six-year-old floated by a large building with people crowded on the roof. She screamed for help. A mill worker named Maxwell McAchren heard her. He dived into the water. His head bobbed up and down in the strong **current**. Several times he went under. But at last he climbed onto the mattress.

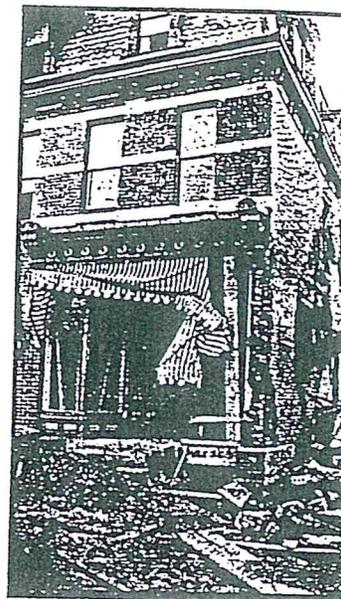
Together, the two floated along. Suddenly, they saw two men on a hillside about ten feet away. The men were trying to help people. One of the men shouted, "Throw that baby over here to us."

McAchren picked up Gertrude. Using all his strength, he threw the little girl to the shore. One of the men caught Gertrude. McAchren had saved the little girl's life. Later, he also managed to save himself.

Starting Over

By the morning of June 1, the flood was over. It left behind a sea of debris and **death**. About 2,200 people had died. Thousands of people had no homes. There was little food or medicine. There was no gas or electricity.

Soon help began pouring in from around the country. People sent food, clothing, candles, blankets, and lumber. The Army and the Red Cross came to help. Slowly, the people of Johnstown brought their town back to life. But they never rebuilt the South Fork Dam.



Do You Remember?

■ In the blank, write the letter of the best ending for each sentence.

- _____ 1. The South Fork Dam was built with
a. bricks. b. steel. c. dirt.
- _____ 2. The dam owners lived in
a. Pittsburgh. b. Johnstown. c. Woodvale.
- _____ 3. Gertrude Quinn jumped onto a
a. horse. b. mattress. c. railroad car.
- _____ 4. Maxwell McAchren threw Gertrude to two men
a. on a roof. b. in a tree. c. on the shore.
- _____ 5. The flood killed about
a. 200 people. b. 2,200 people. c. 20,000 people.

Critical Thinking – Fact or Opinion?

■ A **fact** can be proven. An **opinion** is a belief. Opinions cannot be proven.

Write **F** before each statement that is a fact. Write **O** before each statement that is an opinion.

- _____ 1. People who lived in Johnstown were foolish.
- _____ 2. Daniel Morrell wrote letters to the owners of the dam.
- _____ 3. The South Fork Dam was built in the 1840's.
- _____ 4. Daniel Morrell should have fixed the dam himself.
- _____ 5. The flood hit Woodvale first.
- _____ 6. Gertrude was the luckiest girl in the world.
- _____ 7. Maxwell McAchren liked to swim.
- _____ 8. Many people crowded onto rooftops.

Exploring Words

■ Use the clues to complete the puzzle. Choose from the words in the box.

dam
 enterprise
 nightmare
 ton
 raging
 clung
 debris
 terrified
 current
 death

Across

4. movement of water
5. rushing wildly
6. end of life
9. bad dream
10. scattered trash

Down

1. held on
2. very frightened
3. business
7. 2,000 pounds
8. wall to hold back water

