

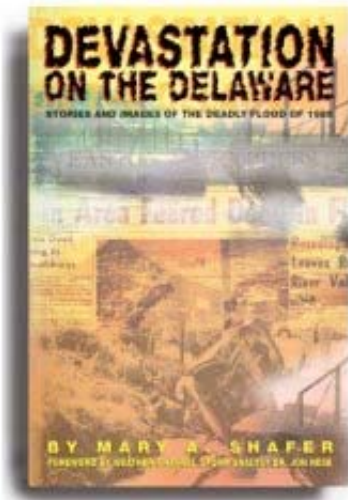


BOOK REVIEW

DEVASTATION ON THE DELAWARE: Stories and Images of the Deadly Flood of 1955

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REVIEWED 6/15/06 BY:
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Riveting account of the historic flood
of August 1955 that would change
life in the Poconos forever

Whenever I read a book about a natural disaster I cannot help but wonder how I might react in such a situation. As the new day dawned on August 18, 1955, folks in the Delaware Valley had absolutely no reason to believe that this day would be substantially different from any other. And yet, an unlikely series of weather events would unfold over the next 72 hours that would severely test the mettle of just about everyone in the region.

In *Devastation On The Delaware*, author Mary Shafer chronicles the heartbreaking events of those three days in August, 1955. More than one hundred people would lose their lives. Some of the victims would not be found until months or years later. And those lucky enough to survive would quickly discover that for them, life would never be the same.

It is hard to imagine the utter devastation that took place. Many residents lost just about everything they owned. Houses were literally torn off their foundations and ripped to shreds, and two-ton automobiles were tossed about like children's toys. In many of these communities, the raging waters damaged or destroyed most of the infrastructure. All along the Delaware, the bridges that were vital links in the lives of so many people were laid waste, and many would never be rebuilt. All over the Delaware Valley, "mom and pop" businesses would be wiped out forever, and scores of people would find themselves unemployed in the immediate aftermath, as the water inundated manufacturing plants, retail stores and tourist attractions.

Mary Shafer does an outstanding job of conveying the full scope of the problems and emotions these people were forced to deal with during those tumultuous days. *Devastation on the Delaware* also chronicles how government officials, private businesses and so many ordinary people managed to rise to the occasion and assist with the recovery effort.

Interspersed throughout the book are dozens of gut-wrenching black and white photographs that really help to illustrate the story that Mary Shafer is trying to tell. Many of these photos are from the private collections of those who lived through the tragedy, but somehow had the presence of mind to record these events on film for posterity.

Even though I am not from the immediate area, I must say that I found *Devastation on the Delaware* to be quite compelling reading. It compares favorably to other outstanding books I have read on the subject of hurricanes, such as *Sudden Sea* (R.A. Scotti), *Black Cloud* (Eliot Kleinberg) and *The Great Hurricane: 1938* (Cherie Burns). And for those who hail from the Delaware Valley, this book will serve future generations as an important piece of regional history that will be a fixture in local libraries for decades to come.

A wonderful book by a very gifted writer. Highly recommended!!