



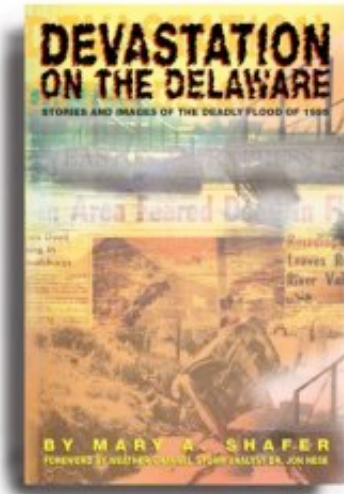
BOOK REVIEW

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

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Author tells of tension along river

Reading Mary Shafer's "Devastation on the Delaware" (\$19.95, Word Forge Books) dredged up some painful memories.

I recall the floods of 2004 and 2005 vividly and the muddy calling card the river left in my Kintnersville home; returning to a dark, skeletal downstairs after work, and months of being without an oven.

Months later, I dread the appearance of a hurricane, however distant, and anxiously look across Route 611 during periods of heavy rain.

But I had time to move furniture, the choice to leave.

Many of the poor souls in 1955 didn't know what hit them, and when they did, it was too late.

Skillfully interweaving scientific data, media and personal accounts, Shafer shows a region largely unaware -- and unprepared for -- the impending disaster.

The 1955 flood was the unlikely union of two hurricanes: Connie and Diane. While Connie brought many creeks and rivers back up to their banks after a long drought, it was Diane's rains that unleashed a torrent of water to devastating effect.

Though there are many, perhaps the most horrific account is of the inhabitants at Camp Davis in the Poconos. Dimly aware of the danger, many sought shelter in a house near the Brodhead Creek, unaware of the wall of debris that was to smash into the building and send many of them plunging to their deaths in the black, raging waters.

Shafer is a master at building tension, cutting in and out of accounts, leaving us wondering whether individuals will make it to higher ground, or be taken by the current.

And amid the sense of doom and gloom there is hope and humor. The legions of helpers descending on the beleaguered river towns, the husband in Bucks County asking his wife when's the last time she cleaned the mud-covered floor.

Shafer doesn't propose any fixes, and I'm not sure there are any. Long after memories of 1955, 2004 and 2005 have receded, people will continue to live along the river, some oblivious, others respectful of its awesome power.

"Devastation on the Delaware" is available at area stores and retailers. For more information, go to 55flood.com.