



Devastation on the Delaware: Stories and Images of the Deadly Flood of 1955

Mary A. Shafer

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August 18-20, 1955: Three terrifying days and nights still remembered with awe in the Delaware River watershed. Record-breaking rainfall from back-to-back hurricanes— Connie, then Diane—abruptly ended a withering drought, but the relief was short-lived. It was soon overshadowed by terror and destruction that tore away bridges and ripped houses from their foundations. From the river’s headwaters in the Catskills and through the Poconos, excessive runoff surged down steep slopes and through valleys on both sides of the river. Tributaries swelled unbelievably, some rising thirty feet in fifteen minutes. Eventually, they all poured into the Delaware, transforming the usually placid waters into a raging, uncontrollable beast. Mountain resorts were inundated, leaving cars up-ended in swimming pools. Entire summer camps were washed away. More than 400 children were evacuated by helicopter from island camps in a tense, unprecedented operation. In the end, nearly a hundred people were dead and hundreds more homeless in the Delaware River watershed. Dozens were missing, some ripped, still sleeping, from their beds in the middle of the night. Victims’ bodies were still being recovered thirty years later—at least one was never found. Despite several more destructive floods in the first decade of this century, the deadly flood of 1955 remains the record-holder in terms of life lost, property destroyed and longterm effects on the Delaware River. Devastation on the Delaware follows the true stories of survivors and eyewitnesses to bring these chilling events to life. More than 125 historical photos and two dozen+ maps illustrate this definitive account of a tragic weather disaster that changed life in the Delaware watershed forever. 60th Anniversary Edition Foreword by Dr. Jon Nese, former Weather Channel Storm Analyst “In the tradition of Isaac’s Storm and The Johnstown Flood, Mary A. Shafer’s Devastation on the Delaware is a meticulously researched, compellingly written account of a major meteorological catastrophe. The stories of innocent people swept away in raging flood waters—some of them taken by surprise in the middle of the night or carried off while would-be rescuers extended helping hands—will haunt me. The prose is crisp, the photos mesmerizing...an electrifying read.” – David Laskin, author of The Children’s Blizzard and Braving the Elements

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