

DISASTER TOURISM AND THE MELODRAMA  
OF AUTHENTICITY: REVISITING THE 1889  
JOHNSTOWN FLOOD

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The Johnstown Flood of 1889 offers an opportunity to examine late nineteenth-century attitudes about tourism and tragedy. The events leading up to the devastating dam break are well known, and the story has recently gained currency as the events leading up to New Orleans' levee breaks during Katrina are dissected. However, some of the events after Johnstown's disaster have not been discussed as thoroughly: as soon as they were able, visitors came to Johnstown to see the wreckage. Rubbernecking tourists flocked toward the scene of disaster (instead of away from it) and seemed to get a shivery pleasure from seeing a city turned into a morgue. Furthermore, newspapermen and photographers conveyed the graphic lessons of Johnstown to a wider and equally eager audience of armchair disaster tourists. By examining the various touristic practices (including souvenir hunting, photography, and the collecting of aftermath pictures) this essay shows how Johnstown's rubberneckers reframed actual disaster in the rhetoric of leisure. As in the late-nineteenth century flowering of

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melodrama, the practices of disaster tourism are involved with the thrill of encountering the authentic and the real.

### The “Flood”

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Johnstown, Pennsylvania was a thriving town on the Conemaugh River known for its vigorous coal and steel mills.<sup>1</sup> The Cambria Iron Company employed working-class immigrants who were mostly German, Welsh, and Irish. Johnstown was not a particularly attractive or genteel town, but it was prosperous enough to have attracted ten thousand people by 1889. Up the river was the town’s antithesis, the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, an association for Pittsburgh’s elite. Among the members (whom history would later call the Robber Barons) were Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, Henry Phipps, Jr. (Carnegie’s partner), Robert Pitcairn (of the Pennsylvania Railroad), and Andrew Mellon. The Club boasted an elegant lodge with forty-seven rooms and a main dining room that held one hundred and fifty finely-dressed persons who dined on innumerable dinner courses. Sixteen cottages and assorted outbuildings surrounded an artificial lake made by erecting an earthwork dam on the Conemaugh River; the lake covered a few square miles and offered the elite members an idyllic place

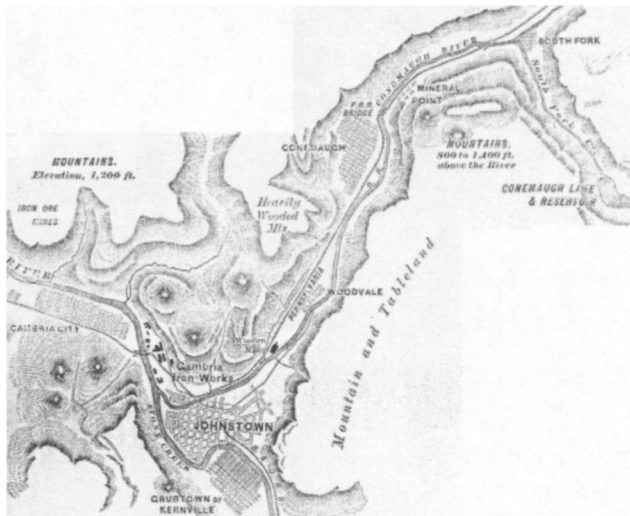


FIGURE 1: Topographic Map of Johnstown and Its Vicinity, (Source: Henry Loomis Nelson, “Johnstown and the Floods,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Volume XXXIII, no. 1695, 15 June 1889, 478).

to boat and fish. The elite played at doing the work of fishing, as they already had plenty of fish to eat. Those in Johnstown, however, would have most likely characterized fishing as food gathering rather than as a leisure activity.

On May 28, 1889, heavy rainstorms began in Kansas and Nebraska and dropped huge amounts of water as they traveled eastward toward Pennsylvania. Some locations recorded as much as ten inches of water in twenty-four hours. The Conemaugh Dam had been improperly patched with straw and horse manure, and the relief pipes that had been positioned for overflow had been sold earlier as scrap metal.<sup>2</sup> The fragile earthen dam holding back the enormous lake burst, spilling the contents of the lake into the valley below the clubhouse. Although the working-class inhabitants of the Conemaugh Valley had long suspected that the dam was less than sound, they had no warning of the actual break. It took less than an hour for the entire lake to empty, and civil engineers estimate that the force of the water approximated Niagara Falls' full power.<sup>3</sup> As the water traveled the fifteen miles to Johnstown, it swept the earth completely clean—leaving only rock and mud behind. The wave of water hurled entire trees, buildings, factories, and locomotives down the valley. When the water hit the hot steel furnaces, there were tremendous explosions. People, houses, animals, factories, trees, and trains crashed into the Pennsylvania Railroad's sturdily-built stone bridge, forming a second sort of dam made of rubble and bodies. Moreover, as the debris fashioned this impromptu dam, the water's force was turned back upon Johnstown itself. As the onrush shot down the valley and then was repelled by the mass at the stone bridge, the force created a colossal whirlpool. Many people who had not already drowned were trapped in the mountain of debris



FIGURE 2: "Johnstown—View Cor. Main and Clinton Streets" (Willis Fletcher Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 1889, 109).

at the stone bridge. The debris caught fire, incinerating those unlucky people and animals who were still pinned and struggling. Although the exact number of the dead will never be known, it is generally accepted that over 2,200 people lost their lives.<sup>4</sup> More than seven hundred and fifty persons are buried in Johnstown cemetery's Unknown Plot. Although commonly referred to as a natural disaster, the Johnstown Flood was clearly manmade.

Even with inoperative telegraph lines and interrupted rail service, people along the Conemaugh were well aware that the dam had burst, for citizens gathered along the banks to see the houses that floated in the massive waves of water.

On Saturday the water had risen to such a height that the people quit laughing and gathered along the sides of the torrent with a sort of awe-stricken curiosity. A friend of mine, Mr. Frank Bellows, and myself went out to see the grand spectacle, and found a place of observation on the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge. Great rafts of logs were swept down the stream, and now and then a house would be brought with a crash against the bridge.<sup>5</sup>

Hundreds of human bodies drifted downstream as well.



FIGURE 3: "The Debris above the Pennsylvania Railroad Bridge" (Willis Fletcher Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 1889, 199).

In the face of this devastation, the newspapers gave graphic, horrifying details even in the headlines, as in "Johnstown Completely Devastated by the Raging Waters: Numerous Bodies of Victims Seen Hanging in the Branches

of Trees This Morning.”<sup>6</sup> Railroads worked quickly to replace viaducts that were swept away by the flood since goods and assistance were badly needed in Johnstown. By laboring around the clock for five days, workers replaced a stone overpass with a wooden crossing so that relief trains could pass. Reporters were early arrivals, and the Johnstown Flood was one of the biggest news stories of the nineteenth century, probably the most explosive since the blockbuster coverage of the Civil War and Lincoln’s assassination.

### Rubbernecking

Along with the reporters and photographers, visitors started moving toward the devastation. Accounts of exactly when outsiders arrived in Johnstown differ somewhat. McCullough states that the tourists “had been coming almost from the first morning of the disaster” on special trains out of Altoona and on weekend excursion trains along the Baltimore & Ohio.<sup>7</sup> O’Connor reports, “By Monday night, June 3, the thrill-seekers had already begun to arrive in search of their morbid delights. Many of them must have endured considerable hardship, slogging over flooded roads from the railheads.”<sup>8</sup>

The rush towards Johnstown began soon after the dam broke, as initial, but sketchy, reports of the calamity were printed in papers immediately even while reporters rushed to the scene. In addition, the motives of those pressing towards Johnstown covered the gamut; as McCullough states, there were workers, reporters, photographers, “charity workers, doctors, preachers, men looking for work, ladies of the W.C.T.U., former Johnstown people heading back to look for relatives, railroad officials, prostitutes, [and] sight-seers.”<sup>9</sup> On June 3, the *Pittsburgh Press* ran a story entitled “Spectators in the Way” which announced that the railroad station in Pittsburgh was crowded and that “applicants were either of the bogus order or merely of the curiosity order.”<sup>10</sup> A sign was posted saying that the train was unable to get all the way to Johnstown as the track was washed out, and one of the Pennsylvania Railroad’s chief clerks added,

“We have practically had to close our doors against the hordes of people who are clamoring for transportation to the scene of the wreck. We want it to be distinctly understood that sight-seers are not wanted. If the Pennsylvania railroad desired to make a play on death and sorrow, we could run continuous trains to the scene of the disaster. We do not want a single person of such a class. Workers are wanted—none else.”<sup>11</sup>

Newspapermen complained that the available spots on the train to Johnstown were taken by “the sight-seeing and curious crowd” which had arrived at the station before relief workers.<sup>12</sup> But the sight-seers were not to be dissuaded by a simple sign because on June 5, the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* ran yet another article:

**Please Keep Away  
Sight-seers Are Regarded as a Perfec [sic] Nuisance at Johnstown**

If there is one thing above another that the authorities and those interested in the work here desire it is that sight-seers stay away. This is urged for many reasons and Mr. Mexham, Gen. Hastings and others have requested newspaper correspondents again and again to impress the fact upon the public that the presence of people who come from no other motive but curiosity is a hindrance and prevents the work that must now be pushed rapidly night and day. They block the bridges, which are inadequate to accommodate the workers. They get in the way of workmen at the ruins. They crowd about the morgues to the exclusion of friends, and are a nuisance in general . . . .<sup>13</sup>

While the Pennsylvania Railroad (P.R.R.) may have had some hesitation to “make a play on death and sorrow” by insisting that passengers carry a permit signed by Adjutant-General Hastings or Scott, the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) seems to have been either less particular or less careful. On the other hand, a cynic might say that the P.R.R. was simply protesting because the B&O was able to get their train lines running again more quickly and therefore could sell more tickets.<sup>14</sup> (Figure 1 shows that the B&O’s tracks to the south of Johnstown do not cross the river a number of times, as do the tracks for the P.R.R.) The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, “The Pennsylvania Railroad has been making every effort to keep out the crowds, but the Baltimore and Ohio, which opened yesterday, brought in a flood of people from the Somerset Valley this morning.”<sup>15</sup> As a result, the militia group Company F along with a “committee of citizens accompanied the militia” stopped “at all the stations along the road [in order to] remonstrate with the people against coming to Johnstown.” The newspaper reported that the problem was clear as “[t]he crowds of curious ones are constantly growing, much to the hindrance of the work of removing bodies and clearing away debris.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* said on June 7 that the

Pennsylvania Railroad was only selling tickets as far as Bolivar.<sup>17</sup> The Relief Committee complained about the struggle to keep people out of the devastated area:

One of the hardest things that the committee had to deal with was the morbid curiosity of people of all classes, who, despite the fact that they knew they were encumbering the work of the people who went to the devastated city to save life and succor distress, insisted upon going up there simply to view the horrible disaster.<sup>18</sup>

Dishonest gawkers “would appeal to the Relief Committee for transportation, telling, in order to gain their end, false stories that were so pitiful that the committeemen were bound to believe them.”<sup>19</sup>

Other reports, however, accused the P.R.R. of refusing passage to some 300–400 people with legitimate business in Johnstown, collecting fares twice, and of letting railroad employees go gawking in Johnstown:

By this time the train was filled. Thereupon a brakeman of the Pennsylvania Road sauntered along with a party of thirty well-dressed men and women, who were so evidently sightseers that the persons in the cars even remarked it. He spoke to the Sheriff, who observed: “Oh, railway people. They can go of course.”<sup>20</sup>

Some accused Pittsburgh residents of trying to run the relief effort single-handedly in order to garner public praise. The Relief Committee in Pittsburgh, whose officials gave out the passes during the periods of martial law, were accused of being liberal with giving passes to Pittsburgh residents, while being stingy with all others; the Chicago Tribune commented, “Almost any one living in Pittsburg can get one [a pass], whether he has business here or not.”<sup>21</sup>

By whatever means, however, sight-seers were successful in reaching the disaster site, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* complained about sight-seers who could have been helpers if they had had the inclination: “If the sight-seers on the ground would go to work some of these decaying bodies could be removed and buried, but they will not work, and the people of Johnstown are thankful that they are not thieves.” As early as June 16, the B&O Railroad was selling round-trip excursion tickets for \$2.35 to allow tourists to see the town for four hours. The railroad sagely advised the

rubbernecker, "Those who desire to go on this excursion should provide themselves with lunch baskets as provisions cannot be procured at Johnstown."<sup>22</sup> Bringing food (or begging food from the relief efforts) would have been necessary, for as Willis Fletcher Johnson commented, "It is now a week since the flood, and Johnstown is a cross between a military camp and a new mining town, and is getting more so each day. It has all the unpleasant and disagreeable features of both, relieved by the pleasures of neither."<sup>23</sup>

Clara Barton—who had come to help at Johnstown—noted the "thousands of excursionists" in the city and saved an article cut from the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, entitled "Excursionists' Day":

**Excursionists' Day**  
**The Morbid Curiosity Displayed by Sightseers in**  
**Johnstown—Women Followed Bodies Until Sickened by the Stench.**  
**Domestic Work Begun**

From the Commercial Gazette Bureaus

Johnstown, PA, June 23.—The gayest, brightest day known here since the horror, when the city was blotted out of existence, was yesterday. It was not so much different so far as the residents are concerned, than the two Sundays that preceded it, as religious services were held in the churches and in the open air, but for the first time since the day of the disaster the railroad let down the barrier they had placed against the outside world and the curious were not slow to take advantage.

The Baltimore & Ohio ran excursion trains from all points along the line, and while the Pennsylvania railroad did not do this exactly, the pressure to get here demanded several sections of nearly every scheduled train and taxed the capacity of the road to convey the thousands who wanted to see.

They came, men, women and children, of all colors and nations, many decked out in holiday attire and laden down with huge lunch baskets. Farmers drove in from surrounding villages with horses and wagons decorated with bunting and evergreens.



### Their Morbid Curiosity

If there was any one spot that seemed to be the magnet for the crowd it was the stone bridge. All work had been suspended for the day except the delving in the river for bodies.<sup>24</sup>

True to the pattern, visitors went sight-seeing on Sunday, June 23—their day of rest. Classified advertisements ran shortly thereafter for “a grand pleasure tour” which would offer “an excellent opportunity of seeing the ruins caused by the late floods.”<sup>25</sup>

“Tourism” is defined as the practice of traveling for pleasure, and the word arose during the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> It is a leisure activity. The term “traveler,” in contrast, comes from the root “travail” and is more associated with work and with learning.<sup>27</sup> Tourism’s commercial aspect makes it different from traveling. In addition, tourism also places great emphasis on the act of *looking* above all other sense perceptions, something marked by the associated term “sight-seeing.” Reports out of Johnstown commonly refer to these visitors as “sight-seers,” as they were there to do exactly that: see the sights.

One could also call Johnstown’s visitors “rubbernecks,” as this American term was born in the latter-half of the nineteenth century. The term is powerfully evocative as the neck must be plastic enough to move the all-important eyes into position. Even the material reference in the word highlights the moment. After Goodyear’s invention of vulcanization in 1839, hardened rubber (or caoutchouc) was used in consumer products from dentures to tires.

The rubbernecker makes a brief appearance in Walter Benjamin’s writings. The *badaud*—variously translated as “idler” or “rubbernecker”—was a modern personage who made his (or her) way into Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk*:

Remarkable distinction between the flâneur and the rubberneck (*badaud*): “Let us not, however, confuse the flâneur and the rubberneck: there is a subtle difference . . . The average flâneur . . . is always in full possession of his individuality, while that of the rubberneck disappears, absorbed by the external world, . . . which moves him to the point of intoxication and ecstasy. Under the influence of the spectacle, the rubberneck becomes an impersonal being. He is no longer a man—he is the public; he is the crowd.”<sup>28</sup>

Rubbernecking is primarily a group activity, and it implies the crowd pressing forward, necks craning, eyes searching. In his work on early cinema, in which the spectator is allimportant, Tom Gunning discusses how the *badaud* is more a figure of the modern world—a part of the crowd, absorbed by spectacle.<sup>29</sup> A disaster such as the one at Johnstown summoned a crowd—not an individual. The timing and behavior of the crowd designates the visitors to Johnstown as tourists and as rubberneckers: they went on their day off in decorated wagons and dressed “in holiday attire” carrying “huge lunch baskets.”<sup>30</sup> McCullough reports on the generally festive mood of these visitors:

But they strolled about everywhere, got in the way, set up their lunch parties inside abandoned houses, laughed, took pictures, asked a lot of silly questions, and infuriated nearly everyone except a few enterprising local men who set up booths and began selling official Johnstown Flood relics: broken china, piano keys, beer bottles, horseshoes, buttons, even bits of brick or wood shingles.<sup>31</sup>

There were worries that some of these visitors were there to do more than just look. For example, the police presence was quickly doubled at Johnstown, and newspapers reported, “As always happens when a disaster of this kind occurs thieves from all over the country have flocked in, expecting to profit on the ruin of others.”<sup>32</sup> Some people did make a profit from the disaster, but not always in the way the report fears. That is to say, resourceful entrepreneurs stepped into provide standard tourist commodities—souvenirs and photographs.

### Souvenirs and Relic Cranks

It is true that the visitors to the devastated city did take things, but most behaved more like tourists than thieves. They took souvenirs. This behavior was in keeping with places of amusement not related to disasters, as in the case of a private museum and zoo at Ridge Hill Farms in Wellesley, MA. The owners were testy about visitors feeding the animals tobacco, but most irritating was the “apparently uncontrollable propensity of visitors to carry away souvenirs [which was] very costly and annoying.”<sup>33</sup> Apparently, taking shells from the grotto was an almost irresistible temptation, and the manager reported that he counted how many visitors took something away: in thirty

minutes, twenty of one hundred visitors claimed a free souvenir. The guide-book urged visitors to purchase photographic views available at the gift shop instead of grabbing shells, tree branches, and other objects. Similarly, it is clear Johnstown's disaster tourists took objects, though perhaps not of the sensational quality that some of the souvenir books detail:

While sketching amid the smouldering ruins about the stone bridge at Johnstown one morning, the writer saw a morbid monomaniac secure the charred bones of an infant from among the smoking *débris* and, wrapping them carefully in a newspaper, carry them away with a look of triumph on his face.<sup>34</sup>

This text goes on to comment upon bandanas, shoes, and sheets taken as souvenirs—all removed directly from corpses. Although it is doubtful that all visitors were taking items directly from dead bodies, as this sensationalistic text claims, the nature of the everyday objects (bandanas, shoes, and sheets) is probably true enough to the actual practices. Quotidian artifacts like these are on exhibit today at the Johnstown Flood Museum.

After Johnstown's disaster, "relic cranks" set up for business, selling those pieces of "broken china, piano keys, beer bottles, horseshoes, buttons, even bits of brick or wood shingles" which McCullough mentions.<sup>35</sup> Apparently, there were quite a few relic sellers:

One enterprising man has opened shop for the sale of relics of the disaster, and is doing a big business. Half the people here are relic cranks. Everything goes as a relic, from a horseshoe to a two-foot section of iron pipe. Buttons and little things like that, that can easily be carried off, are the most popular.<sup>36</sup>

W. A. Kramer's store was the first in Johnstown to reopen, and Kramer "raked in a small fortune yesterday [7 June] by selling articles of glassware which had withstood the shock as relics."<sup>37</sup> The next day, Kramer opened a lemonade establishment and alternated squeezing lemons, selling relics, and shoveling the mud that remained in his ruined store. A few days later, the rain stopped and a number of stores were open, and there were "large sales of flooded goods" which "were bought chiefly as relics."<sup>38</sup> Other visitors, reputedly mostly from Pittsburgh, filled their pockets with the photographs strewn about in the mud.

One man with a great deal of pride displayed about a dozen of these [photographs]. When it was suggested they were all that was left to some poor unfortunates as mementoes of relatives dead and gone[,] he hastily tucked them away in his pocket and replied: "Well, I can't help that. I found them, and I'm going to keep them. They are the best relics there are."<sup>39</sup>

This is certainly not the first time nor the last time that the curious came in search of objects to remember a stupendous event. On his way to find his son wounded in the Civil War, Oliver Wendell Holmes collected a few bullets, a button, a brass belt buckle, and an unopened letter from the bloody detritus left on the battlefields.<sup>40</sup> After the Chicago Fire, everyone "wanted a relic of the greatest fire in the most marvelous city in the world."<sup>41</sup> Enterprising businessmen made small souvenir bells to hang on watch chains from the destroyed Chicago Court House's enormous bell. Dealers who ordered twelve or more souvenir bells were given a photograph of the Court House in ruins in order to encourage sales.<sup>42</sup> After the terrible 1896 tornado, St. Louis' papers commented, "Thousands of persons . . . cut canes from the branches of the trees and carried away parts of benches as mementoes of the storm."<sup>43</sup> After the horrific Galveston hurricane in 1900, a survivor wrote about picking up a piece of marble: "I think I will keep it as another souveneer [sic]."<sup>44</sup> After the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, citizens collected relics and vendors quickly mobilized. The handwritten message on the postcard in Figure 4 reads, "Will search the above places for relics



FIGURE 4: Richard Behrendt, Postcard of Sacramento and Montgomery Streets after the San Francisco Earthquake, 1906, offset lithography (Author's collection).

for you soon,” and vendors in Chinatown sold strange objects melted into shapes by the fire’s extreme heat. Late nineteenth-century capitalism was ready to deliver what the public wanted, even after awful disasters. Oliver Wendell Holmes was quoted as saying “that if the whole world were burned up, and all humanity reduced to a common level of impecuniosity, fortunes would be made in a year out of the travel in potash.”<sup>45</sup>

### Photography and “Picture Spots”

Almost from its beginnings photography was allied with the tourist. Photography was tedious and unpredictable in its earliest incarnations, but wealthy English-speaking gentlemen pursued the practice in their spare time. The camera went with them when they toured—particularly to North Africa and to America’s sublime sights. For example, Niagara Falls was a desirable subject for early American photographs. In fact, the brothers Langenheim of Philadelphia, most well known in photographic history as pioneering lantern slide makers, made a name for themselves in 1845 with a monumental panorama of Niagara Falls taken on five daguerreotype plates—a difficult feat. To garner publicity, they sent versions of this panorama to heads of state; the Queen of England, who normally did not accept gifts, accepted this one and wrote a letter of thanks for the panorama.<sup>46</sup> In the following decades, a great many photographers established businesses selling photos to tourists at the Falls.

Getting images—particularly photographs—of Johnstown’s tragedy was a primary concern. On June 3, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* printed its first drawing of the debris-laden stone bridge at Johnstown; the *Pittsburgh Press*, on the other hand, ran a sketch of a demolished train and a picture of the ruined iron works. On June 5, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* printed an illustration entitled “The Scene at the Bridge Where So Many Lives Were Lost” announcing, “The above picture is the first genuine view that has appeared in any Eastern paper. News can come by telegraph, but photographs cannot. Railroad communications have been restored, and it is now possible to give the work of the photographers.”<sup>47</sup> The illustration is a drawing presumably worked up from a photograph, but it is not a photograph itself. However, the importance of first-hand, accurate photographic evidence is underscored by the drawing’s caption.

Along with physical souvenirs of all kinds, Johnstown’s visitors wanted pictures just like their cohorts at Niagara, and aftermath photography was a

popular pursuit. There are many details about the trade in disaster pictures that have been lost. Exactly how many photographers were practicing, how they sold their pictures, and who purchased them are unlikely to be answered with volumes of hard data because detailed records of photographers' sales practices have, for the most part, vanished. However, evidence remains in the newspaper accounts, the images deposited for copyright at the Library of Congress, and in personal collections.

At Johnstown, six days after the flood, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, "The woods are full of photographers taking pictures and distributing their cards."<sup>48</sup> Reports of photographers' arrests and forced labor were widespread, though it is unclear whether these reports were exaggerated or completely untrue:

The amateur and professional photographers who have overrun the town for the last few days came to grief on Friday. A good many of them were arrested 20 by the soldiers, placed under guard, taken down to Stony Creek and set to lugging logs and timbers. Among those arrested were several of the newspaper photographers, and these General Hastings ordered released when he heard of their arrest. The others were made to work half a day. They were a mad and disgusted lot, and they vowed all sorts of vengeance. It does seem that some notice to the effect that photographers were not permitted in Johnstown should have been posted before the men were arrested. The photographers all had passes in regular form, but the soldiers refused even to look at these.<sup>49</sup>

The work of amateur photographers (often called photo or camera fiends) also found their place at Johnstown, but their activities are particularly difficult to trace. Officials were not particularly amused by the "swarms of amateur photographers who are to be found everywhere about the ruins," and they threatened that "[t]hose who will not work are to be taken uptown under guard."<sup>50</sup>

Some of these photographers belonged to the newspapers that had dispatched staff to the area. Many were also making a business of selling pictures to individuals (whether as a sideline to newspaper coverage or not). Fewer than two weeks after the disaster, Joseph Eichbaum and Co. of Pittsburgh advertised "Flood Photographs: Best made, largest variety, lowest prices."<sup>51</sup> Apparently, these pictures were also for sale in Johnstown itself. The last chapter of a souvenir volume entitled *The Johnstown Horror* takes the form as a literal tour of the city, and the tour guide points out the photograph vendor to the tourist:

“Here is a man selling photographs on the porch of a doctor’s office. Dr. Brinkley. Oh, yes, he was drowned. His body was found last Monday.”<sup>52</sup>



FIGURE 5: Langill & Darling, *Johnstown Flood*, 1889: *Masonic Headquarters*, no. 25 (Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 3b08645).

Many of the professional photographers who ventured out with dry glass plates in folding bed view cameras on the succeeding days after the Johnstown flood issued photographic sets of images for purchase by the general public. The Library of Congress holds many versions deposited for copyright. Rothengatter and Dillon of 912 Arch Street, Philadelphia sold a group called “Photographs of the Ruins at Johnstown,” consisting of twenty pictures (fifteen mounted photographic views, four stereoscopic cards, and one panoramic view). Each photograph has the “Copyright Langill and Darling, 1889” scratched on the negative (which is equivalent to present-day watermarking of digital images). In fact, protecting copyright (or attempting to do so) must have been a serious business. This set was submitted for copyright on June 19, 1889—not even three weeks after the flood.

Other sets at the Library of Congress follow this example, like the twelve image set from Sackett and Carlson of Sycamore, IL and photographs from E. Walter Histed of Pittsburgh (who deposited for copyright on June 24, 1889). Histed’s pictures, like the example in Figure 6, reinforce the importance of the copyright as he placed his mark right in the middle of picture so as to make unauthorized duplication difficult.<sup>53</sup> Stereograph sets, taken with special cameras with two lenses, were also quite numerous, giving armchair





FIGURE 6: E. Walter Histed, *Johnstown Flood, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1889: Debris at P.R.R. Stone Bridge*, (Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 3b26434).

tourists the opportunity to see death and destruction in three dimensions. One can see Johnstown's use of stereography as an extension of the success of stereography to record the Civil War's horrors, as in Figure 7. Many of these graphic and brutal Civil War stereographs were also hand-colored, with wounds and protruding entrails picked out in red watercolor.

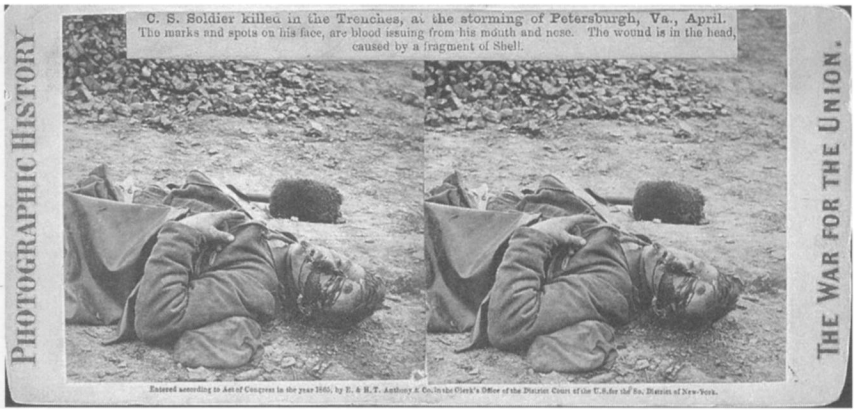


FIGURE 7: "C.S. soldier killed in the trenches, at the storming of Petersburg [sic], Va., April The marks and spots on his face, are blood issuing from his mouth and nose. The wound is in the head, caused by a fragment of shell," E. & H.T. Anthony & Co. "Photographic History—The War for the Union," No. 29 (Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 3b24992).



One disaster photograph buyer might be surprising: Clara Barton, who headed the Red Cross effort at Johnstown to deliver aid to the sufferers. Her pictures are found in the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division and prompt further questions about the role of disaster photographs. Barton brought home photographs from many of her relief efforts, as there are pictures from Johnstown, Sea Island, Galveston, and other locations. They are individually-mounted on cards and are not presented in an album.

There are three distinct types in Clara Barton's photography collection. Some are general views of the disaster probably bought through the channels that were available to everyone. These views had broad appeal. One image is stamped "River Side Gallery, Johnstown" on the verso, and another is by Langill and Darling (Figure 8), photographers whose work on Johnstown is also found in the general collections of the Library of Congress. In addition, Barton and/or the Red Cross may have commissioned this second group of pictures, as there is a letter in her papers during the Galveston effort to a photographer.<sup>54</sup>



FIGURE 8: Langill and Darling, *The Johnstown Flood, Looking West on Main Street*. (Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 3b26416) Barton's collection contains a print of this image, though the illustration here is not from her collection.

This second group may have been made by professional photographers expressly for the Red Cross, as the photographs of the Red Cross' relief efforts showing neatly-stacked relief supplies and Barton's office might not be of great interest to those outside the relief organization. The third group

consists of snapshots made with either a Kodak #1 or #2 camera at the Sea Island hurricane relief effort of 1893.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of these images is uncertain. Did Barton think of these photographs then as documents of relief efforts or souvenirs of travel (or some combination)? There is some indication that Barton might have retained these images simply because the horrors of these disasters were beyond language's descriptive powers. One of her Galveston assistants recalled, "We found the situation in Galveston infinitely worse than had been described. The most sensational accounts of the yellowest journals fell far short of the truth—simply because its full horror was beyond the power of words to portray."<sup>56</sup> Was she collecting a record of her professional activities or was she collecting a scrapbook of her personal life? The purpose of Barton's collection of photographs remains ambiguous.

The difference between professional and personal activity extends to the photographers. Amateurs were also part of the photographic fray, and it is possible that some of these amateurs carried the original Kodak box camera with the barrel shutter, which had been introduced in June of 1888. McCullough estimates that there were at least two hundred amateurs in Johnstown, a thought echoed by contemporary accounts:

The retentive eye of the amateur photographer's camera is gazing from every hill. There are no commonplace scenes about Johnstown, and the little camera appreciates that fact. The artists and their paraphernalia may be seen traveling about together absorbing all the sunlight and all the scene. There will be no lack of pictures of the Johnstown flood horror.<sup>57</sup>

Disney's theme parks today label maps with specific "picture spots" upon which it is suggested that the visitor take a picture with a scenic background. One of Johnstown's "picture spots" seems to have been John Schultz' tree-skewed house which was photographed again and again with different men and boys perched on the gigantic tree. McCullough calls the John Schultz house, a "most popular subject," remarking, "One by one men and boys would crawl out on the tree to sit for a portrait, their faces registering no emotion, their feet dangling in light that had little more color than it would have in the final printed photograph."<sup>58</sup> Part of the attention to this attraction may have also been due to the remarkable fact that the six people in the Schultz house survived the flood.



FIGURE 9: "A Freak of the Flood," Frank Connelly and George C. Jenks, *Official History of the Johnstown Flood* (Pittsburgh: Journalist Publishing Company, 1889), 140.

### Journalistic Rubbernecking

"The social base of *flânerie* is journalism," wrote Walter Benjamin, and journalism was also a social binder for rubbernecking.<sup>59</sup> For prospective sight-seers, rubbernecks, *flâneurs*, or excursionists (whatever the designation) who could not travel to the real ruins, images were available. Disasters were reported in words and pictures to audiences who could not travel. The news industry demonstrated an immediate upswing in business after mass disaster.

The New York *World* correspondent walked four miles into Johnstown and was said to be the first of the reporters to arrive. Journalists from The New York *Sun* and an artist representing *Harper's Weekly* hired a B&O train to get to Johnstown, and reporters arrived before many rescue workers and relief supplies. These reporters, sketch artists, and photographers were generally woefully unprepared for the situation. Some came in their dress shoes and sank in the slimy muck that covered every surface in the valley. The reporter Richard Harding Davis came without a change of clothes and hopefully asked the others where he could get a fresh, boiled shirt, an item that was as rare "as mince pie [was] in Africa."<sup>60</sup> Reporters and telegraph operators set up temporary shop in derelict buildings; many journalism historians say that this was one of the first tests of true field reporting since the Civil War. As their reports trickled back to the periodicals' home bases, the production crews could not keep up with the desire for coverage. One Pittsburgh newspaper, in fact, temporarily reduced the page size because it was running out of paper.

These delivery systems for words and pictures about and of disaster always advertised themselves as being “graphic.” *The Johnstown Horror!!! Or Valley of Death* was obviously a book put together from newspaper accounts, but the title page and advance advertisements give a clear agenda: the book aims at “a complete and thrilling account of the awful floods and their appalling ruin” along with “graphic descriptions” and is “fully illustrated with scenes of the great calamity.” What is remarkable is that the words “graphic” and “illustrated” can be read as both applying to verbal descriptions and to the pictures in the book. However, both share the attribute of “thrilling,” as the introduction details:

These thrilling scenes are depicted, and these wonderful facts are related, in THE JOHNSTOWN HORROR, by eye-witnesses who saw the fatal flood and its direful effects. No book so intensely exciting has ever been issued. The graphic story has an awful fascination, and will be read throughout the land.<sup>61</sup>

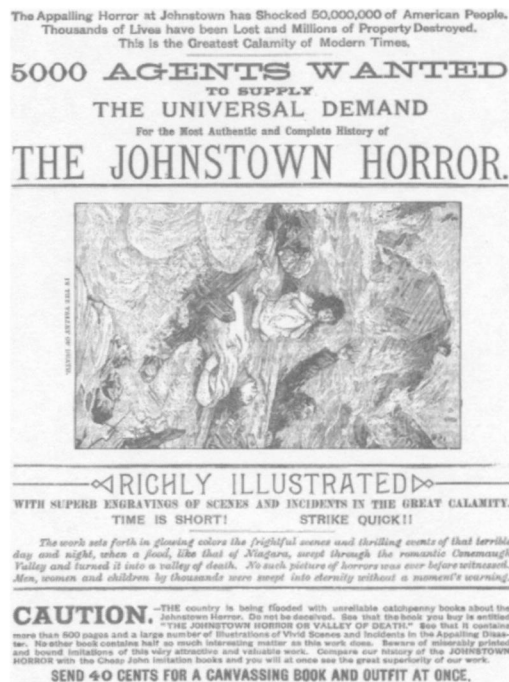


FIGURE 10: Garretson & Co., *The Johnstown Horror or Valley of Death*, #A0075, Emergence of Advertising in America (Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University).

### Tragic Tourism/Dark Tourism/Thanatourism/Black Spots

Visitors used leisure time to travel to Johnstown and practiced activities common to tourists. For those who could not travel, alternate delivery methods were available. People all across the country purchased images, accounts, and books like *The Johnstown Horror!!!* What can one make of this impulse to be a tourist at the scene of disaster? How does one interpret this sort of rubbernecking?

The 1990s saw a flurry of writing about the idea of sites of pain and tragedy as tourist attractions. The largest body of work responds to twentieth-century events like the Holocaust, celebrity deaths, and September 11th, but the nineteenth-century audiences paved the way for contemporary sight-seers.<sup>62</sup>

Researchers (mostly in tourism studies) have examined and have given the phenomenon a variety of names. Lucy Lippard coined the term “tragic tourism” to refer to tourism which brings people to celebrity murder sites, concentration camps, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes.<sup>63</sup> Tony Seaton effectively harnesses Thomas De Quincy’s *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (1827) as a touchstone and coined the word “thanatourism” (from the Greek “thanatos” for “death”) to address tourism at sites of tragedy. He argues that violent death is a commodity of modernism and advocates that a revival of the term “thanatopsis” (from the Greek for “a sight or view of death”) would be useful.<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Foley and John J. Lennon coined the term “dark tourism” to characterize “visits to battlefields, murder and atrocity locations, places where the famous died, graveyards and internment sites, memorials, and events and exhibitions featuring relics and reconstructions of death.”<sup>65</sup> Lennon and Foley also note the commercial opportunities available in death-related tourism, “Horror and death have become established commodities, on sale to tourists who have an enduring appetite for the darkest elements of human history,” and they posit “that ‘dark tourism’ is an intimation of postmodernity.”<sup>66</sup> George Steiner works on Holocaust museums, noting that many visitors find these places grimly fascinating, while Chris Rojek calls these locations of tragedy “black spots.”<sup>67</sup>

Dean MacCannell’s thought-provoking work on tourism uses Georg Simmel’s writings on modernity (in which the metropolis’ pace overwhelms perceptions) and applies semiotics to tourism (saying that the tourist attraction functions as a sign). MacCannell’s study probes the connection between the experiences of modernity and the function of the sign of authenticity. MacCannell says that “generalized anxiety about the authenticity of the city of interpersonal relationships is matched by the certainty about the authenticity of touristic sights”:

The rhetoric of tourism is full of the manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see: this is a *typical* native house; this is the *very* place the leader fell; this is the *actual* pen used to sign the law; this is the *original* manuscript; this is an *authentic* Tlingit fish club; this is a *real* piece of the *true* Crown of Thorns.<sup>68</sup>

Because the modern tourist feels disconnected, tourists seek the genuine when they go on vacation, and the needs of Johnstown's actual and virtual tourists were no different.



FIGURE 11: George Barker, *The Johnstown Calamity: Somebody's Darling—Unclaimed—Unknown*, one half of stereograph card. (Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 3bo8652).

Whether called tragic tourism, thanatourism, dark tourism, or black spots, the customers' and purveyors' motives are difficult to assess. Tony Seaton and John Lennon remark on the lack of research in the field, commenting "There has been little significant research into either the motives of the customers, or the purveyors of thanatourism. Academic and mass media coverage has tended to imply ulterior motives and morbid undercurrents, underpinning both the habits of dark tourists, and even more, the commercial practices of its

entrepreneurs.”<sup>69</sup> Lippard terms these sites “vast memento mori” where “we can contemplate good and evil.”<sup>70</sup>

Lippard takes a stab at tourists’ motives by positing that tourists visit these places to brush up against the “realness” of disaster:

Yet however high-minded our approaches, the insidious elements of voyeurism and sensationalism will creep in. Tourists visit such sites to get a whiff of catastrophe, to rub a bit closer against disaster than is possible in television, movies, or novels—although the imagination has to work a bit harder when confronted with the blank terrains, the empty rooms, the neatly mowed lawns, the negligible remains of real tragedy.<sup>71</sup>

There is a lot to unpack in this brief paragraph. One difference between this study and Lippard’s work lies in the fact that tourists who immediately visited Johnstown did not have blank terrain, though today’s visitors to the Johnstown Flood Museum do have to take the steps Lippard talks about in this passage. There were no “blank” terrains immediately after Johnstown’s disaster; in fact, the streets were littered with debris and death. The mention of “insidious elements of voyeurism and sensationalism” indicate that Lippard seems to be working in that old gap between what people actually like and what is said that they should like, and which resonates with James Beattie’s ideas on the sublime in his *Dissertations Moral and Critical*. He comments on the intense (and socially acceptable) pleasure to be had at seeing the painting of an urban fire as opposed to seeing a genuine conflagration:

In the *picture* of a burning city, we may admire the splendour of the colours, the undulation of the flames, the arrangements of light and shade, and the other proofs of the painter’s skill; and nothing gives a more exquisite delight of the melancholy kind, than Virgil’s account of the burning of Troy.<sup>72</sup>

As in the other descriptions, there is a contradictory element in that the “delight” is “of a melancholy kind.” Beattie continues:

But this does not imply, that we should, like Nero, take any pleasure in such an event, if it were real and present. Indeed, few appearances are more beautiful, or more sublime, than a mass of flame, rolling in



the wind, and blazing to heaven: whence illuminations, bonfires, and fireworks make part of a modern triumph. Yet destruction by fire is of all earthly things the most terrible.<sup>73</sup>

Beattie insists that the viewer's safety is a prerequisite for his pleasure, adding, "In a word, the sublime, in order to give pleasing astonishment, must be either imaginary, or not immediately pernicious."<sup>74</sup> However, he dismisses the notion that people viewing a horrific scene are reveling in their own safety. Likewise, he challenges the idea that those viewing a disaster are doing so because they wish to help. Instead of these two theories, he admits that a "gloomy satisfaction, or terrific pleasure, accompanies the gratification of that curiosity":

It may seem strange, that horror of any kind should give pleasure. But the fact is certain. Why do people run to see battles, executions, and shipwrecks? Is it, as an Epicurean would say, to compare themselves with others, and exult in their own security while they see the distress of those who suffer? No, surely: good minds are swayed by different motives. Is it, that they may be at hand, to give every assistance in their power to their unhappy brethren? This would draw the benevolent, and even the tender-hearted, to a shipwreck; but to a battle, or to an execution, could not bring spectators, because there the humanity of individuals is of no use.—It must be, because a sort of gloomy satisfaction, or terrific pleasure, accompanies the gratification of that curiosity which events of this nature are apt to raise in the minds of a certain frame.<sup>75</sup>

Beattie understood that what people do like and what they are told that they should like might be two different things.

Recent theoretical approaches to tourism have often included notions of the simulated or pseudo-event in contemporary America; in this view, Americans find pleasure in inauthentic attractions to the exclusion of "real life," as discussed in the writings of Boorstin, Eco, and Baudrillard. There are components of these in other presentations of disasters, but they are not useful when applied to the tourist who attends the site of disaster immediately after the event.<sup>76</sup> Seaton and Lennon take another tack by proposing that thanatourism is about a visit to see "The Other," although this "Other" is not some unfamiliar culture in a remote location on the globe but instead is the "Other" of death.



A combination of these various hypotheses about tourists' motivations to visit Johnstown might be the most fruitful. For these first people arriving on trains into town after the calamities, what they were seeing was very real, not some simulacrum or staged display.<sup>77</sup> Tragic tourists in these conditions were seeing actual wreckage and were inhaling the pungent smell of death. It was about as far away from fiction, pseudo-event, or simulacrum as possible. Although a philosopher might argue that even a wrecked city is not real, the "real" seems awfully close when the smell of putrefying flesh is in one's nostrils. People were curious—perhaps even "morbidly curious" as the newspaper reports never tire of saying—to see destruction that was awesome, vast, strange, and terrible—and very real. In *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell argues convincingly that the tourist is after "authentic experience," and the authenticity of death at the site of mass casualty was almost undeniable. One imagines that visitors were both pulled towards and repelled by the authentic and real sights that they saw.

### Theater of the Morgue

The rubberneckers at Johnstown were there to see and experience the disaster's aftermath for themselves—to brush up against nature's awesome power. Railroads made this experience convenient by offering special excursion fares to see the disaster. One destination of choice was the morgue, and Pennsylvania's newspapers reported, "They crowd about the morgues to the exclusion of friends, and are a nuisance in general . . ."<sup>78</sup> This situation was far from an isolated circumstance. An illustration in a St. Louis newspaper after the devastating tornado (Figure 12) shows dapper "excursionists" (a word particularly associated with special railroad trips) gathering around the morgue.<sup>79</sup>

At Johnstown and St. Louis, the morgue was a destination of choice. Undoubtedly there were citizens who had come to identify their dead, but many came for the thrilling sights. After the St. Louis tornado of 1896, the *Chicago Tribune* reported on the fervor of the crowds accumulating at the morgue:

Women, babies in arms, and with three or four small children crushing or tagging behind them, pushed their way into the line. Many of these had no business there except that of morbid curiosity. They were willing to stand the sun and the desperation of the crowd, all for the terrible sights of the morgue. The policemen looked at them in disgust, but said nothing beyond urging them to hurry up. And so the stream continued from early morn until late at night.



FIGURE 12: Excursionists at the Morgue, *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, 2 June 1896, 1.

Officers stood inside the corridor facing the glass windows of the morgue and gave the people no rest. Some did not want to move, and would have quarreled about it if the policemen would have let them. With fascinated eyes glued to the windows they would have staid [sic] there for hours could they have had their own way.<sup>80</sup>

These crowds which had been “a collection of bereaved and grief stricken men and women, had gradually grown to a mass of curiosity seekers.”<sup>81</sup> At one point, the crowd attempted to muscle past the police, and many attempted to get in under false pretenses. At Johnstown, people also sought entrance by pretending to be looking for loved ones, although “[t]he morbid curiosity to see the dead under the pretense of searching for friends is constantly guarded against.”<sup>82</sup> Reporters used the phrase “morbid curiosity” but added spice with the titillating detail that beautiful (perhaps naked) women and children were on display: “The majority of the bodies recovered are nude, but they are put into coffins at once, and only the head and breast can be seen through the glass. There are a number of beautiful girls and children among the corpses.”<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, newspapers reported that “[a] constant stream of people were going in and out of the morgue yesterday. Some of them were attracted by morbid curiosity to see if any bodies had been brought there.

Others came to look for friends and relatives who had lived in the stricken city.”<sup>84</sup> For those reading the papers, the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* ran an artist’s illustration of “A Scene in the Johnstown Morgue” on the front page showing the undertakers working on a body put on an improvised slab. The corpse’s arm hangs limply and grotesquely almost to the ground, where a basin lies ready to catch fluids. To the right of the slab, bodies stretch from one end of the room to the other.<sup>85</sup>

Post-disaster tourism recalls Vanessa R. Schwartz’ work on the Parisian obsession with morgue visits and spectacles.<sup>86</sup> This aspect is reflected in the terminology, as she writes that the antiquated French verb “morguer” describes “looking with a fixed and questioning gaze.”<sup>87</sup> In Paris, the morgue was open every day, and its slabs were populated with bodies that had washed up on the shores of the Seine or had mysteriously appeared in Parisian alleyways. According to Schwartz’ analysis, a few people were trying to identify bodies along with a majority of curiosity-seekers who could tell themselves that they were really doing a public service by looking at the unidentified dead. Schwartz writes, “They went to look at real dead bodies under the pretense of acting out of civic duty. This was public voyeurism—flânerie in the service of the state.”<sup>88</sup> Schwartz reflects on the role that the newspapers played in attracting the (thana)touristic gaze in Paris; “if the Morgue could be considered a theater of crime, then the newspaper was its program.”<sup>89</sup>

While some of the spectators might have been Parisians lured to the site by the most recent lurid narrative in the paper, others may be English-speaking tourists who found the Parisian Morgue listed as a tourist destination in major guidebooks and travel narratives. An 1859 guidebook by Daniel Eddy describes the attraction:

The morgue is a place which I visited with much melancholy interest. This is a plain Doric building on the banks of the Seine, where dead bodies are brought to be recognized by friends. They are divested of their clothing, which is hung up beside them, and are allowed to remain three days, at the end of which time they are buried. They are laid out upon a brass table, or platform, behind a glass partition. The table is inclined, and the whole person may be viewed by the spectator. About three hundred a year, or nearly one a day, are brought here, most of whom are drawn from the river. I went in to this sad place on two occasions. The first time, it was empty; no human form was laid out there in the chill of death. But the second time, it was not so. Two

bodies were laid out for inspection. Large numbers were continually coming and going, and an idle, morbid curiosity seemed to impel these people forward, and gather them close around the bodies.<sup>90</sup>

*Loth's Guide to Paris*, which seems to have been aimed at the British tourist headed to the 1878 exhibition, lists the Morgue right next to Notre Dame because both were on the Ile de la Cité. In *Bemrose's Guide*, the Morgue is listed under the heading "Silence Eternal!" along with other top attractions for the aspiring thanatourist as Père la Chaise, the catacombs, and the sewers.<sup>91</sup>

Morgues were opened in the United States during the nineteenth century, and many used Paris as the model.<sup>92</sup> Junius Henri Browne writes in *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* that Bellevue's morgue was an "exact imitation of the famous dead house in Paris."<sup>93</sup> The causes for anonymous urban American death were similar to those of their Parisian counterparts—"one half of the persons found have been murdered, and one quarter of them have committed suicide" while "the other quarter includes accidental drowning, falling dead in the street, run over by street-cars, and other vehicles and the natural casualties of city life."<sup>94</sup> American morgues also drew visitors. A species of "thanatouristic guides," or "gas-light tours," were sure to include New York's morgue on the list of brand new attractions (or repulsions): "It is a gloomy looking building, this Morgue, and it is rarely empty."<sup>95</sup> In most descriptions—whether of the Morgue in Paris, New York, or Johnstown—the crowd is described similarly as a "crowd, which was almost a mob, surged and groaned with the horror discernable through the glass partition."<sup>96</sup>

Who was in this surging crowd? What do the visitors to morgues in Paris and New York have in common with those who came to view bodies after Johnstown? The morgue was a place for "the crowd," not individuals, a mass or a mob that moves as one organism. Second, the crowd was composed of men, women, children, and infants. Third, most of the visitors were there simply to gape, not to find or identify loved ones, though there were surely plenty of people in the latter category in the case of mass casualty. The only thing that they had in common was a "morbid curiosity" and an "eagerness to see the horrid spectacle."<sup>97</sup> Fourth, although the crowd was reputed to be mostly of the lower or coarser classes (*Baedeker*: "The painful scene [the morgue] attracts many spectators, chiefly of the lower orders"), the frequency of first-hand descriptions from well-heeled travelers indicates that they were not alone. Daniel Eddy, for example, went to the Parisian Morgue twice because

the first time there was nothing (or no body?) to see.<sup>98</sup> Another visitor uses nationality as well as class to distinguish himself from the other visitors in his account:

The most curious feature of all, is the utter indifference which the people manifest, who come to view this horrible spectacle. Do not imagine that the throng in front of the railing has been attracted here in the hope of discovering friends or relatives. No such thing. The Morgue is a great place of resort for the people of the quarter in which it is situated. They come here in crowds every day, drawn to it by a peculiar fascination which even they themselves cannot comprehend. Mothers come here with their children, the husband brings his wife, the lover his mistress, and children come by the score of their own accord—and for what? To gaze upon the poor wretches who lie here so stark and still. It astonishes an Anglo Saxon to see the levity with which all classes treat the dead lying here, and it does not increase his respect for the people of Paris to see men crowd around the bodies of the women, and indulge in coarse and obscene remarks concerning them.<sup>99</sup>

This writer seems to forget that he was an Anglo-Saxon visiting the morgue. James Jackson Jarves, the important American Ruskinian art critic, also made a pilgrimage to the Paris Morgue. “On the Quai du Marche Neuf, I came to one of the sights of Paris, which, like all others, by the policy of the government, is free,” he writes, “but which it would be much more to its credit and to the benefit of public morals, if it charged a large fee for entrance to the merely curious.”<sup>100</sup> He was profoundly disgusted by the crowd’s eagerness and with their variety:

Men, women, and children, even nurses with infants, came, gazed a few seconds on the revolting spectacle, and then left their places to those behind, impatiently awaiting their turn. In making this exhibition so unnecessarily public, I wondered why the government had not, with the system which it displays in every other place, provided a register for names, and a railing with a guard, to prevent crowding, and make the access and egress more facile.<sup>101</sup>

Jarves concludes with perhaps the best line of all about morgue visits: “Seriously, this is a strange show in the heart of civilization.”<sup>102</sup>

Although there are suggestions that this was a “strange show” that could only interest the lower classes, the frequent reports from the wealthy demonstrate that the terrible held fascination for everyone:

A visit to the morgue is attended with something of the fascination the horrible has for even the finest of us. We like to linger there in spite of the repulsion of such a place. We are held, as when in the presence of the dead, by an indefinable magnetism, more painful than pleasurable, and yet we stay.<sup>103</sup>

It was an attraction that was painful and pleasurable at the same time—a painful pleasure that certain writers made sure that said that they did not enjoy with the crowd. At Johnstown, the crowd was equally varied, and people came to watch the morticians who had rushed to Johnstown to embalm the dead:

There is no effort, or at most an exceedingly lethargic one, to conceal the embalming of the dead from the morbid curiosity of boys and even girls, and in fact most of the time of the occupants of Johnstown and its environments is given over to either securing dead bodies, preparing them for burial, or idly watching by.<sup>104</sup>

Like the sporadic, half-hearted efforts to keep spectators away from Johnstown, efforts to keep the morgues closed to the idle and curious were reportedly “lethargic.”

### Morgue Melodrama

Jarves’ mention of the morgue as a “show” and his wish that this “theater” would charge admission sheds light on the crowds at American scenes of tragedy, like that of Johnstown. That is to say, one can also view American tragic tourism as a form of live theater—specifically late-century melodrama—where the thrill was based on reality’s nearness. In nineteenth-century America, while the popularly-priced theater might have blood and thunder melodrama on stage, the thrilling theater of real disaster was also available for the price of a train ticket to the stricken district—or for free at the morgue. In addition, one could stretch the interest in reality tours with the contemporary interest in “gas light” tours of unsavory districts as well as their representations in lantern slide shows.<sup>105</sup>

Vanessa Schwartz points out the theatricality of the morgue with the example that Parisians got upset in the early twentieth century when the morgue was no longer open to the public, ending Paris' only truly "free stage." Physical elements also linked the theater to the Parisian morgue: there were curtains that parted to reveal the (cold and stiff) actors and sometimes cordons to keep the crowd in line.

Theatrical melodrama and the newspaper stories about the Johnstown disaster are intertwined; melodrama informed how stories about decedents were articulated in newspapers, and writers of melodrama took cues from actual disasters. As an expert on melodrama writes, "Catastrophes like shipwrecks, explosions, fires, avalanches, and earthquakes were the stock-in-trade of sensation melodrama" from the start of the nineteenth century.<sup>106</sup> Early melodramas which incorporate mass destruction include *The Woodsman's Hut* of 1814 (narrow escapes from thunderstorm and forest fire), *The Miller and His Men* of 1813 (an explosion destroys the mill), and *Masaniello* of 1829 (ends with a volcanic eruption).<sup>107</sup> Mass casualties gave rise to familiar recurring tropes in news accounts: reports of dead mothers still clasping their babies, entire families buried together in the wreckage, and miraculous rescues performed by people or animals.<sup>108</sup> For example, news stories like "Old Dog Tray's Ever Faithful" tell of a young woman who was saved from drowning at Johnstown by a Newfoundland.<sup>109</sup> Another heroic dog reportedly saved Mrs. C. F. Kress. Losing his mistress among Johnstown's waves, the dog, Romeo, remains determined to save her:

The noble brute, however, was not to be daunted. Again he clung to his mistress very closely, not as if he were to rescue her from a watery grave, but as if his whole life depended upon her safety. Constantly swimming by her side while she was borne upon the current, he contrived to keep her head above water.<sup>110</sup>

Stereograph cards were available depicting Johnstown's canine heroes. Stories of heroism and tragedy were present in news reports, on the theatrical stage, and in popular song lyrics.<sup>111</sup> Illustrations like the one of a child plucking the strings of an upended piano while a drowned body lies nearby (Figure 13) could have come out of any number of melodramatic stage shows—the same kind of shows which held benefit performances for Johnstown during June.<sup>112</sup>



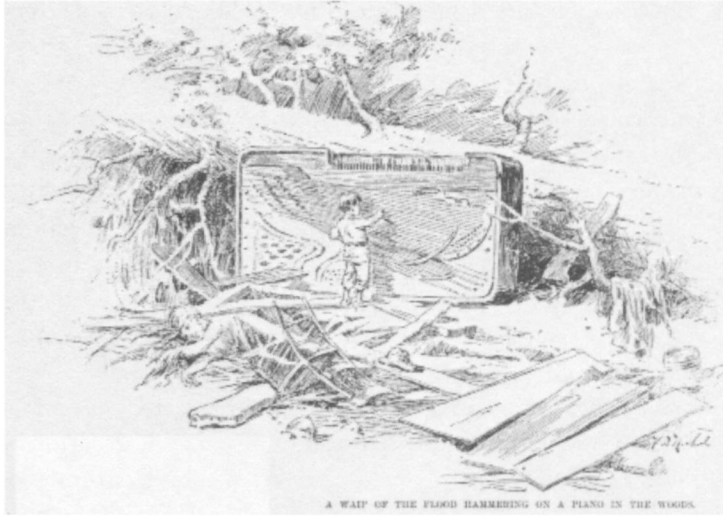


FIGURE 13: "A Waif of the Flood Hammering on a Piano in the Woods," (Source: Henry Loomis Nelson, "Johnstown and the Floods," *Harper's Weekly*, Volume XXXIII, no. 1695, 15 June 1889, 479).

A story retold about a "gentleman" and "Hero," the dog, imparts information about what audiences might have derived from these melodramatic stories. The dog drags the man to safety in the Galveston hurricane, but the man loses his whole family. Tragically, the old man does not survive the night. Hero tries to warm the man's cold feet and body, and the narrator reflects that "this old man's beautiful death and the dog's deep devotion are among the sublime lessons."<sup>113</sup> While real life disaster provided the backdrop, journalists populated it with a cast of characters who would impart "sublime lessons" which would have been at home on the melodramatic stage. Richard Harding Davis, one reporter who rose to prominence with his Johnstown news coverage (and who would be remembered as the reporter who asked for a boiled shirt at Johnstown), cut his journalistic teeth by writing about the theater before his service on disaster's front lines.<sup>114</sup> The experience with the theater would serve him well, both in his writings about Johnstown, and in his later editorship of *Harper's Weekly*.

Late nineteenth-century melodrama also added a thrill of the "real" to the disaster scenarios. Ben Singer talks about how the thrill was heightened in late nineteenth-century melodrama with stage productions that incorporated actual equipment (water, buzz saws, pile drivers, horses, fire engines) that really belonged outside the theater.<sup>115</sup> For instance, Joseph Arthur's *The Still*



*Alarm* (1887) featured an actual fire engine, real horses galloping at full speed on treadmills, smoke, and a moving panoramic backdrop. Stage productions went to ever-dizzying heights to depict better reality effects. In practice this meant that the sets became more complicated, and the “real” had to be produced at all costs, even if it meant risking fire in the theater:

Real flame and smoke must be produced by the ignition of inflammable material, the boiler must burst and scatter fragments, and then the curtain will fall on an applauding audience, who in addition to enjoying this realistic display have probably been kept in a state of breathless though pleasurable expectation of seeing the scenery at any moment burst into flame.<sup>116</sup>

In late nineteenth-century melodrama, machines and sets—instead of actors—were the real headliners. No longer were the “time-honored poison cup, the horse-pistol, the dagger, and the rapier” interesting in favor of “more modern methods of immolation by the locomotive, the fly-wheel, the steam-hammer, or the exploding boiler [were] the sensation of the day.”<sup>117</sup> For instance, Joseph Arthur’s *Blue Jeans* (1890), culminated in a thrilling scene in which the hero almost gets chopped to pieces with a mechanical buzz saw. Theatrical programs affirmed the authenticity of the apparatus by crediting the suppliers. For example, the program for *A Flag of Truce* for the week ending December 23, 1893 at the Fourteenth Street Theatre proudly listed that the “Giant Steam Drills used in ‘A Flag of Truce’ are from the celebrated Rand Rock Drill Co., 23 Park Place, New York City.”<sup>118</sup> The meeting of human beings and complex machines on stage led to some contrived—yet thrilling—scenes in which a person might be injured by a real, operating machine on stage:

The hero, wandering about in an aimless manner, unconsciously gets into a steamforge, and there naturally seeking repose falls asleep on the hammer-block. The audience is then held in breathless expectation for over three-quarters of an hour with the idea of seeing the hammer come thundering down on his devoted head.<sup>119</sup>

Singer’s insightful analysis contends that the kind of realism produced in late nineteenth century melodrama was never meant to immerse the spectator in the events of the drama. Instead, he asserts, “It was extremely self-conscious, soliciting the delight of a highly medium-aware audience.”<sup>120</sup>

What gripped the audience was not that the character might get hurt, but that the real actor could get injured:

The audience's reaction to the spectacle of physical peril in *Blue Jeans* is particularly telling: the thrill was not that the protagonist would be killed by the saw, but rather that Robert Hilliard, the actor playing the protagonist, might be injured. It was an awareness that the stunt was risky, that something might go wrong, or the timing might be off, that agitated spectators. They feared for the actor's flesh, not the protagonist's. This form of spectacular realism shifts the frame of attention from a believable diegetic realm, the frame one would expect realism to foster, to the material circumstances of the theater. Indeed, this is the precondition for the spectacle's effectiveness as a thrill.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, he argues that "[t]he effect was sensational not because it reproduced a convincing diegesis but, in a certain sense, precisely because it did not."<sup>122</sup> The idea of actual danger fuelled melodrama's obsession with the real.

In what might be a late melodramatic echo of the Johnstown story, Cecil Raleigh's "melodramatic-farce," *The Flood Tide* of 1903, which told the story of a mad millionaire, two gullible adventuresses, a soldier, and a dam break.



FIGURE 14: George Barker, *The Johnstown Calamity: A Slightly Damaged House*, one half of stereograph card. (Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 3a47000).

True to melodramatic form, the action takes place at various exotic locations with tremendous stage effects. The protagonists share the stage with a real train as well as the dramatic stage effect of a bursting reservoir that a critic called “truly wonderful.”<sup>123</sup> At the same time that this play was on stage, Coney Island boasted the Johnstown Flood show that the *New York Times* proclaimed “as harrowing as ever.”<sup>124</sup> A few weeks later, the same newspaper insisted, “The Johnstown Flood still holds the palm for being the most powerful illusion at Coney Island.”<sup>125</sup>

It is no accident that the extended title of *The Johnstown Horror!!!* stresses that the book will give “graphic descriptions” of scenes that would be quite at home in latenineteenth century sensational melodrama:

Graphic Descriptions of the Terrible Rush of Waters; the Great Destruction of Houses, Factories, Churches, Towns, and Thousands of Human Lives; Heart—Rending Scenes of Agony, Separation of Loved Ones, Panic-Stricken Multitudes and their Frantic Efforts to Escape a Horrible Fate

*Comprising*

Thrilling Tales of Heroic Deeds; Narrow Escapes from the Jaws of Death, Frightful Havoc by Fire, Dreadful Suffering of Survivors, Plundering Bodies of Victims, etc.<sup>126</sup>

“Thrilling tales,” “narrow escapes,” “frightful havoc,” and “dreadful suffering” were hallmarks both of the Johnstown disaster and of the melodramas occupying contemporary stage shows.

Disaster at Johnstown provided a way in which rubberneckers showed their affirmation of “the category of reality as an object of consumption,” as Vanessa Schwartz puts it.<sup>127</sup> Thanatourists flocked to the scene of mass casualty and did what tourists to Niagara Falls would do—they bought train tickets, gaped at the awesome sights, bought photographs, and collected souvenirs. When natural disasters were scarce, there were other places a thanatourist could experience the thrill at the theater of the real in melodrama.

*Harper's Weekly* characterized the Johnstown disaster in this way: “Nature has not so exerted its destructive powers on this continent within historic times. We must go back to Herculaneum and Pompeii for the story of a like catastrophe.”<sup>128</sup> This is not an idle comparison, for the nineteenth century had

already turned Pompeii into melodrama and spectacle in wide-ranging entertainments like Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), James Pain's late nineteenth century dramatic show fireworks entitled "Last Days of Pompeii," and finally to the fairground depictions of Pompeii and Johnstown at amusement parks. Buffalo's Pan-American of 1901 boasted the Johnstown Flood concession, which came out a "big winner" in ticket sales.<sup>129</sup> A veteran showman remarked, "There isn't one concession out of ten that plays to 5% of the admissions," but "the Johnston [sic] Flood attracted 12% of the total receipts."<sup>130</sup> This was a success that would be repeated in amusement parks across the country.

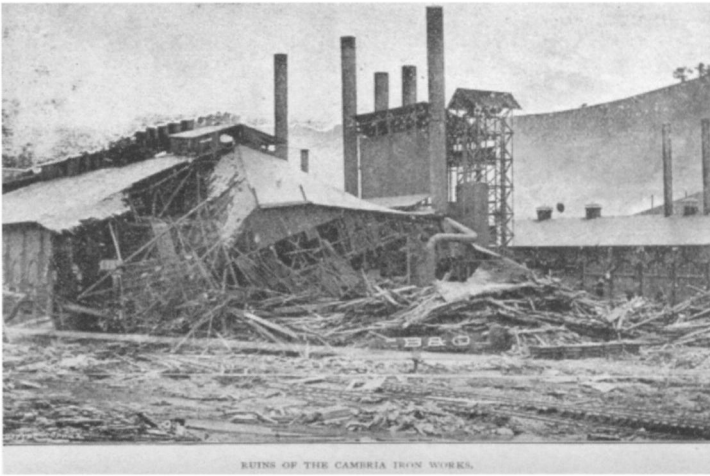


FIGURE 15: "Ruins of the Cambria Iron Works" (Willis Fletcher Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 1889, 217).

It is of no small consequence that the last section of *The Johnstown Horror!!!* takes the form of a literal tour of the city—with a visitor and a guide walking through and discussing the devastated town.<sup>131</sup> At the end of June, newspapers commented on the popular holiday tours to Johnstown:

One of the most popular holiday excursions at present appears to be one to view the ruins of Johnstown. The passenger trains of the Pennsylvania Railroad are heavily loaded with sightseers from all over the State. It is a peculiar phase of human nature, this disposition to gaze upon repulsive sights, and not a creditable though a common one. —*Philadelphia Inquirer*.<sup>132</sup>

Seeing the devastation at Johnstown—whether in person or through graphic photographs and printed reports—was similar to other nineteenth-century leisure activities, like visiting the morgue or going to the melodrama, and all of these offered the thrilling possibility of authentic experience. Leisure experience for these nineteenth-century people was visual and visceral, and Johnstown's example is being repeated today: Grey Line Bus tours of New Orleans is currently offering a "Katrina Tour" which promises the visit of an actual breached levee for \$35 for adults and \$28 for children.<sup>133</sup>

## NOTES

I thank the anonymous reviewers for their careful and engaged reading of this paper and Jeff Davis for his expert guidance and sharp editor's eye. Further thanks are owed to Joel Snyder, Tom Gunning, and Bill Brown at the University of Chicago for their help during the research phase of this project.

1. This will be a brief summary. For more information, readers are encouraged to consult one of the books dedicated to Johnstown's disaster, like David G. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), Richard O'Connor, *Johnstown: The Day the Dam Broke* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1957), or Nathan D. Shappee, "A History of Johnstown and the Great Flood of 1889: A Study of Disaster and Rehabilitation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1940). Numerous books were published directly after the 1889 disaster; these books are interesting pieces of cultural history, though their claims to accuracy should be taken with a grain of salt.
2. Although the Fishing and Hunting Club clearly created the conditions for the dam break by neglecting the dam, no plaintiffs won damages against the members of the club.
3. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 102.
4. Visitors from out of town gathered in Johnstown for Memorial Day celebrations and would have been missed in the accounting for Johnstown's own.
5. Willis Fletcher Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood* (Philadelphia: Edgewood Publishing Co., 1889), 429.
6. "Johnstown Completely Devastated by the Raging Waters," *Pittsburgh Press*, 1 June 1889, 1.
7. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 232–233.
8. Richard O'Connor, *Johnstown: The Day the Dam Broke* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co, 1957), 179.
9. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 203.
10. "Spectators in the Way: Shutting Out Excursionists on the P.R.R.," *Pittsburgh Press*, 3 June 1889, 1.
11. *Pittsburgh Press*, 3 June 1889.
12. Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 219.
13. [ . . . ] Henry, "Please Keep Away: Sight-seers Are Regarded as a Perfec [sic] Nuisance at Johnstown," *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 5 June 1889, 1.

14. Regular passenger service on the B&O was announced on 6 June. "Train Service Resumed," *New York Times*, 6 June 1889, 2. Regular trains on the Pennsylvania were restored by 18 June. "Low Rate Excursion via the Pennsylvania Lines," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 June 1889, 9.
15. "The Quick and the Dead," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 June 1889, 1.
16. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 June 1889.
17. "Passports Demanded at Johnstown," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 June 1889, 1.
18. Frank Connelly and George C. Jenks, *Official History of the Johnstown Flood* (Pittsburgh: Journalist Publishing Company, 1889), 140.
19. Connelly and Jenks, *Official History of the Johnstown Flood*, 146.
20. "Brutality on a Railroad," *New York Times*, 7 June 1889, 2.
21. "Blocks Charity's Way," *Chicago Tribune*, 10 June 1889, 1.
22. Paula Degen and Carl Degen, *The Johnstown Flood of 1889: The Tragedy of the Conemaugh* (Philadelphia: Eastern Acorn Press, 1984), 61.
23. Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 370.
24. *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 24 June 1889, page unknown, found in Clara Barton Papers, Library of Congress.
25. "Fourth of July on the Alleghenies," *Washington Post*, 22 June 1889, 7.
26. The first usage in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from 1811.
27. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 85.
28. Victor Fournel, "L'Odyssée d'un flâneur dans le rues de Paris," *Ce qu'on voit dans le rues de Paris* (Paris: 1858), 263 as quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Rolf Tiedemann, Howard Eiland, and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 429.
29. Tom Gunning, "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and Traffic in Souls (1913)," *Wide Angle* 19, no. 4 (October 1997): 25–61.
30. On the picnic, please see Mary Ellen W. Hern, "Picnicking in The Northeastern United States, 1840–1900," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1989): 139–52; Angela Miller, "Nature's Transformation: The Meaning of The Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1989): 113–38.
31. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 233.
32. "Line to the Grave," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 May 1896, 2.
33. *Guide to the Ridge Hill Farms: Wellesley, MA and Social Science Reform, September 1877* (Boston: Betschell Bros, 1877), 65.
34. Connelly and Jenks, *Official History of the Johnstown Flood*, 109.
35. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 233.
36. Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 377.
37. "Purifying the City," *New York Times*, 8 June 1889, 1.
38. "Getting on Their Feet," *The Washington Post*, 14 June 1889, 1.
39. "Blocks Charity's Way," *Chicago Tribune*, 10 June 1889, 1.
40. See Oliver Wendell Holmes, "My Hunt after 'The Captain'" in *Pages from an Old Volume of Life: A Collection of Essays, 1857–1881* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884).
41. "A Genuine Souvenir of the Fire," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 January 1872, 4.
42. "Charm Bells!," *Chicago Tribune*, 31 January 1872, 1.

43. Julian Curzon (pseud.), compiler and ed., *The Great Cyclone at St. Louis and East St. Louis May 27, 1896* (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1997 [originally St. Louis: Cyclone Publishing Company, 1896]), 86.
44. Letter from Mrs. Alice "Mamie" Easton to Ms. Manie H. Easton, 14 October 1900, Galveston & Texas History Center of the Rosenberg Library.
45. "A Genuine Souvenir of the Fire," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 January 1872, 4. This quote is paraphrased from Chapter I of Holmes' *The Poet at the Breakfast Table*.
46. Additionally, Goupil, Vibert, and Co. issued a series of "American Views" which *The Literary World* was astounded to report that eight (of thirty) were of Niagara Falls. In the article, the word "eight" is italicized for emphasis. "Long Island Mount," *The Literary World* 6, no. 162 (1850): 227.
47. "The Scene at the Bridge Where So Many Lives Were Lost," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 June 1889, 1.
48. "Trip Through the Valley," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 June 1889, 1.
49. Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 376.
50. James Herbert Walker, *The Johnstown Horror!!! or, Valley of Death: Being a Complete and Thrilling Account of the Awful Floods and Their Appalling Ruin* (Philadelphia/Chicago/St. Louis: National Publishing Company), 416–417. Sightseers, it seems, may also have been put to work. "More sightseers got through the guards at Bolivar on Friday night, and came to Johnstown on the last train. Word was telegraphed ahead, and the soldiers met them at the train, put them under arrest, kept them over night, and in the morning they were set to work in clearing up the ruins." Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 376.
51. "Advertisement of Joseph Eichbaum and Co.," *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 13 June 1889, 3.
52. Walker, *The Johnstown Horror!!!*, 477.
53. Similar photographic activity was present around the St. Louis disaster.
54. Clara Barton to Justus Zahn, 26 September 1900, Clara Barton Papers, Library of Congress.
55. Measuring the prints would tell whether they were made with a Kodak #1 or #2. Kodak #1 (introduced in 1888) made an image of 2 5/8 inches in diameter while #2 (introduced in 1889) made a picture of 3 1/2 inches.
56. "Report of Mrs. Ward," in American National Red Cross, *Report of the Red Cross Relief, Galveston, Texas* (Washington: [Printed by the Journal Publishing Company, Meriden, CT], 1900–01), 49.
57. "New Scenes of Horror," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 June 1889, 1.
58. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 217.
59. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 446.
60. *New York Times*, 8 June 1889, 1.
61. Walker, *The Johnstown Horror!!!*, xiv.
62. See also Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989); Nick Stanley, *Being Ourselves for You: The Global Display of Cultures* (Middlesex: Middlesex University Press, 1998); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, (London and Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990). For a discussion of the tsunami memorial in Hilo, Hawaii, see Mike Davis, "Tsunami Memories," in *Dead Cities, and Other Tales* (New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2002).
63. Lucy R. Lippard, *On The Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place* (New York: New Press, 1999). Historians and sociologists (Lucy Lippard, Tony Seaton, Malcolm Foley, and John J. Lennon) consider a wider array of disaster events (war, genocide, and murder) than this study examines.

64. Tony Seaton, "From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism: Guided by the Dark," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2 (1996): 234–244.
65. A. V. Seaton and J. J. Lennon, "Thanatourism in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Moral Panics, Ulterior Motives, and Alterior Desires" in *New Horizons in Tourism: Strange Experiences and Stranger Practices*, ed. T. V. Singh (Oxfordshire and Cambridge: CABI Publishing, 2004), 63. See also M. Foley and J. J. Lennon, "JFK and Dark Tourism: A Fascination with Assassination," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2: 198–211 and M. Foley and J. J. Lennon, "Dark Tourism—An Ethical Dilemma," in *Strategic Issues for the Hospitality, Tourism, and Leisure Industries*, M. Foley, J. J. Lennon and G. Maxwell, eds (London: Cassell, 1997): 153–164.
66. J. J. Lennon and M. Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000), 58, 11. See also J. J. Lennon and M. Foley, "Interpretation of the Unimaginable: The U. S. Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.," *Journal of Travel Research* 38 (1999): 46–50.
67. See also George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Chris Rojek, *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994).
68. MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 14.
69. Seaton and Lennon, "Thanatourism in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century," 69.
70. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track*, 119.
71. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track*, 119.
72. James Beattie, "Dissertations Moral and Critical" (1783), in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 184. The italics are his.
73. Beattie, "Dissertations Moral and Critical," 184.
74. Beattie, "Dissertations Moral and Critical," 184.
75. Beattie, "Dissertations Moral and Critical," 185.
76. Seaton and Lennon, "Thanatourism in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century," 67.
77. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986); Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London and New York: Verso, 1989); Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).
78. "Please Keep Away: Sight-seers Are Regarded as a Perfec [sic] Nuisance at Johnstown," *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 5 June 1889.
79. Thomas Cook's public relations magazine was called the *Excursionist*.
80. "Scenes at the Morgue," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1896, 4.
81. Curzon, *The Great Cyclone*, 208.
82. "Death in the Air," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 June 1889, 1.
83. "Death in the Air," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 June 1889.
84. "At the Morgue," *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 3 June 1889, 3.
85. "A Scene in the Johnstown Morgue," *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 4 June 1889, 1.
86. Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams, 87–113 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).



87. Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-De-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 50.
88. Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus," 90. I would call this a crowd of rubbernecks rather than flâneurs, as the rubbernecker belongs in the crowd.
89. Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus," 91.
90. Daniel C. Eddy, *Europa: or, Scenes and Society in England, France, Italy, and Switzerland* (Boston: Bradley, Dayton & Co., 1859), 221.
91. See also Sieverts Drewett, *Bemrose's Guide to Paris and its Environs. How to Get There; and What to See When You Are There. With Information on Everything that an English Traveller Requires ...* 3d ed., rev. (London, Bemrose & Sons, 1890). Although "top attractions" might sound facetious, it is not. These locations were popular—and still are.
92. The morgue in Boston opened in 1851, Bellevue Hospital in New York City in 1866, Brooklyn in 1870, Chicago in 1872, and St. Louis in 1874.
93. Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis; a Mirror of New York* (Hartford et al: American Publishing Company et al., 1869), 282.
94. Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 283. More information on how people died in the cities can be found in Roger Lane, *Violent Death in the City: Suicide, Accident, and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1979).
95. Edward Winslow Martin, *The Secrets of the Great City: A Work Descriptive of the Virtues and the Vices, the Mysteries, Miseries and the Crime of New York City* (Philadelphia et al: Jones Brothers & Co, 1868), 511. "It is rarely empty" is fairly ambiguous in meaning. Empty of the dead or the living?
96. Curzon, *The Great Cyclone*, 206.
97. James Dabney McCabe, *Paris by Sunlight and Gaslight. A Work Descriptive of the Mysteries and Miseries, the Virtues, the Vices, the Splendors, and the Crimes of the City of Paris* (Philadelphia [etc.]: National Publishing Co., 1870), 155. This was a subscription book: "Issued by subscription only, and not for sale in the book stores. 54 Residents of any State desiring a copy should address the publishers, and an agent will call upon them. There is a little warning before the morgue pages: "\* The reader will find this story told with inimitable fidelity in our illuminated title page, the scenes embodied in that engraving explain themselves, and convey no uncertain warning." McCabe, *Paris by Sunlight and Gaslight*, 512.
98. K. Baedeker, *Paris and Environs*, 9th revised edition (London and Leipsig: Karl Baedeker and Dulau and Co., 1888), 216.
99. McCabe, *Paris by Sunlight and Gaslight*, 156. Interestingly, the text contains a footnote warning about the information on the morgue: "\* The reader will find this story told with inimitable fidelity in our illuminated title page, the scenes embodied in that engraving explain themselves, and convey no uncertain warning."
100. James Jackson Jarves, *Parisian Sights and French Principles, Seen through American Spectacles* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 49.
101. Jarves, *Parisian Sights and French Principles*, 50.
102. Jarves, *Parisian Sights and French Principles*, 50.
103. Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 283.
104. "Burying Its Many Dead," *New York Times*, 6 June 1889, 1.

105. Additionally, one might view Jarves' visit as a form of "slumming," an activity which might also be traced to contemporaneous lantern slide shows of the seedy side of American cities. For some visitors, like Jarves, the morgue offered an opportunity to differentiate oneself; in this view, while the crowd was indulging in sensationalist pleasure, the more elite visitor saw himself as standing apart, contemplating life, death, and society. *Working at Play* recounts the story of Richard Henry Dana, a man of good breeding who felt curious enough to go to the notorious Five Points area in New York in 1843 and even to visit a prostitute (for research purposes, of course). Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 134–135. For more information on sex tourism and "slumming," see Chad Cottrell Heap, "Slumming': Sexuality, Race and Urban Commercial Leisure, 1900–1940," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2000.
106. Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850–1910* (Boston, London, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 12.
107. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, 12.
108. The final paragraph of "Purifying the City" contains a typical story of families drowned together: "Four Episcopal clergymen, who had been sent here by Bishop Whitehead, were working about the ruins near Lincoln-street, when they came upon the body of their late brother. Clapsed in one arm was the body of his babe and in the other his wife, whose arms were about his neck. They were removed in this position, and will be buried to-morrow, the Episcopal clergymen officiating." *New York Times*, 8 June 1889, 1.
109. "Old Dog Tray's Ever Faithful," *Washington Post*, 21 June 1889, 4.
110. Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood*, 510.
111. There were many memorial songs written about Johnstown which would prove fruitful for another study. A partial list would include V. Taylor, "The Great Johnstown Disaster" (s.n.: n.d); Joseph Flynn, "The Johnstown Flood" in *Mammoth Songster*, no. 180 (New York: Henry J. Wehman, 1889); Calvin J. Bushey, "Oh, Conemaugh" (Philadelphia: A. 55 W. Auner and M. D. Swisher, 1889); William Thomas, "That Valley of Tears" (Philadelphia: Wm. Thomas, 1890); J. P. Skelley, "My Last Message" (Boston: P. R. McCargo and Co., 1889).
112. "Benefits at the Theatres," *New York Times*, 6 June 1889, 5; "Benefits at Theatres," *New York Times*, 7 June 1889, 5; "The Colleen Bawn," *The Washington Post*, 10 June 1889, 8.
113. Paul Lester and Richard Spillane, *The Great Galveston Disaster Containing a Full and Thrilling Account of the Most Appalling Calamity of Modern Times Including Vivid Descriptions of the Hurricane* (Galveston: n.p., 1900), 404.
114. Arthur Lubow, *The Reporter Who Would Be King: A Biography of Richard Harding Davis* (New York: Scribner's, 1992), 34–35.
115. Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 182.
116. "The Mechanical Sensation Drama," *The Manufacturer and Builder*, Volume 4, Issue 6, (June 1872) 140.
117. "The Mechanical Sensation Drama," *The Manufacturer and Builder*, 139.
118. Copies are located in the Theater Collection, Museum of the City of New York.
119. "The Mechanical Sensation Drama," *The Manufacturer and Builder*, 140.

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120. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 185.
121. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 185.
122. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 186.
123. "New Play at Drury Lane," *London Times—New York Times*, Special Cablegram, 18 September, 1903.
124. "Invasion of London Stage by American Playwrights," *New York Times*, 9 August, 1903, 21.
125. "Regular Season of Things Theatrical is at Hand," *New York Times*, 16 August 1903, 21.
126. This is the extended title as reproduced on the title page of Walker, *The Johnstown Horror!!!*, title page.
127. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 11.
128. Henry Loomis Nelson, "Johnstown and the Floods," *Harper's Weekly*, Volume XXXIII, no. 1695, 15 June 1889, 478.
129. "Some Who Made Money," *Buffalo Evening News*, 6 November 1901.
130. Louisiana Purchase Exposition Concession Minutes, Missouri Historical Society, 211.
131. Walker, *The Johnstown Horror!!!*, 477.
132. "Excursions to Johnstown," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 June 1889, 3.
133. Grey Line New Orleans homepage, <http://www.graylineneworleans.com/>, Accessed January 20, 2006. One might also say, as did Harper's in 1889, that the disgrace of an avoidable disaster has been repeated with Katrina: "But the final proof of a high civilization will be that an event so horrible as this in Pennsylvania shall never occur again. Its causes are perfectly comprehended: they are entirely avoidable; and a disaster of the same kind anywhere and in any degree, after this appalling warning, would be not only a calamity, but a disgrace." "The Great Calamity," *Harper's Weekly*, Volume XXXIII, no. 1695, 15 June 1889, 470.