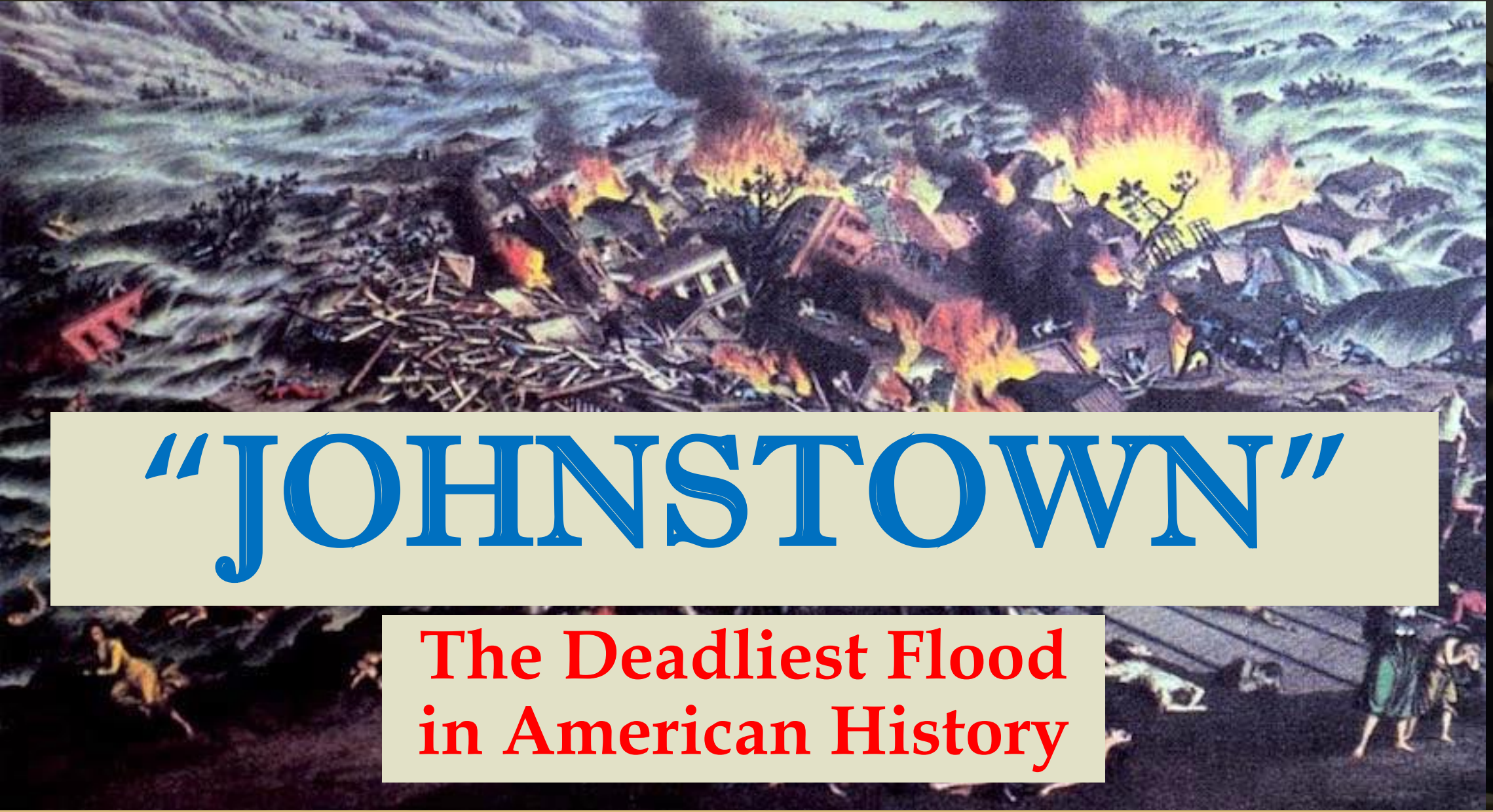




“JOHNSTOWN”

The Deadliest Flood
in American History

“Like A Mountain”

On May 31, 1889, twenty million tons of water burst through a dam in central Pennsylvania and crushed town after town in a twisting, steep 15-mile valley until it reached the city of Johnstown.

The flood waves reached 70 foot high in some areas of the valley and were described as a “mountain” from those who witnessed this horrible spectacle.

Over 2,200 people died in little over an hour.

This story has never been told in the modern cinema era.





2023 Screenplay
Award Winner

2023 Screenplay Pitch
Semi-Finalist

Summary

- Title: “Johnstown”
- Length of Film: Two Hours
- Genre: Historical Drama
- Budget: Over \$40 Million
- Screenplay registered with WGAE and has a US Copyright
- Contact writer: Rmd1064@aol.com
- Website with the full script and pitch deck: www.Johnstownthemovie.com

Our Story

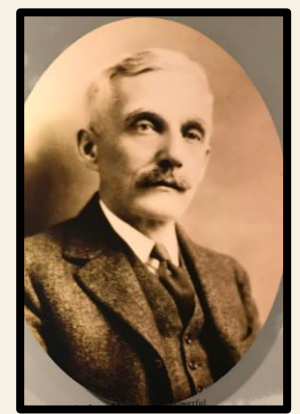
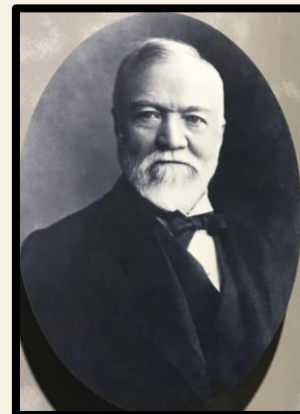
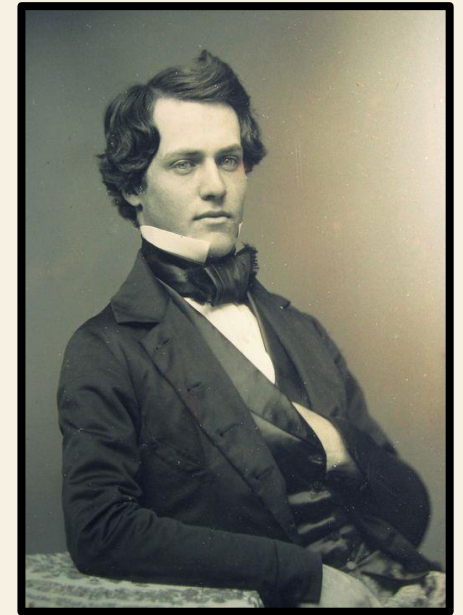
Emma, an ambitious, gifted, young singer, is ready for a new life outside of her small town.

A rich, handsome heir to a Pittsburgh steel fortune falls for her. Could this be her way out?

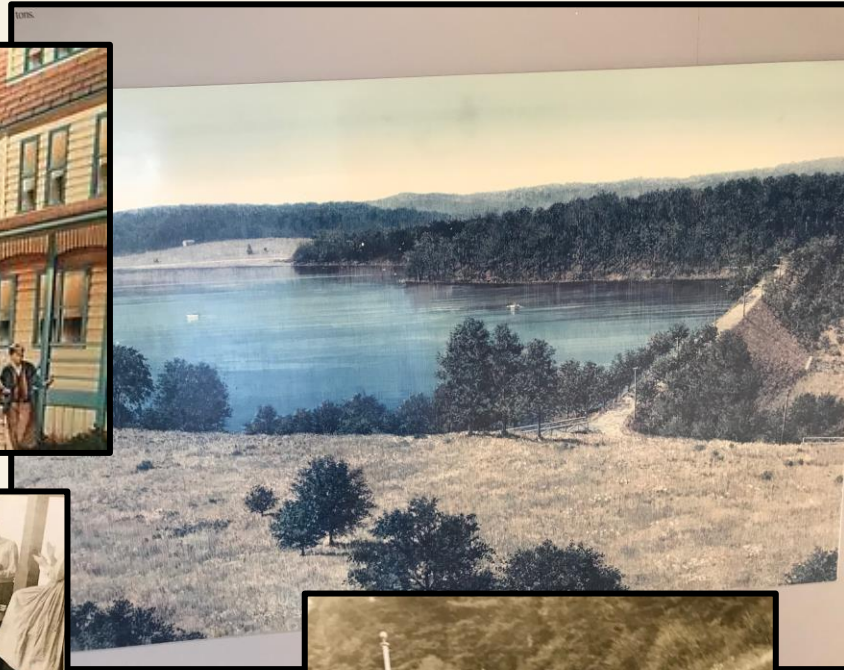
But the worst flood in American history shatters her life. Her town. And all those around her.

And was her beau's father and the other big Pittsburgh bosses at fault for this tragedy?

Men with names like Carnegie, Phipps and Mellon.



How It Started: The Bosses Club



- The South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club was founded for the “big bosses” of Pittsburgh and their families to spend summers on a beautiful, mountain lake to fish, hike, boat and enjoy lavish dinners and parties at the Clubhouse.
- Lake Conemaugh was created in the 1830s with an earthen dam. Over the years, the lake grew to three miles long and a mile wide and 80 foot deep in places. And after over fifty years, the dam was showing signs of strain and faltering.
- The President of the Club, Colonel Elias Unger, was warned about the dangers facing the dam: it was leaking, was too low compared to the growing lake, and other issues. They were not addressed.

The Deadly Horrible Flood



- After a record ten inches of rain over two days, the swollen Lake Conemaugh breached the top of the dam the morning of Friday May 31, 1889.
- Around 3:15, the dam was crushed as the waters blasted through it.
- The powerful wave flattened town after town in the valley before reaching Johnstown around 4:00 that day.
- In just over an hour, over 2,200 people would perish including 99 entire families.
- At the Stone Bridge in Johnstown, nearly one hundred people, trapped in their battered houses, were burned alive as flames consumed the debris.

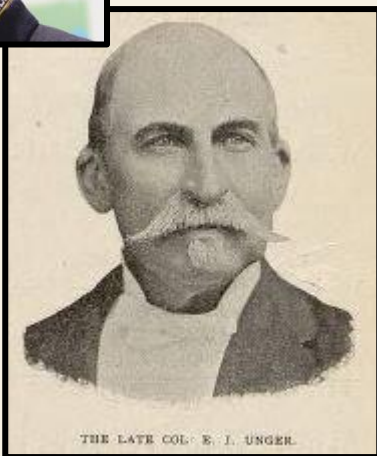
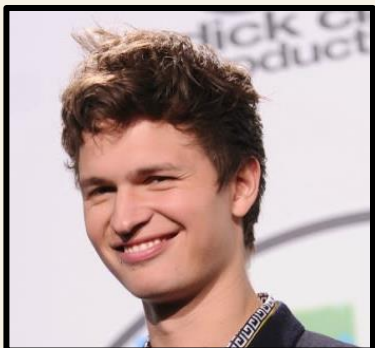
The Players

Emma Hart (fictional) works at the Cambria Iron Works, but is also very talented and beautiful singer. She wants to leave Johnstown for bigger stages, but her father passed away in a mill accident and now she is the only one taking care of her family. But she does get an exciting job for the summer, singing at the exclusive South Fork Club in front of the rich and powerful families of Pittsburgh. Maybe this is her big break?

At the club, Emma meets Jay Phipps (historical figure), the son of steel baron Henry Phipps. Jay falls hard for Emma and after some romantic summer time at the lake, she visits him in Pittsburgh. But there, she learns some ugly truths about Jay.

In Johnstown, the son of shopkeeper, Victor Heiser (historical figure), has been in love with Emma for years. And now he is heartbroken that Emma may have found a new rich beau, and that she will soon leave their home town. Forever. But fate takes a hand.





The Players

Charlie Hart (fictional), a tall handsome young man still in high school, plays guitar and accompanies his older sister Emma when she sings at the Club at the lake.

Colonel Elias Unger (historical figure) is the President of the South Fork Club. He enjoys moving in powerful circles with the big bosses. And the bosses like that he does such a good job in running the club with a tight fist. But his focus on ruthlessly saving money has terrible consequences.

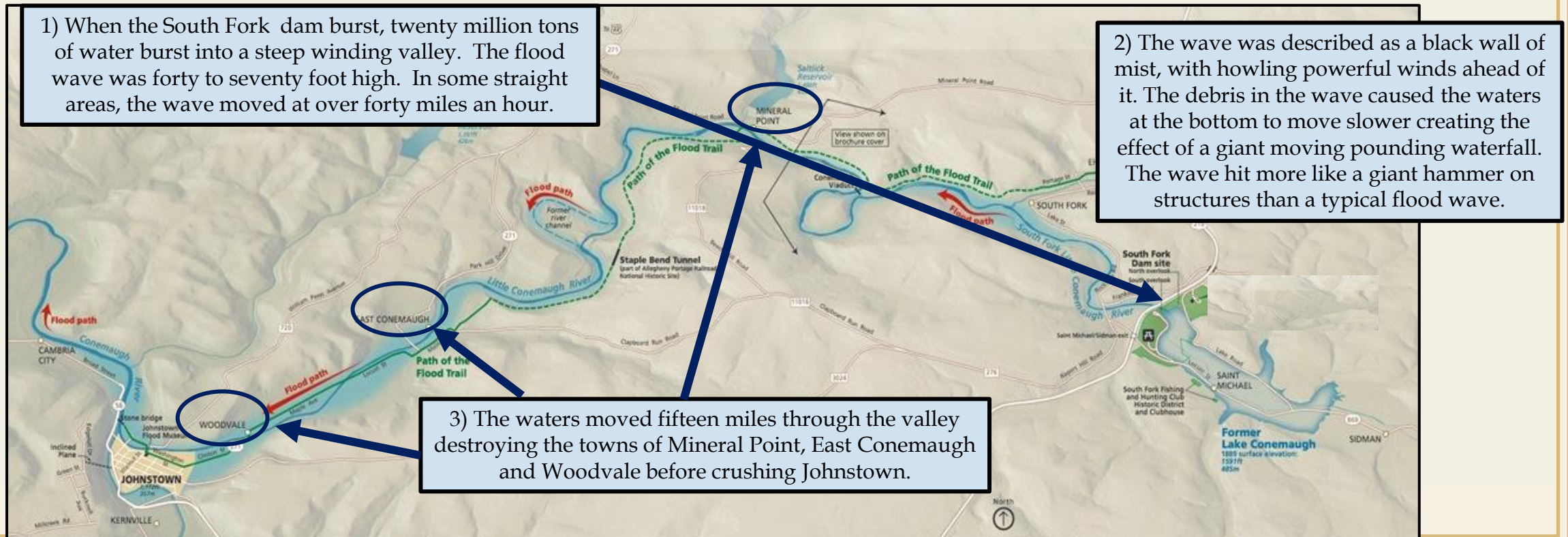
Clara Barton (historical figure) arrived in Johnstown just days after the flood and stayed over six months, assisting the victims through her new organization, the American Red Cross. The Red Cross earned their reputation for their work in Johnstown that continues to this day.

Casting Notes

- Emma Hart is the protagonist of this movie along with her journey to reach her goal to sing on the stages of the biggest cities. I would hope Emma would be played by accomplished singer. In the story, Emma believes she may have reached her goal, but finds it was an empty dream. And after that disappointment, she faces the awful tragedy of the terrible flood that destroys her town and her life.
 - My inspiration for Emma Hart is the singer Haley Reinhart. In my opinion, she is one of the best singers of our generation and her radiant looks and beauty are a throwback to the great classic actresses of the early cinema. She seems like she would fit in very well in this period piece.
 - On another slide, I discuss the music for the film, which I think could result in a very popular soundtrack album. Just a note that Haley is not participating in this project currently, but is aware of it.
 - In any case, this role would be a huge opportunity for a young actress/singer (Sabrina Carpenter? Hailee Steinfeld?) to shine in a gorgeous and historic period drama. A star-making role.
- The other main actors are young men in their early twenties, both of whom are vying for Emma, Jay Phipps and Victor Heiser. Another young man in his twenties would be the engineer John Parke. Emma's friend Peg and Jay's girl friends are also in their early twenties.
- Secondary players would be older actors: Ruth Hart, Colonel Elias Unger, Henry Phipps, Philander Knox, Andrew Frick, Andrew Mellon, Durbin Horne and Robert Chambers.
- Clara Barton appears in one important scene in the movie.

The Immense Power of The Horrible Flood

- Although there are story lines and arcs around the characters, the real star of this movie is the Johnstown Flood. To this day, it is the deadliest flood in American history, killing 2,209 people, including 99 entire families and 396 children. Over 750 people were never found. Billions in today's value were lost.
- With today's CGI Graphics and Special Effects Technology, the sheer fierceness and power and horror of this flood could be realized like no disaster movie ever filmed. The devastating and awful destruction. The horrible heartbreaking loss of life.



Locations

- Amazingly, many of the historical structures in the screenplay survive to this day. Below are the various locations in the movie and how they look today.
- One benefit to this movie would be a huge boost of tourism to the Johnstown area as people will want to visit and explore the real-life places shown in the movie.



The Clubhouse



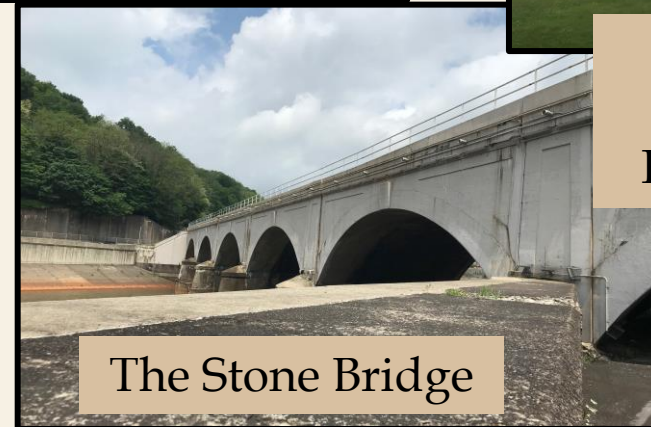
Central Park



The Grandview
Cemetery and
Flood Monument



Colonel Unger's Cottage



The Stone Bridge

What Others Have Said: Coverage Notes

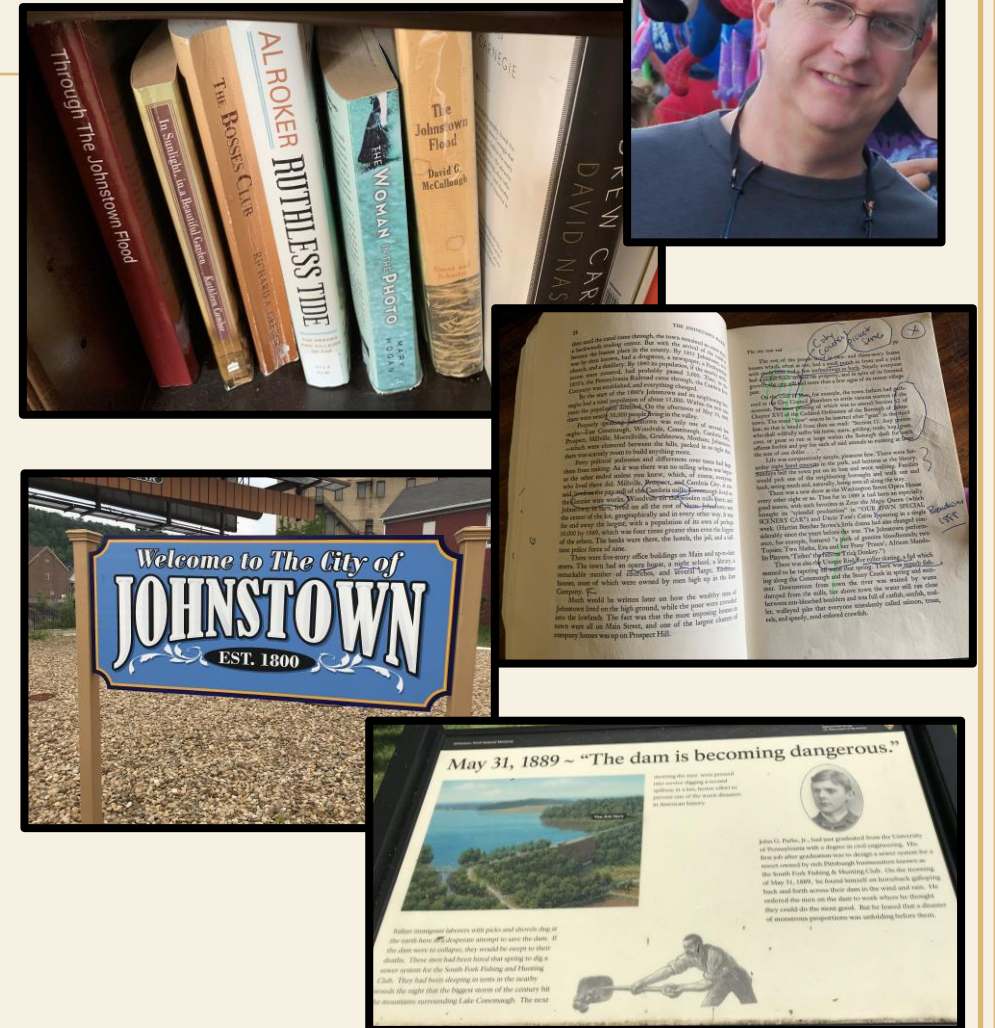
- "Rest assured, this is a movie that must be made. It's tragic yet it's also a rollicking adventure and incredibly dramatic, all the while remaining a story little known in this day and age."/"You have the makings of one powerful story on your hands...the script (is) engaging and a really good effort"/ "I maintain you will find **you might have a gem on your hands.**"
(**Script Reader Pro**)
 - "This is an excellent concept for a feature. **I'm shocked it hasn't already been made into a well-known movie**"/ "The dialogue is quite good...the characters each speak in distinct voices"/ "Really nice work...You're a talented writer". (**We Screenplay**)
 - "Interestingly, this movie, even though it is set in 1889, would have a spellbound audience today." / "This is well-written, exhaustively researched..." (**Script Lab**)
 - Overall, this is a strong script. It has good balance between the storylines of romance and those focused on the context of history. **The research done by the writer comes across on the page.** It has great potential in appealing to a very wide demographic and fitting into a number of marketable genres."/"These final scenes provide a splendid emotional conclusion, with a nice final transition to the closing scene of Emma's performance. **This happy ending feels earned. It balances the tragedy of the narrative well.**" (**Table Read Your Screenplay**)
 - "The story has potential and clearly a lot of research went into this screenplay. **The scenes with the flood overtaking the town are poignant and horrifying.**" (**Austin Film Festival**)
- "I genuinely got invested in the story. **I fell in love with Emma instantly.** I learned so much reading this script. Excellent ending. I liked the happy ending." (**Carnegie Screenwriters Group**)

The Music of The Era

- Emma Hart performs several songs throughout the movie. Below is a listing of music that could be part of the soundtrack. Some are sung in the movie, others could be background music for the era.
 - “God Moves In A Mysterious Way” (William Crowder) Sung by Emma at the 1892 monument dedication ceremony at the Grandview Cemetery. (This specific song was performed at the 1892 ceremony.) This could be a HUGE SONG, a radio hit perhaps on Adult Contemporary Radio, much like “My Heart Goes On” by Celine Dion from “Titanic”.
 - “Shenandoah” (Unknown) . Traditional American folk song of uncertain origin, dating to the early 19th century. Sung in screenplay by Emma
 - “Home On The Range” (Brewster Higley) Classic western folk song sometimes called the "unofficial anthem" of the American West.
 - “Aura Lea” (Fosdick/Poulton) Sung in screenplay by Emma at the Duquesne Club in Pittsburgh. One of the most popular love songs of the Civil War era. The scene in the movie of Emma singing this song to the big bosses would be mesmerizing.
 - “Blue Danube” (Johann Strauss) An Austrian waltz
 - “My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean” (Traditional) Sung by Emma to the children. A Scottish folk song.
 - “Oh My Darling Clementine” (Percy Montrose) Sung by Emma in the screenplay. An American western folk ballad.
- In addition, original songs and music themes could be used that fits the genre and story of the movie.
- The song over the closing credits could be a slightly edited “When The Levee Breaks” by Led Zeppelin, performed in the period style, sung by Emma Hart.
- The “Johnstown” soundtrack featuring moving songs from the era performed by a great singer (Haley Reinhart?) along with original music could be a HUGE HIT, much like the soundtracks to recent period movies like “O Brother Where Art Thou”, “Titanic” and “Moulin Rouge”.

The Writer

- On a long plane ride about many years ago, I started to read the David McCullough book, “The Johnstown Flood” which was his first major book, released in 1968. As I read it, I wondered how this amazing story had never been told in a modern movie. I started to take notes on that flight, and that started my journey.
- Along the way, I read numerous books and articles on the subject and researched the vast resources of the Internet.
- I visited Johnstown three times, including the site of the dam and the Johnstown Flood Visitor Center along with the Johnstown Flood Museum. And, I visited the sites of the path of destruction through the valley and the Johnstown area.



In Closing

- As someone noted in the coverage notes, this is a story that should be told, and would have the same impact today as 1889. The issue of upper class versus working class. Rich versus Poor. And how money and power can thwart justice.
- My model for this movie was "Titanic" – a true life story told with fictional characters and historical figures. Emma and Jay and Victor could be the new Rose and Jack and Cal. That movie did pretty well, right?
- I believe people, especially older Americans (and there are more and more of us every day), like to go to movies in which they not only enjoy a great film, but learn some real history. This is some amazing history.
- The story of this flood has never been told in the modern screen era. With today's CGI and special effects technology, the oncoming flood could be a stunning, moving, horrifying experience. Then there is the history, the music, the impact it could make.
- I hope someone makes this movie. Thank you for your attention.

