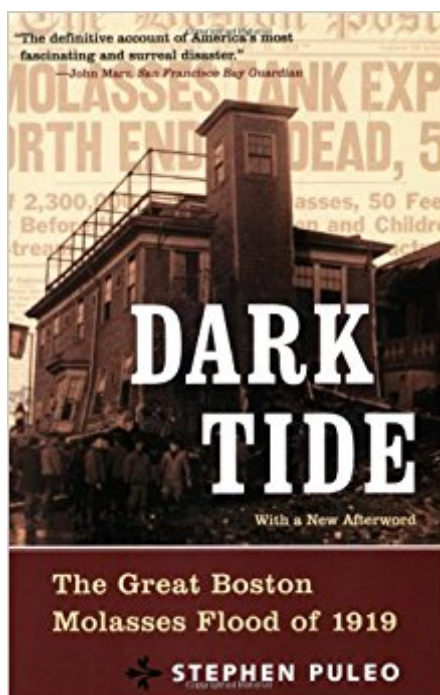


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# Dark Tide: The Great Boston Molasses Flood Of 1919



## Synopsis

Around noon on January 15, 1919, a group of firefighters was playing cards in Boston's North End when they heard a tremendous crash. It was like roaring surf, one of them said later. Like a runaway two-horse team smashing through a fence, said another. A third firefighter jumped up from his chair to look out a window-"Oh my God!" he shouted to the other men, "Run!" A 50-foot-tall steel tank filled with 2.3 million gallons of molasses had just collapsed on Boston's waterfront, disgorging its contents as a 15-foot-high wave of molasses that at its outset traveled at 35 miles an hour. It demolished wooden homes, even the brick fire station. The number of dead wasn't known for days. It would be years before a landmark court battle determined who was responsible for the disaster.

## Book Information

Paperback: 273 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press (September 16, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807050210

ISBN-13: 978-0807050217

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 329 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #80,292 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Industrial, Manufacturing & Operational Systems > Health & Safety #20 in Books > Science & Math > Technology > Safety & Health #76 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Disaster Relief

## Customer Reviews

In this volume, Puleo, a contributor to American History magazine, sets out to determine whether the collapse of a molasses tank that sent a tidal wave of 2.3 million gallons of the sticky liquid through Boston's North End and killed 21 people was the work of Italian anarchists or due to negligence by the tank's owner, United States Industrial Alcohol. Getting into the minds of the major players in the disaster-USIA suits, victims, witnesses, North End residents, politicians-he re-creates not only the scene but also the social, political and economic environments of the time that made the disaster more than just an industrial accident. While the collapse's aftermath is tragic, the story itself is not exactly gripping. More interesting are the tidbits of Boston's and America's history, such as the importance of molasses to all U.S. war efforts up to and including WWI, which Puleo uses to

put the tank collapse in the context of a very complex time in U.S. history. The most striking aspect of this tale is the timeliness of the topics it touches on. Describing Americans being persecuted because of their ethnicity, a sagging economy boosted by war, and terrorism on U.S. soil that results in anti-immigration laws and deportations, Puleo could just as easily be writing about current events as about events in 1919. Overall, this is another piece in the jigsaw puzzle that is Boston's long and rich history. Photos. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In January, 1919, a fifty-foot tank filled with molasses exploded, sending waves of viscous goo through waterfront Boston and killing twenty-one people. Were Italian anarchists to blame or was it negligence by the tank's owner, the United States Industrial Alcohol company? Such matters form the crux of Puleo's account, which is narrated with gusto (and sometimes too much gusto: one victim has molasses "clinging to his private parts, like an army of insects that just keep coming"). Molasses was a vital commodity at the time, used in rum manufacture (the tank was full to the brim to cash in on pre-Prohibition demand), and it had been important in the production of First World War munitions. Puleo overreaches in claiming the story of the flood as a "microcosm of America"â "an almost obligatory conclusion in this sort of historyâ "but his enthusiasm for a little-known catastrophe is infectious. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Author Stephen Puleo has done it again. In this book, he has taken a relatively obscure event and told us an incredible story. The historical part is expertly researched by him and full of insight not previously well known. He gives us the historical context of the times when this event took place and more than that, he describes the people victimized in this deadly incident and their life, their passions, their plights. We become one of them. In addition, he focuses on the evil conspirators of the entire incident, the ones dedicated to their quest for money and power and the unwitting spineless co-conspirators. I cannot tell what a page turner this book is and how surprisingly important the entire event became to me as I read it. Puleo never disappoints. His books are so well researched, his stories so intricate and detailed as a result.

This was a horror story. A defective tank, built in a hurry, for molasses which was shipped in and out of Boston to make alcohol, started leaking. Some of the little children living in close quarters to the tank were able to collect little dishes of molasses from the ground surrounding the tank. Yet, nothing

was done for the sake of time and money. When the tank finally let go, the coast surrounding Boston Harbor was inundated with molasses ... people actually drowned in it. There were many deaths and loss of homes from the 45 foot tall wave of thick brown molasses and its ensuing flow through homes and streets. The author has written the only known book about this tragedy. It is written in great detail, including the legal aspects which finally brought to light the truth in a court battle. It is a tragedy and a thriller at the same time. One wonders HOW such a thing could exist in the first place. All is explained in the court proceedings that follow an excellent accounting of this tragedy. It is told in living color.

Not only does this book describe one of the most bizarre disasters that occurred, the failure of a huge tank holding over 2 million gallons of molasses, but it gives a view of Boston and the USA prior to our entry into WWI. Our attitudes toward immigrants, big business, poverty, war, class consciousness and even the rum / molasses / slave trade. A look at the Anarchists and their actions is currently echoed by today's terrorists along with the government's reactions to them. There are other parallels that appear making this past tragedy surprising current. A very worthwhile read that grips you until the end. The author has done fine research, well documented and the bibliography is very interesting. One can see the cycle of no regulations, disaster, new regulations, memories fade regulations removed, and the looming next disaster to start it all again. Puts everything into a framework. Very educational.

Oh my! What can I say about the Molasses Flood? This was such an interesting book about a piece of our history we were not taught in school. It should have been and should be today. It not only tells about a huge tank holding millions of gallons of molasses, but also that this same tank was put up on the cheap in a crowded area and even though it was failing, the stress to the tank was covered up and an awful flood of this dark sticky mess, covered the dock area in Boston, 1919 and killed 21 people. At this same time and is covered nicely in the book, is the anarchist who were protesting the war and anything else they could get their hands on. These two things and the parallels that followed for the next nearly a decade as this played out in the court is startling and makes a wonderful tale. Thank you Mr. Puleo. This was quite a journey.

Walking through a bookstore, this title caught my eye... a molasses flood!?! I'd never heard about this event, so I picked up the book and flipped through it. It intrigued me enough to buy a copy. Puleo does a great job of bringing the story to us in terms of the people involved, as well as laying a

back story of what was happening in the world, that contributed to the failure of the holding tank. Balancing just the right amount of that history, with the actual events up to, during and after the tragedy, Puleo's narrative was easy to follow and well written. He brings us into the lives of the victims, the corporate players and the legal drama that followed. All in all, this was a fascinating story and one that history fans should add to their libraries!

I had vaguely heard a few things about a molasses flood in Boston, as a New Englander there are many bits of history to hear. This sounded like a Monty Python skit, or a Looney Tunes visual, which is perhaps why the august chronicles of Bean Town history have glazed over the event (bad pun intended). Pulls not only cites the tragedy itself and the ensuing human suffering, he does a marvelous job of detailing why such a monster was built in a heavily crowded area and what happened after Mr. Ogden's judgement that USIA was culpable, not an anything's bomb. A bit of everything in this one, corporate greed and haste, minimized immigrants, the urgency of war production, and a ruling against a huge corporation in the Harding/Coolidge feel good era for business. Well written, well crafted, and just about the only book on the subject that exists! If you enjoy history, you'll like this, the characters are well drawn.

An interesting story about a part of New England history I did not know. I wasn't aware of the molasses industry and how it was used so intensely for ammunition during WWI - as well as for consumer products. I lived in MA for 40 years and had not heard of this industrial accident, but I know the area where it happened and all traces of that devastation are gone (maybe not to those who live directly where it happened).. it was interesting to see the event from different viewpoints and how the investigation was carried out. Good photographs. I recommend this book to anyone interested in New England history or history of molasses.

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