



# PANNEBAKKER FAMILY NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE PANNEBAKKER FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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## The Johnstown Flood, 1889

On the afternoon of May 31, 1889, heavy rains caused the dam on Lake Conemaugh to fail, sending the water from the lake rushing downstream to devastate the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. With a death toll upwards of two thousand, the Johnstown flood was the deadliest natural disaster in American history up to that point.

Lake Conemaugh was a manmade reservoir created in 1853. In 1879, the lake and the surrounding land were sold to the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club to create a getaway in the Pennsylvania mountains for Pittsburg's elite, including Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and Andrew Mellon. Although warned in 1881 by an engineer that the lake's dam desperately needed maintenance—improper repairs, among other problems, had weakened the dam—the club ignored the recommendations.

Fourteen miles downstream from Lake Conemaugh was Johnstown, a booming steel mill city. An unusually heavy rainstorm that began on May 30, 1889, caused nearby rivers to overflow their banks, and the streets of Johnstown filled with water; the storm also caused the waters of Lake Conemaugh to rise rapidly. Despite frantic last-ditch efforts to prevent the dam from failing, the dam collapsed around 3 p.m. on the 31st.

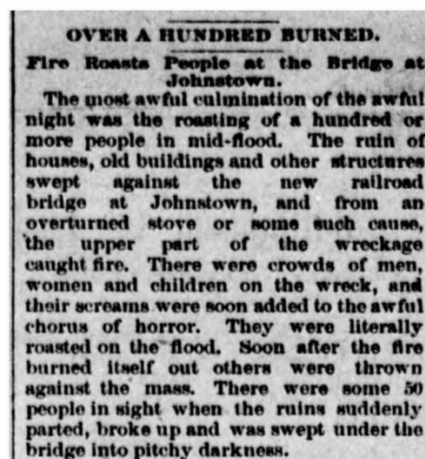
The water of Lake Conemaugh was sent hurtling into the valley below, wreaking havoc on the smaller towns in its path and wiping out houses, trees, railcars, animals, and people. By the time the water reached Johnstown about an hour later, it was still dozens of feet deep and moving at about 40 miles per hour.

As the water cut its destructive path through Johnstown, the massive amount of debris carried by the flood accumulated against a stone railroad bridge that stood on the edge of the city. Somehow, the mountain of debris caught fire that evening, and the resulting conflagration killed many people who had been trapped in the debris.

The water from the dam took only about 10 minutes to sweep through the city, but it left incredible damage in its wake. More than two thousand people were killed, including ninety-nine entire families, and 1,600 homes were destroyed.

When news of the disaster reached the outside world, money and supplies came pouring in to help the people of Johnstown and the surrounding communities rebuild their homes, businesses, and lives.

Clara Barton and her newly created American Red Cross provided relief for five months. Although lawsuits were filed against the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, none of them were successful, and the club was not held legally accountable for the disaster.



## January 15, 1919: The Great Molasses Flood

Does the scent of molasses linger in your home long after the holidays? The Great Molasses Flood of 1919 left residents from one city claiming they could smell molasses for decades. On January 15, 1919, a giant tank holding 2.3 million gallons of molasses burst open in Boston's North End neighborhood. It flooded the streets creating a 15-foot wave of molasses that carved a path of destruction. The sticky quagmire killed 21 people and injured 150, paving the way for more stringent safety standards across the country.

During WWI, molasses was distilled into industrial alcohol and used to produce military explosives. The Purity Distilling Company set up shop in the densely populated North End neighborhood in Boston. The area was home to many immigrants, and the company encountered little opposition when they constructed a 50-foot tall, 90-foot diameter molasses tank, just three feet from the street in 1915.



Days before the deadly explosion, a ship delivered a fresh load of warm molasses. It was mixed with cold molasses already in the tank, causing gasses to form. With the tank filled to near-capacity, a later structural engineering analysis revealed that the walls were too thin to support the weight, and there was too much stress on the rivet holes.

Around 12:30 p.m. on January 15, 1919, workers stopped for lunch and a group of firefighters in a nearby firehouse sat down for a game of cards. Suddenly firefighters heard a strange staccato sound. It was the rivets on the molasses tank popping off. Other witnesses described a low rumbling sound. Before anyone could react, the tank of molasses burst, sending a rush of air that hurled people off their feet. A tsunami of sticky syrup poured over bystanders and horses, and knocked buildings off

their foundations. The resulting river of molasses ran through streets and passageways, filling cellars and basements. A one-ton piece of steel from the vat flew into a trestle of elevated railroad tracks, causing the tracks to buckle.

First responders rushed to help but were slowed down by knee-deep sticky molasses that had become thicker in the cold air. They labored to find survivors and recover the dead. Initially, there were concerns that the bursting tank was caused by sabotage or an outside explosion (a claim that Purity Distilling Company clung to). Officials later determined that faulty tank construction was the cause. Workers spent months cleaning the molasses mess by sprinkling sand and hosing down the streets with saltwater.

A one-ton piece of steel from the vat flew into a trestle of elevated railroad tracks, causing the tracks to buckle. Two children collecting firewood and dripping molasses near the tank disappeared under the fast-spreading liquid.

The tragedy led to many lawsuits and more than 100 damage awards. It also spurred changes in building codes with more stringent building regulations, first in Boston, then in Massachusetts, and then across the country.

## OBITUARY

**Rose Mary Pennebaker Koski**, 98, of Greenville, formerly of Edgewater, NJ, beloved wife of the late Anthony "Tony" Koski, passed away peacefully Saturday, January 30, 2021.



Born in Detroit, MI, she was the youngest of eight children of the late Leo and Zita Jaminet Pennebaker. During World War II, Rose Mary worked in the manufacture of planes and ships for the war effort. In 1942, on a weekend trip with friends to Chicago, IL, she met her future husband Tony, who was on leave from the US Army Air Corps. The two sent letters back and forth across the country from Michigan to California for almost two years, until Tony asked her to marry him. A young woman filled with a sense of adventure, Rose Mary set off on her own in January 1945 for a four-day bus trip to California to start her new life as an Army wife. In 1949, they settled in Edgewater, NJ, Tony's home town, where they lived for most of their marriage.

Rose Mary and Tony were blessed with three daughters. Rose Mary was a gifted cook. She was a Girl Scout leader who put together many events, including a summer day camp. She later transported special needs children to and from school, and then worked retail in New Jersey's largest shopping mall. She had a keen interest in current events all her life, always voted, and did word puzzles to keep sharp.

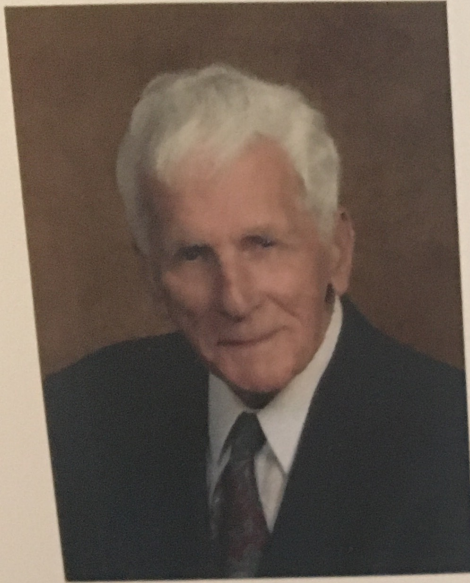
She was a devout Catholic who faithfully attended Holy Rosary Parish in Edgewater, NJ for over 30 years. She ran their monthly women's Sodality breakfasts and helped with two annual festivals. After relocating to South Carolina in 1983, she joined St. Mary's Catholic Church in Greenville and enjoyed attending mass, volunteering each week to count the weekly collections, and saying the rosary daily.

She is survived by three daughters, Mary Bullock of Staten Island, NY, Catherine Koski of Greenville, and Susan (and Joseph) Provenzano of Greer; two grandsons, Andrew (and Megumi) Provenzano of Kumamoto, Japan, and Stephen Provenzano of Greer; two great-grandchildren, Leila and Liam Provenzano; and many nieces and nephews.

### Lineage

Hendrick, Jacob, Henry, Cornelius, Henry, Joshua, Leo, Rose Mary

## OBITUARY



*II Timothy 4:7*

*I have fought a good fight,  
I have finished my course,  
I have kept the faith.*

*In Loving Memory of  
LEON S. PENNEPACKER*

*DECEMBER 3, 1931 — NOVEMBER 30, 2020*

*Beloved Husband of  
MARGARET S. (FOX) PENNEPACKER*

*Beloved Father of  
LEON & wife, CYNTHIA, PEG & partner, ROBYN  
and MICHELLE & husband, KENNETH*

*Beloved Grandfather of  
CONNER and JACK*

*Beloved Brother of  
The Late RALPH, JR.*

*Funeral Service  
11:00 A.M. on WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2020*

*MANN-SLONAKER FUNERAL HOME  
222 Washington Street, East Greenville, PA  
[www.mannslonakerfuneralhome.com](http://www.mannslonakerfuneralhome.com)*

*Officiating  
REV. HOMER ROYER  
New Goshenhoppen United Church of Christ*

*Interment  
ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CEMETERY  
Pennsburg, PA*

*Memorial Contributions  
NEW GOSHENHOPPEN UCC  
1070 Church Road, East Greenville, PA  
AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)  
EASTERSEALS  
[www.easterseals.com](http://www.easterseals.com)*

## Lineage

Hendrick, Peter, Samuel, Samuel, Benjamin, John, Leon, Ralph, Leon

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# *Pannebakker Family Association*



The Pannebakker Family Association is an outgrowth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699. In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."