

PRESS RELEASE

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UNKNOWN COLLECTION RELATING TO JOHNSTOWN FLOOD DISCOVERED IN PHILADELPHIA

*Johnstown Area Heritage Association to present Beale collection for first time
as part of 1889 Johnstown Flood commemoration activities*

JOHNSTOWN, Pa. – The Rev. David Beale was one of the most important figures in the story of the 1889 Johnstown Flood – and one of the most controversial. He was also the author of one of the best memoirs of the flood, “Through the Johnstown Flood.” But he left Johnstown in 1890 in the wake of a bitter controversy. After his death in 1900, his diaries, letters, photographs and other memorabilia disappeared. Then in 2006, Dan Ingram, the curator of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association, got an unexpected phone call from a Philadelphia man who had been cleaning out a carriage house. The man wanted to know -- was JAHA interested in a collection of photographs and papers from the Rev. David Beale?

“What happened to Beale’s papers has always been a mystery – he was too literate and too important of a man not to have kept them,” said Richard Burkert, executive director of JAHA. “But what we didn’t know is that he kept such detailed diaries. We are thrilled that this collection has surfaced in such wonderful condition. It will add immeasurably to our knowledge of the flood, and of Johnstown at that time.”

JAHA, which owns and operates the Johnstown Flood Museum, will present “Through the Flood: The Collection of the Rev. David Beale” on May 31, 2007 at 7 p.m. at the Heritage Discovery Center, 201 6th Ave. in Johnstown. The presentation is part of annual events (see enclosed release) held by JAHA and the National Park Service to commemorate the Johnstown flood, which occurred May 31, 1889. An AmeriCorps member working at JAHA, Nathan Koozer, has been reading the diaries and other papers, and will conduct the illustrated presentation.



The Rev. David Beale, about the time he served in Johnstown. From the collection.

The collection consists of:

- About 30 handwritten diaries; dates of the diaries range from the 1860s through 1900, when Beale died
- A morgue book, one of only three known to survive; the book records the details of the bodies of flood victims brought to all nine temporary morgues (the Rev. Beale's church, First Presbyterian Church, was one of the nine). The National Park Service, which owns and operates the Johnstown Flood National Memorial, will retain ownership of the book. It will be on display for one day only on May 31 at the Johnstown Flood National Memorial visitor center.
- About 80 photographs of flood destruction in excellent condition. Many are known photographs that include handwritten captions with previously unknown information, such as the date of the photographs and details about their subjects; several are prints of photos that have only been available in books published immediately after the flood; several are heretofore unknown. The best of these will be included in the May 31 presentation.
- Photographs of Beale's friends and relatives
- Letters written to Beale and his family, including condolence letters written to his widow
- Various receipts, including the receipt for his funeral costs



The page from Beale's diaries that records the flood. "This book was submerged 2 weeks in my study," he notes.

The diaries are especially significant because there are very few first-person remembrances of the flood written in the survivor's own hand, according to Dan Ingram. JAHA staff has begun reading the diaries and other materials, which are written in ink in Beale's small, barely legible cursive, beginning with the diaries nearest to 1889. But a full analysis of the materials will take years.

"We've only just scratched the surface of what this collection can tell us," Ingram said. "Many diarists of the period tended to record the weather and what they did that day, which has limited interest for historians. By contrast, Beale wrote notes for his sermons and for his flood memoir, discussions on Presbyterian theology, political opinions, and thoughts on his personal life. The collection is an incredible resource for historians interested in not only the flood, but a variety of topics related to that period."

Beale acted heroically in the initial flood recovery effort, but soon became embroiled in a controversy that would cause him to leave Johnstown just a year after the disaster. He was accused of not showing the morgue book to those interested in seeing it, and many people concluded that his reason was because he was writing a memoir about the flood and did not want others to have access to the information. Beale wrote in his diary, "to the best of my knowledge none but known lewd women and drunken men were prohibited from handling these books," but the perception remained, and Beale became a polarizing figure.



A heretofore unknown photo from the Beale collection, showing the remains of the South Fork Dam after it failed, causing the 1889 Johnstown Flood.

In addition, Beale had long been at odds with John Fulton, the manager of the Cambria Iron Company and one of Johnstown's leading citizens. Fulton was an elder of Beale's congregation and did not agree with him on various aspects of Presbyterian theology. In the aftermath of the flood, the relationship between the two deteriorated further. Beale's difficulties became widely known; there were even two articles in the *New York Times* about the controversy. The December 20, 1889 article was about a congregational meeting held to air the differences between the Fulton and Beale factions, and noted that "Fulton... is particularly bitter in his denunciation of Mr. Beale...it was hinted last night that Dr. Beale used

funds intended for the relief of his church members in such manner as to influence them in his favor. So boisterous and noisy was the meeting that several women fainted and had to be removed to their homes. Manager Fulton declares that the proceedings would have disgraced a New York ward political meeting."

"We were aware of the Beale controversy, and knew that it caused him to leave town. But the diaries show how ugly the accusations against him became," Ingram explained. "For example, he records an episode where his daughters were accused of wearing earrings looted from the bodies of flood victims, which Beale angrily refutes by noting that his daughters didn't have pierced ears. Some people even said his sermons were not as good after the flood."

Beale left Johnstown with his family, moving first to Frederick, Md. before settling in Philadelphia, where he lived for the rest of his life. However, he apparently continued to feel connected to Johnstown -- his correspondence includes many letters from friends in Johnstown, he recorded visits from Johnstown residents in his diaries, and receipts show he continued to subscribe to the *Johnstown Tribune* until his death.

"It's exciting that a collection of this significance has been discovered, over a century after the flood," Burkert said. "But it also makes you wonder what else is out there, just waiting to be found."

For more on the Johnstown Area Heritage Association, including its museums, programs, projects and special events, visit www.jaha.org.

The Johnstown Area Heritage Association is a non-profit, membership-based organization dedicated to preserving and showcasing Johnstown's unique history to the nation through high-quality educational, cultural and recreational experiences. JAHA owns and operates the Johnstown Flood Museum and the Frank & Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center, and produces the AmeriServ Johnstown FolkFest, a 3-day free music and food festival held annually over Labor Day weekend; events commemorating the 1889 Johnstown flood; The Johnstown Film & Wine Festival; and a variety of additional cultural programming. The Wagner-Ritter House & Garden opened in 2006, and the Johnstown Children's Discovery Museum is currently under construction and will open in late 2007.