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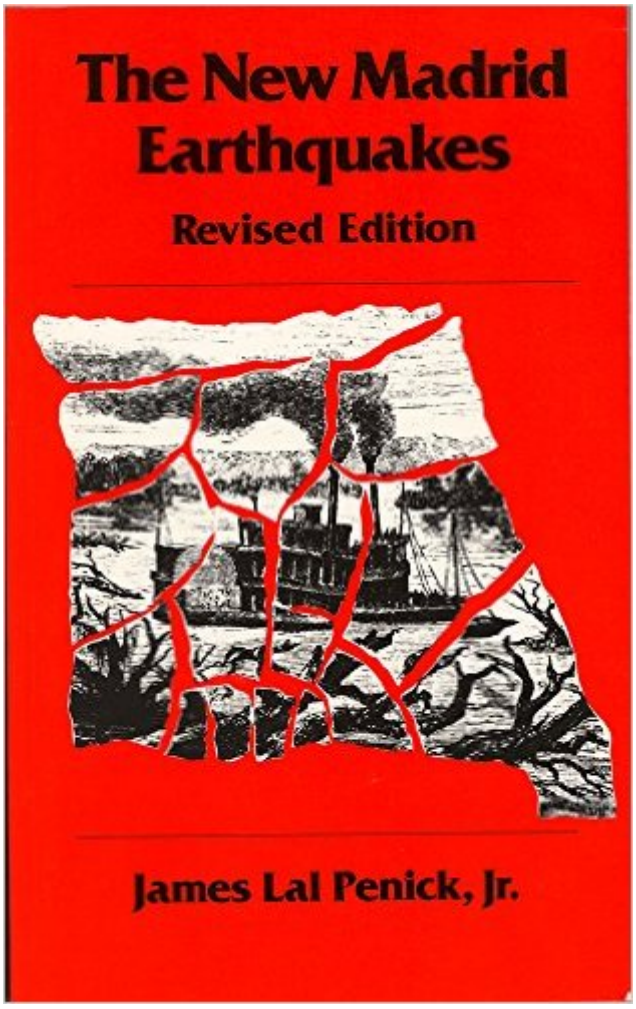
The New Madrid Earthquakes, Revised Edition



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Synopsis

Since its publication in a cloth edition in 1976, Penickâ ™s book has met with enormous regional appeal as well as critical acclaim. For the new paper edition, the author has written a new introduction. New material in the final chapter reports on the scientific inquiries into the New Madrid quakes since 1976.Critical comments on the cloth edition: â œJames Penick has put together a well-written account of the quakes and their effects upon people, animals, waterways, and land. Based on the scattered accounts of the times it offers a good insight into the reactions of persons suddenly confronted with the perils of the unknown. The vivid description of the devastation wrought upon the face of the land gives a picture of dramatic change brought about by the upheaval of natural forces. In short, reading Penickâ ™s work one is readily caught up in the total violence of the event.â •â ”American Historical Review â œPenick provides information relevant to present studies of earthquakes in this area.â •â ”Earthquake Information Bulletin

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I found this book to be quite interesting and easy to read. It gives a detailed eye-witness account to the destruction caused by the series of earthquakes in the early 1800's. If you are looking for a technical book about the Rift Zone, this book is not for you because it does not go into much detail about the fault itself. However, it does tell of the relation of the current geology and how it was effected by the earthquakes. Generally, I found this book very enjoyable and I suggest it for anyone who is interested in the learning more about the potential hazards that lie below the Mississippi Valley.

I was caught by the title of this book. I have a personal interest in the events of 1911-1912.My great-grandparents lived in Missouri and they told such a wild story that it ended up in our family's history. My grandmother told the story to me. At first I thought that everyone was fibbing. The story told about the Mississippi River running backwards, the huge sand blows and the continual shaking. My great-grandmother was a Crow Indian and she told our family what the Crow People remembered. The earthquakes seemed to the settlers to be never ending. It was terrifying.This book gives the reader a feeling of the awful immensity of our planet and all is not what it seems. The story of the earthquakes in the heartland of the American Continent started my lifelong interest in geology. There is a lot of good and fascinating facts. Hopefully the information in the book will wake up people to the dangers of the New Madrid fault between Memphis and St. Louis.

I found this book provided me with good background information about the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812. The author gives a history of the region prior to the quakes, especially the town of New Madrid. I especially enjoyed the maps showing the original location and layout of the town. The author provides a chapter on how people throughout the country responded to the seismic events. Some of the theories people of the time had for the quakes are amusing to read. Included are speculations on the future seismic activity in the region. There is an explanation about the Mercalli Intensity Scale and the modern estimated Richter Scale measurement of the quakes. I found this book informative.

The last big "New Madrid" earthquake was the largest earthquake in recorded US history, both in intensity and in the length of time the quake and aftershocks continued. Although the quake seemed to center on the west side of the Mississippi River, it caused church bells to ring in Boston and caused the Mississippi River to flow backwards for a time. You would think that this would cause tight building codes in the affected areas, but policymakers seem to ignore the warnings. Penick does a good job of describing the known effects of the famous quakes. Reporting is handicapped by a lack of scientific reports, but Penick mines many different sources to provide good coverage. This is a great book, and I highly recommend it.

There is a lot of poor information out there on these 19th century quakes, but this book is meticulously researched and won't pass along rumor or guesswork or grind his own political axe (which other books on this topic do). He cites primary sources and he critiques them (from the point

of view of seismology at the time of the writing). I found it interesting that he mentions the "two-tailed comet" without much comment; at the time he wrote this, the multiple tails of comets were not talked about, but now we know those people with lovely dark skies of pre-electricity did in fact see such a thing, though of course, its relationship to the quake was purely coincidental, as the author points out. It is difficult to accurately re-create an event like this in such a rural place, before photography, when a letter back east might take a month to arrive (and if your house fell down, getting to the pen and paper would have been a trick, too). He does as good a job as can be done.After you read this, you'll have an accurate view of the New Madrid quakes of 1811-12. Though it is older, it is still the best, most objective, most carefully researched book on the event.Almost a five-star rating from me. If only the prose were a little more lively, it would have reached that extra star.

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