

Volume 14

Number 118

The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 -

I

Lead: In 1927 the Mississippi River exploded from its natural and man-made restraints creating the greatest natural disaster in American history up to that point.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Since the beginning of humanity, rivers have attracted people. These waterways provide swift transportation as compared to the cross-country alternative. River valleys provide famously rich, productive land for farming and

other agricultural pursuits. Each year alluvial floods bring tons of rich soil from upriver to renew the nutrients necessary for growing crops. Because of the benefits the water bestows on those who live close to it, primitive societies have often held the rivers in religious veneration. Villages, then towns, then cities have been built on land adjacent to rivers, but most of the time just beyond the reach of potential flooding at least in the memory of those doing the building.

Until the modern era, men tended to accept the rivers' natural patterns and accommodate themselves to the river rather than the other way around. Recent human efforts have not been so accommodating and often

the rivers have taken their revenge.

At the heart of the North American continent is the Mississippi River. Native Americans called it "Great River." It is among the world's largest river systems with tributaries that stretch from New York to New Mexico. Beginning in the 19th century Americans attempted to "alter the natural cycle of the river in flood." By building levees at strategic points along the river engineers attempted to curb the rivers flooding or at least force it to flood in uninhabited places. The problem is that as the population grew and the richness of the bottomland along the Mississippi became more apparent, like moths drawn to a flame, and

ignoring the obvious threat of billions of gallons of water rushing toward the Gulf of Mexico, people settled in floodplains thus setting the stage for events such as the Great Mississippi flood of 1927. Next time: bending the river to man's will.

Resources

Barry, John. *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1997.

Daniel, Pete. *Deep'n as it Come*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

**Morrison, Steven J. "Downhome Tragedy: The Blues and the Mississippi River Flood of 1927." *Southern Folklore* 51 (1994): 265-285. **

**Charley Patton. "High Water Everywhere – Part 1."
Taken from
<http://music.aol.com/song/player/audioplayer.jsp>
(accessed December 1, 2008).**

