

(Dec)

At the close of the year 1811, the Valley of the Mississippi was agitated by repeated shocks of earthquakes, which continued, with more or less violence, for nearly three months. The country seventy miles below the mouth of the Ohio River seems to have been near the centre of the convulsions, and the locality, for many miles, was seamed with wide chasms, and disfigured with immense subterranean holes, the remains of which are still pointed out. The scenes which occurred during the several days that the shocks continued, are represented as being terrible beyond description, and many weeks elapsed before nature resumed her usual quiet sway. During the commotion, sulphureted gases tainted the air, and, for more than a hundred and fifty miles, perceptibly impregnated the rolling floods. The river banks, the sand-bars, and islands dissolved away, engulfing vast tracts of forest. Out of the seething waters rose huge snags and the remains of gigantic trees, which, after resting for ages in the accumulations of the bed of the river, were again born into daylight to become merciless enemies of navigation.

submerged trees dislodged

Every shock of the earthquake was accompanied with what seemed to be the discharges of heavy artillery, while every few moments the surface of the river rose and fell many feet. "Finally," records a witness of these strange phenomena, "after escaping many dangers, my boat suddenly swung around in the conflicting currents, and rapidly shot up the river. Looking ahead, I beheld the mighty Mississippi cut in twain, and pouring down a vast opening into the bowels of the earth. A moment more and the chasm filled; but the strong sides of the flat-boat were cumbled to pieces in the convulsive efforts of the flood to obtain its wonted level."

river cut in 2

New Madrid, at that time a flourishing town, was completely ruined, and the bluff on which it was situated sunk down to the level of the river, and was afterward submerged. Most of the inhabitants would have met with the fate of those of Caracas, a city destroyed at the same time with New Madrid, had their houses been of similar material--heavy stone.

Among the incidents remembered is that of a poor Indian, who, completely bewildered by what he saw, stoically give himself up to what he deemed to be inevitable destruction. Upon being asked what was the matter, he significantly and solemnly pointed to the heavens, and replied, "Great Spirit--Whisky too much."

Indian account