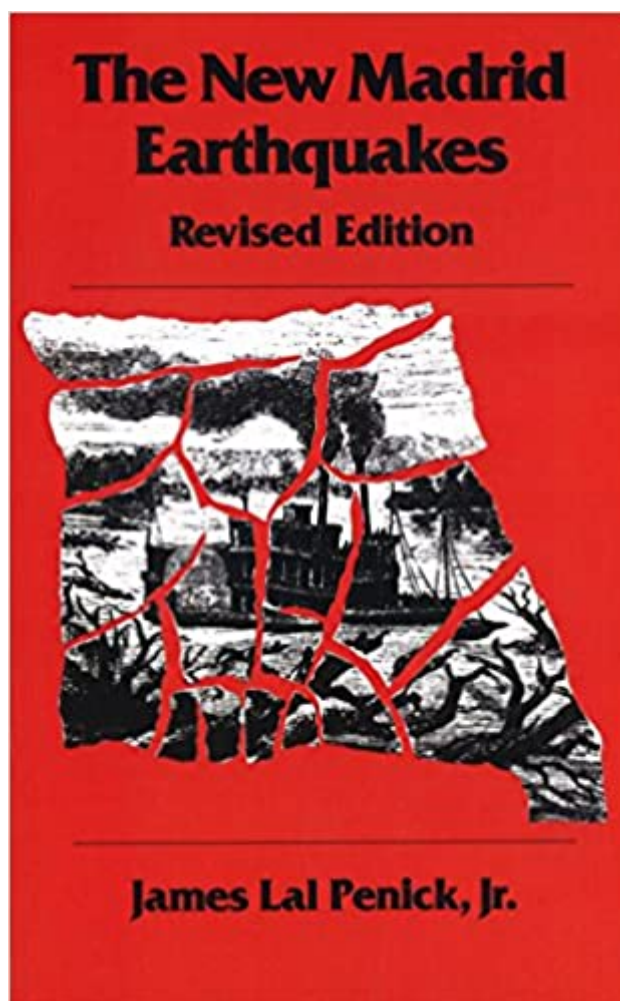


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# The New Madrid Earthquakes, Revised Edition



## Synopsis

Since its publication in a cloth edition in 1976, Penick'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: "James 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 Penick's work one is readily caught up in the total violence of the event." • American Historical Review "Penick provides information relevant to present studies of earthquakes in this area." • Earthquake Information Bulletin

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## Customer Reviews

"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."--American Historical Review "Penick provides information relevant to present studies of earthquakes in this area." • Earthquake Information Bulletin

James L. Penick, Jr., is Professor of History at Loyola University of Chicago. Among his many published works is *The Great Western Land Pirate: John A. Murrell in Legend and History* (University of Missouri Press, 1981).

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.

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.

This is an old book that describes the devastation that occurred as a consequence of the earthquake that struck New Madrid, Missouri. This is considered to be the greatest earthquake in the modern history of the North American tectonic plate. It was written many years ago, so that it has both the advantage of being close to contemporary, but also the disadvantage of later scientific investigation results.

Penick did a pretty exhaustive survey of the data available on this topic. Unfortunately, due to the time frame in which these events occurred, there isn't much data. I thought he did about as well as anyone could gathering and presenting both fact and myth, and piecing these events together. Good effort!

I grew up in the area to the north of New Madrid, but well within its strike zone. Always wondered about it.

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.

The book is a history work, cites sources in footnotes on almost every page, and a nearly twenty-page section follows the final Chapter Six, called "An Essay on Sources." Only historians likely read the essay, but I give high praise and my four stars maximum for a history book, to the six chapters that precede the essay. I might like the book more than most people do, because I live in western Missouri on the edge of effects felt from the 1811 and 1812 earthquakes. The book is about

a true calamity that occurs early in the known history of the region, and all six chapters demand continuous attention. Penik says in Chapter Two that U.S. government funds to reimburse residents of the Missouri territory for losses from earthquakes, were and remain lost to fraud as described by a new synonym for worthless, "New Madrid claim." Chapter six, "A Question of Causation," details advances in earthquake science, talks about the underground faults near New Madrid, and concludes that someday it will happen again in the same area.

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