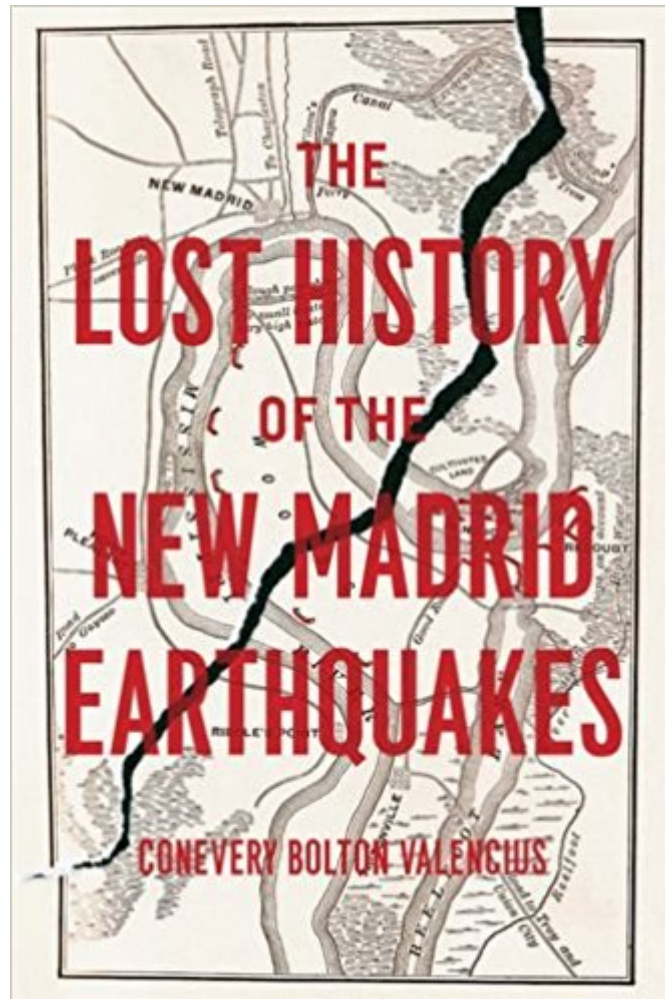


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# The Lost History Of The New Madrid Earthquakes



## Synopsis

From December 1811 to February 1812, massive earthquakes shook the middle Mississippi Valley, collapsing homes, snapping large trees midtrunk, and briefly but dramatically reversing the flow of the continent's mightiest river. For decades, people puzzled over the causes of the quakes, but by the time the nation began to recover from the Civil War, the New Madrid earthquakes had been essentially forgotten. In *The Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes*, Conevery Bolton Valencius remembers this major environmental disaster, demonstrating how events that have been long forgotten, even denied and ridiculed as tall tales, were in fact enormously important at the time of their occurrence, and continue to affect us today. Valencius weaves together scientific and historical evidence to demonstrate the vast role the New Madrid earthquakes played in the United States in the early nineteenth century, shaping the settlement patterns of early western Cherokees and other Indians, heightening the credibility of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa for their Indian League in the War of 1812, giving force to frontier religious revival, and spreading scientific inquiry. Moving into the present, Valencius explores the intertwined reasons—environmental, scientific, social, and economic—why something as consequential as major earthquakes can be lost from public knowledge, offering a cautionary tale in a world struggling to respond to global climate change amid widespread willful denial. Engagingly written and ambitiously researched—both in the scientific literature and the writings of the time—*The Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes* will be an important resource in environmental history, geology, and seismology, as well as history of science and medicine and early American and Native American history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is a seminal work. It is a comprehensive rendering of the events before, during and after the tragic New Madrid earthquakes which occurred in December, 1811 and January and February 1812. There were thousands of other, smaller quakes before and long after. I'm qualified to write this in praise of Professor Valencius because I've written extensively on the NMSZ (New Madrid Seismic Zone.) and served as a consultant to county disaster preparedness groups to aid in their compliance with state and federal readiness. Our home just happens to sit on the epicenter of the December 16th, 1811 quake, four miles south of the Missouri Bootheel. I've followed her down many of the same roads of research but she drilled much deeper than I did for I was only writing a novel. She has researched the only clues to what happened in taking most seriously the writings of the period be they understated or overblown. Her coloration of the people of the era is illuminating. The other twenty five percent of this work is most of the geology of these horrific events and is of equal interest. If you have no interest in the NMSZ or mid plate phenomena, this may not be your book. However, if your interest is passing or passionate you will be consumed by the Professor's evidence and conclusions. Conevery Bolton Valencius has researched and written the gold standard of our understanding of these incredible and horrible events. No other book even comes close, not even mine.

Am into this information about the Madrid Earthquakes for very specific and personal reasons, and this book leaves out NO detail and the range is fantastic. But if this is a subject that you are remotely interested in, find something much lighter to read. The author did an excellent detailed job and I enjoyed it very much. It's a part of history that most people don't know about but should!

I live about 80 miles from New Madrid, so I'm curious about the history of the region. This book is one of the best accounts I have found.

I picked this up having just finished Full Rip 9.0, the book about the Cascadia fault on the west coast. I was expecting this to be similar, full of anecdotal stories and such, but two earthquake books couldn't be much different. That being said, this is a fantastic work on the history of the New Madrid earthquakes and the history of that history. Which is to say as a people we literally ignored

or forgot the earthquakes happened for over 100 years, because acknowledging them was more expensive or less lucrative than paying attention to them. The impressive part of this book is the sociologically and anthropological history of our country. This book explains what our society was like in 1811, who was in it, how it changed, and who told the stories. There are sections on Native American cultural changes, the Revival movement, the changing attitudes of scientists toward historical narrative, and lots and lots of bits and pieces of mid-American history that was never covered (nor will be) in any class I took. This is not a riveting edge-of-your-seat tale and to be honest it could use more first person narrative to make it so. On the other hand, its tone is appropriately academic, which fits the material. Also, it's already 333 pages, so more narrative may make it a bit too heavy for comfortable beach reading. All in all, I'm glad I read it.

The best book on the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-1812. Covers the account of all who commented on the big events from the first part of the 19th century. Did the Mississippi Run Backward? See what the people of the time said.

Instead of simply discussing the physical impact of this a catastrophic event, Valencius embeds its consequences in the ethnic, religious, and economic milieu of the time. A great piece of investigative history, I heartily recommend it

In late 1811 and early 1812, massive earthquakes and thousands of aftershocks rocked a considerable area of what today is Arkansas, Kentucky, and the bootheel of Missouri. In this engaging and thoroughly researched book, Conevery Bolton Valencius argues that knowledge of the quakes was lost, forgotten, or deliberately downplayed because the contemporary European population of the area was small, because information about the quakes was disseminated through anecdotal accounts published in newspapers rather than through scientific journals, because the swampy "sunk lands" created by the quakes were drained and turned into farmland during the early 20th century, and because the quakes can not be explained by the current theory of plate tectonics. Valencius, nonetheless, maintains that the quakes had significant effects: rearranging (for the worse) the geography of an extensive region, encouraging the departure of Native Americans, stimulating religious movements among both Indians and Europeans, and playing an important role in the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Valencius writes with enthusiasm, and this book is clearly a labor of love as well as a scholarly contribution. I am a fan of the discursive footnote, and I read all of Valencius's. Nevertheless, I admit to running my eyes lightly over numerous pages of the text

itself. The book is simply too long for a general reader who doesn't live in the area or have a professional interest in seismology.

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