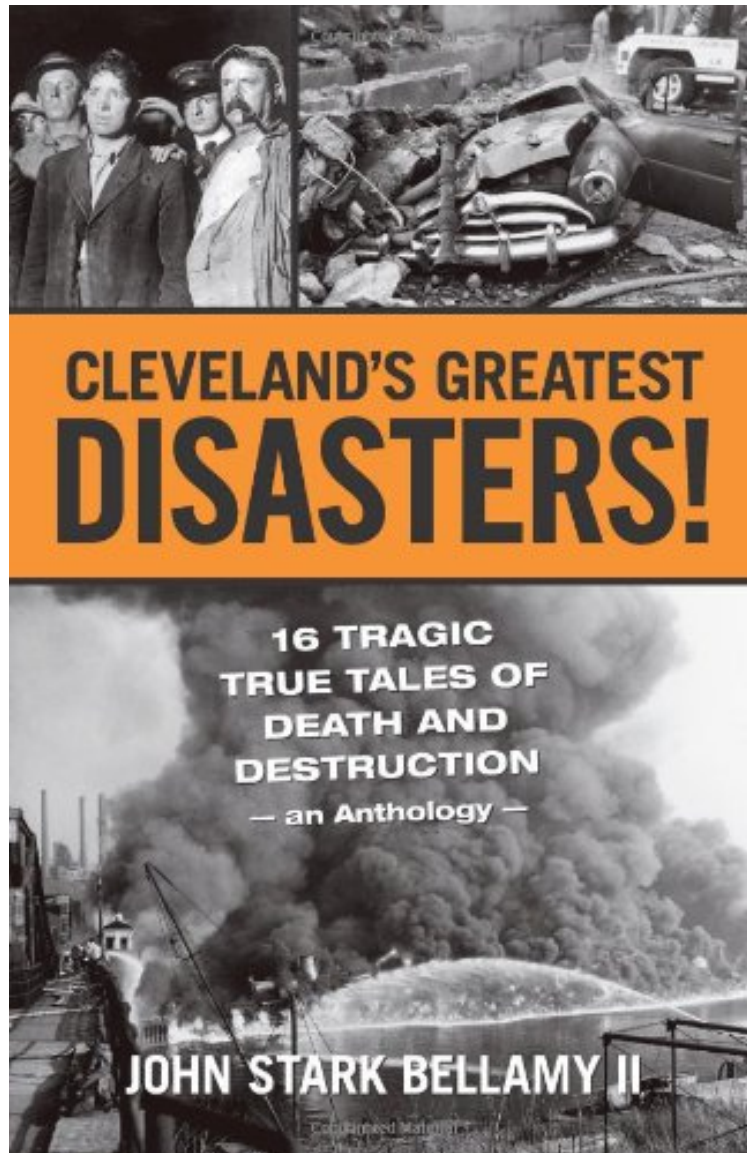


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## Cleveland's Greatest Disasters!: Sixteen Tragic Tales of Death and Destruction--An Anthology

*John Bellamy II*

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**John Bellamy II : Cleveland's Greatest Disasters!: Sixteen Tragic Tales of Death and Destruction--An Anthology** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cleveland's Greatest Disasters!: Sixteen Tragic Tales of Death and Destruction--An Anthology:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Murder and MayhemBy Magda DenesBellamy is such a fun writer

with an obsession for the macabre. He delights in focusing on unusual and horrible deaths from the past. Much (or all?) of his inspiration came from working in the Cleveland library where he would scour old newspapers and records for his stories. His books are real crime and disaster tales. Make a special effort to enjoy his books late at night when the world is asleep so you'll get the full effect of that tingle going down your spine! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Stupidity vs. Heroes By Karen It's easy to overload on these "16 tragic true tales of death and destruction", because the moral of most is that people can be amazingly, as my niece was wont to say, "toopit!". Venality, corner-cutting and just plain what-were-you-thinking? idiocy underlies most of the tragedies here. And yet there's a certain fascination to these vignettes, too, igniting the same impulse that leads (some of us) to endless episodes of "Ice Road Truckers". And the heroes. You'll find them aplenty. They rise in opposition to the "toopit" and try to save the day, or at least try to save as many people as they can. John Stark Bellamy II has done an excellent job of illuminating some of the lowest points of Cleveland's history, in highly readable stories that immerse you in the action "as it happens" far better than the evening news. Take a stroll through time - and my favorite city - with him. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Great read but... By John I love Mr Bellamy's books, but this one doesn't have too much new in it if you have read his other books. If this is your first book by Mr Bellamy, you will love it. If you have his other books, you will love this too, but many of the stories you will remember from his previous writings.

An anthology of the 15 best true disaster stories from the popular book series by John Stark Bellamy II. Revisit the most terrible tragedies in Cleveland history, including: The apocalyptic East Ohio Gas Company explosion and fire of 1944, which destroyed an entire east side neighborhood; Genius inventor Garrett A. Morgans' daring underground rescue efforts (using his recently invented gas mask) during the gruesome 1916 waterworks collapse; The unspeakably horrible Collinwood school fire of 1908, in which 172 schoolchildren perished in panic because of obstructed exits; The Cleveland Clinic disaster of 1929, in which thousands of pounds of X-ray film exploded in flames, causing 123 deaths; The grisly drama of two doomed workmen buried alive in the very concrete that became Cleveland's celebrated landmark the Terminal Tower. A great introduction to Bellamy's five-book Cleveland crime and disaster series.

Bellamy sets the disasters in context and doesn't skimp on details as he tells of 16 catastrophes from natural-gas explosions, collapsing tunnels under Lake Erie, school fires, bridge collapses and even an explosion in a fireworks factory (Michael Gill Cleveland Scene 20091125) Bellamy knows the dark side of Cleveland better than anyone. (WMJI FM Radio 20100419) About the Author John Stark Bellamy II is the author of six books and two anthologies about Cleveland crime and disaster. The former history specialist for the Cuyahoga County Public Library, he comes by his taste for the sensational honestly, having grown up reading stories about Cleveland crime and disaster written by his grandfather, Paul, who was editor of the Plain Dealer, and his father, Peter, who wrote for the Cleveland News and the Plain Dealer. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 Streets of Hell The East Ohio Gas Company Explosion and Fire (1944) It happens very suddenly, as you drive north through the neighborhood straddling St. Clair Avenue near East 55th Street on Cleveland's northeast side. Where residential housing still persists in the upper 50s, there are mostly modest frame dwellings of turn-of-the-century vintage small houses on postage-stamp lots, so crammed together as to give passersby claustrophobia just looking between them. Unless you know the dire history of this place, however, you aren't prepared for the abrupt architectural change that begins north of St. Clair on East 63rd Street and persists westward to East 55th. Little by little, and then suddenly, the frame houses disappear and in their stead one finds modest, brick dwellings of a post-World War II character. And the closer you get to the property of the East Ohio Gas Company, the more modern brick homes you find until residential housing ceases completely at the peaceful green border of Grdina Park, today the southern perimeter of the once-enormous gas company grounds. There's a reason for that park, and there's a reason for that eruption of modern, brick homes. For this is the Norwood-St. Clair neighborhood, once and still the heart of Cleveland's Slovene community and the site of Cleveland's worst industrial disaster: The East Ohio Gas Company Explosion and Fire of 1944. How bad was it? Well, in terms of the bald body count, it wasn't the worst Cleveland area disaster: at 130 known dead it barely surpassed the Cleveland Clinic Fire of 1929 by a mere five corpses and fell more than 40 short of the 1908 Collinwood School Fire death toll. But for sheer horror, its effect on a large community, and the physical destruction involved it would be hard to beat. Of its 130 dead, 61 were so badly burned or pulverized that identification, sometimes even as to the sex of the corpse, proved impossible. Seventy-three of the dead were employees of East Ohio Gas. The disaster injured 225 persons badly enough to require hospital treatment, 23 of them Cleveland firemen. It totally destroyed 79 houses, 2 factories, 217 automobiles, 7 trailers, and 1 tractor, and partially destroyed another 35 houses and 13 factories. It did extensive damage not only to the Gas Company #2 works but also to property or facilities owned by Bell Telephone, the Cleveland Transit System, the New York Central Railroad, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and Western Union. The total damage amounted to between \$6 million and \$8 million. Not to mention the cost of repairing the surrounding streets and sewer systems, largely smothered into a splintered landscape of cavernous craters, and the promiscuous wreckage of subsidiary gas explosions. Dollars, of course, don't tell the real story. The explosion and fire that turned

most of East 61st, 62nd, 63rd, Lake Court, and Carry Avenue into neighborhood holocausts burnt out the heart of a deeply rooted, cohesive, supportive, ethnic community. That community would proudly recover and rebuild but no one involved could ever pretend that things would be the same. Again, how bad was it? It was the force of 130 billion British Thermal Units (BTUs) unleashed within 30 minutes on a mere 160-acre area, much of it congested residential housing. It was 25 millions of horsepower suddenly vented to destroy hundreds of homes, families, and lives. It was searing, scorching flames, reaching heights of 2,800 feet and 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit in streets where children played and retirees sat on their front porches of a sunny October afternoon. It comprised the destructive force contained in 10,000 tons of coal or, say, the energy of 120 minutes worth of all the hydroelectric power west of the Mississippi devoted to the cause of blowing up and burning down the Norwood St. Clair community. After it was over, everyone agreed surprise! that it never should have happened. East Ohio Gas Company officials argued, quite correctly, that the explosion should not have occurred, given the laws of probability and the precautions taken to prevent it. City and neighborhood leaders excoriated both the gas company and city fathers for allowing such a lethal facility to be built so near a residential neighborhood. The fact of the matter is that the East Ohio Gas Company fire came, like Carl Sandburgs fog, on little cat feet. Decisions, both residential and industrial, unwittingly taken over decades of development, quietly and steadily made it almost inevitable that the East Ohio tragedy would happen just the way it did. All it took was a dangerous facility located close to a fragile, congested neighborhood. The East Ohio Gas Company #2 plant, located cheek-by-jowl to the Slovenian neighborhood of the East 60s, provided just such a site . . . and the exigencies of World War II energy production and distribution ensured that the disaster would occur in a certain way in that very particular place at that precise time. The East Ohio Gas Company works located north of St. Clair and east of East 55th (formerly Willson Avenue) was one of the oldest industrial sites in Cleveland. Developed originally by the Cleveland Gas Light Coke Company in the mid-19th century, the gas works became a part of the extensive East Ohio Gas Company properties shortly after the turn of the century. Known eventually as the #2 works, the 10-acre gas company grounds east of East 55th and north of St. Clair became a major nexus for the storage and distribution of natural gas to East Ohios many thousands of customers throughout Ohio. Meanwhile, just to the south of the #2 works, a vigorous ethnic neighborhood was developing simultaneously, and with little coordination to its industrial northern neighbor. Most of the housing stock was built between 1895 and 1905, predominately modest, working-class houses on very narrow, short lots, many of them two- or even four-family homes. This predominately Slovenian community stretched along the axis of St. Clair Avenue from the East 30s well into the East 70s, with the emotional focus of the community centering on St. Vitus Church, a Catholic nationality parish created in 1893. It was only in the 1940s that the character of the #2 works changed in a manner threatening to the actual existence of the neighborhood. Owing to fluctuations in the rate of supply and limited storage capacity, East Ohio Gas was having trouble meeting the needs of its customers, especially during times of peak demand, such as prolonged winter cold spells. Supply problems were further aggravated by the war, and gas service to East Ohio customers had to be curtailed a number of times in the early 1940s. Something had to be done, and the solution chosen was a gas liquefaction-regasification facility. And it was to be located at the heart of the utilitys service area, the center of Clevelands East Side. The technology of natural gas liquefaction had been under development for a half century, with most of the technical advances made by German chemists. The scientific concept was simple and its practical advantages were obvious: transformation of natural gas to a liquid state at minus 260 degrees Fahrenheit involves a volume reduction ratio of 640:1. To be able to store 640 times as much natural gas as could be stored in its gaseous state, for regasification and use at peak demand times, was an irresistible option for East Ohio Gas, and they exercised it by constructing three liquid storage units of spherical design. Built at a cost of \$1.5 million, the three tanks were completed in January 1941. Their total capacity was 150,000,000 cubic feet. An adjoining regasification plant could convert the liquid back to gas at a rate of 3,000,000 cubic feet per hour. Storage commenced on February 7, 1942, and the plant quickly proved its commercial worth. But there were still shortages as wartime production demands increased, so East Ohio Gas Company received permission from the War Production Board on August 3, 1942 to build a fourth tank of 100,000,000 cubic feet capacity, double the size of its existing #1, #2, and #3 tanks. There were some critical differences in the design of the fourth tank. Unlike the first three tanks, it was of cylindrical design. The first three tanks, in fact, were designed as spheres-within-spheres, the inner gas-holding sphere being insulated from its outer containing sphere by cork, with the entire 57-foot-high structure supported and suspended by steel supports. The fourth tank was a cylinder-within-a-cylinder (technically called a toro-segmental two-cylinder) and its inner insulation between the cylinders was composed of rock wool. The contrasting designs reflected, mainly, wartime economies. Despite its higher capacity, the #4 cylinder tank used 100 fewer tons of steel than a comparable spherical design, in part because it required fewer steel supports. Since cork was a critical war materiel, rock wool was chosen as the substitute insulation. As was the case with the other tanks, the inner gas-holding shell of the 50-foot-high #4 was constructed using a three-and-a-half-percent nickel-steel alloy to construct. Designed and built by the Pittsburgh Des Moines Steel Company, the #4 tank went into service in March 1943. But not for long. While being filled for the first time, the bottom of the inner steel shell cracked because of uneven cooling, and it had to be rebuilt. It was soon back in service, although it seems that the cooling problem was not corrected. Neighborhood air-raid wardens would complain

periodically over the next year and a half that there was frequent frosting on the surface of the tank, obviously caused by settling of the rock wool insulation, which allowed outside moisture to settle on relatively uninsulated spots between the inner and outer shells of the #4 tank. Friday, October 20, 1944, arrived and waxed as a beautiful, crisp fall day in Cleveland. Things were humming at the #2 works. In anticipation of the coming winter, the L.S.R. crew of 24 was topping off the last of the four tanks, #1,...