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# Harrisburg's 'drowning machine' dam has killed at least 29 people. Their stories

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*Aerial view of the Dock Street Dam to the left of Interstate 83. (File photo 2011)*

The people killed at the Dock Street Dam range from three years old to 63.

Some of them didn't know the low-head dam existed until it was too late.

Some of them didn't understand the power or reach of the dam's volatile waters.

And other victims were sent helplessly into the dam after running out of gas or encountering mechanical problems with boats or personal watercrafts.

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A boating accident last month by a driver who didn't know about the dam killed a young mother and her 3-year-old daughter.

After those deaths, PennLive sought to find out how many people had been lost at the dam.

Turns out: No one tracked it.

Not the city of Harrisburg, which owns the dam. Nor the Fish and Boat Commission, which oversees the state's dam act. Not even the fire department or Harrisburg River Rescue, the agencies that respond to distress calls at the dam.

PennLive combed through local agency records and newspaper archives to assemble a comprehensive list of Dock Street Dam drowning victims, perhaps the first one of its kind.

The investigation identified 29 victims dating back to 1935, including at least nine children or teenagers.

The figure of 29 does not include suicides or bodies washed down toward the dam. It includes only people who drowned in the violent, churning waters created by the dam.

"I'm shocked there have been that many people who died," at a single dam, said John Fletemeyer, an expert from Fort Lauderdale who has examined more than 1,000 drowning deaths in his career. "That's an ungodly amount of death.

"And it's going to happen again, absolutely," Fletemeyer said, without some major changes.



*Two men and a woman were injured but survived after an encounter with the dam in July 1989. (File photo)*

### **Near drownings**

In addition to the fatal drownings, PennLive found at least 28 more cases where [rescuers plucked victims from death's door.](#)

"I thought I was dead," Nicholas Greenholtz, 28, of Adams County told the Patriot-News in July 1989. "I'd just like to thank those guys for saving my life."

Greenholtz and a roommate and friend were aboard his 16-foot power boat for an afternoon outing when it approached the Dock Street Dam at about 5 p.m.

"I didn't know [the dam] was there," Greenholtz said. His roommate yelled a warning and Greenholtz tried to throw the boat "into reverse but it was too late, we just went over."

The prop of the inboard motor became lodged in the top of the dam and the bow of the boat began to fill with water. The boat "went over sideways and capsized," Greenholtz said.

The friend was thrown clear of the churning whirlpool effect of the dam, but Greenholtz and his roommate were sucked in. The two, who were wearing flotation devices, believe they were in the turbulent water for nearly 15 minutes, fighting to remain at the surface.

"It just kept sucking us under. We tried to swim away but we couldn't," Greenholtz said.

The month prior, rescuers saved two men and two boys, ages 11 and 12, who got sucked into the dam.



*A pair of men in a boat, top right, prepare to tow one of two pontoon boats caught along the Dock Street Dam in Harrisburg after the Hurricane Irene storm system passed through the area.*

### Statistics hard to find

PennLive identified the near-drownings through newspaper archives and likely missed some that weren't documented or searchable online.

Local agencies haven't tracked rescues historically, even though experts say that data is equally important as fatal drownings in assessing the need for changes at the dam.

Harrisburg River Rescue has electronic data dating back to 2011. It showed four calls at the dam, including two incidents that were fatal.

A log provided on request by Dauphin County dispatch for emergency responders at the Dock Street Dam missed several incidents, including the rescue of a person on a Jet Ski in 2017 and a fatal drowning of a kayaker in 2011.

With those caveats in mind, the dispatch log still tallied 28 calls at the dam in recent years:

2008-1

2009-3

2010-4

2011-3

2012-3

2013-1

2014-4

2015-2

2016-4

2017-0

2018-2



*Physical Therapist Patti McCorkle, of Comfort Care Home Health Services, works with Malcolm Logan, 11, at his home in Harrisburg. (File)*

Deaths at the dam create tragic ripple effects, as relatives mourn the loss of loved ones and miss out on seeing what kind of men and women they would become. Survivors suffer from frightening flashbacks and feelings of guilt.

In one case, a mother and sister spent 16 years caring for a boy who suffered severe brain damage after being trapped under a boat at the dam.

The father of Malcolm Logan, 10, and paramedics performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation to bring Malcolm back to life in 1996. He survived, despite doctors' saying he wouldn't last the night, but with severe brain damage.

He spent the next 16 years in a semi-comatose state, which required constant care from his mother and help from his sister, who was 14 at the time of the accident.



Malcolm died in 2012, at age 26, after spending most of his life unable to move or talk.



*This low-water photo from 1995 shows the actual concrete dam and some caverns underneath that are normally covered with water (file)*

### **Why are low-head dams so dangerous**

Low-head dams often don't look dangerous, but the water flowing over the top of the dam creates a powerful hydraulics under the surface that can be nearly inescapable, even for strong swimmers wearing life vests.

The heavily-oxygenated water near the dam actually decreases a person's natural buoyancy, adding to the forces that keep victims under water.

Low-head dams earned the nicknames: drowning machines or killer dams, because of their effectiveness is keeping victims disoriented and unable to break free from the powerful circulating water.



**Mary Bredbenner and Madelyn Binkley, died in 2018**

The latest victims of the dam were Mary Bredbenner, 25, and her three-year-old daughter Madelyn Binkley.

Cody Binkley was driving them in his 16-foot Jon boat when the family set out just before 10 p.m. May 7 to go fishing and camping.

But on his way north, Binkley ran straight into the dam, capsizing his boat. He was able to swim to shore in the chilly water, but his fiancée and daughter drowned.

Here are the stories of the previous 27 victims:



*Malcolm sustained considerable brain damage after nearly drowning in a boating accident*

### **Malcom Logan, injured 1996, died 2012**

Malcolm Logan, known by family members as "Mac," was a healthy, kind-hearted 10-year-old boy who loved to play baseball.

His mother Tracy Taltoan remembered him lamenting to her that other kids were making fun of kids in the special-needs program at Ben Franklin Elementary.

"He used to go down and read to them," Taltoan told PennLive in a recent interview. "Then he became one of them."

Malcolm suffered catastrophic brain injuries during a Memorial Day fishing outing with his father and uncle after their boat lost power, went over the dam and capsized.

Malcolm ended up trapped under the boat. He was revived, and required a ventilator at the hospital, where doctors encouraged his mother to consider organ donation.

"I loved my son like they loved theirs," she said. "I wasn't going to take him off life support."

A week later, Malcolm opened his eyes. He eventually was able to return home but never regained the abilities to move or talk.

Still, he was able to convey things that he liked and didn't like, his mom said. For example, he didn't care for the canned liquid diet for his feeding tube. Instead, his mother pureed food that he liked.

Taltoan got him out of bed every morning and into his wheelchair. She bathed him, gave him pedicures and watched TV with him. She continued his education: a teacher visited their home to read to him.

Wherever the family went, Malcolm went too. That became a lot easier after Public Works Director Aaron Johnson spearheaded a fundraiser to buy the family a wheelchair-accessible van.

Taltoan kept her son's life as normal as possible and to that she credits his longevity after the accident.

"To me, he was aware," Taltoan said of Malcolm. "He knew we were there."

But he eventually succumbed to an infection at the site of his tracheotomy.

"What they need to do is shut that dam down," Taltoan said. "Too many lives have been lost and affected."





*Mike Romo*

**Mike Romo, died in 2011**

Mike Romo, 41, of New Cumberland, died within days of purchasing his first kayak.

He had been attending weekly paddling sessions with a group from Susquehanna Outfitters, then bought his own 9.5-foot kayak, proudly posting a photo on his Facebook page.

He put the kayak in the Suquehanna River alone shortly after 4 p.m. on June 15 and rode right over the dam, where it capsized.

Witnesses reported no efforts by Romo to avoid the dam. Friends believe Romo didn't understand the danger.

Romo could swim but was not wearing a life jacket, although one was found in the boil of the dam along with an inflatable air bladder.

His body was recovered later that day, about ½ mile downstream.

His death was the second tragedy to hit his family. His father had previously died from pancreatic cancer. The tragedies continued after the drowning with his sister being killed one year later by her husband in a murder-suicide and his mother dying from severe multiple sclerosis in 2016.

Romo's aunt, Patricia Begalle, said Romo's father taught Romo how to golf and bowl. Romo excelled at bowling, often scoring more than 300 in games.

Romo worked as a Motor Vehicle Operator for the Defense Logistics Agency in Fairview Twp.



*Hawryluk had just returned from military service (at left.) He enjoyed fishing at his grandpa's cabin.*

#### **David Hawryluk, died in 1997**

David Hawryluk, 24, a former Marine who served in Japan and Somalia, was a powerful swimmer, and his friend John Bivins was a former life guard.

'We both could swim better than we could walk, ' Bivins told the Patriot-News in 1997. 'We thought we were staying far enough away from the dam. We didn't even consider it. We didn't think it would matter.'

They were fishing at their favorite spot July 21, just below the South Bridge. The river was low and the area under a drought watch, but an insidious danger lurked below.

Bivins and Hawryluk were using fishing poles as depth finders, Bivins said.

"I lost bottom," Bivins said. "He said, 'Brother, you okay?' and I said, 'I think I'm in trouble.' I started to lose it."

Bivins had fastened a bait bucket around his waist. The current seized the bucket, and Bivins tried to struggle out of his jeans.

'We were holding on to each other's shirts, yelling at each other... We were yelling at each other to let go because we were pulling each other down under,' Bivins said.

The last time Bivins sank under the water, 'It got dark, and I was just, like, floating sideways. I said, 'Please, God, don't let me die. I have a beautiful wife and a son. Don't let me die.' '

Bivins swam to a river island where he shouted to some nearby fisherman and eventually was pulled into a New Cumberland River Rescue boat.

When he spotted Hawryluk's body from the boat, he dove off. He lost sight of his friend, but spotted him again, dove to the bottom and grabbed him.

But it was too late.

Hawryluk, who worked at Weaber's sawmill in his native South Annville Twp., was described as a church leader, particularly in youth ministry.

His mother Judy Hawryluk told PennLive recently that her son survived the ravages of war in Somalia and a head-on dump truck crash in Okinawa only to be killed in the Susquehanna River.

He wasn't wearing a life jacket.

"We were just getting to know the him as an adult, and we were really looking forward that," she said. "You have to have a respect for the danger of the dam."





*David Hodrick worked as an emergency dispatcher for the Pennsylvania Turnpike.( Submitted)*

**David Hodrick, died in 1990**



David Hodrick, 30, and two co-workers planned a fishing excursion after their shift ended with the Pa. Turnpike, where they were emergency dispatchers.

They knew about the danger of the Dock Street Dam. Or so they thought.

John D. Hocker was a volunteer firefighter and he showed his co-workers rescue photos at the dam during their shift that night May 10, 1990. Dale Wickard said they had no idea that in a few hours they would be the ones who would need rescuing.

"I thought all the people who got rescued were going over the dam," Wickard told PennLive in a recent interview. "I didn't know about the turbulence below the dam."

They put down their anchor in Wickard's newly purchased boat and fished a bit, then moved north, dropping anchor again. But this time, they continued drifting north, and ended up nose first in the dam.

Wickard furiously tried to start the motor amid the looming loud splashing of the dam. The waterfall started filling up his boat and Hodrick and Hocker stripped off their clothes, preparing to swim.

The boat capsized with Wickard still in the driver's seat. While under the boat, Wickard felt the anchor rope and used it to pull himself to the surface, where he clung onto the motor.

If it weren't for the rope, Wickard said, "I would have probably been the first casualty."

The trio clung to the boat for at least 30 minutes as the boat surged with the churning water. The force of the waves tore off their clothing.

They watched vehicles pass along I-83, with the drivers unaware of their dire need for help. Eventually, the water sucked Hodrick under water. When he surfaced later, "you could tell he was dead," Wickard said. "then he disappeared again."

Recognizing their options were dwindling, Wickard said he tried to push off the boat to break free of the boil line. But he ended up getting thrown right back into the boat. He didn't want to take another chance.

Hocker then gave it a try. He pushed off at just the right time or direction to be able to get out of the entrapment zone. He swam to shore and summoned help that rescued Wickard.

In all, Wickard spent four hours in the cold waters. His legs turned black, but he didn't lose them.

Hodrick's body was recovered seven days later.

"I lived in Boiling Springs. I didn't know the danger," Wickard said. "To this day, people are still drowning. What's been done? Not a whole lot."



*Members of the Old Order Mennonite stand vigil at the bank of the Susquehanna River after three members of their order went into the Dock Street Dam while fishing in a rowboat. (Associated Press/file)*

**Titus Zimmerman, Earl Zimmerman, Lawrence Martin died 1990**

Titus Zimmerman, his 16-year-old son and their neighbor Lawrence Martin, 27, were paddling north of the dam to fish on June 20, 1990 around 11:30 a.m. and left the water to eat lunch.

Soon after re-entering the river just south of the dam, the group realized the currents were drawing the boat toward the dam, witnesses told police.

Although one of the fishermen dropped an anchor about 20-25 feet from the dam, the boat did not stop.

Two passers-by watched in horror from the Harrisburg shoreline as the boaters feverishly used paddles in a futile attempts to push away from the the base of the dam. But the boat capsized.

The three were pulled under the water immediately and were never seen alive again.



**Leonard Evans, died in 1987**

Leonard Evans, 45, and his friend Joseph Seagers were rafting and enjoying the weather along the Susquehanna River July 6, 1987 when their raft went over the dam.

Evans emerged three times from the water, but then wasn't seen alive again.

Seagers held onto the collapsed rubber raft until a helicopter helped rescue him.

Seagers later was convicted of involuntary manslaughter because he operated his raft while intoxicated.



*Seagers clung to the partially deflated raft until he was rescued. (file)*

Seagers told authorities he had several beers at a tavern between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. the day of the accident. He later purchased a fifth of whiskey which he poured into two canteens - one for himself and one for Evans.

Seagers gave Evans the canteen with the lesser amount "for safety's sake" because he knew Evans could not swim and had not been on the river in a raft.

There were no life vests on the raft. Witnesses told police both men on the raft stood up before the craft went over the dam.

"It upsets me every time we have another drowning at the dam," said Leonard's sister, Eunice Evans. "I don't think there are enough signs to tell people."

She said Evans went by the nickname "Chicago," and worked as a truck driver and cook. He loved spending time with friends and was outgoing, she said.





*Photo taken May 10, 2018, three days after the latest fatalities. (Sean Simmers)*

#### **Unknown victim, died in 1986**

Pennsylvania's Fish and Boat Commission in 1990 researched the number of deaths at the dam since 1971 to determine which ones occurred from the top of the dam versus the bottom of the dam.

This research was prompted by the death of Hawryluk below the dam in May 1990.

The resulting memo sent to Harrisburg's River Rescue found eight fatalities from seven incidents, including one on June 18, 1986. But PennLive could not locate details about the drowning on this date, including the victim's name or any circumstances.



*Buttorff's gravestone in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in York County*

**Ira Buttorff Jr., died 1981**

Ira Buttorff, 63, was fishing below the dam April 9, 1981 just north of the I-83 bridge when his boat became caught in the boil line and was pulled against the base of the dam.

"He got his boat up real close to the dam," said Charles Gipple, another fisherman anchored about 100 yards away, according to a Patriot-News article. "I think maybe his anchor had come loose because the boat was broadside heading toward the dam and he was pushing away from the dam with his pole."

Buttorff's boat filled with water and Buttorff struggled to stay above water for three or four minutes, Gipple said.

"He went under and I couldn't see him for an instant, then he popped up and I grabbed him by his hair and got him into my boat."

But it was too late, Buttorff had already died. A coroner later ruled his death was from a heart attack, not drowning.

Buttorff, of new Cumberland, co-owned a furniture store and was a veteran of World War II. He was survived by his wife of 40 years, two daughters and four grandchildren.





*Jed Flocken, at left, serving as best man in his friend's wedding*

#### **Jed Flocken, died in 1979**

Jed Flocken, 30, disappeared about 10 p.m. on a Saturday night when the canoe he was in was swept over the dam in the middle of the river.

Officials at the time said Flocken was drawn into the circulating waters of the dam.

"While the dam has only 2.5 feet difference between water levels above and below it, the currents make it very treacherous," a river rescue officials told the Patriot-News at the time."

A passenger, Alice Wells, 29, survived the June 2, 1979 incident.

Flocken served as best man at Bob Homstad's wedding nine years earlier.

Homstad said Flocken graduated college in 1969 and lived in New York, never bothering to get a driver's license, before moving to Harrisburg.

"He was a huge Rolling Stones fan and loved baseball," Homstad said. "He knew all kinds of minutiae about the players."



*Photo of the Dock Street Dam spillway taken May 10, 2018*

**Donald Wright, J.A. Johnson, died 1976**

A truck driver traveling across Interstate 83 spotted two men clinging to a boat in the Dock Street Dam about 1:40 p.m. April 29, 1976.

When rescuers arrived, all they found was a boat belonging to Donald Wright, who lived at 1730 State Street. They also found a parked vehicle owned by J.A. Johnson, who was believed to have been with Wright.

Wright didn't return home from his fishing trip and rescuers searched the river to find the men's bodies.



*River Rescue volunteers train regularly near the Dock Street Dam*

**Robert E. Keys, died 1973**

Robert E. Keys, 58, of Lemoyne, disappeared June 17, 1973 during an all-night fishing expedition.

He parked his car and trailer at the New Cumberland boat docks and was seen shortly after midnight when he talked with river rescue volunteers. He told them he planned to fish all night, according to a Patriot-News article.

Keys' brother and son-in-law were members of the river rescue squad.

Keys was not seen alive again. His boat, life jacket and gas tank were found near the dam. His body turned up downstream two weeks later.



*River Rescue follows up on reported boat in distress, 2009.*

### **Michael Gruber, died in 1968**

Sixteen-year-old Michael Gruber dove into the Susquehanna River Sunday at the top of the Dock Street Dam June 23, 1968.

A police officer saw him enter the water and never resurface.

Three days later, officials found his body.

Steve Oliphant, owner of Susquehanna Outfitters, attended school with Michael and remembered the profound effects of losing a classmate.

"It's just unconscionable that the Dock Street Dam still exists in its current state," Oliphant said. "We have a known source of death alongside a public recreational pool."



*Robert Adams is buried in the East Harrisburg Cemetery*

**Robert E. Adams, died in 1967**

Robert Adams, 45, was driving a boat while pulling his 16-year-old son on water skis over Memorial Day weekend.

But Adams' boat went over the Dock Street Dam and overturned, killing Adams.

His son had been treading water at the time of the accident and he survived.

Adams, of Susquehanna Township, was a World War II veteran.





*In this photo taken May 10, 2018, a child's life jacket is still rotating in the dam's water.*

**William McHose, died in 1961**

William McHose, 18, of Dauphin, was driving an outboard motor boat on the Susquehanna River on May 30, 1961, when the boat went over the dam.

McHose died, but rescuers were able to save his 10-year-old brother Terry and an 18-year-old woman on the boat named Nancy Bivens.

McHose's body was recovered three hours after the accident.



*Paul Boudier at left with his wife and one of their three children. (Newspapers.com)*

**Paul Boudier, and a teenage River Rescue volunteer, died 1960**

Paul Boudier, 26, had just purchased a 14-foot fiberglass boat two days before he took it on its first outing June 24, 1960 with his wife and three young sons.

The boat, however, stalled three times, sending the boat toward the Dock Street Dam, according to newspaper accounts at the time. As the boat neared the dam, Boudier jumped out and held the boat from going over the dam for about 10 minutes, while his wife tried to restart the motor.

The force of the river, however, sent the boat over the dam and it capsized.

Boudier was swept underwater as he tried to save his wife and children.

George Oxley, 16, and two other volunteers with the River Rescue Service, sprung into action to try to save the family, but their boat also capsized.

Oxley drowned. The other volunteers were able to save the 27-year-old wife and three boys, ages 7, 6, and 3.

The oldest boy suffered cuts to his chest and arm and a broken arm.

HVS-20007-85M-9.54-10 COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS  
File No. **86663**  
Registered No. **1785**

**CERTIFICATE OF DEATH** *F*

1. PLACE OF DEATH  
a. County **Dauphin**  
b. City (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) or Borough **HARRISBURG**  
c. Length of Stay (in this place)  
d. Full Name of (If not in hospital or institution, give street address or location) **SUSQUEHANNA RIVER - DOCK ST.**

2. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived. If institution: residence before admission)  
a. State **Pa.** b. County **Dauphin**  
c. City (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) or Borough **Paxtang** **22066**  
d. Street Address (If rural, give location) **3735 Rutherford Street**

3. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or Print)  
a. (First) **Thomas** b. (Middle) **J** c. (Last) **Hoffman**  
4. DATE (Month) (Day) (Year) OF DEATH **10-9-55**

5. SEX **Male** 6. COLOR OR RACE **White** 7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify) **Married** 8. DATE OF BIRTH **10-16-1910** 9. AGE (In years) (last birthday) **44** If under 1 year Months Days If under 24 hrs. Hours Min.

10. FULL NAME OF SPOUSE **Blanche E. Hoffman** 11. BIRTHPLACE (Also give State or foreign country) **Philadelphia Pa.** 12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY?

13. FATHER'S NAME **Thomas D. Hoffman** 14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME **Augusta Rothger**

15. USUAL OCCUPATION (even if retired) **General Foreman - Reading Co.** 16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. **715-16-7085** 17. INFORMANT'S OWN SIGNATURE **Mrs. Blanche E. Hoffman** ADDRESS **Paxtang Pa. 3735 Rutherford St.**

18. CAUSE OF DEATH Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c)  
\*This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, asthma, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.

**MEDICAL CERTIFICATION**  
I. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH\* (a) **Crowning by**  
Morbidity conditions, if any, DUE TO (b) **accidental Cause**  
DUE TO (c) **(Found 10/13/55)**  
II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death.

19a. DATE OF OPERATION 19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION 20. AUTOPSY? Yes ☐ No ☒

21a. ACCIDENT (Specify) **accident** 21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g. in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.) **near Dock St.** 21c. (CITY, TOWN AND TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE) **Harrisburg Dauphin Pa.**

21d. TIME (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour) (Minute) OF INJURY **10/9/55 5:00** m. E.S.T. 21e. INJURY OCCURRED While at Work ☐ Not While at Work ☒ 21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR? **Boat apparently capsized at Dam**

22. I hereby certify that a view (an inquest) was held upon the body of the above named deceased on **10/13/55** and that death occurred at **5:00** a.m. E.S.T., from the causes and on the date stated above.

23a. SIGNATURE OF CORONER **Thomas J. Hoffman** 23b. ADDRESS **101120. 2nd St. Hg. Pa.** 23c. DATE SIGNED **10/14/55**

24a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL (Specify) **Burial** 24b. DATE **10-15-55** 24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY **East Harrisburg Cemetery** 24d. LOCATION (Town, township and county) (State) **Penbrook Dauphin Co. Pa.**

DATE REC'D by LOCAL REG **10-14-55** REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE **Jas E. Morrison** 25. SIGNATURE OF FUNERAL DIRECTOR **Wm. C. Smith** ADDRESS **2001 Market St. Hg. Pa.**

Death certificate for Thomas Hoffman

Thomas Hoffman and Oscar Bosner, died in 1955

Two fisherman died Oct. 9, 1955 when their boat overturned in the Dock Street Dam.

Thomas J. Hoffman, 44, of Paxtang, died just days before his birthday. His friend Oscar C. Bosner, 59, of Hummelstown, perished in the accident too.

Both men worked for the Reading Company. Hoffman was a general foreman and left behind a wife.

Bosner left behind a wife and daughter. A niece wrote a message to Bosner in 2006 on FindAGrave.com.

"I would have liked to to have known you Uncle Oscar," she said.





*Throngs look on as rescuers drag the Susquehanna River for Aldine's body. (Newspapers.com)*

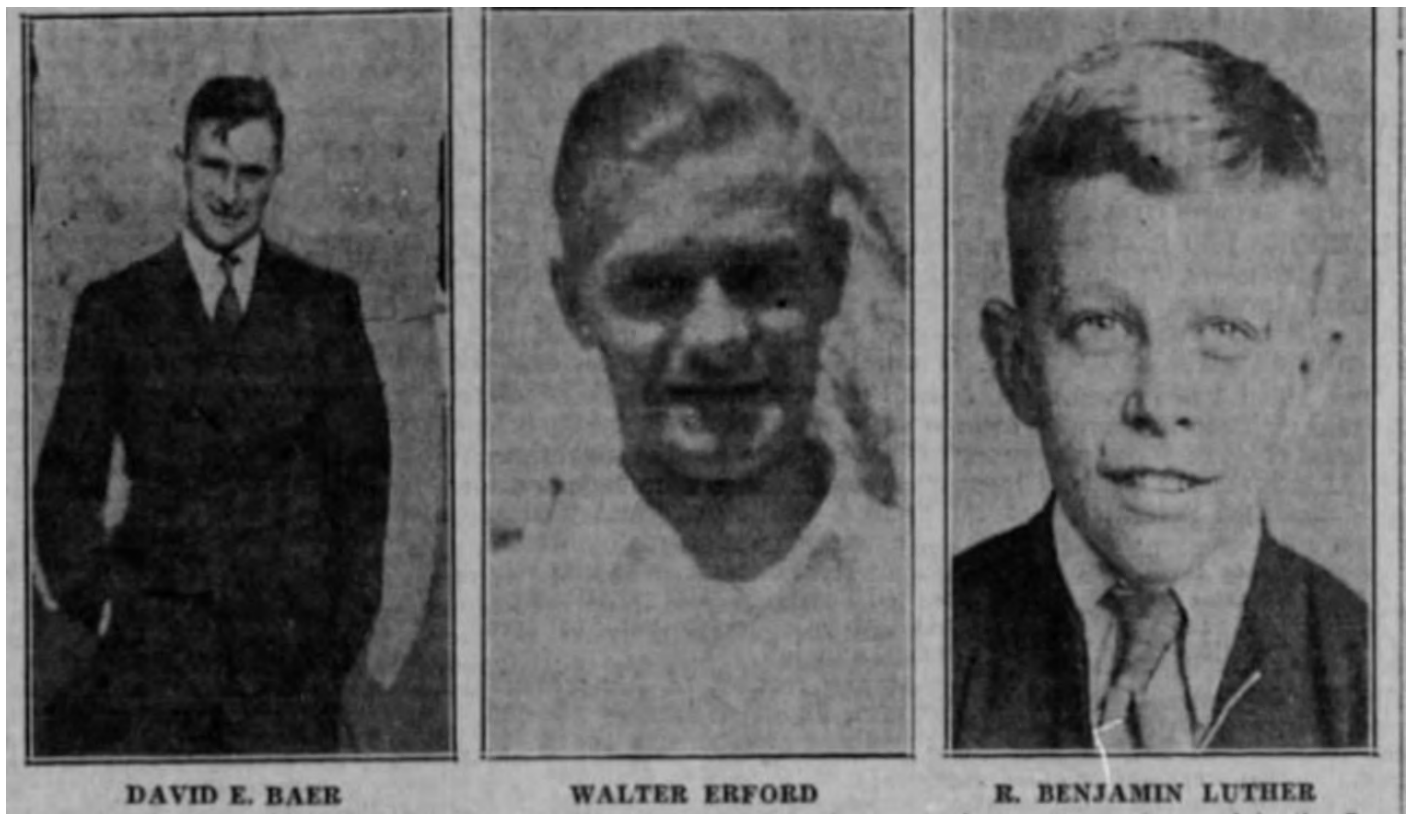
#### **Aldine Whittington, died in 1940**

Four-year-old Aldine Whittington toppled into the Susquehanna River Aug. 2, 1940 from the riverwalk steps and was swept over the Dock Street Dam.

A 5-year-old friend with him didn't tell anyone about the accident until 90 minutes later. That's when Adline's father summoned a team of rescuers.

Aldine was survived his parents, a 10-year brother Richard, and two sisters, Jean and Sarah, ages 6 and 2, according to the Harrisburg Telegraph.

Jean turned 6 on the day Aldine died.



DAVID E. BAER

WALTER ERFORD

R. BENJAMIN LUTHER

**David Baer, Walter Erford and Benjamin Luther, died in 1940**

David Baer, his brother-in-law, Walter Erford and 16-year-old R. Benjamin Luther were fishing in a boat near the dam July 1, 1940 when they inched too close to the dam.

They were about 100 yards from the Lemoyne shore, according to another fisherman on the water.

The undertow sucked in their boat, tossed the trio into the water and smashed their boat to pieces, according to the Harrisburg Telegraph.

All three, of New Cumberland, died. They were all reportedly excellent swimmers.

Baer, 25, was the father of a two-year-old daughter and had been married four years. He had just recently obtained a job at the Hench Klingsborough company.

Baer's wife told the newspapers that her husband had previously saved eight people from dying at Lisburn.

Erford was married and employed by the Hershey Creamery Company. Luther was approaching his senior year at New Cumberland High School, where he was manager of the basketball team.





*A fisherman illegally fishes from on top of the Dock Street Dam when the water was low in 2005. (PennLive/The Patriot-News)*

**Paul T. Ricker, died in 1937**

Paul T. Ricker, 16, of Hummelstown drowned May 28, 1937.

The high school athlete drowned after his canoe went over the dam. A companion was rescued.

Two people on shore recovered Ricker's body from the water.



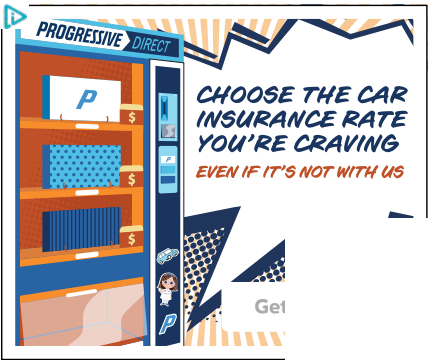


Harrisburg City Island from the north ,showing all bridges and Dock St. Dam in 1994.

**David Stone, died in 1935**

David Luther Stone, 28, died Dec. 3, 1935 while trying to salvage a boat from the water below the Dock Street Dam.

A companion reached the shore safely.





*This is one of two kayakers who were rescued after going over the Dock Street Dam, June 10, 2014*

What accounts for some victims surviving the dam while others perish?

Besides floatation devices, the factors are hard to know. But experts say it's a combination of many things including water levels, flow rate, and luck.

In Harrisburg's history, it's notable that several of the victims were new to boating or paddling and several drownings happened early in the season before the buoys were placed north of the dam.

The number of deaths at the Dock Street Dam pose a huge liability issue for the city of Harrisburg, according to Fletemeyer, the Florida drowning expert. City officials should be doing everything in their power to alert people about the dam, he said, including having floatation devices at the side of the rivers for emergencies.

"Even one death puts the city on notice that it's dangerous," he said. "But 29? They need to do something.

"With a study and time, there are measures that can be done," he said.

### **Recorded drownings at low-head dam in New York**

This video shows how quickly boaters can find themselves in trouble at a low-head dam.

These firefighters tried to rescue rafters from the dam and ended up needing to be rescued themselves.

Three firefighters died and four others nearly died in the September 1975 incident.



*Buoys positioned north of the dam*

## **No boating license required in PA**

Pennsylvania law requires all operators of jet skis to obtain an education certificate.

The same is not required of all boaters.

Instead, Boating Safety Education Certificates are required for persons born on or after January 1, 1982, to operate boats powered by motors greater than 25 horsepower.

The latest double-fatality in Harrisburg involved a boat driven by Cody Binkley, 26, who was using a boat with a 20-horsepower motor.



*Warning signs on the stone bridge piers are faded at left*

### **Not enough warnings?**

Binkley told authorities he was unaware of the dam as he approached from the downstream side of the dam.

Buoys have never been posted on that side of the dam, despite a law requiring them on both sides at high-hazard dams.

Harrisburg officials believe they had a waiver because of the obstruction of the Interstate 83 bridge and swift water downstream.

But no one can find the paperwork. So state officials are asking city officials to apply again for a waiver, which would have to justify the lack of buoys.

Mayor Eric Papenfuse told PennLive he is not against adding buoys on the downstream side, if it's logistically possible. Such a move could expand the "exclusion zone" around the dam, limiting fishing opportunities.



### **What to do**

Harrisburg River Rescue Frank Egresitz said boaters and paddlers should only enter water with which they are familiar.

And everyone on the river should wear a life vest. Having one on board won't suffice, he said, because if you capsize, you and your life vest could be tossed in two different directions.

If you find yourself struggling in water: Try standing up.

Fletemeyer, the drowning expert, found that 40-50 percent of open water drownings occur in water where victims could touch the bottom. But standing in swift water can be impossible at times, he noted.

In fast-moving water, Egresitz said, try floating on your back to get to safety, feet first to fend off any objects you may encounter.

RECOMMENDED

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If you get caught in a dam's "drowning machine" without a life vest, allow yourself to sink to the bottom and then try to push off as hard as you can away from the dam to break free past the boil line.

"That's hard to do in a panicked situation," Fletemeyer said. "You have to be skilled."

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