The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919: A Disaster that Changed America and Why it Still Matters Today

Shortly after noon on January 15, 1919, a fifty-foot-tall steel tank filled with 2.3 million gallons of molasses collapsed on Boston's waterfront, disgorging its contents in a 20-foot-high wave of molasses that traveled at 35-miles per hour. When the tide receded, a section of Boston's North End had been transformed into a war zone. The Great Boston Molasses Flood claimed the lives of twenty-one people and scores of animals, injured 150, and caused widespread destruction.

For the first time, Stephen Puleo told the story of the flood in its full historical context in his Boston-area bestseller, Dark Tide: The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919 (2003). Tracing the era from the tank's construction in 1915 through the multiyear lawsuit that followed the disaster, Puleo drew from long-lost court documents, fire department records, and newspaper accounts to tell the story of the flood and examine the sweeping changes brought about by World War I, the anarchist movement, immigration, and the expanding role of government and big business in society. It's also a chronicle of the courage of ordinary people, from the firemen and children caught in the unimaginable catastrophe, to the judge who presided over the civil lawsuit with heroic impartiality.

In the 10th anniversary year of Dark Tide's publication, author Stephen Puleo will discuss the flood story and the major themes and issues covered in his book - social, ethical, and moral. In addition, he will talk about the making of the book and the astounding response he has received since Dark Tide was published, as well as why the story is still relevant in so many ways today. Following his presentation, he will look forward to answering questions from all in attendance.

Stephen Puleo Biography

Stephen Puleo is an author, historian, university teacher, public speaker, and communications professional. His books include The Caning: The Assault That Drove America to Civil War; A City So Grand: The Rise of an American Metropolis, Boston 1850-1900; The Boston Italians: A Story of Pride, Perseverance and Paesani, from the Years of the Great Immigration to the Present Day; Due to Enemy Action: The True World War II Story of the USS Eagle 56; and Dark Tide: The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919.

A former award-winning newspaper reporter and contributor of feature stories and book reviews to American History magazine and the Boston Globe, Puleo holds a master's degree in history (From Italy to Boston's North End: Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1890-1910, UMass-Boston, 1994), for which he received the Dean's Award for Academic Achievement, and was the Graduate Convocation keynote speaker. He teaches at Suffolk University in Boston.

As an experienced, dynamic, and in-demand speaker and presenter, Steve has made more than 350 public appearances since the publication of his first book in 2003. Events have included bookstore signings, keynote addresses, presentations at libraries, historical societies, community events, seminars, panel discussions, book clubs (nearly 50 have chosen
his books), newspaper and magazine interviews, radio and television appearances, and appearances at universities, and public and private K-12 schools.

Among his showcase appearances have been serving as keynote speaker at the Northeast Regional Association of the Social Studies; as a guest speaker for the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the Massachusetts Superior Court; and as a panel participant with Italian-American and Jewish-American scholars entitled *Italy and the Holocaust: The Calabria Connection*, presented at UMass-Boston.

**Critical praise**

Steve’s books have been reviewed favorably by the *New Yorker*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Portland Press Herald*, the *Providence Journal*, the Associated Press, the *Denver Post*, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, the *Hartford Courant*, *Kirkus Reviews*, Barnes and Noble Review.com, the *Fredericksburg Star*, ForeWord magazine, Forbes.com, and *Publishers Weekly*. One review of his most recently published book, *The Caning*, called it a “compelling account of the caning and its aftermath [which] presents the often-overlooked drama of the late 1850’s, illuminating a cast of fascinating characters — not only Brooks and Sumner, but Stephen Douglas, John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln — just as they step from the wings onto the great stage of history.” Review by Russell S. Bonds, author of *War Like the Thunderbolt: The Battle and Burning of Atlanta*. Another noted that readers “may be surprised to find multiple parallels to today’s political climate” … The *Fredericksburg (VA) Star*

*Dark Tide*, the subject of Stephen Puleo’s appearance at Wentworth, was selected by the Boston Authors Club as a finalist for its prestigious Julia Ward Howe Award for literary merit. The Associated Press included it in its “round-up” selection of books to read, a recommendation that appeared in more than 80 newspapers nationwide. *The Boston Globe* wrote that “giving a human face to tragedy is part of the brilliance” of *Dark Tide*. The book was also the subject of a History Channel program, and Steve discussed *Dark Tide on C-Span’s Book TV*. Several communities have voted to read *Dark Tide* as part of town-wide reading programs, and the book has been selected for reading and discussion by scores of book clubs.