

# Liquid Death

## Background

### Great Molasses Flood

- Year is 1919--in Boston Massachusetts
- Purity Distilling company had a HUGE tank right by the harbor
  - Stood 50 feet tall, and 90 feet in diameter
  - Could hold up to 2.3 million gallons (of what)
  - Was full of molasses
- Why so much fucking syrup?
  - Molasses can be used to produce ethanol, which is used in ammunition, necessary for World War I, and alcoholic drinks
  - Offloaded from ships, stored there before it would be transported by railroad to the Purity ethanol plant in Cambridge
- On January 14, 1919, a ship delivered a fresh load of molasses, warmed to make it easier to transfer into the tanks
- On January 15, 1919, Boston temperatures rose above 40 degrees Fahrenheit
  - This was a rapid change from the day before
  - The older, colder molasses already in the tank expanded (may have also been some fermentation adding pressure to the tank)
  - Around 12:30PM, the ground started shaking, and there was a loud rumble--like an elevated train was passing, and suddenly there was a “thunderclap like bang” and the sound of the rivets shooting out of the tank rang through the air
  - The liquid, 40% denser than water, formed a 25 foot high wave, and moved at 35 miles per hour
  - Nearby buildings were swept off their foundations and crushed
  - Steel beams on the Boston Elevated Railway were bent--jet fuel can't melt steel beams, but syrup sure fucking can
  - Several blocks were flooded with molasses, 2-3 feet deep
- A Boston Post report on the incident read:
  - “Molasses, waist deep, covered the street and swirled and bubbled about the wreckage .... Here and there struggled a form—whether it was animal or human being was impossible to tell. Only an upheaval, a thrashing about in the sticky mass, showed where any life was .... Horses died like so many flies on sticky fly-paper. The more they struggled, the deeper in the mess they were ensnared. Human beings—men and women—suffered likewise.”
- Within a couple hours, the molasses started to cool and become thicker, making rescue even harder

- Killed 21 people, injured 150
- Aftermath
  - 116 cadets from the Massachusetts Nautical School were docked nearby, and first on the scene
    - Ran several blocks
    - Waded through the molasses to rescue survivors
  - Soon police, Red Cross, Army, and Navy soon arrived--they called literally everywhere
  - So many injured, they set up a makeshift hospital nearby
  - Searched for 4 days
  - Kept finding bodies in the Boston Harbor for months, of people that were swept away and out to the harbor
  - Ultimately, 21 people were killed and 150 people were injured
- Cleanup
  - Crews of several hundreds used saltwater fired from a fireboat to wash away the molasses
  - Took weeks to clean up immediate area
  - Took even longer to clean up the rest of Boston and suburbs---people had tracked molasses through streets, subway platforms, seats in trains and streetcars, payphone handsets, into homes
  - Crews committed an estimated 87,000 hours cleaning
  - "Everything that a Bostonian touched was sticky" --SAME
- Lawsuit
  - 119 Boston residents brought a class action lawsuit against the United States Industrial Alcohol Company, which had bought Purity Distilling in 1917
    - Lawsuit was a milestone for corporate regulation
    - Company claimed the tank had been blown up by anarchists ?? what??
  - Auditor found the company responsible 3 years later, ended up paying \$628,000 in damages (9,910,000 nine-million-nine-thousand-nine-hundred-ten dollars, adjusted for inflation)
    - Not that much
    - Class action--relative received only about \$7,000 per victim, or \$104,000 (one-hundred-four thousand) today
- Why?
  - Interestingly, this was right when prohibition was starting (literally the 18th amendment was ratified the day after the explosion)
    - Believed that the company was trying to out-race prohibition
  - Also, lots of basic safety tests were never done when constructing
    - Ignored warning signs like groaning sounds when the tank was filled
    - Literally painted the tank brown to hide the leaks, cause there were so many
- Great Molasses Flood also known as the Boston Molasses Disaster or (my favorite) the Boston Molassacre

- Now the site of the vat is a park, and in 2019 (100 years later) a bunch of people stood in a circle where the vat used to be--photo on the drive, this thing was fucking enormous

## London Beer Flood

- Your name is George Crick--you live in London, England and work for one of the largest breweries in London--Meux and Co's Horse Shoe Brewery--the year is 1814
- You've been working for Meux and Co for 17 years and watched it become the enormous brewery it is
- One October afternoon, around 4:30, you hear a loud clanging noise, come from one of your 22-foot tall barrels, and notice one of the 700 pound iron bands around it has slipped
  - Since bands slip two to three times a year, it's no worry to you, even though the enormous barrel is filled all but the final 4 inches at the top
  - You tell your supervisor anyway, and he replies "no harm whatever would ensue", so you write a note to have it fixed
  - Alas, harm whatever did ensue
- An hour later, you're standing on a platform 30 feet from the enormous vat, holding the note to have it fixed, when suddenly, your enormous vat of porter bursts
  - The force of the torrential beer bath forces the stopper from another vat, and destroys more barrels of beer, adding them to the ocean
  - You're thrown from your platform, and carried out in the flood of over 128,000 gallons
  - The 25 foot tall rear wall of your brewery is knocked down, and bricks from it are thrown upwards, crashing into the roofs of houses nearby
  - A 15 foot wave sweeps onto the street, destroying 2 houses and damaging others
  - A four year old girl and her mum are having tea in a house nearby, when suddenly a wave of beer crashed through their home, and carries them out onto the street
  - In another home nearby, an Irish family is hosting a wake (in a cellar) for a 2 year old boy when the beer wave interrupted them and killed 4 of the mourners
- Naturally, the land around the building was low-lying and flat, without drainage, the beer flowed into homes and cellars, and people had to climb onto furniture to avoid drawing--imagine that scene from Winnie the Pooh, but beer
- In the following days, hundreds of people collected beer
  - There was mass drunkenness, and even a death from alcohol poisoning
  - Newspapers at the time made no note of this, but instead said crowds were well behaved
  - Watchmen at the brewery started charging people to come view the remains of the beer vats, and the Irish family hosted another (public, and not in a cellar) for their 4 additional lost family members

- Eight people died, none of which were brewery employees, though some had to be taken to the hospital
  - Of the 8 dead, 4 were under the age of 15 and the other 4 were women
- It was determined the accident was an act of God, so Meux & Co did not have to compensate for the damages
- After this, people started using concrete vats instead of wooden vats

## Wine Flood

- Honorable mention: in September 2020
  - Spanish winery Bodegas Vitvinos in Villamalea spilled 13,000 gallons of red wine
  - The wine drifted from the enormous vats, and spilled all the way down to the winery's field
  - Made rounds and was made famous by a video posted on Twitter

## Oil Spills

- Shit is even more fucked
- Deepwater Horizon - 184 Million gallons of oil
  - Would take 8.6 miles worth of connected olympic sized swimming pools (that's 279 of them) to hold all of this oil
    - These pools are 6 foot 7 inches deep
  - Alternatively, the amount of oil lost could have powered 674,563 (six hundred seventy four thousand five hundred and sixty three) U.S. homes for an entire year
  - Or, you'd need 20,000 semi tanker trucks to carry this
    - If you put them back to back they'd be bumper to bumper for 310 miles
  - Good to know: if the gulf of mexico were the Cowboys Stadium in Dallas, the largest domed stadium in the world, the oil spill would be the size of a 24 oz can of beer

## Sources

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How Much is 184 Million Gallons of Oil