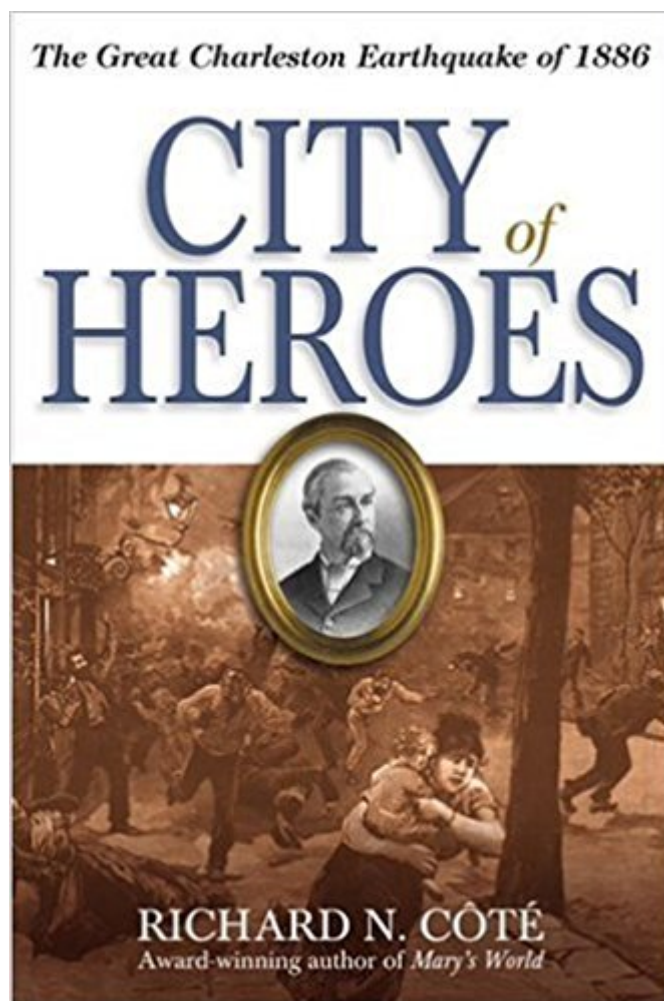


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# City Of Heroes: The Great Charleston Earthquake Of 1886



## Synopsis

At 9:51 PM on August 31, 1886, William Ashmead Courtenay, the much-respected mayor of Charleston, South Carolina, was relaxing aboard the Etruria, an elite Cunard Line luxury liner bound for New York from Liverpool. At that same moment, the most powerful earthquake ever to strike the East Coast rolled through South Carolina and devastated Charleston, killing over 150 people and damaging or destroying over 90% of the historic city's masonry buildings within sixty seconds. Within ten minutes, it had spread its terror throughout half the nation, causing panic and damage as far north as Toronto, east to Long Island, south to Cuba, and west to St. Louis. The nation was stunned. No one in Charleston, or anywhere on the East coast, ever thought such an unthinkable catastrophe of such magnitude could possibly strike east of the Mississippi. They were very, very wrong. *City of Heroes: The Great Charleston Earthquake of 1886*, is a riveting, heavily illustrated non-fiction book filled with gripping, first-hand accounts of the earthquake, drawn directly from newspapers, personal diaries, journals, and letters of the earthquake survivors. It will also follow the earthquake sleuths who descended upon Charleston to discover what caused the disaster. But above all, it identifies the noble and heartwarming acts of numerous unsung heroes, black and white, inspired and led by Charleston's extraordinary mayor, William A. Courtenay. Working together, they saved numerous lives, nursed the wounded, fed the hungry, sheltered the homeless, and enabled Charleston to make a full recovery from the massive disaster within eighteen months.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A story of courage, sacrifice, and self-devotion by everyday people. Dick CÃfÃtÃfÃ© is right: it all

boils down to a matter of character. --Walter Edgar, Ph.D., author, *The Encyclopedia of South Carolina* Engaging, well researched and written, it draws the reader into the earthquake's effects on people in a way no other book has. An important work. --Norman S. Levine, Ph.D., Professor of Geology, College of Charleston

Creating this book was the most challenging experience I have ever faced as a writer. In previous books, I had chosen demanding writing assignments. Nevertheless, I felt that if I worked hard enough and did sufficient research, I could craft a good and thorough tale which would be interesting and useful to the reader. Immediately after the 1886 Charleston earthquake, everyone in the affected area started writing to their friends and relatives to recount their experiences. Within weeks, however, the correspondence quickly trailed off, as the novelty of the disaster turned into grueling days of frustration and sameness. I became worried that I would not have enough authoritative source material to tell the complete story of the disaster and the miraculous recovery. However when I turned to contemporary newspapers, magazines, and, later, scientific journal articles, they proved to be the rich sources that I needed. As the research progressed, more intriguing facts! and mysteries surfaced. Now I was nearly inundated with information—but what and how much should I use, and what should I ignore? Nine months before my completion deadline, I abandoned my carefully crafted original outline and let the earthquake tell me how to present its story. The result was an amazing odyssey that I could have never predicted—and a book far richer and more complex than anything I had initially set out to write. I hope that readers enjoy the result as much as I enjoyed the ride. —Dick Căfă'tăfă© --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

On the night of August 31, 1886, at 9:51pm, an event happened in Charleston, SC, that was never forgotten by those who were present. Many people had already retired for the evening. The newspaper, the *New & Courier* was getting ready to finish their morning edition, when all of a sudden the building started rocking and rolling like the ocean was underneath the building. The walls of the building started coming down. Some of the people of the newspaper jumped out of the 2nd story building. Others ran out of the door but, had difficulty getting out because, the front of the building had fallen into the street. When they reached the street, there many people in the street. What they did not know at this time was that a 7.3 earthquake had taken place close to them. The rest of the book describes the results and how people handle what happened. It is very interesting to note that the final answer about the earthquake did not come until almost one hundred years later

in 1983. This was a wonderful book full of stories of heartbreak and tragedies, yet the resilience of a population strong enough to rise above it all and triumph once again. All of this was done without the help of the Federal government; whose total contribution was a few large tents. City of Heroes tells how leaders in Charleston organized themselves to ask for help from fellow countrymen, yes, even those from "Up North". They had several years before in 1876 gone to Philadelphia, PA. to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. Charlestonians wanted to show their willingness to make it "one nation" again. Soon money came in from many sources, and they were able in less than a year, to rebuild and rejuvenate their businesses to be the lively town they had been before the earthquake.

City of Heroes is an excellent writing about a terrific story. Many people know little to nothing about the Great Charleston Earthquake of 1886. This book gives a very thorough account of the event. It is presented in an orderly, logical method. It is well written for those of us that are not scientific in our background, but presents the scientific information in layman's terms. The book is easy to read and provides many photographs, drawings and maps. The author deserves all the credit for the method and talent in which the book is written, but, the credit for the amazing story all goes to the people of Charleston, Summerville and surrounding areas of South Carolina for all the charitable and humane work performed in the aftermath. The earthquake and the potential threat of future earthquakes is obviously fascinating, but the people of Charleston and the colossal effort they put into recovery in the aftermath of this disaster is worthwhile reading for every American. It demonstrates the ability and drive that have always made America Great. This book, and its story should be used to demonstrate and guide all cities in the management of disasters. It illustrates all that can be accomplished with hard work of self-less people organized for the good of the people and even more amazing is the fact that there was essentially no federal or state assistance provided. All financial assistance was through donations. Any reader would have to be impressed with the organization and recovery efforts. I cannot praise this book or the people of South Carolina enough. And just for the record, I was born and raised in New Jersey and have lived the last 27 years in New York state. So I am not bragging about my home state, but I might be bragging about a state that some day will be home state.

As I began to read this book, I thought I would read it and then donate it to our library. But as I came to more and more details, I marked the pages and knew I could never turn it loose! It detailed a few frightening experiences in northern S. C., as well as in some states much farther north. My

grandmother in southern N. C. said her parents referred to it as the "shake," so everybody around was aware that something had happened! They had no daily newspapers then to keep them informed. Charleston was very badly damaged, and it was not nearly as built-up as it is today.

Amazing research has gone into this worthwhile documented event. It documents what a city can do in a time when there was no FEMA to rescue you. People working with people to save their city. A city full of pride and southern spunk.

Great story!

Purchased this book for a gift to an ardent S.C. resident. But read it first. It is informative and detailed - lots of pictures. Also purchased "Red Neck Riviera" - it was great - 5 stars.

When I first read an account of the Charleston quake, I assumed there must have been a mistake. Earthquakes don't happen in South Carolina. Actually, Cote informs us the area was subject to constant tremblors for over twenty years after the 1886 event. In many respects the discussion of seismology in the Carolinas is the best part here. Records show a pattern of shaking every four hundred years or so. We should have a break from earthquakes there for some time. Those who believe Federal assistance is a must for any city recovering from disaster should heed the example of Charleston. Given only tents by Washington, the city subsided and recovered on charity alone. Granted the damage was not too terrible or extensive. Cote also minimizes the conflicts and obstacles people must have faced in the aftermath. Charlestonians could not all have been as positive and well behaved as they are portrayed here. Still, we see how much can be achieved by the residents themselves.

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