

## Krakatoa Volcanic Explosion, 1883

An interesting article appears in the “Colebrook News” of December 14, 1883 edition. Here is what it said:

“We have been waiting patiently for H.N. [?] or some other wise man to tell us what the peculiar sunrises and sunsets, which we have been admiring all the fall indicate; but as they don’t seem to know anything about it, we feel called upon to venture the opinion that the phenomena portend very comfortable weather for the time of year.”

So much for the wild speculation of newspaper reporters prior to the day of instant worldwide communications. Here is the cause of what our ancestors witnessed in the fall and winter more than a century and a quarter ago as published in the Royal Society of London report, 1884, about a volcanic island lying in the Sunda Strait, the body of water separating the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra:

“Krakatoa erupted with the most violent explosion of recorded history. The entire north portion of the island was blown away, and in place of 10 square miles of land with an average elevation of 700 feet, there was formed a great depression with its bottom more than 900 feet below sea level. Apparently pent-up superheated vapor exploded and ruptured the throat of the volcano, allowing cold ocean water to ‘freeze’ a crust on the rising molten magma there. Then, as with a safety valve tied down, the pressure began to build up. On the morning of August 27, 1883, this crust let go.

Over 4 cubic miles of rock was blown away: the sea was covered with masses of pumice for miles around – in many places of such thickness that no vessel could force its way through. [Pumice is a frothy stone substance, which can be used much like sandpaper to polish metals. It easily floats on water.] Two new islands rose in the strait, the lighthouses were swept away. A column of dust rose 17 miles and spread out so that in Batavia [Djakarta today, the capital of Indonesia], 100 miles away, the sky was so dark that lamps had to be burned in the houses at midday. Eventually this dust was distributed by stratospheric winds over the entire earth, the finer particles coming into the higher layers of the atmosphere were diffused over a large part of the surface of the earth, and showed their presence by the brilliant sunset glows to which they gave rise. The actual sounds of the volcanic explosions were heard over a vast area, especially to the west. Thus they were heard on the island of Rodriguez, in the Indian Ocean, 3,000 miles away; at Bangkok, Thailand, 1,413 miles; in the Philippines Islands, about the same distance; in Ceylon, 2,058 miles, and in West and South Australia, from 1,300 to 2,250 miles. On no other occasion have sound waves ever been perceived at anything like the extreme distances to which the detonations of Krakatoa reached. The atmospheric shock wave reflected off itself at the antipodes of the earth, in other words, a wave or oscillation traveled outward in all directions until it reached 180 degrees from its point of origin, at which point it continued onward and contracting until it came back upon itself over the original point of the explosion. This oscillation was observed no less than seven times.

But the most damaging effect was that of the waves, which inundated the whole of the shores of Java and Sumatra, which border the strait. Many villages were carried away by water reaching 60 to 72 feet. One town, at the head of a funnel-shaped bay, was struck by a wave variously estimated at 100 to 135 feet high. More than 36,000 people were drowned, and many vessels were washed ashore, including one warship that was carried 1.8 miles inland and left 30 feet above sea level. The sea-waves traveled to vast

distances from the doomed island. The long wave reached Cape Horn (7,818 miles), and traversed the Atlantic Ocean, coming to the English Channel (11,040 miles), where it was approximately six inches high.

I wasn't able to find anything in subsequent newspaper accounts about the cause of the phenomena that was responsible for the vivid sunrises and sunsets. Apparently it was quite some time before news of the volcanic blast reached our area.

What follows is another historic event reported in the old *Harold* that was destined to make great changes in the lives of every person in the country. I have read an account of the first train trip in North America, but I never saw it written in the first person. I think that you will enjoy this account.

**The Trial Trip of the First Locomotive.** Major Horatio Allen, the engineer of the New York and Erie Railroad, in a speech made during the recent festival occasion, gave the following account of the first trip made by a locomotive on this continent.

“When was it? Who was it? And who awakened its energies and directed its movements? It was in the year 1828, on the banks of the Lackawaxen at the commencement of the railroad connecting the canal of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company with their coal mines – and he who addresses you was the only person on that locomotive. [This is in Pike County, Pennsylvania, just north of Interstate 84 and east of Lake Wallenpaupack. Lackawaxen Creek is the outflow from Lake Wallenpaupack, and empties into the Delaware River.] The circumstances that led to my being alone on the engine were these: The road had been built in the summer, the structure [track] was of hemlock timber, and nails of large dimensions notched on caps placed far apart. The timber had cracked and warped from exposure to the sun. After about three hundred feet of straight line, the road crossed the Lackawaxen Creek, on trestle work about 30 feet high, with a curve of 350 to 400 feet radius. The impression was very general that this iron monster would either break down the road, or it would leave the track at the curve and plunge into the creek. My reply to such apprehensions was that it was too late to consider the probability of such occurrences, there was no other course but to have a trial made of the strange animal, which had been brought here at great expense; but that it was not necessary that more than one should be involved in its fate; that I would take the first ride alone, and the time would come when I should look back to the incident with great interest. As I placed my hand on the throttle valve handle, I was undecided whether I would move slowly or with a fair degree of speed, but believing that the road would prove safe, and preferring, if we did go down, to go handsomely, and without any evidence of timidity, I started with considerable velocity, passed the curve over the creek safely, and was soon out of hearing of the cheers of the vast assemblage. At the end of two or three miles, I reversed the valve, and returned without accident to the place of starting, having thus made the first railroad trip by locomotive on the Western Hemisphere.”

*February 9, 1856*