



The New Madrid Earthquakes

When the Mississippi ran backward, right in our own backyard

Three great quakes

Date	Estimated magnitude	What happened
December 16, 1811	About 7	Struck at 2 a.m. in northeast Arkansas
January 23, 1812	About 7	Centered in Missouri's Bootheel
February 7, 1812	About 7 or more	Destroyed the town of New Madrid, Missouri

Scientists still debate the exact sizes; estimates run from about 7 to 7.5. Thousands of aftershocks followed.

What people saw



The river ran backward

The Mississippi briefly flowed upstream in places



A new lake

Reelfoot Lake formed in northwest Tennessee



Felt far away

Shaking was felt across much of the eastern U.S.



The land changed

Sand blows, sunken land and new waterfalls

Is it still active?

Yes

- Small quakes happen there regularly
- The fault zone sits under Memphis and nearby towns
- Eastern ground carries shaking much farther than in California

What to know

- The USGS estimates a 25-40% chance of a magnitude 6 or larger there in 50 years
- Secure tall furniture and water heaters
- Drop, cover and hold on when shaking starts

Remember

The biggest earthquakes east of the Rockies happened next door to Arkansas and Tennessee.