

REVIEW OF EASTER TORNADO THAT BROUGHT DISASTER

(By Jas. B. Wootan, in Omaha Bee.)

The tornado struck Omaha Sunday at about 5:50 p. m., entering at Fifty-fourth and Center streets, the extreme southwest, sweeping diagonally across the city to the northwest, going over the bluffs at about Fourteenth and Spencer street, demolishing the Missouri Pacific roundhouse, leveling the big trestle work of the Illinois Central across Carter lake, wrecking some buildings and the Rod and Gun club and vanishing.

The path of the storm reached for a length of some six miles with a width from two to six blocks.

It resulted in 120 deaths, to which should be added seven in Ralston and eleven at Council Bluffs; injured, 350, not fatally; totally demolished 559 homes; partially wrecked 1250 other homes; eleven churches, eight schools and a number of small stores and shops; rendered 2,500 persons homeless and destroyed or damaged property valued at \$5,000,000, on which approximately \$500,000 in tornado insurance was carried.

Weather Presaged Terrible Storm.

Preceding the storm the weather was cloudy and unsettled, growing abnormally warm toward evening with intermittent hail and rain. For hours the barometers showed the lowest registration. A shower of rain, succeeding hail, ushered in the tempest, and a torrent followed it from a sky of faint yellowish hue, soon deepening into red with rising tongues of flames from buildings set afire by the storm. But a little while and the rain ceased, nightfall was utterly black, darkness everywhere, as all electric and gas street lights went out, then the mercury began to fall, and within an hour and a half the air was biting, steadily growing colder through the night.

Thousands of people saw the fatal funnel-shaped cloud rise out of the southwest and many watched it throughout its course. It was of dull greyish color and seemed to emit smoke as it came on its mission of death. But those who saw it, while perhaps, haunted by the vision, will never forget that horrifying roar accompanying it. It was a steadily-sustained, deep, terrible rumbling like the grunt of some hideous monster in distress, and it vibrated with a sort of hum as if keeping time to its terrible velocity. Nearer and nearer it comes, more depressing and deadening and sickening the sound. In the epic speech of the Roman poet, "thunder roars from pole to pole, the sky glares with repeated flashes and all nature threatens them with immediate death."

Personal Experiences, Observations.

Some have tried to describe this tornado cloud as many great engines rumbling on abreast to destroy a city. Remarkable experiences have been related by those who stood and gazed at what they believed to be their doom.

Many charmed by the glamor, or transfixed by fear, or bewildered beyond fright, stood still and gazed at the fleeting inferno, while others fled for refuge to cellars or lay prostrate upon the ground, and some of both were taken, and some spared. Cellars did not prove a sure retreat in every case. Many became in a twinkling the dark chambers of death.

The first trace of the tornado within Omaha's limits was at Fifty-fourth and Center streets. From there it traveled north, veering slightly to the east, to Leavenworth street. Thence it traversed a northeasterly course to Fortieth and Farnam, clearing its path as it went. At Fortieth and Farnam it spread its ominous wings until they stretched from Forty-second on the west to Thirty-eighth on the east, and thus arrayed it tore like a ravishing demon down to the north. Apparently it had directed its course in a straight line, centering about Fortieth and Forty-first streets, but suddenly in a new caprice it veered again a little to the east and touched its most northern point on the west at Saunders school, Forty-first avenue and Case streets.

Wise folk say cyclones and tornadoes, once they strike a lowland, will keep to it instead of turning uphill. That is only one of the many vagaries people indulge about these phenomena.

Wrecks the Homes of Wealth.

In veering it mounted the beautiful heights of Thirty-eighth street crowned with costly dwellings, mostly new and built of solid material. Into their midst it dipped as in fiendish mockery of the magnificence puny man had wrought. And it tore through this region of wealth and beauty as if it were a canebreak, hurling houses or parts of houses high into the air and far down the slope of the hill to the east.

But these cruel wings which had spread at Fortieth and Farnam encompassed that rich row of architectural beauty ranging along Thirtieth, from Farnam north to Davenport, buttressed by the Joslyn castle.

W. A. Smith's new burnt brick residence, just north of Thirtieth and Farnam corner, escaped with but slight damage, but the red stone home of H. H. Baldrige, the Crofoot residence, a massive frame structure, built and once occupied by former President H. G. Burt of the Union Pacific; the Redick place; several others newer and as handsome, were cruelly handled in this rampage. Casper E. Yost's large grey brick at Thirtieth and Davenport was given a few cursory slaps as the wind leaped in ghoulish glee to wreck the towering turrets of the Joslyn castle.

And here about this great estate one catches a new conception of the velocity of cyclones. The Joslyn place is enclosed with a heavy stone wall, surmounted by strong iron fencing, which is deep set in stone. Before the wind this—both stone and iron—went down as if it had been a fragile paling fence.

Now, over the hills to beautiful Bemis park lurches the infuriated demon, licking up telephone and telegraph and electric light poles as it

goes, scattering a few more structures, uprooting trees and shooting them in some cases blocks away; skirting the vast building of Sacred Heart convent, Thirty-sixth and Burt, thrusting a glance sideways at the residence of the Rt. Rev. Richard Seannell, Catholic bishop, disfiguring the large new, half-completed home of Louis Nash and demolishing others nearby.

Laughs at Wooded Hollow.

Here once more it reached a sharp decline and takes the grade into Bemis park like the winning auto on the last lap of the speedway. Here it truly "scours over the land," and "ploughs up the whole deep from the lowest bottom" for not a spot of Bemis park seems to have been missed. It burrows into the hollow and rolls "vast billows" of trees and earth and furniture from Cumins street homes over against the north side slopes.

One might imagine that so great a depression as the tree templed lowlands of Bemis park would break the velocity of the wind, but he would not imagine it after gazing upon the sad ruins of the once handsome homes that densely crowded upon the hills of this choice residential district. There they lay an indiscriminate mass of material intermingled with the shattered trunks and limbs of the splendid old trees that made Bemis park as pretty and inviting a spot for a home as ever the eye of the artist feasted upon.

As if gathering new impetus, the funnel cloud on scaling the hill back at Fortieth and Farnam streets came hurtling north with a queer quivering of the eastward wing, wrought, it seemed, to an insatiable fury, so now it rears its sable head over the Bemis hills and up the steep incline of the old Creighton farm abutting on Thirtieth street and extending east.

Wreckage on the Lowland.

Aha, from the summit of this last elevation it looks down upon its completest conquest, the low plateau to the north!

Speed on, thou wanton peryor of death, speed on! Feed thy ravishing passion upon the precious lives of men! Tear thy way to them through this dense forest of homes built by their frugality and skill! Snatch them from each other in the quiet of an Easter Sunday's communion and regale thyself in their blood.

And so it did. It passed down Parker and Blondo streets eastward to Twenty-fourth street, here expanding the width of its path to about six blocks and as far north as Lake street it wrought its worst devastation. It took house after house and converted it into kindling wood, strewn streets with a mass of rubbish and splinters, which but a few seconds before composed dwellings for hundreds. And in these somber ruins were to be found the largest toll of victims, dead, dying or badly injured.

Apparently Split Twice.

Some descriptions of the cloud indicate that it separated twice, once at orty-eighth and Leavenworth, a spur taking down the Belt line, and again on North Twenty-fourth street, the more destructive part moving along Lake, Ohio, Maple, Locust and Binney streets until it crossed the river on the east. These apparent separations must have been the widening of the path, as, for instance, in the vicinity of Fortieth and Farnam streets, when, at the time it veered eastward, the western extremity was at Saunders school on Forty-first and Cass streets and the eastern away over near Thirty-sixth street and further north.

It was no respecter of persons or things, and besides making a clean sweep most of the way, shook out windows and some doors blocks distant from its regular line of travel. Wherever buildings withstood its ravages at all, they were, mostly, the brick or stone structures. As a rule the frame simply crumbled up like egg shells, no matter how well built. One illustration of the relative resistance of a frame and brick house under similar circumstances is found on Thirty-eighth avenue near Farnam, where a two story frame, or the crushed remnants of it, lie hurled against a brick, comparatively free from serious damage. Of course, there is room here for a freak of the storm also.

Centers of Chief Damage.

The centers of chief damage were around the Fortieth and Farnam section from Fortieth to Forty-second and from the Child Saving institute on Howard north to Dodge; in Bemis park and for a radius of a few blocks around Twenty-fourth and Lake. Of course, the damage done the scores of most costly dwellings on Thirtieth, Thirty-eighth and Thirty-sixth, from Farnam to Cumins, was extensive, chiefly because of the great values of the buildings, but the density of destruction while tremendous and complete in spots even here, was not to be compared with the devastation in Bemis park, along Cumins street and over in the north bottoms, where for whole blocks houses were simply leveled.

Here, too, was the greatest loss of life. In Idlewild hall, 2307 North Twenty-fourth, the largest single body of lives was lost, thirteen in all. This was an old two-story structure, not far from Lake street, owned and patronized by colored men. Some were in playing pool, others for refuge from the storm, but most of them were buried in the basement when the floors fell in and the walls out and water filled up the cellar.

Its Work Among Poor.

Here, also, on the north side was the greatest amount of suffering, for the majority of homes belonged to or were occupied by poor families, a large portion of them negroes. To some it was a complete effacement of a lifetime's saving and acute destitution. Many of the people, wage earners, white and colored, were buying modest homes on the installment or building loan plans and lost their homes as well as their furniture, consequently were turned out adrift with

nothing but the clothing upon their backs, and as the death list shows, all too many came out even minus their lives. One whole family, a father, mother and five little ones—the Nathan Krinsky family—was completely wiped out.

It was at first reported that another thirteen men and women went down to death in the Diamond moving picture theater on Lake street near Twenty-fourth, where one negro escaped after six hours of confinement in the ruins, alive and well. But time proved that no deaths occurred here.

Several were killed within a radius of three blocks of the fatal Fortieth and Farnam corner. On the south side of Farnam from Forty-first to Forty-second three were killed, Geo. J. Duncan, Miss Mabel McBride and the venerable A. J. Peck, and a fourth, Ray Talbot, barely escaped, coming out with severe, though not mortal, injuries.

Cellars Sought for Safety.

People generally where possible rushed to cellars and basements for safety and, as the facts show, the vast majority of them did not go in vain, though scores did.

Next to the loss of life and homes, the destruction of shade trees was disheartening. Beautiful maples, elms, oaks and others by the score were destroyed, some whipped into shreds, some torn from their sockets by the roots and others badly disfigured. While such devastation was common all along the path of the storm, it was most noticeable, perhaps, in Bemis park, where the trees in their pestine glory so graciously adorned that picturesque section. It has been the current comment that it will be years before these old friends will be replaced, if they ever are.

Rescuers Work by Night.

The public utilities, especially electric light and power, were badly smitten by the storm. Lights went out, street cars stopped in the very spots where the tornado overtook them. Many fires were caused by overturning stoves or furnaces or gas lights and the firemen had a strenuous night of it, vying with the policemen and others in the work of rescue and salvage. All night long men carrying lanterns could be seen searching ruins for missing men, women and children, and now and then strode solemnly by four men in khaki uniform bearing a stretcher, on which lay a dead or dying or injured victim of the vicious wind. Soldiers from the federal forts were quickly on hand with their ambulances and did heroic service. So along this same line did civilians, many of them owning autos putting in the whole night at this human task.

Hospitals were thrown open and filled with maimed sufferers. Physicians and nurses had a busy time of it. Private homes in many cases were converted into havens of refuge. Names were not asked; the only requirement for admission was to be injured or homeless.

Monday Morning's Awakening.

The city officials, led by Mayor Dahlman, Police Commissioner Ryder, the other city commissioners, Chief of Police Dunn, Fire Chief Salter and others, were quick to respond to the call for help and put in, most of them, a ceaseless night of toil, laying immediately plans for the important relief work to be carried on indefinitely. The city awoke, as cities usually do under such circumstances, stupefied by the appalling disaster, not yet prepared fully to comprehend or appreciate what had happened. The morning was still cold and this only lane of devastation presented a bleak and forbidding spectacle, indeed.

Monday became largely a holiday, though not formally so. People—men, women and children—tramped all day long over every vestige of the waste places, though not all simply in curiosity, for ever and always there was the helping hand outstretched. Without delay the work of restoration really began in the efforts to clear away debris. The city set large numbers of laborers to work and private individuals looked out for their own and others, but a day of ever so strenuous toil made but little impression upon the twisted ruins.

Relief Work Organized.

Bright and early Governor Morehead came up from Lincoln, made a tour of the ruined districts, repaired to his hotel appalled at the magnitude of the disaster, to reflect upon what to do. Before leaving Lincoln he had ordered out four companies of the state militia and soon he augmented the forces to 600 troops. Martial law was declared throughout the zone of destruction, lines stretched and sentinels placed in charge.

At midnight Police Commissioner Ryder had delivered a system of "passes" to be used in case of necessity in getting through the lines and these were printed and ready for distribution at daybreak. The city police and officials co-operated with the young men of the National Guard and soon the system of patrol was established on a systematic basis. The big task now was relief to the stricken. Hundreds of people had to be housed and fed and clothed and that would require vast sums of money, stores of provisions and raiment, and the city bent to as if it had been schooled in the facilities of such a service.

A citizens relief committee was at once formed of Police Commissioner Ryder, T. J. Byrne and C. C. Rosewater, and an executive board of these three, with T. J. Mahoney, Father John Williams, Mayor Dahlman, Commissioner J. M. Guild of the Commercial club and City Commissioner Dan B. Butler.

The Auditorium was made the general depot for receiving and dispensing clothing and provisions and has been the busiest single place, perhaps, in the city. The newspapers speedily lent their facilities for distributing information as to the ways and means of relief and receiving money for the same purpose. The result was that within twenty-four hours almost every element of the city's population was working in systematic co-operation with each other toward the common end of relieving distress and succoring needs. Automobiles, by the scores were volunteered by their owners along with them to run them for use of the relief forces and many

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NOTICE

To the Public

WE know very well that everyone is aware of the fact that within the last week or two many million dollars worth of property has been destroyed by wind, tornado and cyclone, in any and all parts of this country, and therefore it would be well enough to consider this very important matter and protect your property by a policy of insurance against loss by

Wind, Tornado and Cyclones

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