

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Tornado in Carroll County"

Carroll County Times article for 28 February 1993

By Joe Getty

On February 2nd, the ground hog saw his shadow. According to folk traditions, that would account for the gusty winds, snow and otherwise miserable weather of recent weeks.

One hundred years ago, the Uniontown correspondent wrote, "Has any one a word to say in favor of Mr. Ground Hog?" His comments appeared in the *Democratic Advocate of February 24, 1893, and were apparently in reference to a tornado that hit Carroll County.*

The tornado occurred on February 19th and caused damage throughout the county. The Democratic Advocate provided the following details of the storm:

A Tornado in Carroll County
Destruction of Property in this City,
At Linwood and elsewhere in the County.

A violent storm, approaching the force of a hurricane, passed over this city and a portion of this county on Sunday night last, between 9 and 10 o'clock. Churchgoers in this city had just reached their homes when the storm broke, and some perhaps, who tarried on the way, encountered its first breath. It swooped down upon the unsuspecting inhabitants with a suddenness seldom experienced here, and with a force and fury unequaled in the history of the place. Strong, well-built houses were rocked to their foundations, and for moment the thought of seeking safety in cellars crossed the minds of some who are read up in relation to the consequences sometimes attendant upon such occurrences. Flashes of lightning were observed, but the accompanying thunder was drowned in the roaring of the wind. The air was darkened by driven snow, rain and hail, making up a temporary but typical blizzard. The extremest violence of the storm continued but a brief period, but the wind maintained a high velocity during the night and did not entirely abate until the following evening. The temperature, which had been very mild during Sunday, went down on the run, after the storm began, and by Monday morning had gotten pretty close to zero.

Few were aware of the consequences of the tornado until the morning light revealed the devastation it had wrought. In this city its greatest force and worst results were experienced at the West End, where considerable destruction of property was wrought. Just beyond the city limits, on the New Windsor road, it toppled over the chimney on the house of Mr. Lewis Little, damaged the roof considerably and wrecked his stable. Then it struck Prospect Hill, the home of Mr. Wm. A. Cunningham, sent most of his barn whirling through the air, and overturned the tower of his wind-pump, which fell upon the dairy and wrecked it. Part of the stabling in the barn was left with several fine horses unhurt, but one valuable animal in another part of the structure was severely and probably fatally injured by the falling timbers. Some of the debris from the wind-wheel was carried as far as Main street and broke windows in the residence of Mr. Nelson Gilbert well-nigh a quarter of a mile away. The damage of Mr. Cunningham's property amounts of \$1,500.

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Smith Hall, the north wing of the principal building of Western Maryland College, seems to have received the full force of the tempest and was unroofed and damaged to the extent of probably a thousand dollars. The structure is 105 feet in length and 30 feet wide. The roof and supporting timbers were lifted from the walls and dashed to the ground an indiscriminate wreck. The upper portion of the walls was damaged slightly. The apartments of the young lady students are in this wing of the college and they were preparing to retire for the night when the catastrophe occurred, and were necessarily alarmed; but their fright was of short duration and they were soon provided with comfortable quarters.

The greatest damage from the storm, in this city, was probably sustained by St. Paul's Reformed Church, the towering steeple of which was blown down and now lies in the adjoining grounds. In its fall it struck the slate roof on the northeast side of the brick tower and crushed it over a considerable space, breaking, at the same time, some of the sustaining timbers. Some large stone ornaments were also knocked from the tower and front wall of the church, and the bell wheel was broken. A number of the memorial windows of the edifice were broken and the roof on the southwest side was somewhat damaged by timbers from the residence of Mr. Thomas H. Bankard, about a hundred yards west on Bond street. The church is probably damaged to the amount of \$2,000.

The roof, with its sustaining timbers, of the dwelling of Mr. Bankard, was caught up by the wind and carried across the corner of Belle Grove Park, part of it falling on a tree of considerable size, crushing it to the ground, and the remainder landing on the roof of the Reformed Church, as already stated. Some of the bricks at the top of the wall were knocked off and broke through the ceiling of a room occupied by George L. Stocksdales, Esq., who had just fitted it up with a handsome carpet, suite of furniture and costly rugs, which were somewhat damaged. Mr. Bankard's loss approximates \$200.

The stable and chicken-house on the premises occupied by Mr. J. R. Eader, on Bond street, a short distance west of Mr. Bankard's house, were blown down and completely wrecked. Some of Mr. Eader's chickens were killed and the residue perished from the cold during the night. The premises are owned by Mrs. Jesse A. Smith, of Orlando, Florida, whose loss is considerable.

A large new frame building connected with the carriage factory of Mr. John E. Eckenrode, on George street, was severely strained and somewhat twisted on its foundations. Mr. Eckenrode estimates the damage of \$100.

A portion of the brick wall of the second story of the large cooper-shop of Messrs. W. S. Myer & Bro., on Liberty street, was blown in and the building considerable damaged. The damage can be repaired at an outlay probably not exceeding \$200. The roof was covered with snow and was not blown away but settled to the floor and is not badly damaged.

The roof was blown off of a portion of the dwelling of Mrs. Isaac C. Baile, on West Main street. Mrs. Baile had retired and was asleep, and was not aware of the damage to her property until the following morning.

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A portion of the rear porch at the residence of Mr. A. M. Warner, West Main street, was blown down.

A large spruce tree in the yard of the Misses Cassell, at the junction of Main street and Pennsylvania avenue, was blown over and fell against the porch and roof causing some damage.

At the residence of Mr. Milton Schaeffer the panes of glass of a large window in a room in which several of his children were sleeping, were forced in by the wind and the room rendered untenable. The sky-light at Mr. Schaeffer's store, on Main street, was blown off and fell on the roof of the iron warehouse, breaking it considerable.

All the damage above reported was sustained by property west of the railroad, and there were many instances of minor losses, including \$5 or 10 to the Lutheran Church, the slate roof of which was slightly broken and a few small holes made in one or two of the memorial windows. The wheel of Mr. Edward Lynch's wind-pump, on Liberty street, was blown off and dashed to pieces in the garden of his son, Mr. M. John Lynch, adjoining.

Just east of the Green street bridge over the railroad, the upper half of the front of Messrs. H. S. Roberts & Co's. fertilizer factory was blown out and landed on the opposite side of the street. The building is owned by Mr. Edward Lynch. The loss is probably \$15 to \$25.

At the residence of Mr. Charles V. Wantz, on East Main street, a number of venitian shutters were blown off, two of which could not be found and were probably broken to pieces. A dozen large plate-glass window panes were also broken, exposing a room, in which some of Mr. Wantz's children were sleeping, to the fury of the storm.

At the residence of Mr. U. L. Reaver, East Main street, a chimney was blown down and the roof slightly damaged.

Half a mile east of the city limits the barn of Mr. Francis A. Wampler was badly wrecked. The roof was blown off, and the framework of the ends blown down, it was a comparatively new structure, having only been built a few years. It will probably cost \$400 or \$500 to replace it, if not more.

Probably the greatest sufferer by the storm is Mr. Jesse Smith, near Linwood. His dwelling house was unroofed and one gable wall blown down, the barn was unroofed and wrecked, two sheds or barracks, one of them a new structure sixty feet long, were destroyed and a large tree was up rooted and fell on the dairy, which was crushed under its weight. The loss is variously estimated at \$2,500 to \$4,000.

At Linwood the storm did consideration damage. The capola on the house of Mr. Nathan Englar was blown down, Mrs. Eliza Englar's house was damaged by the falling chimneys, and a large number of window panes were broken in the residences of Messers. Joseph Englar and J. W. Messler. A small footbridge over Little Pipe Creek, in the same vicinity, was blown away.

A large grain-shed belonging to Mr. Alfred Warner, near New Windsor, was demolished.

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A large corn-crib owned by Messrs. L. F. Miller & Sons, at Double Pipe Creek, was overturned and broken and a number of chimneys and small outbuildings in the vicinity of Bruceville blown over.

A shed fifty feet in length and partly enclosed, on the premises of Mr. William Allgire, near Houcksville, about eight miles east of this city, was wrecked. Part of the enclosed portion was used as a chicken-house and a number of the fowls were killed by the falling timbers. Those that escaped perished by the cold during the night and were found frozen on Monday morning.

Half-a-dozen haystacks belonging to Mr. E. N. Blizzard, near Patapsco, were overturned by the force of the wind and some of the hay carried away and scattered in every direction. Much fencing was overthrown in the same locality.

From the best information obtainable it is apparent that the storm was cyclonic in character, that its course was from west to east and its vortex limited to a mile, or less than a mile, in width, possibly not over half-a-mile. Outside of that path the wind rose to a gale, but did not attain sufficient velocity to do much damage. It is apparent, too, that the tornado was not in contact with the surface of the ground along its entire track, but passed most of the distance, over which it extended, at an altitude sufficient to avoid contact with trees and buildings. The widespread storm that followed it drifted the snow which fell on the previous Friday very badly, blockading some of the county roads entirely. Even the Littlestown turnpike, north of Stonersville, was impassable, the snow having been drifted to the height of the fences across its entire sixty feet of width.

Photo caption: The steeple at St. Paul's German Reformed Church, Belle Grove Square, in Westminster toppled during a February 19, 1893 tornado that caused widespread destruction in Carroll County. The tall wooden spire was originally built in 1868-70 and was not reconstructed after the tornado's damage.