

NEPA no stranger to devastating tornadoes

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One of the worst tornadoes to hit the city of Scranton came on July 3, 1834. The gale reached its peak just before dusk as the wind uprooted trees and lifted roofs, houses, barns and fences, dashing them to pieces.

The wind leveled a meeting house, partly built, carrying its frame some distance. Wind lifted the house and store of a Mr. Cottrill from its foundation, turned it around from the west to the northwest, and left it in that position. The house's chimney fell, covering a cradle holding an infant. But the child had been shielded by some boards and was found unharmed.

A large timber passed like a battering ram entirely through the tavern house, stopping only when it embedded itself six or seven feet into the hill just in back of the building. The force of the wind drove timbers into the south abutment of a bridge that crossed the Lackawanna River.

The wind drove gravel through panes of glass, leaving holes like those a bullet would make.

Office upside down

The funnel caught the office of Elisha S. Potter, Esq., and carried it more than 100 feet before letting it down, completely inverted, its roof in the ground. Mr. Potter was inside conducting business with Otis Severance at the time. Both escaped without severe injury.

One of the most frightening incidents during the tornado happened to a young woman who lived half a mile from the village, directly in the tornado's path. Afraid of the raging storm, she had sought refuge in bed. While she lay there, the tornado blew the roof from the house, lifted the bed and carried it some distance before putting it down safely in the adjoining meadow.

Cyclonic winds hit the Lackawanna Valley again on Oct. 27, 1906. The storm started just before 6 p.m. in Peckville and made its way down the valley. It uprooted trees, downed utility poles and wires, ripped the roofs from some homes and leveled others.

Coal breakers wrecked

The most shocking effect of the storm was the destruction of coal breakers. In Peckville, the storm reduced to a mass of wreckage the upper part of the Scranton Coal Co.'s massive **Ontario breaker**. Frank Pickering, the night watchman, was making his rounds when the storm hit. With the breaker's timbers falling around him, he groped his way outside. Winds ripped the roof from a nearby freight car. Damages at the breaker were estimated at \$75,000.

Old Forge bore the worst of the storm. The upper portion of the **Jermyn No. 1 breaker** fell in, wrecking valuable machinery. The breaker was unsalvageable, but the men would be able to start work within a few days at the Jermyn No. 2, which had been idle. Damages there were estimated at \$100,000.

At least 12 people were hurt in Old Forge by falling debris. The house of John Applenap, near the Sibley breaker, was lifted from its foundation and caught fire. By some freak of nature, the wind - instead of fanning the flames - extinguished them.

Most of the damage in the city happened in North Scranton. The upper part of the Lackawanna Coal Co.'s **Cayuga breaker** was blown down. The wind blew over eight large smokestacks at the engine house. Two miners narrowly escaped injury.

One tragedy occurred -at the **Exeter Breaker** of the Lehigh Valley Coal Co. in Exeter. Joseph Mackin was just finishing work for the day when the wind blew the top from the breaker, leaving him trapped inside under a mass of debris.

Rescue workers came to his aid. Hearing him calling for a priest, they dug a tunnel to Mr. Mackin and sent for Father J.P. Quinnan of St. Cecilia's Church. Father Quinnan crawled into the tunnel to ease the last moments of the dying man's life.

The 1906 storm was one of the worst to hit our area. Next week, part two of our story will detail more devastating tornadoes.

CHERYL A. KASHUBA writes on behalf of the Lackawanna Historical Society. She is co-author of the book "Scranton."