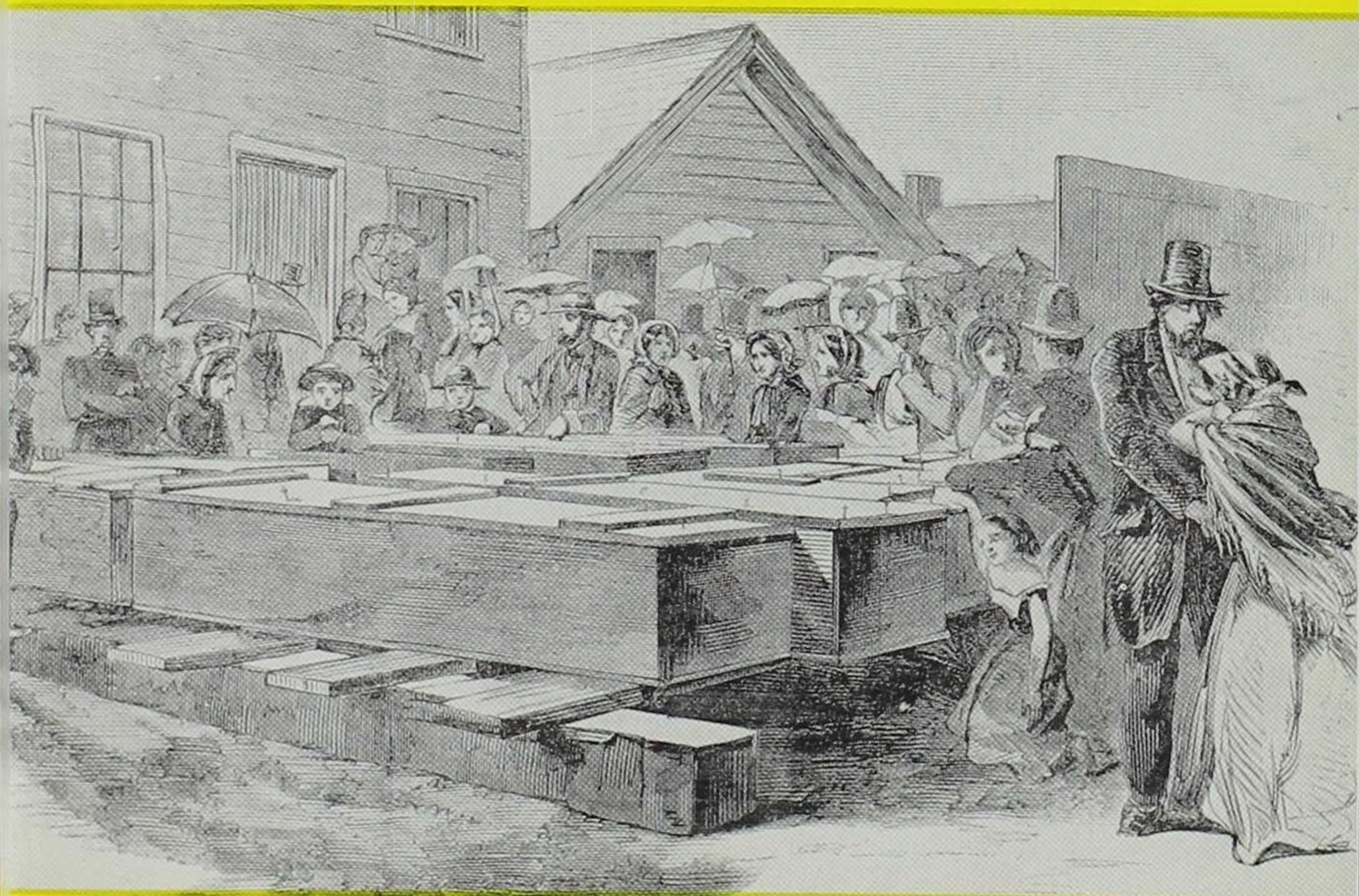


The
PALIMPSEST



The Twenty-Two Coffins for the Dead, at Camanche

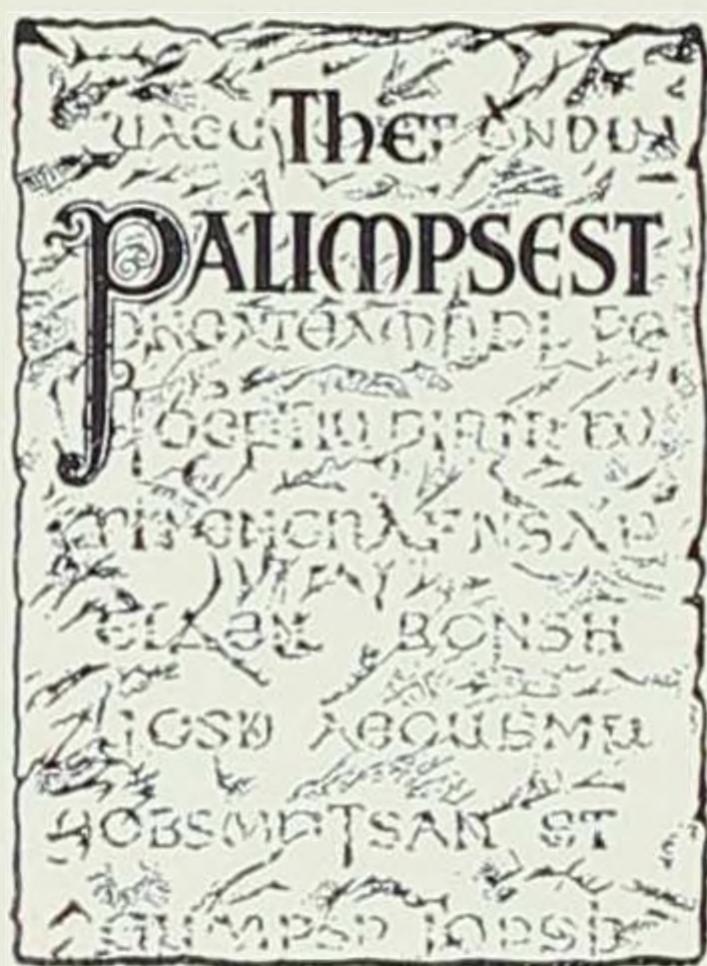
TORNADOES IN IOWA

Published Monthly by

The State Historical Society of Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa

DECEMBER, 1959



The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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Illustrations

Illustrations are from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *The Story of a Storm*.

Authors

William J. Petersen is Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa. "The Camanche Tornado" is reprinted from the April, 1933, issue of *THE PALIMPSEST*, and "The Pomeroy Cyclone" appeared in the same magazine for June, 1926.

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT
IOWA CITY IOWA UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

PRICE — 25 cents per copy; \$2.50 per year; free to Members
MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual Dues \$3.00
ADDRESS — The State Historical Society, Iowa City, Iowa

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XL

ISSUED IN DECEMBER 1959

No. 12

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Cyclones, Windstorms, Tornadoes

Cyclones, windstorms, and tornadoes have afflicted Iowans since pioneer days. The devastation wrought by the elements caused heavy loss both in life and property resulting in frequent comments by eye-witnesses. Captain William Clark recorded winds of cyclonic proportions on July 29, 1804, as the Lewis and Clark expedition toiled up the Missouri.

On the S.S. passed much falling timber apparently the ravages of a Dreddfull harican which had passed oblequely across the river from N.W. to S.E. about twelve months Sinc, many trees were broken off near the ground the trunks of which were sound and four feet in Diameter.

The destructive force of summer windstorms in Iowa was noted in handbooks, gazetteers, and newspapers. Prior to the Civil War at least two Iowa windstorms were severe enough to attract national attention. Thus, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* of June 18, 1859, recorded a destructive storm in Johnson County south of Iowa City on May 24. The magazine contained

five graphic pen sketches plus a brief but vivid account of the tornado by J. A. Wetherby of Iowa City. Although the History of Johnson County published in 1883 declared no lives were lost the account of this "most remarkable and destructive phenomena" in the Iowa City *Republican* of June 1 clearly reveals that the loss of life and property was heavy even though the storm did not pass through Iowa City.

The following year, on June 3, 1860, the Camanche Tornado devastated more than a hundred mile tract in Iowa. It virtually obliterated the sleepy little town of Camanche, six miles below Clinton, before crossing the Mississippi into Illinois. The Camanche Tornado was described with graphic woodcuts in *Harper's Weekly*.

The Camanche Tornado, like the Grinnell Cyclone and the Pomeroy Cyclone, is illustrative of the destructive nature of cyclones and tornadoes when a populated area is struck. The tornadoes of 1859, 1894, and 1902 best illustrate the type of havoc wrought in rural areas.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

The Great Tornado of 1859

On May 24th, 1859, the area south of Iowa City was visited by a devastating tornado that left death and destruction in its wake. A resident of Iowa City, J. A. Wetherby, wrote an unusually graphic account of the tornado, and accompanied it with such fine sketches, that *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* of June 18 gave it front page coverage. The descriptions by Mr. Wetherby which follow were not overdrawn, those appearing in the local Iowa City press carrying fuller and more harrowing accounts. According to Mr. Wetherby:

On Tuesday, the 24th of May last, a tornado, which has seldom been exceeded in violence and destructive power, passed over the strip of country which lies to the south and south-east of Iowa City, laying waste all the tract over which it went.

The day had been fine, but rather sultry — a sort of foretaste of summer, but towards the evening the dark clouds piling up in heavy masses in the west, threatened that a stormy night would ensue.

But while the people of the town were anticipating the coming storm, the tempest separated at a point a little north of west, each part bearing away on opposite sides of the city, while at the point of division the first germ of the tornado was apparent in a small funnel-shaped mass of vapor.

As the mass moved on to the south-east, the formation enlarged and its spiral motion became perceptible in that retrograde whirling, like the back movement of the hands of a watch, peculiar alone to the tornado of the northern hemisphere.

During the progress of the tornado, two giant oaks, one measuring at least three feet in diameter, standing near together, were uprooted, one thrown to the westward, the other east. Another, probably two feet through, was snapped like a pipe-stem close to the ground. Another, larger than any of these, and probably sixty feet in height was stripped of its massive branches fifteen or twenty feet from the base, and its huge antlers strewn in every direction, with apparently as little effort as though they had been the twigs of a rose-bush. Many of these branches are reduced almost to firewood. Most of them split rail fashion. One stick, converted from the very heart of an oak into a capital fence post, was found imbedded in the earth so deep that two men were unable to stir it, the projecting part probably four feet long, and the balance doubtless six or ten.

Wherever the tornado passed, the houses are levelled with the ground, fences were stripped of their boards, posts taken bodily out of the ground, the prairie in every direction was covered with bits of timber and shingles, and every growing thing in the fields was stripped of its leaves, flattened into the earth or torn up by the roots.

Furniture, moveables of every description in and about the houses, were rent to pieces and scattered along the tract for miles; here the broken round of a chair, there part of a bedstead, here a bit of some once precious daguerreotype; whilst, worse than all, the bodies of those who fell victims to the violence of the storm lay amid the wreck of their once happy homesteads.

We have not yet learned how many were killed, but

from the loose accounts which have reached us, the loss of life must have been great.

As to the nature of this tornado, we have little to say. We are not so versed in the theory of storms as to account with readiness or ease for the wonderful variety and fearfulness of this phenomenon. That tornadoes and water spouts, however, are produced by the conflict of opposing currents of air, is supposed to be an admitted, as it is a rational fact; but whether those currents are necessarily diametrically opposite, or strike each other at various angles, is a matter of dispute.

The editor of the *Iowa City Republican* was appalled by the destructive nature of the tornado. He followed in the path of the storm, recording the loss of life and devastation to property. According to the editor of the *Republican* on June 1, 1859:

. . . There was not very much rain in the immediate vicinity of the whirlwind, not much more rain falling there than fell for a half a mile or a mile on either side of it. The cloud which bore the whirlwind, in appearance differed in no essential particular, as we could discover, from an ordinary thunder cloud. It was not blacker, nor was it moved to its place in the heavens with any greater velocity or force than we have witnessed an hundred times before. — It was not until the conical form of the cloud had descended, apparently reaching the earth, that the cloud looked black and assumed a majestic and threatening appearance. Then it looked like a moving column of black, dense smoke, such as is sometimes seen emitted from large furnaces. Coming in contact with the earth, the base seemed about of the same color, a little darker if any thing, and the base and the apex seemed to move in a

perfectly perpendicular direction. The fragments of boards, timber furniture, nearly all fell perpendicularly, so that hundreds and thousands of the splinters now dot the prairie and describe the path of the king-storm. The persons who were in the vicinity of the river say that the whirlwind lingered at the river for a few moments, and that the water was lifted by it in such large quantities that the bed of the river could be discovered. We cannot ourselves vouch for this. It may be true, probably is, as credible witnesses seem sanguine on this point.

And here is a little incident which may not be improper to mention, when first discovered and arresting attention from chamber windows and house tops, it was about due West, and Iowa City seemed to be exactly in the range of its flight. Soon after it became apparent that it was being borne to the South of the City. — Then it was that women ordinarily more fair than brave, more curious than wise, in the sweet innocence of their hearts and lives *audibly* wished that the water spout would not prove so coy, but would come where it might be seen and handled and petted. Innocent, yet dreadful wish! had it come directly over the City, the City in all probability or parts of it, would have been a pile of ruins, to-day smouldering and seething in the blessed rays of a Summer sun. Hundreds of thousands of dollars would have been stricken from the tax rolls, and hundreds if not a thousand lives would have been offered up to the insatiate spirit of the storm. As it is, five valuable lives have been lost, six very seriously injured, some dozen or more, more or less injured, and property to the amount of at least twelve thousand dollars has literally and suddenly taken wings. Thanks from ten thousand hearts and incense from fane and fire-side should ascend to Him who guides the whirlwind and holds the ocean in his hand, that He directed its journey away from the peopled town and sent it on its terrible

mission across the sparsely settled prairie. Gratitude, sympathy and acts of large hearted and deep pocket benevolence should be excited in behalf of those who mourn their loved ones, as well as of those who though they yet live nevertheless by an inscrutable dispensation of Providence are caused to suffer in mind, body and estate.

First hand descriptions of tornadoes and cyclones afforded exciting reading for the Iowa pioneers who differed little on their choice of literature from their Twentieth century descendants. Perhaps the recital of the misfortunes of others helped to lighten the seemingly endless toil and privation of the average pioneer. At any rate editors filled their columns with lurid accounts of crime and disaster, leaving the everyday happenings to the imagination of his reader, and of the historian.

It is comforting to record that for fully three quarters of a century Iowans have been protected from the heavy losses caused by cyclones, windstorms, and tornadoes. On March 10, 1884, Lorenzo Dutton of Fayette County took out the first policy in the Iowa Mutual Tornado, Cyclone, and Wind Storm Insurance Association. This policy, covering \$1,100 of property for twenty years, though modest in amount, is historically significant as we observe the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Mutual Tornado Insurance Association.

The establishment of the Iowa Mutual Tornado Insurance Association at West Union in 1884

marked the beginning of a new era in mutual protection that gained peak after peak during the Twentieth Century. During the seventy-five years between 1884 and 1959 this statewide association has grown from a small regional company to one with statewide coverage and tremendous assets. Its steady growth, due to its many fine agents and satisfied policy holders, simply reflects the strong leadership it has had over the years.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

The Camanche Tornado

It was sultry for the third of June. In the brick church of the Methodists, men dozed peacefully, while their Baptist brethren, in a "neat frame building," were equally soothed by the warm air and the voice of their minister. Even Reverend George D. Young, the Presbyterian pastor, found it hard to hold the attention of his flock.

Outside, the whole town of Camanche lay steeped in Sunday torpor. The brick schoolhouse seemed strangely quiet and empty after its winter's activity; the fine three-story brick Millard House, run by H. G. Sessions, was almost deserted; and Joseph W. Waldorf's large brick block, which he had built in 1858, showed no signs of the week-day bustle and stir that had characterized its two years of occupancy. No traders, with grain and pork, enlivened the market place; no land speculators proclaimed the virtues of the little town as a location for business and an ideal place for homes, beautifully situated on the level west bank of the Mississippi where the majestic stream sweeps around Beaver Island to the southwest.

The calm and peace continued throughout the long, hot afternoon. Neighbors came to call; men

talked of the prospect of a railroad bridge being built across the Mississippi at Camanche instead of at Clinton some six miles upstream. The women spoke of the prices paid for flour and sugar at Westphall's grocery store, or commented on the latest fashions. The darkening sky about 6:30, and the clouds along the southwestern horizon, occasioned no great apprehension. "A shower will cool us off," they said with relief.

And then, almost before any one realized it, the storm was upon them. The violent shower of rain, vivid flashes of lightning, and heavy peals of thunder sent people scurrying for shelter. It was nearly seven o'clock when out of the west came a menacing rumble and roar as of a heavy train passing over a bridge.

On his farm, three miles west of Camanche, Mr. Ralston saw approaching from the vicinity of DeWitt, a huge, black, funnel-shaped cloud, twisting and writhing with terrific velocity. "Quick!" he yelled at his family. "To the grove! A tornado is coming!"

In desperation they all ran to the locust grove, fearful lest the tornado should arrive before they could reach that doubtful shelter. Suddenly the whirlwind was upon them.

"Lie down on the ground and cling to a tree for dear life!" shouted Ralston above the deafening tumult. Automatically, too frightened to question his command, the family obeyed.

The tornado swept across the yard. The barn and sheds were demolished at once, but the house was picked up bodily and carried about twenty rods west, then brought whirling back to within a few feet of its original location, and finally, with one last vent of fury, "rubbed out as you would rub a snowball between your hands." Not a fragment remained.

On to Camanche rushed the diabolical fury! To a citizen who saw it coming, the tornado then appeared "not larger than a tree," a funnel-shaped "cloud of murky blackness, with the appearance of a thin white vapor revolving around it." Everything in the path of this phantom shape was obliterated. Even the grass was torn up by the roots, leaving the ground bare and black, as if a fire had passed along. The air was full of dust and rain and flying debris. Thus the tornado blasted its way straight through the heart of the town.

Pandemonium reigned! Buildings were sucked up violently by the whirlpool of wind and then dashed to the ground — nothing could stand before the savage onslaught. Through the crash of falling buildings and the frenzy of the storm could be heard the anguished cries of the wounded, the frantic screams of the terror-stricken people, the moans of the dying — and always, above it all, the relentless bellow of the wind.

Flashes of lightning revealed the air "filled

with fragments of lumber, furniture and trees flying in every direction with the force of cannon balls." Everything was in chaos and confusion — a jumble of shattered buildings, dead animals, and wreckage of all kinds. Bewildered and frightened, the residents of Camanche knew not how to escape the terror which had descended upon them.

But in less than three minutes the tornado had left Camanche and passed over the river to Albany, Illinois. "Darkness immediately closed over the scene." Soon, out of the general gloom, came the glimmer of lanterns as some of the survivors extricated themselves from the wreckage and tried to help those pinned under the ruins. Messengers were dispatched at top speed to Clinton and Lyons to secure aid.

The storm was over at Clinton, and the air was soft and balmy, with a few stars peeping through the clouds, when up the street dashed a rider from Camanche. Scarcely drawing rein, he called out: "Camanche is destroyed by a tornado, and half the inhabitants are buried in the ruins! Send down all your doctors and materials to dress the wounded!" Then he hurried on, repeating the message wherever he saw a group of people.

In an instant, all Clinton was agog with the news and every one was eager to render every assistance possible. Superintendent Milo Smith immediately "despatched all the hand-cars at

hand, and gave orders for a train to at once be prepared to carry to the spot all who desired to go." The steamboat *Queen City*, loaded with sympathetic helpers, came from Lyons and stopped at Clinton to pick up additional passengers. Meanwhile, every available vehicle had been pressed into service and an advance force of nearly a hundred people were speeding along as fast as they could to aid the distressed town. By this time, the moon was out bright and clear, the sandy road was washed hard and firm, and it seemed difficult to realize that death and destruction could be so near. But when they reached Camanche quite a different scene met their eyes.

"God save us from ever seeing again such a sight as that village presented," was the prayer of one man. "To describe it would be impossible. No conception could be formed of the scene except by seeing it, and once seeing it would haunt the memory forever." Although nearly as familiar with Camanche as the streets of Clinton, he could not recognize "a particular quarter of the town."

With great difficulty the host of volunteer workers picked their way "over fragments of buildings, fences and loose materials of all kinds to the few shattered fragments of houses that still remained upon First Street. Here were chiefly gathered together the dead that were found and the wounded who still lived. Parents were weeping for their children and children for their par-

ents. Here a husband bent sobbing over his dying wife, and here a mother, with frantic joy, pressed to her bosom the child she thought was lost and found to be alive. Many seemed blessed with a calmness from on high; many were beside themselves and many were bewildered and overcome with stupor."

Seeing that they could be of no service there, the men from Clinton and Lyons "rushed on as a relief to join the eager souls who were toiling like giants, removing the rubbish in search of other victims." Hour after hour they worked frantically. "The ruins strewed around, the hideous distortions of the dead, the mangled bodies of the living, the multitudes of eager, grimy workmen, the peaceful summer night and the clear moonlight overhead," formed a scene "never to be erased from the minds of any who were present."

All night they toiled and by morning it was possible to take account of the devastation. The entire length of Front Street was in ruins. Every business building was destroyed, including Waldorf's new brick block, the three story dwelling and grocery store of Gottfried C. Westphall, and the Millard House. Churches, schoolhouse, and most of the dwellings were demolished, and the streets looked "as if a heavy flood had swept over them," strewing timbers, boards, shingles, cord wood, and trees all over the town.

"At about half past ten a rude platform was

erected" in the street, upon which were laid nineteen dead bodies that had been recovered and placed in rough pine coffins. These "bodies were so mutilated and mangled that it was utterly impossible for their friends to recognize them except by the placard that had been placed upon the coffins by the persons who laid them out."

Later that day, the list of the dead, as announced by Judge William E. Leffingwell of the coroner's jury, included twenty-eight persons. Eighty-one were estimated to have been injured. Hundreds were homeless and without food or clothing, but the good people of Lyons and Clinton and other cities of Iowa were prodigal in their donations and in their willingness to help the victims in every way possible.

Public funeral services were held on Tuesday and by ten o'clock in the morning some of the people had begun to gather, although the procession did not move to the cemetery until one P.M. The services were opened by the whole assembly of two or three thousand people joining in singing a hymn, after which "remarks were made by the several clergymen present, Rev. A. J. Kynett, of Lyons, taking the principal part." The simple ceremony over, "the coffins were loaded upon wagons and the procession formed, in which was nearly 200 teams. It reached from the place where the dead were deposited on Front Street to the grave yard" one mile distant.

An observer noted that "besides this, large numbers went to the graveyard on foot. It was an imposing spectacle, and certainly speaks well for the people in the vicinity of the catastrophe." All business was suspended in Lyons and about half the population attended the funeral, many of them having been at Camanche most of Sunday night and Monday as well.

Probably the great majority of those who visited Camanche were impelled by the humanitarian urge to help fellow humans in distress, but there was the usual influx of sight-seers also, and these persons found many strange phenomena to satisfy their curiosity. Among the exhibits was a cedar shingle of ordinary size and thickness which had been driven through Waldorf's store in the very opposite direction from the course of the tornado, and which was "forced through the clapboards, lathes and plastering without a fracture or a bruise."

The chimney of Mr. Anthony's house, "weighing nearly a ton," was blown off and deposited in a perfectly upright position in a garden about ten feet away, "without a single crack." One of the most singular effects of the storm occurred when the lower story of a building on First Street was blown into the river and the upper story simply dropped down into its place, almost uninjured. It was intriguing also to observe that "upon some roofs the shingles were stripped off in fanciful

FRANK LESLIE'S
THE ILLUSTRATED



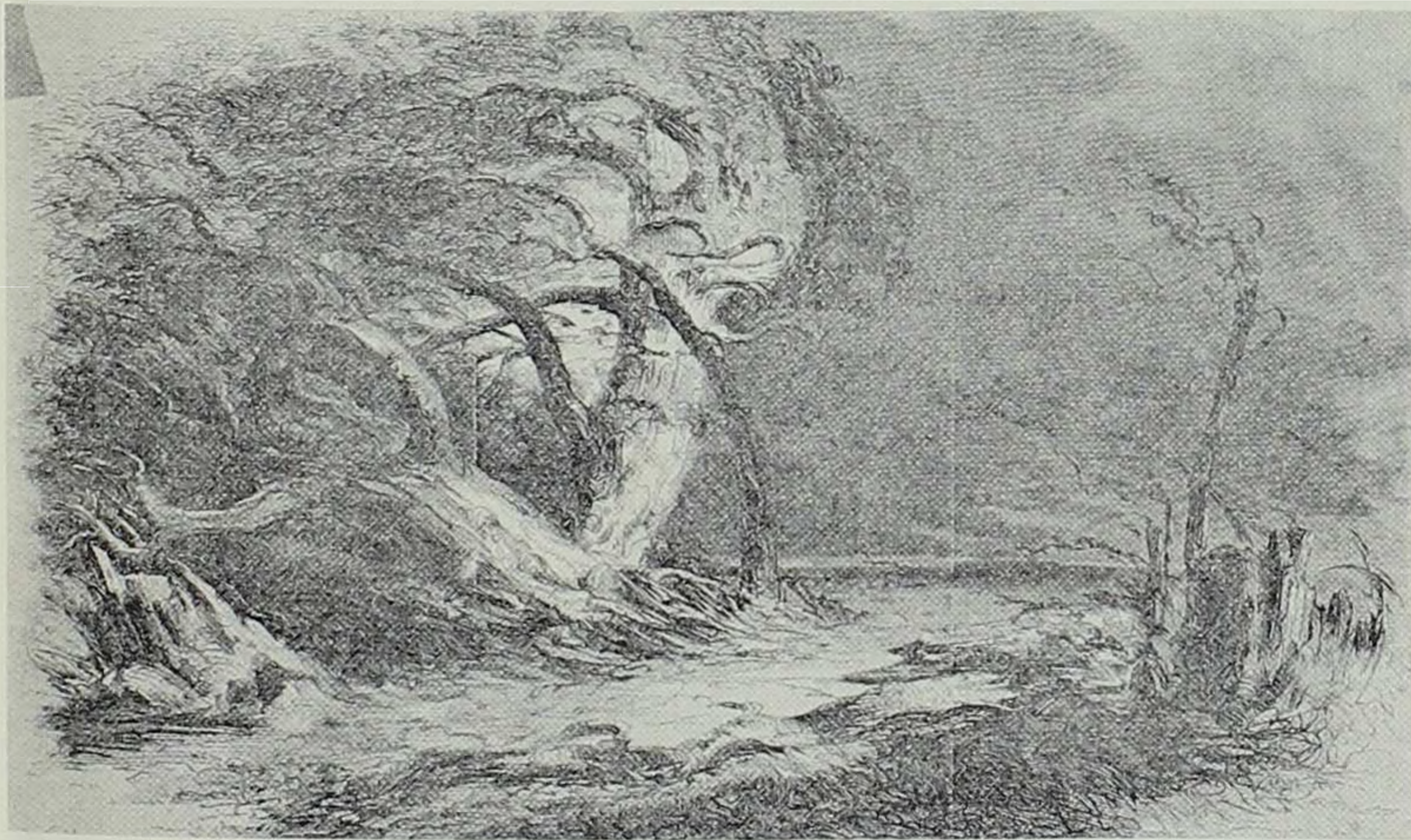
NEWSPAPER

Printed according to Act of Congress in the year 1859, by FRANK LESLIE, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Northern District of New York.

No. 185 - Vol. VIII

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 1859.

PRICE 6 CENTS.



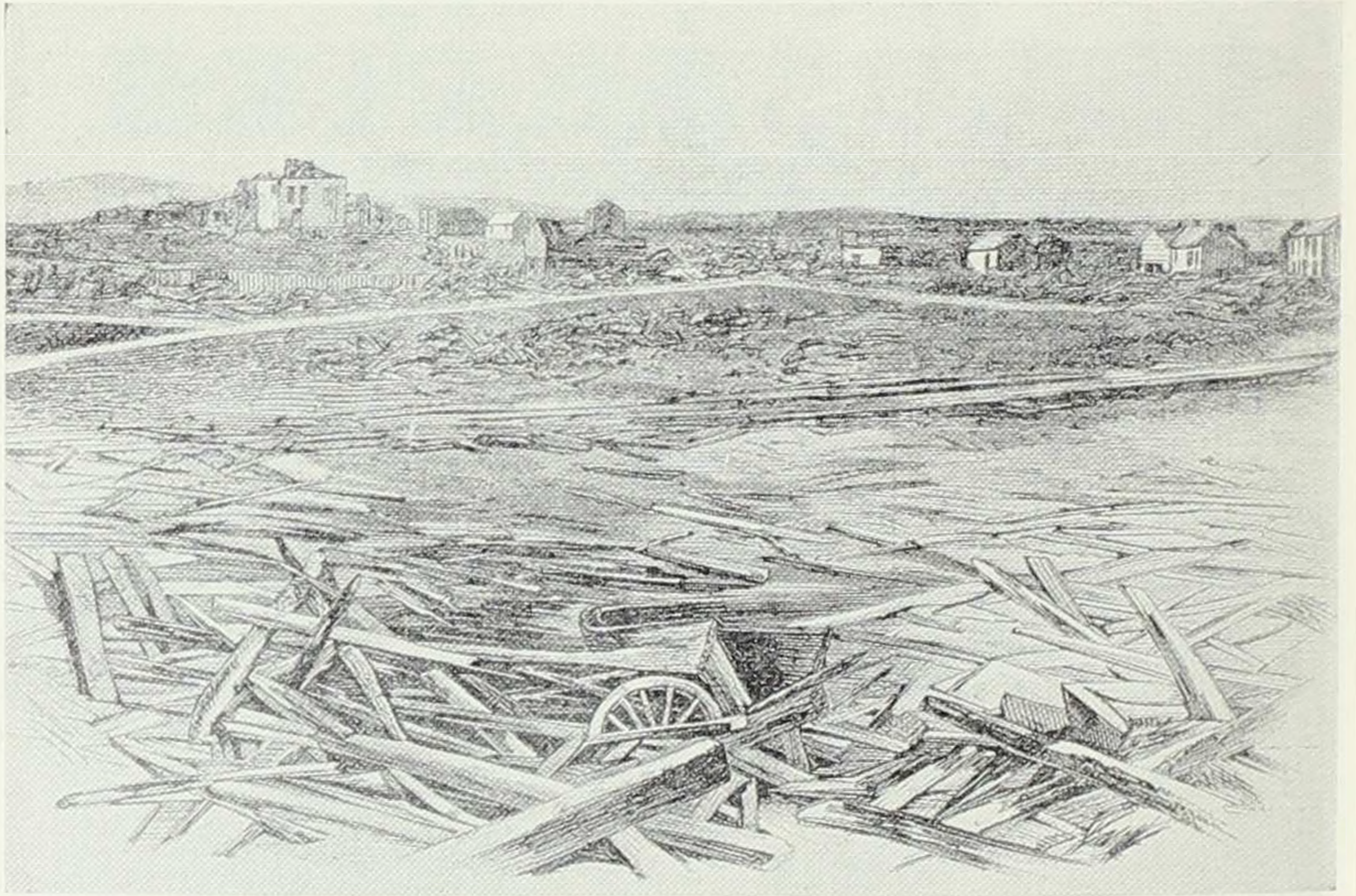
Sketch by J. A. Wetherby

The Great Tornado of 1859 Passing Over the Timber



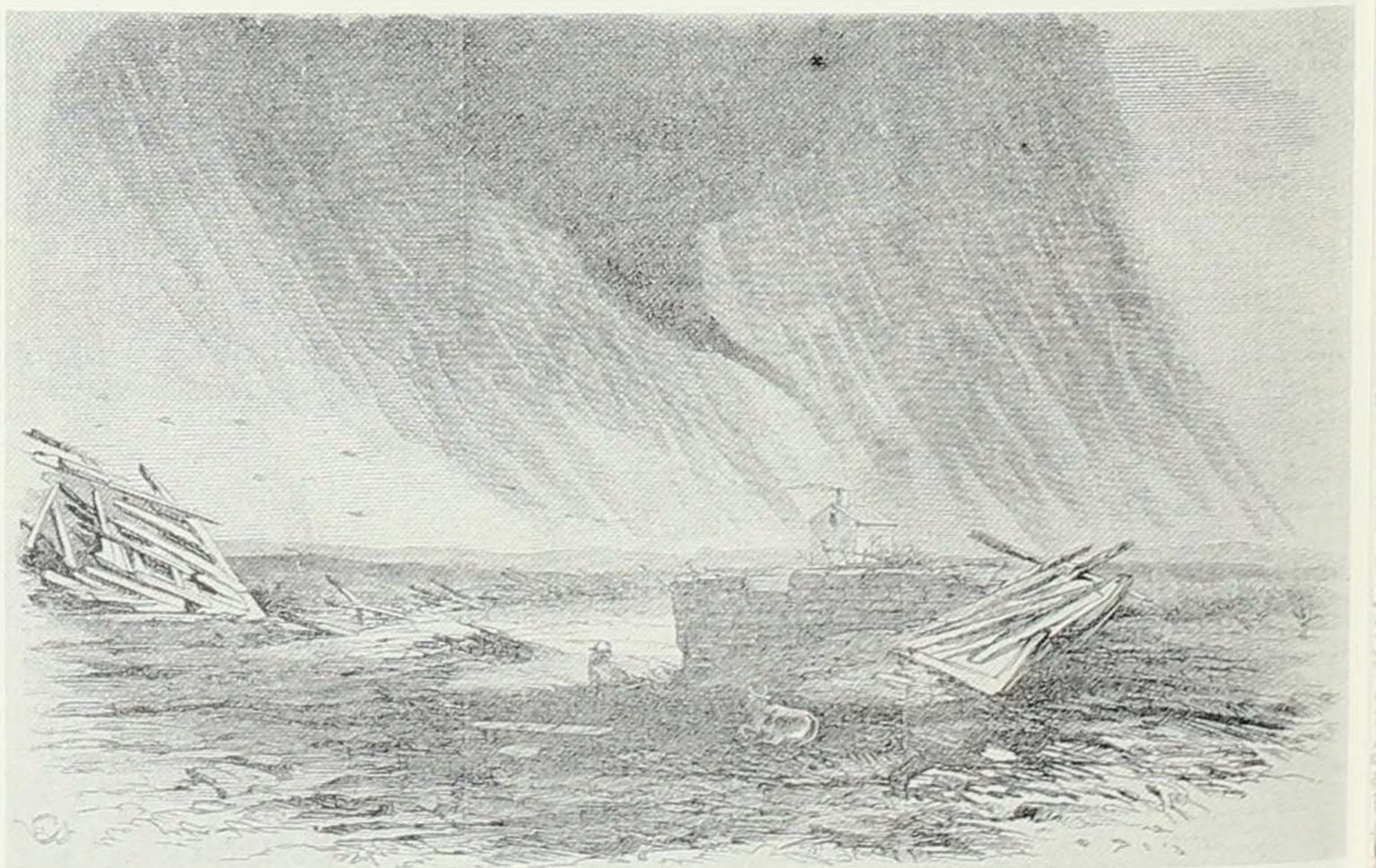
Sketch by J. A. Wetherby

Scene After the Tornado Had Passed



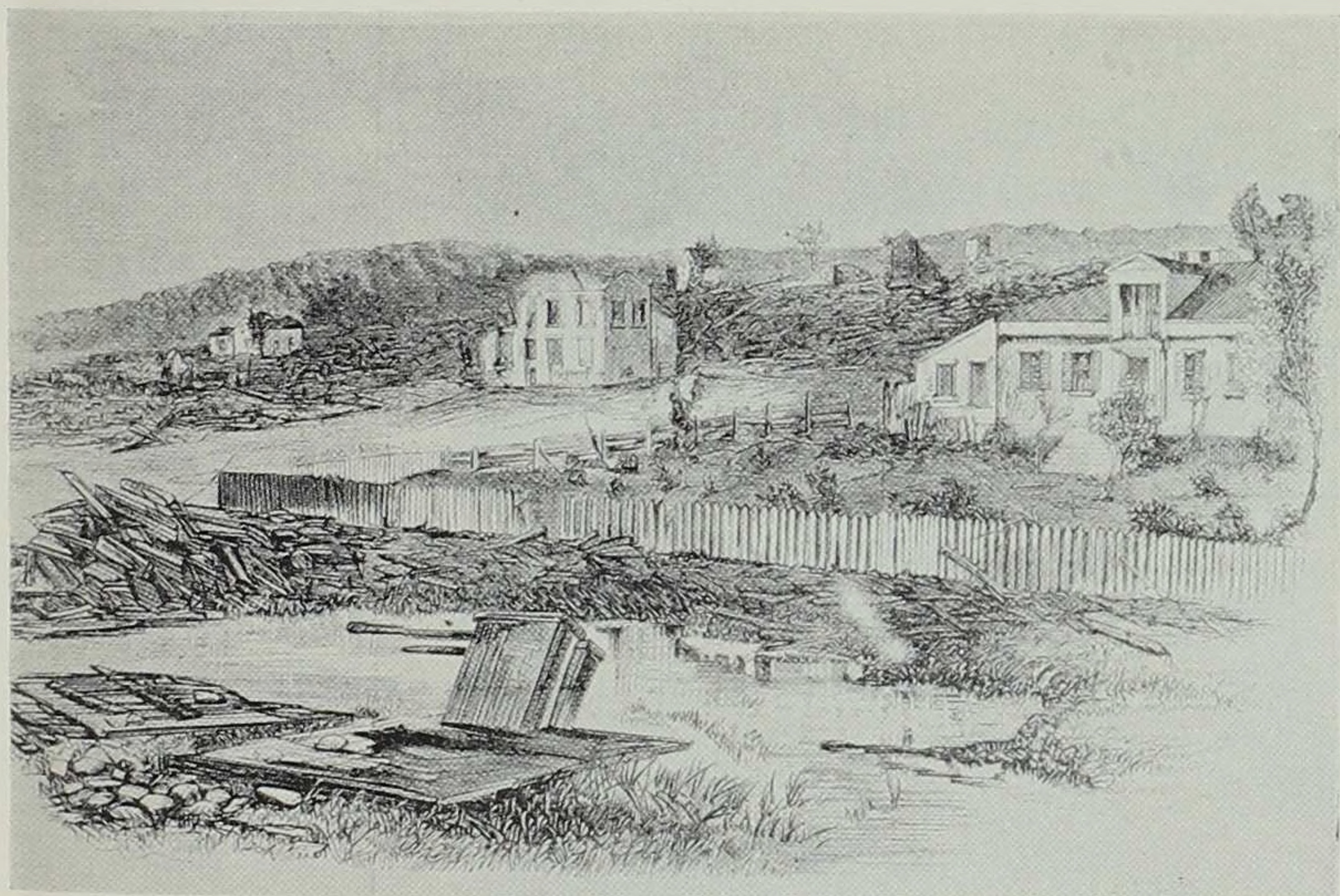
From *Harper's Weekly*

Devastation After the Camanche Tornado — 1860



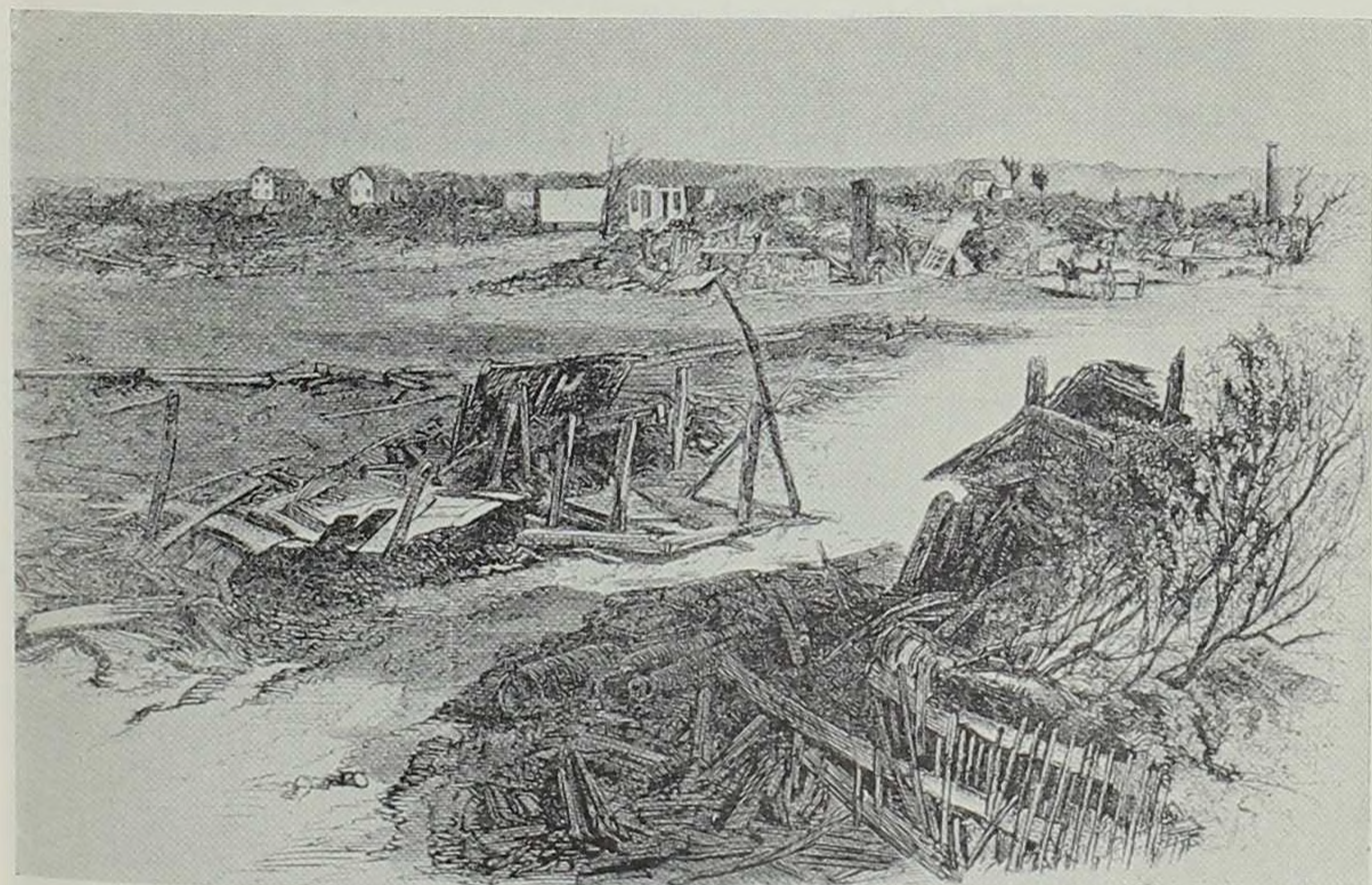
Sketch by J. A. Wetherby

An Eye-Witness Drawing of the Tornado of 1859



From *Harper's Weekly*

Ruins of the Camanche Tornado — 1860



From *Harper's Weekly*

Aftermath of the Camanche Tornado — 1860

"It would seem impossible, on looking at the devastation, to suppose it the work of so short a time."

THE IOWA CITY TORNADO — 1859



Sketch by J. A. Wetherby

Family Taking Refuge in a Cellar



Sketch by J. A. Wetherby

After the Tornado Had Passed

shapes, a bare spot upon one roof exactly resembling the figure eight."

But if a visitor to Camanche exhausted the visible evidences of the storm's caprice, he could always be regaled by the stories of eye-witnesses. One citizen related that "his first realization of the power of the storm was in seeing a horse come flying through the air at about twenty feet from the ground, followed by a cow at about the same height and which must have been carried over three hundred feet." Or Mr. Butler would tell how his stable was carried away over the treetops, and the horses left standing on the earth floor, attached to their rack.

Some of the tales, however, must have taxed the credulity of even the most gullible listener. For example, it was reported that "a child was blown from fifteen miles west of Camanche to that place and landed uninjured." Also that "a man was furiously borne some distance, caught in a tree and held fast desperately while the furious wind stretched straightly out his body and stripped him utterly of his boots and all his clothes."

Probably the most amazing story of all, in some respects, was not revealed until some time after the tornado. It seems that the Tiler's jewel of the Masonic Lodge at Camanche had been blown to Ogle County, Illinois, "where it was picked up by a lady and worn as her breast-pin for some time,

before its identity was discovered by the skillful eye of one of the craft."

However exaggerated these stories of the storm may be, there is no doubt that the tornado which struck Camanche on the evening of June 3, 1860, was one of the most tremendous on record, "rivaling the cyclones of the Indian ocean, the hurricanes of the West Indies and the typhoons of the China seas, in the distance that it swept, from central Iowa to the interior of Michigan, and surpassing most tropical storms in the force of the wind."

The first appearance of the tornado in Iowa was noted about fifteen miles beyond Cedar Rapids, where it consisted of two wings. To the south an enormous waterspout was seen "bellying and surging down from the clouds, and twisting and writhing like a huge worm till it finally reached the earth and became an hour-glass-shaped column rushing wildly onward with the gale." Overhead the clouds were of a "purple hue bordered on the van by pitchy black, and the rear by gray and lurid white, constantly illuminated by flashes of lightning." To the north loomed "a mountain mass of heavy, inky colored clouds crashing along the surface of the ground." Somewhere beyond Marion and Lisbon, the two cyclones united and moved eastward together.

The form of the tornado varied at different places. "At times it appeared as an inverted cone,

with a revolving motion, which seemed to hang down from the heavens, and sweeping along, drew up everything in its course. At times it would rise and bound over spaces of half a mile or more, and then settle down again. In some parts of its path, its diameter was from eighty rods to a half mile; in others its main force was contracted to twenty or thirty rods." Once or twice the whirlwind seemed to divide and reunite. "At times it moved in straight lines, and at other times its course was zigzag. Its speed varied — at times moving for miles with the velocity of a train of cars; then stopping and revolving for several moments in one place; then shooting forward a mile or two in a single moment."

Although the storm wreaked the greatest damage at Camanche, it collected a toll of death and destruction all along its path. "The most reliable authorities estimate the total number of killed" in Iowa "at 134" and "over 2500 people must have been rendered homeless." Everywhere the newspapers proclaimed the "Great Tornado" as a national calamity.

DOROTHY WAGNER

The Pomeroy Cyclone

The hot sultry afternoon of Thursday, July 6, 1893, was lazily drawing to a close. A fitful breeze from the east had brought some relief from the oppressive heat of the day. At about five o'clock people living among the bluffs along the west side of the Little Sioux River in Cherokee County looked up and saw beyond the hills two angry clouds, one in the northwest and another in the southwest. Ominous with deep rumbling thunder and sharp flashes of lightning, they rolled up rapidly, growing ever blacker and more threatening. A sinister greenish gloom spread like a pall over the face of nature. On the crest of the hills to the west the two harbingers of violence met, and the whirling tornado swept eastward, carrying death and destruction over a path fifty-five miles long and a thousand feet wide.

At the northwest corner of section thirty-five in Rock Township, Cherokee County, about three miles northwest of Quimby, lay the farm of Jerry Bugh and on the quarter-section to the north was the home of Elroy Cook. There the clouds joined, and there the destruction began. The buildings on both farms were wrecked, but members of the two families suffered only slight injuries. Just to

the east, however, the buildings on the J. H. McClintock farm were demolished and there the first casualties occurred. Mrs. Roy Wright and her child were very severely injured.

As the rolling, greenish bank swept on, the characteristic tornado cloud funnel appeared, particularly noticeable from afar. This swaying, bounding elephant's trunk of vapor picked up the Perry schoolhouse. The building burst like a skyrocket leaving no board fastened to another. From a drive well near-by the pump and about forty feet of tubing were torn out.

By this time people were seeking cellars and caves where with fear they awaited the approach of the tornado. Some heard the storm pass, "like a regiment of railway trains," carrying with it their worldly goods but leaving them practically uninjured. Others were not so fortunate. A short distance west of the Little Sioux River stood two houses which were completely destroyed and there the first human lives were sacrificed. In one of the homes three women and two small children huddled in the cellar. Suddenly the house was torn away and the cellar filled with ruined walls and flying debris. A spoke, torn from some wagon wheel, struck one of the women, Mrs. O. M. Lester, and she died instantly — probably the first victim of the Pomeroy cyclone. About the same instant and on an adjoining farm Mrs. Molyneaux was hit by some flying missile and instantly

killed when the wind demolished the house as she was in the act of opening the cellar door.

When the tornado reached the Little Sioux River, it ripped the heavy iron Pilot Rock bridge from its abutments and dropped the long span lengthwise into the river. On went the twisting cloud, climbing the bluffs on the east bank and continuing its destructive work. Houses, barns, and trees were blown down. Grain and farm machinery were scattered far and wide and live stock was killed. Yet at one farm where the barn was blown away, four horses in it were uninjured. A reaper wheel of solid iron was carried half a mile. Two men were caught in V. M. Grove's big barn when the storm struck. For an instant they were pinned down by the heavy timbers, but a second attack of the wind lifted the wreckage and they were left unhurt.

At another farm the man, his wife, and four children were killed when their home was destroyed. The bodies of the woman and two of the children were blown about sixty yards and were terribly mutilated. The little girl was found under a tree, her limbs swollen and purple and her body so surcharged with electricity, it is said, that it gave a distinct shock to the hand laid upon the flesh. John Peters and his family went to the cellar, but Mr. Peters, returning to close a door, was carried away with the house. His arm was shattered and he was badly bruised and cut.

On the next farm east Marian Johnson was killed in his house while his three children escaped injury. At that point the storm rose and passed over the home of Ellis Whitehead with only slight damage to the buildings but descended again to wage its fury upon the farm of William Slater. There Ida Johnson and Lulu Slater were killed. Miss Slater's body was dismembered, one leg being found two miles away. At the Horatio Pitcher place Frank Lord was killed. The storm then turned north for nearly a half mile destroying buildings and killing seventeen cattle.

At the Cherokee County line the lashing funnel again rose and for two miles no further damage resulted. The first place struck evidently did not feel the full force of the storm, but eighty rods east a house and barn were entirely demolished, while at the next farm the hired man, Barnard Johnson, was blown against a tree with such force that his body wrapped firmly around it. He died two days later.

As the cyclone crossed from Maple Valley Township into Hayes Township the destruction and casualties increased. At the Jacob Breecher place everything except a corn-crib was wrecked, Mr. Breecher and his daughter were killed, and the hired man, Joseph Slade, died from his injuries the following day. Mrs. Breecher found herself sitting on the floor several rods from where the house had stood.

The improvements on L. A. Clemons' place were wrecked, although the house was only unroofed. The escape of several women who were spending the afternoon with Mrs. Clemons seemed almost miraculous. A little farther east stood the home of W. R. Clemons. He had just returned from town and, seeing the storm coming, hurried his wife to the cellar and followed her. Just as he reached the last step he threw up his left hand to steady himself and at that instant the house was torn away and with it the muscles of his arm. Although the bone had been laid bare Mr. Clemons helped his wife, who was also severely hurt, out of the cellar and over to his son's home.

The fury of the storm constantly increased. Unlike the usual balloon-shaped tornado cloud with its tail sweeping the earth, the Pomeroy cyclone developed four descending vortices which twisted, swayed, and bounded up and down as they swung along. Another schoolhouse was swept away completely. Barns were ground to splinters and mixed with horses, cattle, hogs, and poultry. As the *Storm Lake Pilot* expressed it, there was not enough left of several farm homes to build a pig pen and the ground for a mile around was stuck full of slivers and strewn with farm machinery. Chickens, completely stripped of feathers, walked about with an air of consternation and amazement.

Residents of the town of Storm Lake watched with fear and trembling the approach of the storm clouds. Never before had they witnessed such a display of electricity. The air was filled with dust and grass and it was too dark to read.

Then the hurricane struck. The spires on the German Methodist and Catholic churches were torn away. But the center of the storm crossed the lake, whirling the water up into a tall column that moved swiftly forward in a most spectacular manner. A steamboat was the only victim of the typhoon's destructive mood. After the wind had passed, a high tidal wave rushed back across the lake. At the southeast corner of the lake the storm wrecked some barns, killed about seventy head of stock and scattered a hen house, much to the confusion of the chickens within. After passing the Albert Scharm home, however, no material harm was done until the tornado reached section twenty-six in Providence Township where a stable was destroyed. Almost directly eastward it took its course with little damage except to crops and buildings until almost to the Pocahontas County line where John Slayman's buildings were all blown away and every member of the family injured. Crossing into Pocahontas County, the storm took toll only on buildings until, about a mile and three-quarters west of Fonda, it claimed the lives of Mrs. Amos Gorton and her child.

There the storm again veered southward and the town of Fonda was saved from the fate which Pomeroy met a few minutes later. But the cyclone was not to be denied its sacrifice of human life. Almost every farm and home between Fonda and Pomeroy was visited by injury and death.

Like their neighbors to the west, the people of Pomeroy, with mingled curiosity and fear, watched the approach of those threatening clouds welling up in the west. Many remarked that it was "good cyclone weather" but few made definite preparations to seek shelter in caves or cellars, for strangely enough no one thought of telegraphing ahead that a tornado was moving eastward. "The sky was a fearful sight to behold," wrote the editor of the Pomeroy *Herald*. Clouds of inky blackness filled the entire west, "rolling and surging in wild commotion" and pierced by jagged lightning. As the storm approached, the clouds took on a greenish hue, the lightning became continuous, the thunder reverberated incessantly, and the rumbling roar of the wind could be heard above all.

And then, at about six forty-five, the storm struck the town! A heavy rain accompanied by a high wind lasted some ten or fifteen minutes after which there was a perceptible lull — a lull which brought from their caves with a false sense of security many of those who had sought shelter. A moment later the town was literally blown away.

One of the survivors told of remarking to a neighbor that a cyclone was coming. He replied, "Well, let 'er roll," and in telling of the incident the narrator added, "After the promptitude with which his permission to 'roll' was acted upon on this occasion, Mr. M. will doubtless hesitate before again speaking flippantly of a tornado when it is likely to be within hearing distance."

As the storm hit, it was travelling in a southeasterly direction parallel to the Illinois Central railroad track. After taking the full row of houses on the west side of Seneca Street, south of the tracks, it veered southward a block then turned again sweeping clean a path about four blocks wide through the most populous residence district of the town.

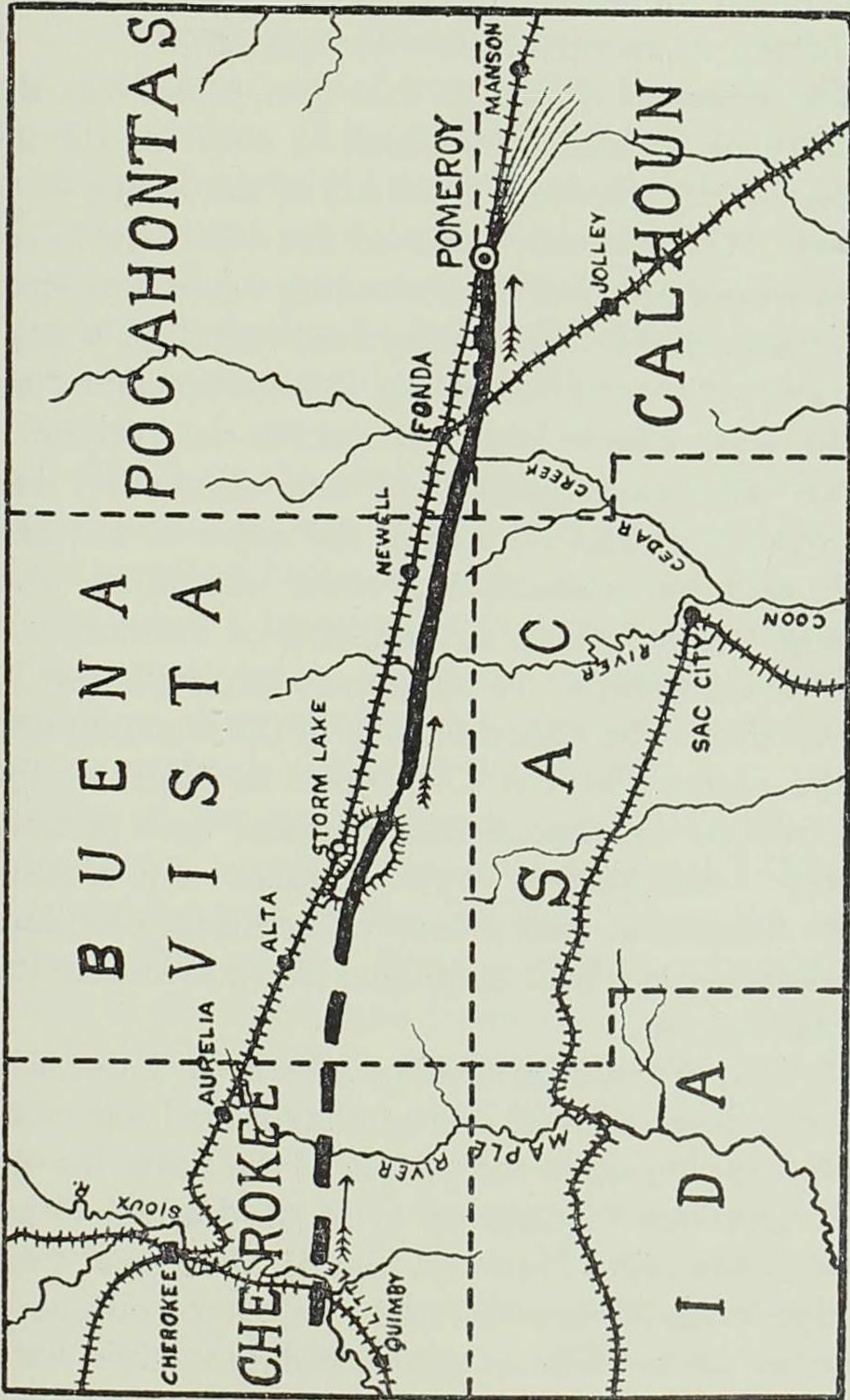
In less than five minutes the devastation was complete. Eighty per cent of the houses were rendered unfit for human habitation and the tornado passed on leaving a track discernible for a distance of two miles east of Pomeroy before the clouds rose and the whirling vortices dissolved. Nearly an hour and three-quarters had elapsed while the storm travelled fifty-five miles. The whirling velocity of the wind must have been terrific, but the forward progress was scarcely thirty miles an hour. An eastbound express train could have easily outrun the cyclone as it moved along the route of the Illinois Central railroad.

The tornado was spent, but there remained the

suffering and anguish of the survivors and the work of relief — a dreary prospect. Out of a thousand people but twenty-one families were left with no dead or wounded of their own to care for. Rain was falling in torrents, accompanied by hail. Night came, covering the town in utter darkness. There were few lanterns and the cries of those imprisoned in the ruins were the principal guide for the rescuers.

Ed Masterson, a Pomeroy banker, secured a horse and started for Manson to secure help. Picking his way over a road almost blocked with debris, he found the bridge over Purgatory Creek washed away and in attempting to cross on foot fell into the water. Swimming ashore, he had barely time enough to flag a west-bound train. Although Mr. Masterson must have looked like a maniac he convinced the vice president and division superintendent, whose special train he had stopped, that Pomeroy had been blown away and that surgeons and supplies must be obtained at once. The train was ordered back to Manson where all available help was taken on board. Another special train was dispatched from Fort Dodge and soon plenty of aid was started toward the stricken town.

Meanwhile J. W. McKeen had ridden on horseback to Jolley, seven miles southwest, making the trip in record time of about forty minutes. There he found Dr. J. R. Thompson who rode



The Track of the Pomeroy Cyclone

post-haste to the scene of the disaster, followed by fifteen or twenty fellow townsmen.

The greatest difficulty that first night was the scarcity of buildings in which to care for the injured, but by eleven o'clock all of the living were housed. Of necessity some of the dead had to remain where they fell until morning when a morgue was established. During the next two days thirty-one graves were filled in the Pomeroy cemeteries. In all, sixty people lost their lives in the cyclone.

No telephones existed in this community but the telegraph had broadcast the news of the disaster and by morning the town was filled with willing workers — to say nothing of hundreds of morbid sightseers. A temporary organization of the workers was effected early in the morning after the storm. M. D. O'Connell of Fort Dodge was placed in charge and surgical and general supply headquarters were opened. By Friday night fifty tents and plenty of bedding, clothing, bandages, food, and medicines were available for immediate use.

At four o'clock on Friday afternoon Governor Horace Boies arrived and at once issued a proclamation calling upon the people of the State for aid and donations. Company G of the Fourth Regiment of the Iowa National Guard came from Fort Dodge Friday forenoon, and was placed on guard duty at once. These guardsmen, together with Company C of Webster City, virtually ruled the

town for two weeks, aided during the first night by the firemen from Storm Lake.

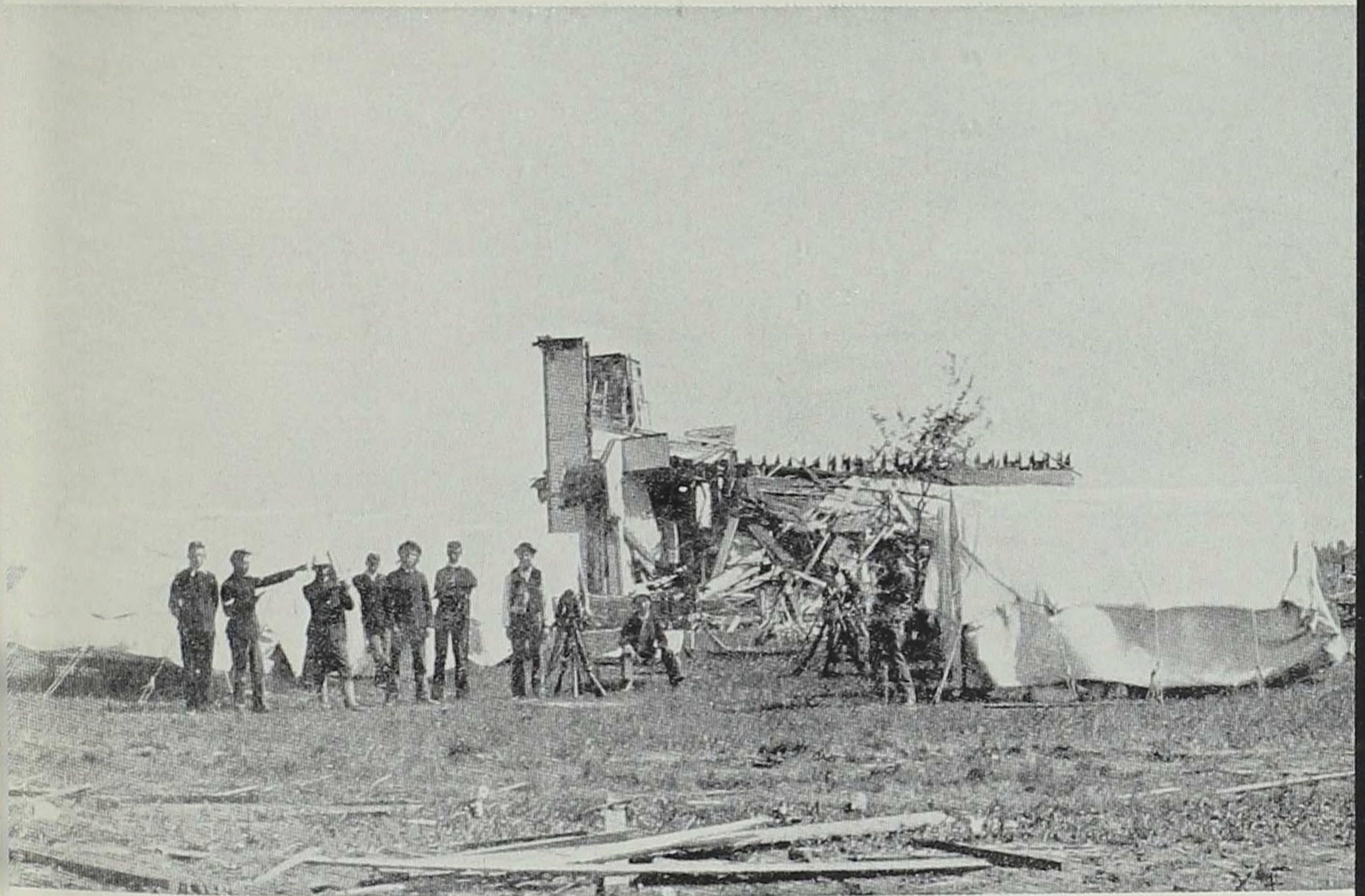
A permanent relief committee was organized Friday evening. This committee was in session almost continuously for ten days after the storm. The money and provisions which poured in had to be receipted for and distributed, plans for aiding the survivors had to be outlined, and the July heat rendered immediate disposal of all dead animals imperative. County Attorney E. C. Stevenson took charge of this disagreeable task and burned the carcasses as fast as possible, using the debris of the wrecked buildings and coal oil as fuel. For several days a large crew of men under Thomas Miller continued to clean up the town, and the success of their efforts was apparent in the fact that no epidemic followed the disaster.

Fifty of the most dangerously wounded were placed on a special train, including two Pullman sleepers donated by the Pullman Company, and taken to Sioux City. Most of these patients were placed in the Samaritan Home and Saint Joseph's Hospital. Of the fifty, one man died en route and four others during the next ten days, but within two months the others were able to return home.

The storm was over, but the work of the committees went on. By October 12th cash contributions of \$69,761.23, exclusive of a donation of \$2000 by Webster County, had been received and acknowledged. Besides money, plentiful sup-

plies of medicine, clothing, and food had been distributed. The people of Iowa and friends from Pennsylvania to Nebraska had done their share to alleviate the suffering and to make it possible for the new Pomeroy to spring up, characteristic of the indomitable energy of the prairie communities.

JAY J. SHERMAN



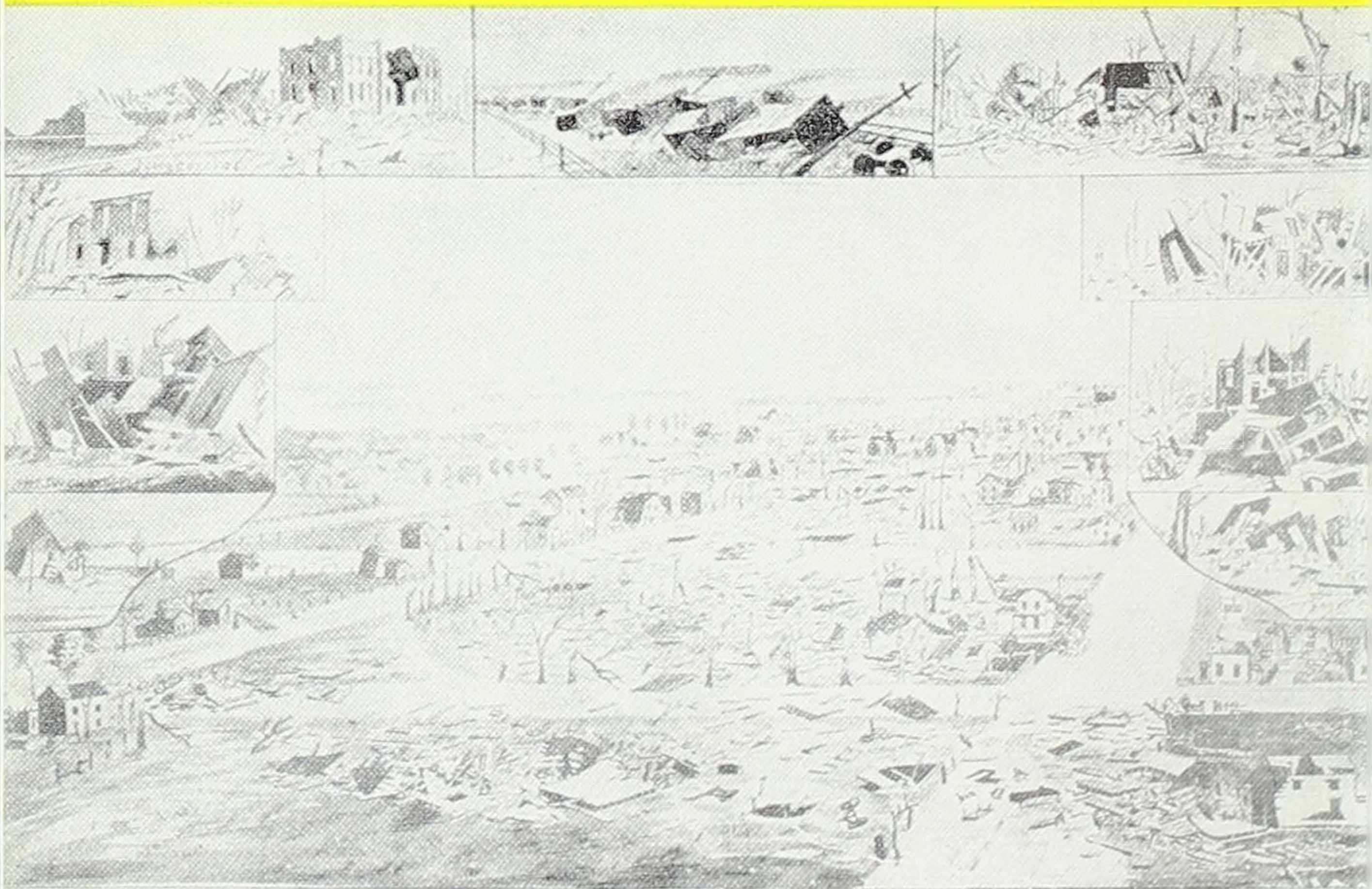
Guard Headquarters at the Schoolhouse in Pomeroy

From the Story of a Storm



A View of Pomeroy from the Southwest

From the Story of a Storm



Scenes from the Grinnell Cyclone