

# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XL

ISSUED IN DECEMBER 1959

No. 12

Copyright 1959 by The State Historical Society of Iowa



## 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