

## 1866 - Tornado

Source: Crawfordsville Weekly Journal 19 April 1866 p2

THE GREAT TORNADO SCOTT TOWNSHIP, MONTGOMERY CO., April 11th, 1866. Mr. EDITOR: Having traversed that section of the country visited by the terrible tornado of the 20th ult., for near thirty miles, I herewith submit a brief description of the same. It was after a day of unusual warmth for the season, that the tornado passed through our section of country. At sunset a heavy bank of clouds was seen to lie in the west, reaching several degrees above the horizon, and at the same time extending from the south-west to that of about north.— Thunder was heard at different intervals. At this time my observations ceased, until seven o'clock when my attention was again directed to the approaching cloud, by a low, rumbling noise, somewhat unusual, accompanied by almost continuous flashes of lightning and deep, heavy thunder. The cloud, I noticed, had extended farther south and was rapidly gathering in the south-west. At about half-past seven I was again attracted to the door by the increasing noise, and stepping out, I at once realized the character of the storm, seeing from the vivid flashes of lightning and from the loud, rolling sound, that a terrible tornado was fast approaching from about 25 degrees south of west, in the direction of the same point north of east, sweeping on with great rapidity, scattering dread and menacing destruction in its path. From the continued and almost incessant flashes of lightning which illuminated the sky in every direction, it was rendered partly visible. There was a terrific grandeur about it that surpasses description. It seemed as though the very heavens themselves were dissolving back into their original element. It is needless for me to say that at this time my nerves were unsteady. I have witnessed the fierce tide of battle, reposed under the heavy fire of artillery, participated in the struggle for victory, and met the fearful charges of the enemy with much more coolness than I could manifest under the approaching crisis. At this time its appearance showed two layers or strata of clouds, one above the other, while a less denser cloud filled the intermediate space. The one below, which seemed almost to sweep the tops of the forest trees, had rather a white, fleecy appearance the intermediate a bright white while the upper strata assumed a darker and more angry aspect. The flashes of lightning were rapidly discharged from the upper to the lower strata, accompanied with low, heavy thunder.— This rolling mass of matter resembled in shape a common funnel, largo at the top and tapering to the earth's surface, and must have moved forward at the rate of one hundred miles per hour.— The noise at this time was incessant and appalling. The air seemed to be rushing in at the top and supplying the force as fast as exhausted below. But a few moments and the shock was over—the tornado had passed, leaving behind it a desolate track, that will in some respects be seen

for the next century to come. My observations since commence a half mile south of Russellville and continue to nearly south of Lebanon. From the point south of Russellville for about twenty-four miles it is on a complete air line, angling as before described to the north of east about 25 degrees. At this point for four miles it lays almost directly east, when it angles again to north of east, and raises, doing but little damage for the next two or three miles, where my own observations cease. Its width at Russellville is about a half mile two or three miles further east it is near three fourths of a mile wide, and just west of Ladoga the timber has been broken for about one mile in width after this it has gradually contracted until the point where I left off, being only about fifty yards wide. Along this entire track of near thirty miles it is a scene of desolation. Houses, barns, timber, fencing, logs, and even in some places stumps have been wrenched out of the ground. Many of the houses and barns have been blown down to their very foundations, shivered into thousands of pieces and scattered over considerable space of ground. But what is very remarkable, along this entire line but four persons were killed.— Several were wounded but the wounds were generally of a slight character. There was stock killed at several places along the track. The fencing, in many places, was removed several rods from where it stood, and in some places the rails were carried for a quarter of a mile. The timber was thrown in every direction—cast, west, north and south—and in one or two places drifted as though it had been inundated by water. Large oaks, and in fact all kinds of timber, was broken off, and turned up by the roots. Some twisted off, others splintered into hundreds of pieces, and now and then a large tree, with some of the small undergrowth, was left standing as a guide-post in this track of desolation. The storm seemed to have been more destructive in some places than in others. More especially is this the case about three miles eastward from the point south of Russellville. On the farm of Henry A. Foster, it seemed to have culminated in all its fury, carrying and moving almost everything before it. His house was blown down, and his wife and two children killed. Mr. James' house was also blown down, and his daughter, aged about 11 years, killed. The losses sustained by persons along the line is very great, and will amount to thousands of dollars.— In years to come, the great tornado that passed through Montgomery and adjacent counties on the 20th of March, 1866, will be described as among the most destructive known to our latitude. R. H.