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A SHORT
DESCRIPTION
OF THE
TORNADO
OF
APRIL 5th, 1936

BY
JUDGE C. P. LONG
OF
TUPELO, MISSISSIPPI
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INTRODUCTORY

The contents of this pamphlet is composed of a copy of letter written by me for a lady friend of mine, who is engaged in procuring facts for the Historical Department of Mississippi and my reason for putting same in this form, is that practically every one, who has read it, desired a copy of the same, and in this way, at a small price, I can accommodate them.

I have no desire to make any gain from the cyclone and if enough people want this pamphlet, to more than pay the cost of production, the same will not be kept by me, but will go for a worthy cause.

C. P. LONG.
ing was somehow not as usual; suddenly the lights were all extinguished and darkness was everywhere; one seemed to be partially engulged in some cave and the air was thin. As soon as all lights were extinguished and darkness ensued, this writer's notice was called to a roaring, nerve-racking sound, in the south and southwest, as if a mighty army or a cavalcade of heavily-laden freight trains was fast approaching the city and in less time than it can be written, the wrath of the universe seemed to be turned loose upon us. Trees and houses were falling, window glass, doors and plastering were coming in, roofs were disappearing and every moment seemed hours and this world's stay seemed about at its end; however, I have heard several people say that they heard this roaring, some time before the lights were extinguished and have heard one or two say that they stood in their west windows and saw the storm in its wrath and fury at work at Willis Heights and out west of the city, and could see trees falling and houses tumbling down before it reached Tupelo.

Strong men and women were paralyzed for the moment and realized how helpless we all are when the great forces of God, or Nature or the Devil are turned aloose. (I say God, or the Devil or Nature for the reason that the reader can have his own opinion; I have one of my own, but have heard so many ideas about who sent this catastrophe, that I do not care to get up any argument on that proposition).

Anyway, it is my hope and honest, sincere wish, that whoever did send it, will be able at all times in the future to find a home market for the same or never see any good reason for sending anything of that kind back this way again.

The first destructive effect of this monster (which for advertising purposes) may well be called the world's greatest land cyclone, occurred or took place in what is known as the Black Zion neighborhood, about fourteen miles southwest of Tupelo, on the west side of Pontotoc County, where several homes and other buildings were totally demolished and many others partially destroyed and some three or four people were killed.

It seemed, after leaving this neighborhood, that it rose in the air a sufficient height that for a distance of six or eight miles no extreme damage was done and no lives were lost, but swooped to earth again about six or seven miles southwest of Tupelo, in the Metcalf community, again commencing its destructive efforts, there destroying and tearing down several homes and demolishing other property and killing people, some six or seven in this community being left dead or practically dead after its passage, and making its way across Coonewah bottom, upon reaching the higher land on the east side of the same, it again commenced its work of uprooting trees, sweeping away homes, crippling and killing people along its entire course.

At one place, Mr. Burrough's home, the house or home of the family, was razed to the ground; kindling wood was made of the home and the entire family, consisting of thirteen in number, were blown and scattered in every direction, and were all left cold in death, all over the community.

Next reaching Willis Heights, or Harrisburg Heights, a thickly settled and well built up community, of many pretty homes on Highway No. 6, it come tearing down this highway, like some mad animal, leaving on each side of the same, a mass of uprooted trees, lumber, shingles, roofing, Ford cars and other debris, picked up and scattered in every direction, and also leaving many dead and many seriously injured, as an indication or example of its destructive force and power and practically every one without a home, and swiftly bowing itself across King's Creek lowland, where there was nothing to satiate its appetite or destructive force, it landed in Tupelo, seemingly more anxious to destroy and terrorize than before; striking at the west end of Main Street, it extended its main route of endeavor and greatest force as far east as Madison Street and also with some less destructive effect, on to as far east as Broadway, in the lower portion of its route and went in a northerly and noreasterly direction, across the northern portion of the city, making its exit across Park Lake. In its main path or that portion where there was the greatest force, it carried practically everything before it at one gust.

The extreme width of the path of the same, where damage was done, was more than a half mile wide, but the path of the greatest force, where everything, or practically everything, was taken, was something like three hundred yards in width.

From reports of the doings and performances
and happenings, taking place by reason of the force and power of the same, it is my impression that in the area of the greatest force, there was only one big fell swoop, the power and force of which was sufficient to destroy and carry off everything in opposition to its progress and travel.

There is no way to explain, many of the strange freaks and observable results of the same, which were left and were observable after its passage.

In some places the front part of a home was totally destroyed and the back part practically uninjured and the next house, the back part was destroyed and the front left in good condition, but everything situated in the path or force of the wind was injured, more or less in some way; however, this was not a poor man's storm nor a rich man's storm. It picked no special class to work on. Every church, with one or two exceptions in the city, was seriously damaged and left unfit and unsafe for use and occupancy.

A friend of mine told me a few days ago that he overheard a conversation between two people on a train down in the central part of the state, in which it was stated, that the only two churches injured or damaged were the First Baptist and the Calvary Baptist church, and the person talking stated that their misfortunes were perhaps imposed on them, because there had been a dissenion, etc., resulting in two churches.

This person evidently had arrived at this conclusion without full knowledge of all the facts, as there were only two churches not damaged, and one of these was struck by lightning and set on fire a few weeks afterwards and considerable damage done, and the two Baptist churches referred to in above conversation were the only ones in the city carrying enough insurance to rebuild.

Cottages and mansions all suffered alike; and saints and sinner; atheists and infidels at the conclusion thereof were numbered among the dead and seriously injured.

The theory has been advanced by some, that: the good were taken as an example, to the bad, of God's power and what He could do, but this theory is falacious I think for the reason that, all that went did not belong to any one certain class.

At my home, which was not in the direct line of the main force of the wind, but some fifty or seventy-five yards out of it, there seemed to be instead of a direct gust, taking everything at one movement, a round or whirling process. It made about four butts at us, showing some of the nature of a billy goat. Trees on every side of the house were uprooted and brought back on the house. The garage, which was situated with the extreme east line of the house, was blown away, nothing but the brick foundation left and parts of same have never been found, but a car situated in the garage, was not scratched or hurt. A cord of stove wood stacked up in the same did not have a stick blown off, and one of the doors of the garage, although the wind was supposed to be going in a northeasterly direction, was carried to the upstairs room in the southwest corner of the home and landed on the bed in this room, tearing it practically to pieces. A few days afterwards, the man who sold me this wood and stacked it, was in the office to sell me more wood, and I told him how his wood withstood the force of the wind and how good it was stacked, and he said, "You bet when I stack it, its stacked."

Unfortunately at the time of this conversation, I had already let my contract for a new home; otherwise I could have had this man stack me up one which would have withstood future cyclones and tornadoes.

This is only one of the many strange results or effects of the storm. Hundreds of things of the same kind took place, which are unexplainable. Shingles and pieces of timber were blown and carried unaccountable distances and ripped into and tore up buildings far distant from where they were brought, penetrating walls, posts and trees. Chickens were completely stripped in some places of their feathers and left with their entire bodies exposed to the gaze of the curious and vulgar, but this fate did not befall all of them, as I have heard of two old mother hens, which had not yet adopted the theory of birth control, which were on their nest, doing their duty in providing more chickens for the consumption of man, and were untouched or interfered with and remained at their post of duty throughout the whole disaster and afterwards brought into life full grown broods and raised them.

Before reaching Tupelo for an interval of time, there seemed to be a rift, or partially thinner place in the clouds than existed on either side thereof and on each side there was a raging, roll-
ing, terrific movement, and when those opposing forces came together there was an explosion, which brightened and illuminated the cloud over the greater area or part of the same.

No details of individual losses or damage are attempted to be given herein, brought about here or any other locality over which the cyclone passed as to give such would enlarge this communication far beyond what it should be and if the same were attempted there would necessarily be many omissions and inaccuracies in the same.

After passing out of the City of Tupelo and crossing Town Creek bottom, the force of the same swooped upon the residents of Auburn neighborhood, about six miles east of this city, where many houses were destroyed and damaged and several lives were lost and many others seriously injured.

The force of the wind continued for many miles thereafter but it must have arisen above the earth far enough to abate to a great extent its power to tear down and destroy property and kill people, for many letters, papers and articles of clothing, which were blown from Tupelo and other points along its path, were found as far as one hundred or one hundred and fifty miles northeast of this place.

A kitchen cabinet, which had belonged at one time to some one in Tupelo, was found intact and uninjured somewhere in the northern part of Itawamba County. I do not know whether the owner of this cabinet has ever been found, but it would seem that the manufacturers of this cabinet, if they could procure the same, would be willing to pay a good price for it, as an advertisement of the kind, character and quality of cabinets manufactured by them. The fact is this cabinet seems to have been as well built as the stove wood referred to owned by me, was well stacked.

There has been considerable discussion and effort on the part of our people to locate the exact minute and second that the cyclone came along without any degree of success, for the reason that the time varies according to the time shown by the watch or clock of each individual owner of such at the time of its appearance, and it is a well known fact that no two running clocks or watches ever show the exact same minute and second for the only kind of clock and watches exactly on the same time are those not running.

About half of the people who have ever tried to say exactly what time it was, say that their clocks or watch stopped at exactly the time the storm hit, but no two stopped at the same time. Approximately speaking, it hit this community some time between 9:00 P. M. and 9:10 P. M., and I suppose was about two or three minutes in passing, when figuring on the same, after enough time has intervened to allow such computation, but during the short time of its passage and the short time of its approach, it appeared then to be hours.

More than two hundred people were either killed outright or afterwards died, by reason of and on account of injuries received in this catastrophe. Many others were seriously injured, some of whom will be crippled for life on account thereof. Perhaps the property damage, when closely estimated, was around four million dollars. Hundreds of other people were rendered of such nervous temperament thereby that they will never be able to look any kind of cloud in the face without undergoing fear and trepidation and hundreds, who up to that time, had never had any gray hairs, have since that date, noticed that they have more or less of the same, and mostly more.

The loss of animal life in the path of the wind was also of great moment and magnitude. I am informed, that to bury the mules, cows, hogs, dogs, cats and poultry that were killed in the storm in the city limits and close around thereto and which were afterwards hauled out and buried, required four trenches or ditches, seven feet wide, eight feet deep and one hundred and fifty feet long, for animal grave yard purposes, and this notwithstanding most of the people ride in cars in this city and buy their milk from dairies out in the suburbs.

A large part of these chickens that were killed had been deprived of their feathers. Many cows had lost their horns and a great many of the mules and cows had been punctured by flying timbers and had great holes punctured in different parts of their bodies by these objects and were bruised and battered and their limbs broken and crushed.

I do not know how widespread this feeling of distrust of each other existed among the husbands and wives of the city prior to the cyclone, but I have heard of one colored family whose home was...
next to the city water tank, which was blown down and torn to pieces by the wind and thousands of gallons of water was turned aloose upon the home, and the wife, who was still not good awake or in a dazed condition, was wading through the water and thought she was crossing the river Jourdan, approaching Heaven, but suddenly she heard her husband speak and said that she realized then, when she heard his voice, that she was not in Heaven.

Anyway, if such feeling did exist, I am sure that after the passage of the wind, and since that time, conditions along this line have been better.

I remember that some time, after this monster, made its appearance, there was an editorial in some Chicago paper, which attributed the coming of the same to the way the southern people had treated the colored people in the past, but this theory is not tenable, for the reason that the cyclone did not skip anything except Indians in its passing, and the reason it skipped them was because there were no Indians in it, and therefore I think that it would be a more reasonable theory than the Chicago paper theory, to say that perhaps some Indian God sent it on us, because we had, a long time ago, robbed the Indians out of their land.

This cyclone and the one in Georgia made their visit on the same day and of course would not necessarily have any connection one way or the other. There was also that same night a cyclone or tornado at Booneville, Mississippi, where considerable property damage was done and some homes destroyed and if I am correctly informed, three or four people were killed.

There was some argument and dispute between the editor of a Tupelo paper and the editor of a Booneville paper afterwards, as to whether the Booneville wind was a branch or outshoot of the one here, one claiming that it was and the other claiming that it was not, which question I am not going to debate, as we had all we needed anyway and a long ways more than we wanted. The "BIG BOSS" was here to say the least of it, and we had no objection to the balance of his family going somewhere else.

I have stated in an earlier place in this letter that no one of the age of accountability, who survived, would ever forget their experience.

I now remember that I have heard of one old lady who slept, through the entire performance and it so happened, that the home she was in was not blown away, but the roof was carried off and the rain, as herinafter stated, was then coming down, and when she woke up, with water pouring in her face, she stated to the lady of the house "that the house was leaking."

Up to date I have only mentioned the main path of the wind but there were minor paths separate and distinct from the other. There was one which crossed below Main Street, which was not over seventy-five yards wide, which did considerable damage to the lower end of the town, where one of the biggest property damages was done at the Tupelo Oil Mill and in this streak, although it was narrow and although not so many buildings were blown away, trees were uprooted and much damage done. However, I do not think there was any loss of life along the path of this junior streak which passed that way.

Approximately speaking, there was about forty-two blocks of city property destroyed or more or less damaged. After the passage of the wind, there was a few minutes in which the people all over the storm stricken area were panic stricken and dazed and no one, at that time had any conception of the wide spread disastrous results of the same. Many people were among the debris and wreckage left and the cries and screams of the injured and wounded could be heard on every side. The streets were full of trees and other wreckage and travel along the same in any kind of vehicle was practically impossible.

Within just a few minutes after the passage of the same, fire broke out in the large home of Mrs. Georgia May Weaver, situated out near the public school building and also in the home of Mrs. Frank Monaghan on North Spring Street, and one or two other places, but fortunately, there was then a down-pour of rain and although there was burning shingles and other objects carried from these burning buildings for long distances, there was no further spread of the fire. This rain, which followed the storm, was a God send and perhaps prevented a holocaust on account of fire, which would have been practically uncontrorollable had it become general throughout the city, as it would have been impossible to have made any successful fight against the same, on account of the unsettled condition of the people, the impassable condition of the streets and the
interference which had taken place with the water works system of the city. I saw burning shingles from the Weaver home in the air, some this rain, disastrous results of the storm, on account of the fire, which would have ensued, would have perhaps been more disastrous than the storm itself.

In the greater portion of the city, the water system was out, out of commission and even drinking water was unobtainable.

As stated, no one had any conception for a short time after the wind ceased, of the wide spread desolation which had ensued; however, it did not take the people very long to commence the work of rescue and salvage, both of human life and property.

Unfortunately, as there always is, there were a few people ready to take advantage of the misfortunes of others and pilfering and stealing, in some places, commenced, but this was not allowed to proceed for any great length of time. Fortunately, Battery “C” of the 114th Field Artillery of the Mississippi National Guard. was located here, and within an hour’s time, this organization, consisting of sixty men and four officers, were out, engaged in rescue work and guard duty, and they remained on duty both night and day for about forty-eight hours, and were afterwards supplemented and helped by units of the National Guard from all over the State of Mississippi, and military rule was inaugurated, with Adjutant General John A. O’Keefe in command.

In addition to this force, many private citizens, who were outside of the path of the main force of the cyclone, and a great many in the path, who were not hurt, also went into active work and cooperation in this relief work and guard duty, and many members of the American Legion also volunteered their services and engaged in the same.

I have heard, practically my entire life, a few people make the statement “that no one cares for any one else and the misfortunes of one person are private affairs of his own and have no appeal to any one else.” I have never adopted this idea as my own and have never believed it. But if I had ever had such an idea, the same would have been thoroughly dispelled, after seeing and witnessing the quick response by every one locally and in surrounding territory in coming to the aid of the unfortunate of this territory.

The response, both by personal service, subscription of money, expressions of sorrow and true sympathy, was something wonderful, some instances of which will be mentioned without any intent to over-look others.

Just about the time, or a little while after the passage of the storm, a passenger train on the Frisco railroad, reached Tupelo. A sufficient time had, then intervened for a partial realization of the vast property damage and loss of life and personal injury to others. Telephone and telegraph communication had been cut off and the conductor of this train without authority from any one, and realizing that by such action, it might cause him to lose his position, took the personal responsibility, to hold this train here to gather up the wounded and injured and carry as many as might want to be carried to the hospitals at Amory and Aberdeen and Columbus, holding the train in Tupelo until about two o’clock that night.

The driver of one of the Greyhound busses, without any authority from his superior officers, carried several injured persons to the hospital at New Albany, and the passengers on the same, I am informed, through kindness and sympathy and desire to assist in the work, agreed to lay over in New Albany and allow him to return to Tupelo and take others who needed to go to the hospital.

Doctors from all over the county made quick response and offered their services free of charge, coming here to help alleviate suffering and save the lives of the injured people. The railroads and public service corporations tendered their equipment and lines, for service free of charge; and nurses came also from all the neighboring cities. The houses and homes of a large part of the people who had been fortunate not to have the same destroyed, were thrown open and were converted into temporary hospitals and homes for those who were injured and were also open for the reception, care and abiding places of others who were left without shelter and protection.

My flock, consisting that night of eleven, was taken in and furnished a place of refuge by two neighbors. At one of these places there was just twenty-three people who spent the balance of the night there.

The Court House, the City Hall, the theatres
and that part of the churches which was left safe for occupancy were all converted into and used as temporary hospitals and most of them were full of wounded, injured and dying people. The hospitals in all neighboring towns were thrown open for the reception of those injured and hurt and many were carried to New Albany, Pontotoc, Amory, Aberdeen, Columbus, Meridian and to Memphis and Birmingham and perhaps hospitals in other places and for days and days thereafter the information bureau, which was established for the purpose of furnishing information to those having relatives who were injured in these places away from the city, were kept busy making investigations and answering inquiries of those anxious and solicitous about their relatives and friends, and there was a spirit of solemnity, quietude and sadness expressed on the face of every one you would meet, which had never been seen in this city on such great a scale before that time and I trust that, the occasion will never arise again for such to exist at any time in the future.

With few exceptions, this spirit of help, sympathy and generosity prevailed.

Fortunately, a great many people had their property partially insured against loss by cyclone and the insurance companies and their representative were extremely liberal, quick and expedient in bringing these matters to final settlement and payment. All of the banks in Tupelo collected all drafts and checks given in settlement of losses without charge.

The Red Cross was quick in its response to the needs of the people and performed the task of helping to reestablish people in a wonderfully meritorious and praiseworthy way. And if I were to enumerate in detail the people helped and re-established by this one organization it would require several pages to do so.

The Government organizations were also quick in their response and contributed on a great, enthusiastic and large scale in helping to clear up the wreckage.

The Commercial Appeal, The Evening Scimitar and other newspapers of all surrounding territory opened their columns free of charge in solicitation of funds for the relief of the storm stricken area and gave people desiring to do so an opportunity to easily subscribe to relief funds and the response to this opportunity and appeal was on a great, liberal and munificent scale.

For all of which aid and assistance, each and every citizen of Tupelo feels under lasting gratitude to each and every donor, and while we have always tried to be liberal in coming to the aid of other people in times of disaster, I am sure that such desire and willingness on our part to assist others has been increased and grown many fold and we now stand ready in case of disaster to other sections or places, to respond quickly and liberally and in the same manner that others contributed to us, in our time of misfortune and need.

Disaster of this kind and the damage done is too great to be left to be looked after by the locality alone, in which such takes place.

No battle field, not even that of Sherman's march to the sea, ever presented a more desolate and depressing sight than, that this cyclone left the citizens of Tupelo and the thousands of people who visited this city, in the few days next after the same occurred, and it looked then as if reparation and restoration would be practically an impossible thing, but with the indomitable spirit, which has always characterized our people and a determination to go forward, boosted and buoyed by outside help and encouragement, as stated above, the work of restoration was immediately undertaken and although the same is not yet complete and many places which were destroyed have not yet been rebuilt, such work has proceeded in a marvelous way and a large majority of the houses have been repaired and rebuilt, more beautiful, attractive and convenient than they were before, except for the fact, that for many, many years, the area covered by this cyclone, will be deprived of the shade and beauty of the vast number of trees, that were uprooted and twisted and distorted and are now gone and absent.

A large number of the ladies of the city, some time after this disaster, when a sufficient time had passed for thought and study, about the necessary things to be done to rebuild and rebeautify the city, organized themselves into a committee or body, to promote and encourage the planting of shrubbery and trees, and a great work has been done along this line by them and others, who have joined in such movement, and I feel certain that after the passage of a few years,
that these things will be restored, and that the
torn up path left by this cyclone will be only a
memory in the minds of those who were here and
passed through the same.

During the morning hours of the very day in
which the cyclone came that night, I was engaged
in conversation with a friend of mine on the Court
House lawn and mentioned the fact that many
years before I had dug up a cedar tree in the
old family grave yard at Palmetto and learned
that cedar trees had no tap root. He stated to me
"the reason was that it was a transplanted tree
and that no transplanted tree ever has a tap
root; that when the same was once cut it never
grew again". I did not think then that the truth
of what he was telling me was to be so soon
demonstrated, but after the storm, I found that
none of the trees, which were between the side-
walks and the streets had any tap root and that
what he had told me was a fact. However, those
without tap roots and those with tap roots all
underwent the same fate at the hands of the
wind that night. Practically all of them in the
main path of the storm were up-rooted and great
holes were torn in the ground in some places; the
sidewalks near these trees were also brought up
with the trees.

In clearing up this debris afterwards there
were many truck loads of these stumps hauled
out of the city and in three low place in the city
there is now approximately one-half acre each,
or more, of ground covered and occupied by these
stumps and the large outgrowing roots which
came up with them.

I have avoided individual experience in this
sketch as far as possible but I am informed that
one man and his family were out riding in their
car and were carried up by the wind above the
falling trees and houses and were whirled and
turned over several times and no one was hurt
and were landed back on the ground right side
down and everything in running order and the
only damage done was several broken glasses
in places in the glass part of the car.

In the home of Mr. V. S. Whitesides a little
negro girl was found in one of the upstairs rooms
of the house who did not know where she was and
who said she was not hurt and who had been
blown from her home several blocks away from
this home where she was found.