

TORNADO 1888

On Wednesday, June 6, 1888 a powerful tornado tore a path of destruction across the townships of Dalhousie, Lanark, Drummond, Beckwith and Montague. Modern investigators estimate the storm packed winds over 200 kph, the equivalent of an F-3 tornado on today's Fujita Scale¹. Lanark County had never before seen a storm of such ferocity², and no tornado of such force has ever again visited the County.³

The storm first struck at about noon, northeast of Lanark Village, its violent winds accompanied by thunder, lightning, hail, and torrents of rain. Over the following weeks, as reports trickled in from the rural areas that bore the brunt of the onslaught, local newspapers reported its impact.



“The storm, or rather cyclone, is new to this part of the country ... Immediately preceding the great blow, the clouds put on most unusual colors, green, coppery, black, etc., In another minute, the mild south wind was displaced by a furious whirling blast from the northwest which increased to a cyclone, and in a trice fences, barns and trees were wrecked and scattered in all points. Some lost whole sugar bushes, others will

have to build new barns, sheds, etc.; fruit trees were stripped of leaves and buds ... In some cases, people were injured and stock killed by falling buildings; poultry and wild birds were slain in scores by the pelting hail bullets ...”⁴

“The wind covered a width of some miles, and it is calculated that it cost each farmer along its path on an average of \$100 each⁵. In some places the deluge washed out entire fields of grain ...”⁶

¹ The Fujita scale rates tornado wind speeds as: F-0 105-137 kph, F-1 138-177 kph., F-2 178-217 kph., F-3 218-266, F-4 267-322 kph, F-5 over 322 kph).

² On May 23, 1873 a tornado estimated as an F-2 swept in a near circle through Elmsley, Montague, Beckwith, Ramsay, Lanark, Darling and Lavant Townships.

³ On the same day another F-3 tornado touched down near St. Raphaels.

⁴ *Perth Courier*, June 15, 1888.

⁵ About \$3,500 in 2024.

⁶ *Perth Courier*, June 15, 1888.

Dalhousie & Lanark

“In parts of Dalhousie and Lanark Townships two destructive hailstorms added its furies of the outburst. One came about noon and showered down hailstones as large as robin’s eggs. Another came a few hours after, pelting the hearth with stones the size of marbles. Numberless windows were broken, the store at Poland and the dwelling of J. D. Easton being left almost without a whole pane. In some places among the hills the hailstones could be fairly shovelled out.”⁷

The storm swept through Lanark Township “levelling fences, barns and almost everything in its course, some farms being left without a fence or outbuilding, and a number of dwellings unroofed” ...⁸



Drummond

“At Doyle’s Corners⁹, Drummond, trees were uprooted and blown across the roads, miles of fences levelled, and barns badly damaged. The barn of Thomas Murphy was blown down, and those of his neighbors, D. Walsh, Russell, and others lost their roofs, and in some cases were moved from their foundations.”¹⁰

⁷ *Perth Courier*, June 8, 1888.

⁸ *The Watchman*, Lindsay, June 14, 1888.

⁹ Located at the intersection of today’s Highway-7, Tennyson Road and Wayside Drive.

¹⁰ *Perth Courier*, June 8, 1888.

*“Robert McCulloch, on the Perth and Lanark Road, had his barns levelled. The roof of one of the sheds belonging to Mrs. J. J. McIlquham, Christie Farms, was blown off and Adam Armstrong had his outbuildings more or less wrecked ...”*¹¹

*“Between John Rathwell’s and Lanark Village, 13 buildings, mostly barns, are down, on the main road. Mr. Rathwell’s barn 30X50 was moved off its foundation and his cattle all came roaring and tearing into his yard from all over his unfenced farm to escape the impingement of the great hail stones ...”*¹²



*Mr. Valally’s barn was blown down. William, Robert and Joseph Walters, three brothers, each lost two cedar bars, so did Charles Close and Peter Stewart. David Campbell lost his barns and shed, John Sullivan lost two barns and his machinery and buggies, which were crushed. Thomas Pierce’s big new barn was shifted six feet. Mr. McTavish’s was lifted off its foundation and twisted so no power can restore. It must be taken down and put up again. David Cameron’s son was seriously hurt by falling timbers. Peter Stewart has nothing left but an old log house. John Poole, Archibald McEwen, Thomas Richards, Geroge McFarlane, all have their barns down.”*¹³

*“A gentleman at Ferguson’s Falls was driving along when the hurricane overtook him, lifted up his buggy four feet, and shot him out upon the road. His ankle was dislocated. The R. C. Church at Ferguson’s Falls was injured.”*¹⁴

¹¹ *Perth Courier*, June 15, 1888.

¹² *Carleton Place Canadian*, June 1888.

¹³ *Perth Courier*, June 15, 1888.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Ramsay

“R. A. Gailbraith in Ramsay Township had a shed blown completely to the ground, even the foundation forming part of the wreck. The roof of a building adjoining was moved four feet out of place; while a valuable sugar bush had all the old trees uprooted, or broken off ... The roads after the hurricane were littered with shingles and other debris of wrecked real estate. Thomas Foster, in Ramsay, lost two buildings.”¹⁵

Beckwith

“In Beckwith Thomas Kidd’s barn and shed were unroofed, Allan Cameron’s was blown down, so was Mr. Davis’s and Thomas Griffith’s and William Box’s. James Drummond’s sugar bush on the third concession was almost destroyed.”¹⁶

Montague

In Montague Township *“a barn belonging to James Christie, 9th Concession, was blown down injuring Mr. Christie who was inside at the time so severely that he died”¹⁷*

Ottawa

The tornado continued eastward and, touching down at Ottawa *“blew down many houses and barns between Billings Bridge and Leitrim”¹⁸*. Twelve-year-old Mary Anne McVeigh was killed, and a dozen other girls injured in the wreckage of St. Thomas the Apostol Roman Catholic Church. The foreman at Romand’s Brickyard, William Gray, was also killed when the building in which he sought shelter collapsed.

“At the farm of J. R. Booth, adjoining the Experimental Farm, a large barn worth \$10,000 was demolished. Five men working on the Experimental Farm had taken refuge in it and were eating their dinner when the cyclone struck the barn, The men started to run and four got away, but the roof fell on the fifth, John Mulligan, mangling him frightfully and killing him almost instantly”¹⁹

“The storm was the most terrific ever remembered here. A great part of the exhibition buildings were blown away and an overskirt of a lady’s dress stripped from her on Parliament hill.”²⁰

- Ron W. Shaw (2024)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Carleton Place Canadian*, June 1888.

¹⁷ *The Watchman*, Lindsay, June 14, 1888.

¹⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, June 7, 1888.

¹⁹ *Woodstock Standard* June 7, 1888.

²⁰ *Ottawa Citizen*, June 7, 1888.