

Collection #
P 0551

INDIANA TORNADO DAMAGE COLLECTION 1910–1927, N.D.

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Processed by

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30 March 2015

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Indiana Historical Society
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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: One half photograph box, 2 boxes of glass lantern slides, 2 flat file folders, 2 Cirkut photograph folders

COLLECTION DATES: 1910–1927, n.d.

PROVENANCE: Multiple

RESTRICTIONS: None

COPYRIGHT:

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 1980.1203, 1993.0307, 1998.1152X, 2004.0367, 2004.0403, 2006.0209, 2006.0313, 2007.0214, 2013.0380

NOTES: See also: The W.H. Bass Photo Company Collection (P 0130), Indiana Postcard Collection (P 0408), General Picture Collection (P 0411)

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The earliest records of tornadoes in Indiana are from 1814, but little is known about these early twisters. The worst outbreak of tornadoes in the state's history, in terms of fatalities, occurred on Palm Sunday, 11 April 1965, when 137 people were killed. There were at least ten tornadoes and a number of lesser storms reported on that date. These tornadoes also struck Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan. As the tornadoes moved across north central Indiana, they damaged or destroyed ninety percent of the buildings in Russiaville in Howard County, and caused extensive damage in Kokomo, Lebanon, and Marion. A total of 32 counties suffered damage; 18 of those counties experienced major damage. Seventy-one million dollars in private property damage and \$13.5 million in public property damage resulted from these storms.

The second most deadly tornado in Indiana was part of the deadliest tornado in U.S. history. It occurred on 18 March 1925 as a tri-state tornado that began in southeast Missouri, traveled through southern Illinois, and then struck southwest Indiana. At least 695 people died and more than two thousand were injured, the majority in southern Illinois. About 75 people were killed in Indiana, including fifty in Griffin in Posey County, where 150 homes were destroyed. The tornado then moved into Gibson County, Indiana, passing just northwest of Owensville. About 85 farms were ravaged in that area. About half of Princeton was destroyed, and losses there totaled \$1,800,000. This tornado set records for speed (an average of 62 mph), path length (219 miles), duration (3.5 hours), and deaths per city (234 in Murphysboro, Illinois). In Indiana, multiple funnels were occasionally visible, as the 3/4-mile-wide path of destruction continued, finally dissipating about ten miles northeast of Princeton. Within hours, help came from nearby towns, the American Red Cross, and the Indiana National Guard. Within weeks, Griffin was slowly being rebuilt, and much of the town was rebuilt after a year.

A tornado that struck New Castle in Henry County on Sunday, 11 March 1917, killed 22 people, injured hundreds, and damaged or destroyed 500 homes. A large number of the city's many greenhouses were leveled, contributing to \$1 million of property damage. The Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce donated sugar, flour, meats, and potatoes to New Castle residents. More than \$9,000 poured in from all around the state as well as other states. The Maxwell Motor Co. in Dayton sent \$2,000 and Montgomery-Ward in Chicago sent another \$1,000 in relief contributions.

On 28 March 1920, another Palm Sunday, a family of tornadoes landed near Uniondale in Wells County, reaching F4 intensity south of Ossian, leveling farms along its path. It then moved into Allen County, striking Townley, where virtually every building was flattened and four people were killed. The tornado continued into Ohio, ending northwest of Toledo.

In May 1927, a tornado accompanied by high straight-line winds struck Indianapolis. Two boys died and up to 200 people were injured. The worst destruction was in the east central part of the city where sixteen blocks were devastated.

Sources:

Indiana Department of Homeland Security. "Tornado History"
(http://www.in.gov/dhs/files/Chapter_3_Risk_Assessment_c.pdf). Accessed 30 March 2015.

Indiana Historical Bureau. "Tri-State Tornado"
(<http://www.in.gov/history/markers/16.htm>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "Remembering the March 18, 1925 Tri-State Tornado" (<http://www.noaa.gov/stories/s393.htm>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

National Weather Service. "Central Indiana Weather History: May"
(http://www.crh.noaa.gov/ind/print_localdata.php?loc=txtdat&data=TDIHMY.TXT). Accessed 30 March 2015.

National Weather Service. "The Palm Sunday Story: April 11, 1965"
(http://www.crh.noaa.gov/iwx/program_areas/events/historical/palmsunday1965/). Accessed 30 March 2015.

National Weather Service. "Violent Tornadoes: Indiana"
(http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lmk/?n=violent_tornadoes_indiana). Accessed 30 March 2015.

Radford, Darrel. "From 'Rose City' to Ruins" from *The Courier-Times* (New Castle, Ind., 30 March 2013) posted on the Web site of the City of New Castle, Indiana
(<http://www.cityofnewcastle.net/eGov/apps/document/center.egov?view=item;id=994>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Photographer Owen Thomas Bennett was born in November 1866 or 1867 in Colfax, Iowa, but grew up in Indiana. It appears that Bennett lived at 1109 St. Paul Street in Indianapolis ca. 1907–1913. He was working as a photographer by 1907 and by 1909 he had a photography studio and frame shop at 1122 Prospect Street. It appears that his shop expanded in the 1920s to occupy three adjacent addresses at 1120-22-24 Prospect Street while his home was then nearby at 1142 Prospect (at least till 1926).

It appears that Owen married Mary Veach (b. 1872) on 3 April 1892 and that they had a son, Claude, born in 1898. In 1900 Claude was living with his maternal grandparents in Monroe County while Owen was married to a woman named Lillian (b. 1873) and worked as a grocer in Monroe County. By 1905 he was working as a barber in Indianapolis. On 14 November 1918 Owen married Katherine Graham Hindman (1874–1925) in Marion County. Claude was with them at the time of the 1920 census. It appears that in the late 1920s Owen moved to Terre Haute, Ind., where he continued working as a photographer and was married to a woman named Lou Mina (1869–1959). Owen died 24 September 1934 and is buried beside Katherine in Greenlawn Cemetery in Franklin, Indiana.

Sources:

Indiana Marriage Collection, 1800–1941 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

Indiana Select Marriages, 1780–1992 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

U.S. Census, 1870, 1900, 1920 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

U.S. City Directories, 1821–1989 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

U.S. Find A Grave Index, 1600s–Current (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>). Accessed 30 March 2015.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection is composed of black-and-white photographs, glass lantern slides, and graphic images of damage in the aftermath of tornadoes in various parts of Indiana. It is arranged in seven series, as follows.

Series 1: 1910 Tornado -- Ben Davis -- This series contains one real photo postcard.

Series 2: March 11, 1917 Tornado -- New Castle -- This series includes 24 postcards (one is a real photo postcard) of damaged or destroyed homes and businesses. There is also a large uncut sheet of postcards with 28 views, mostly duplicating the individual postcards in this series.

Series 3: March 28, 1920 Tornado -- Allen County -- Five real photo postcards comprise this series, which shows destruction of homes, a church, and a grain elevator in eastern Allen County.

Series 4: 1925 Tornado -- Gibson County (March 18th Tri-State Tornado) -- This series is composed of 16 black-and-white glass lantern slides, some with text, some with photographs. These slides show some destruction and document relief efforts by the Indiana Farm Bureau and Sears-Roebuck and Company.

Series 5: May 18, 1927 Tornado -- Indianapolis -- This series contains three versions of the same image. Two are large panoramic photographs by Starkey and Brown that show widespread destruction in the area of Hamilton Avenue. The third is a graphically produced panoramic postcard.

Series 6: Tornado Damage Photographs by Owen T. Bennett -- This series includes eleven mounted black-and-white photographs stamped on the back with: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind." The dates and locations of these photographs are not known, but it appears that Bennett lived at 1109 St. Paul Street ca. 1907–1913. The photographs show destroyed homes and other rubble, a railroad bridge and other railroad tracks, and men standing by tents.

Series 7: Unidentified Tornado Damage Photographs -- This series contains six mounted black-and-white photographs depicting damage to buildings and trees, and one photograph of men standing by tents. Date and locations are unknown. The mounts of these photographs are different from those in Series 6 and do not have a photographer's stamp on them. However, it is possible that they may also have been taken by O.T. Bennett. One photograph is a different view of the same damaged house that is shown in one of Bennett's photographs. These photographs and O.T. Bennett's, along with a few others, arrived to IHS together.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: 1910 Tornado -- Ben Davis

CONTENTS

One real photo postcard shows four men standing by debris with houses in the background. On back is written: "Cyclone / 1910 / Ben Davis."

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 1

Series 2: March 11, 1917 Tornado -- New Castle

CONTENTS

Real photo postcard showing debris, damaged house, people on the street. Location not specified, but probably New Castle.

Postcard showing destruction on Grand Avenue.

Postcard showing destruction of W.H. Bell's residence, Grand Avenue.

Postcard with two views: top view -- Southeast of town, east end of Grand Avenue; bottom view -- Fourteenth Street looking west.

Postcard showing destruction on Lincoln Street, looking east.

Postcard showing damaged houses on Lincoln Street, looking west from 12th.

Postcard showing destruction on Lincoln Avenue.

Postcard with two views: top view -- Bundy Mansion as seen from top of B.W. Tompkins home on Lincoln Avenue; bottom view -- Mayor J. Leb Watkins' residence on A Avenue.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

<p>Postcard with two views: top view -- residences on Lincoln Avenue; bottom view -- barn completely demolished on Grand Avenue.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing damage on A Avenue with people on sidewalk.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing a collapsed house on the south side of A Avenue, with people standing around it.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing cross section of a damaged residence on A Avenue.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing debris and damaged residence on A Avenue.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Real photo postcard showing debris of large area flattened on D Avenue at 21st Street. Written on front of photograph: "Entire row leveled killing several people." This postcard was sent by "Aunt Kate" who wrote on the back: "Arrived home Tuesday night at one o'clock. Oh what a sight to see...."</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing destruction at D Avenue and 21st Street. "Everett Dunlap killed here."</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing destruction at 18th Street and D Avenue.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing damaged houses on 20th Street "where the two Williamson women were killed." Shows people by the houses.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing South 25th Street, "where Mrs. Fletcher was killed."</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing a couple of men by the destruction of Dr. Cofield's residence.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Postcard showing men by destruction of Benthey's Greenhouses.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>

Postcard showing a crowd gathered by the destruction of a drug store on the corner of C and 18th streets, "where fire started."

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Postcard showing some people by the damaged Kuntz Lumber Company.

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Postcard showing ruins of rolling mill.

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Postcard showing ruins of shovel works.

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 2

Large uncut sheet of postcards with 28 views of tornado damage around New Castle. Shows all of the images listed above except for the first one at the top of this series. This sheet includes two additional scenes: 1) View from top of B.W. Tompkins' roof on Lincoln Avenue, looking West shows numerous houses damaged or destroyed; 2) South School with damage primarily to roof and upper floor. This sheet of postcards is not in as good condition as the individual postcards listed above.

Flat File: 2-o, Folder 1

Series 3: March 28, 1920 Tornado -- Allen County

CONTENTS

Real photo postcard showing destruction in a residential area of Edgerton.

Real photo postcard showing a couple of people standing amid the ruins of a Methodist Episcopal church in Edgerton.

Real photo postcard showing damage of residences in Edgerton.

Real photo postcard showing two men by the ruins of a grain elevator in Townley.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 3

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 3

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 3

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 3

Real photo postcard of an unidentified structure damaged by the Palm Sunday tornado.

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 3

Series 4: 1925 Tornado -- Gibson County (March 18th Tri-State Tornado)

CONTENTS

Slide with this text: "Presenting Indiana Farm Bureau Tornado Relief / Posey, Gibson, Harrison, Washington and Jackson Counties / March 18, 1925 -- October 12, 1925 / W.H. Settle, President / Jas. G. Covert, Manager."

Indiana Farm Bureau relief tent.

Slide with text detailing an account of John Robb's property losses from his farm in Montgomery Township, Gibson County.

Slide with this text: "Sears-Roebuck and Company of Chicago, Illinois / Sam Guard of the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation first to suggest co-operation with the Indiana Farm Bureau Federation in the storm zones of the three states, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. / Made the first donation of \$1,000.00 / Gave three carloads of supplies consisting of Food, Clothes, Blankets, Tents and Cots. / Kept the W.L.S. Radio Station open day and night for News and Contributions / Cash Contributions / Supplies Contributed / Total Contributions"

Unidentified damaged building.

Unidentified man standing by a field.

"Unloading Sears-Roebuck Goods" -- seven men with a load of supplies.

CONTAINER

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Intro Plate

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 1

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, [Plate 2]

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 3

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 4

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 5

Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 6

Destruction of Baldwin Heights School [on West Garfield Avenue on the outskirts of Princeton, Ind.].	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 7
"Special Commission" -- three men and two women, all unidentified. [This slide has cracks in it.]	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 1, Plate 8
Destroyed factory, Princeton, Ind. [photo by Peterson].	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 9
"Unloading at Princeton" -- shows what appears to be a load of tractors [International Harvester].	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 10
An unidentified man standing by a building [possibly Mr. Taylor from Plate 12?].	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 11
Three men identified as Covert, East, and Taylor standing outside of a building.	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 12
Ruins of a home.	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 13
The same men identified in Plate 12 as Covert, East, and Taylor, standing outside of a building.	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 14
Slide with text summarizing Auditor's Report: "Statement of Cash Receipts and Disbursements / Indiana Farm Bureau Federation--Indianapolis / (Tornado Relief Fund) / Period from March 20, 1925 to October 12, 1925." Shows receipts totaling \$48,320.91 from contributions received in Indianapolis and Princeton offices, sale of merchandise, equipment, etc. Shows disbursements totaling \$43,292.37 with details of administrative and rehabilitation expenses.	Glass Lantern Slides, Box 2, Plate 15

Series 5: May 18,1927 Tornado -- Indianapolis

CONTENTS

Panoramic view (10" x 51") of devastation following the tornado, shows people standing amid the ruins (Photo by Starkey and Brown). Written in upper right: "Wednesday / May 18th 1927 / 8 pm." Small part of upper right corner is missing.

Lighter print of same image as above, without the writing in the upper right.

Mechanically produced panoramic postcard (3 1/2" x 16 1/2") of same image as above. Has added caption: "Panorama of scene at Hamilton Ave., Indianapolis, after tornado of May 18th, had done \$3,000,000 damage to the city."

CONTAINER

Cirkut Photographs,
Folder 1

Cirkut Photographs,
Folder 2

Flat File: 2-o, Folder 2

Series 6: Tornado Damage Photographs by Owen T. Bennett

CONTENTS

Six mounted black-and-white photographs show destruction of houses. Date and location are unknown. Each is stamped on the back: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind."

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows a railroad bridge over a stream with damaged houses in the distance. Date and location are unknown. Stamped on the back: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind."

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows rubble and trees. Date and location are unknown. Stamped on the back: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind."

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows a ditch with bare trees in the background. Date and location are unknown. Stamped on the back: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind."

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows two men standing by two large wheels and other rubble by railroad tracks, with bare trees in the background. Date and location are unknown. Stamped on the back: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind."

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows several men, some in military uniform, standing by a group of tents. Date and location are unknown. Stamped on the back: "O.T. Bennett, Photographer and Artist, 1109 St. Paul Street, Indianapolis, Ind."

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Series 7: Unidentified Tornado Damage Photographs

CONTENTS

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows a few people standing by a damaged house (same house but different view of one of the houses in a photograph by O.T. Bennett, listed above). Date and location are unknown.

Two mounted copies of a black-and-white photograph that shows the damaged interior of a building. Date and location are unknown.

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows the ruins of a brick building. Date and location are unknown.

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows barren landscape with damaged trees. Date and location are unknown.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 5

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 5

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 5

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 5

Mounted black-and-white photograph shows several men standing by tents. Some men appear to be in military uniform. Date and location are unknown.

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 5

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog:
<http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0551).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.