

Storm Makes Landfall

By Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society

Terrifying wind and darkness held the White Lake area in its grip on Monday, 11 November 1940. The full force of the storm hit this area about three o'clock Monday afternoon, diminishing throughout the night. Those who first saw the dark wind funnels sweep in off Lake Michigan reported that they were drawing shafts of water high into the air. As the clouds approached land they appeared to flatten out, losing their vertical swirling suction powers, but none of their force.

The thermometer dropped from more than 60 degrees at about 2 P.M. to as low as 25 degrees in the evening. The storm that swept across the land left a path of wreckage behind it, razing frame sheds and houses, tearing huge trees from the ground by their roots, and leveling electric and telephone poles by the hundreds, and causing untold damage in general.

In the vicinity of San Juan and Pine Bluff, more than 30 giant pines split and torn from the ground. The area near Lloyd's Landing was also hard hit with many big trees being destroyed. On the Whitehall side of the lake, in the Michillinda and Sylvan Beach sections more than a score of beautiful trees were uprooted and destroyed. The damage at the F. J. Lewis estate was particularly bad.

Sheds on White Lake Dock & Fuel Company property were blown down. The bathhouse at the Maple Grove tourist park in Montague was turned over.

Two cars parked at the tannery were crushed under falling trees. A water tower derrick on the Merk Whitbeck farm was twisted into a pretzel-like loop.

A door was torn off the Congregational Church and a window blown out.

The Whitehall bandstand sign was torn off and hurled on the village dump. Many streetlight globes were lifted from their stands by the wind and shattered on the sidewalk. During the height of the storm a huge metal sign floated high over the business section and disappeared in the direction of the tunnel.

Power lines were torn down about 5 PM Monday and all lights and power in the Whitehall area were out of commission for more than 15 hours.

Streets, highways and private roadways were blocked in many sections by huge trees or power or telephone poles which fell across the right-of-way. Branches littered all streets in both towns.

A plate glass window in Ripley's Drug Store in Montague was broken. A chimney was blown from the Montague A&P store. The front windows at the Farm Bureau were also among those broken by the storm.

Part of a new barn on the Joe Parker Dairy Farm was blown down, and a steel windmill tower on the Merle Whitbeck farm was twisted out of shape. Roofs were blown off the barns on the Charles Coors and Otto Glassner farms. Part of the roof was missing from the Robert Stuart home on White Lake, near Maple Grove, and a water tower on an adjoining property was completely demolished.

when struck by a falling tree. A barn at the Barney Eilers farm in White River was demolished. The turkey roosts at the Guy Turkey Farm were ripped from the ground and scattered over the entire farm.

At the Montague Garage, the wind blew a large sign off the front of the building and William Stewart was trying to remove it from the street when a sudden gust of wind hurled both Mr. Stewart and the sign through one of the large plate glass front windows, removing the glass entirely but not even cutting Mr. Stewart.

Seven of the huge plate glass windows in the Bell & Carleton garage were smashed by the wind Monday afternoon. The roof of Swidens Tavern was blown off and roofing paper was strewn the length of Colby.

Considerable damage was done in the Muskegon area and similar damage to property was reported in Grand Rapids.

Pre-warned of the approaching blow, White River Coast Guardsmen were busy Monday morning checking on local crafts and making ready for the threatening storm. Yachts anchored on the lake were moved to more protected moorings. No great damage was reported to local crafts.

White River coast guardsmen are now patrolling a 22-mile stretch of the Lake Michigan beach in the aftermath of the storm. Daily patrols are made as far south as Duck Lake and once a day a shore patrol is made as far north as Little Point Sauble. It is expected the patrols will be continued for some time in the hope that bodies of the many seamen lost during the storm may be recovered.

Following on the heels of Monday's storm, Michigan suffered its first snow on Tuesday, accompanied by driving winds, with the thermometer tumbling to 20 above on Tuesday night. Wednesday saw slight snow flurries and decreasing wind, with the temperature going to 15 above at night.