

# Transcribed Excerpts from "Tornado Rips Oelwein" Newspaper Article, May 16, 1968

## Excerpt 1

Four residents were counted dead Thursday morning following the worst disaster ever to hit the city of Oelwein and the nearby community of Maynard. A tornado ripped through Oelwein at 4:47 p.m. Wednesday with estimates of damage running from a conservative \$10 million to as high as \$30 million. Listed as dead by officials were: Mrs. Grace Damon, in her fifties, of Oelwein; Mrs. Louis Ponsar, Maynard; Glenda Kelly, Maynard, 3 years old; Albert Heaton, 89, Oelwein (died of a heart attack).

Hundreds of area and local repair crews, emergency utility crews, and an uncountable number of area residents were on hand Thursday morning to assist in the cleanup campaign. Over 200 members of the Iowa National Guard were on duty along with 47 members of the Iowa Highway Patrol, Oelwein City Police, and volunteer firemen (too many to even begin to estimate).

A report from utility crews indicated reconstruction of the damage began immediately. Iowa Electric Light and Power Co. (Gas Company) estimated 50 men working on damage with only three problem areas in the core city. Gas officials report service was only disconnected at areas where buildings were completely destroyed.

Northwestern Bell Telephone Manager Hobert O. Link stated at least 75 out-of-town servicemen have been rushed into the city to begin repair. Link estimated as high as 75 percent of the city phones were out of city with only emergency calls being handled in long distance service. Link, like all utility officials, was unable to estimate the damage in dollars and was also unable to estimate when service would be restored.

Interstate Power Co. reported 100 work crews from all sections of the state have been rushed to the city. No one was able to estimate the exact damage, but power lines were down throughout the city. Red Cross Emergency Units were rushed into the city with stations set up in the basement of the Sacred Heart church and Presbyterian church. Cots, blankets, clothes and other emergency rations have been trucked into the city to handle all situations.

City officials were urging residents to preserve their water supply. There was no immediate danger with water, but crews were working on pumps to handle normal water flow.

Mercy Hospital was flooded with injured immediately following the disaster. The serious and critical were transferred to Waterloo and Independence hospitals.

*(Page 2, column 1)*

## **Excerpt 2**

(Governor) Hughes offered the city any available state equipment and personnel such as trucks of the highway commission, chainsaws, etc. He also complimented the Mayor and Clerk Tom Peterson saying, "It looks as if you have everything organized real well."

The Governor was particularly interested in what advanced warning the town had and was informed by the Mayor that a broadcast warning went off (the siren sounded) briefly before the electrical power was disrupted.

...The Governor declared the city a disaster area in order to provide governmental help, however he said, "It won't be enough."

"This job requires a total community effort. Everyone has to rebuild and review. I'm sure the Federal Housing Administration and Small Business Administration will offer help. I have confidence in Oelwein's courage to recover with all help available ... Small communities sometimes are hurt more by these disasters because they don't have the resources to recover."

*(Page 2, Columns 1 and 2)*

### **Photo Caption, Front Page**

Mrs. Grace Damon was dead on arrival at Mercy Hospital in Oelwein minutes after this picture was taken. Mrs. Damon was trapped under a giant pile of bricks in her apartment over the Ben Franklin Store.

### **Photo Caption, Page 2**

One of Oelwein's business establishments leveled in the storm was Barney's Texaco at the north edge of the city. Fred's Super Valu, Sperry's Garage, and the Book & Art were also heavily damaged in the immediate area.