

"Tornado Rips Oelwein" Newspaper Article, May 16, 1968

The Oelwein Daily Register

Extra Copies of this Special have Available at the REGISTER Office... 15 cents each

VOL. 61- NO. 164

Thursday, May 16, 1968

Oelwein, Iowa 50662

TORNADO RIPS OELWEIN

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.

**4 DEAD; SEVERAL CRITICAL
\$14 MILLION DAMAGE**

Storm Rocks City at 4:57 P.M. Wednesday

*By MIKE MAHONEY
REGISTER MANAGING EDITOR*

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 big 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 Meaton, 89, Oelwein (died of a heart attack)

Hundreds or area and local repair crews, emergency utility crews, and an uncountable number of area residents were on hand Thursday morning to assist in a 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, numerous surrounding 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 & 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 states at least 75 out-of-town servicemen have been rushed into the city to begin repair. Link estimated as high as 75 per cent 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.

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

The injured list, certain to reach several hundred, will never be completed. Officials at Mercy reported 58 treated and released, 16 admitted. Hospitals at Independence, Sumner, and Waterloo reported: 20 admitted for treatment.

HUGHES VISITS AREA

Gov. Harold Hughes and Adj. Gov. Junior Miller toured the city with Mayor Samuel Mazzlotti and Capt. Les Oehl of the Oelwein National Guard Thursday morning. (Oehl's wife was one of the injured.)

Hughes offered the city any available state equipment and personnel such as trucks of the highway commissions, chain saws, 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 advance 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 Mayor estimated damage at a conservative \$14 million. He reported three dead and three on the critical list.

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

"This job requires a total community effort. Everyone has to rebuild and recover. 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. The Governor also reported that he would fly over the Maynard area to investigate damage there.

"Small communities sometimes are hurt more by these disasters because they don't have the comparative resources to recover."

2,000 TREES

The damage in the city was estimated to include at least 2,000 trees, an undetermined amount of houses completely destroyed and an estimate of at least 50-75% of all housing of the city had damage varying from minor to total.

Listed below is the group of business establishments that have been either completely destroyed or suffered near-total losses. They were made in personal observations in a car-tour this morning.

They included: Woods Novelty, Colonial Baking warehouse, Drester's DX, Oelwein Chemical Company, Oelwein Tool and Die, Oelwein Specialty, Sacred Heart church, Oelwein Body and Truck, Hertz Truck Rental, McAlean's Laundromat. Chandler Company, Sanitary Dairy, Dairy Queen, Laigi's, Rueber's Auto and Farm Equipment Specialties.

Terry's Gulf, Sun Mart, Oelwein Bottling Works, Whittig's Flowers, Farm Fleet, Acme Trucking, Kinsman Greenhouse, Warthan Mchors, Pine Lodge, Oelwein Veterinary Clinic, Valley Mobile Homes, Hub City Implement, Oelwein Furniture, Apco Station, Northwest Distributing, Oelwein Elevator, Rogge's Machine Shop, Grand Hotel, Lambert Chevrolet, Oelwein Implement, Wiley Davis Insurance and Oelwein Glass and Paint.

ONE OF OELWEIN'S business establishments leveled in the story was Barney's Texaco at the north edge of the city. Valu, Sperry's Garage, and the Book & Art were also heavily damaged in the immediate area.

Dunlap Press, Knief's, Meyer and Lincoln Hardware, Earl Moore Garage, Oelwein Supply, Zacharias DX, Elden's Shell, Kuhn's Blacksmith, College Studio, Cross Printerie, First Presbyterian church, First Christian church, First Baptist church, St. Mary's Episcopal (completely destroyed), Barney's Texaco, Fred's Super Vals, Sperry's Garage, Book and Art Shop, United States Post Office, and City Laundering Company.

There was hardly a business place or home in the Oelwein area that did not receive damage.

The Oelwein City hall was practically destroyed along with many other city buildings.

Because of quick assistance from the telephone company, the Register was able to use two phone lines.

Members of the news and advertising staff called all hospitals involved and made a list of the injured. The list includes only those at hospitals, and does not include the many who suffered injuries, but who did not go to the hospital.

Treated at Mercy Hospital:

- Bescke, Elizabeth
- Bilyes, Mrs. Lois
- Bilyes, Daniel
- Benjamin, Sister Mary
- Cue, Susan
- Dixon, Mrs. Charles
- Duncan, Mrs. Madeline
- Elkerberry, John
- Elkerberry, Mary

- Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Mary June
- Gates, Jennifer
- Goulder, Albert
- Halleck, Pat
- Houser, Jessie
- Houser, Robert
- Hutter, Paul
- Hutter, Steven
- Ingeis, Jean
- Johnson, Earl
- Kamper, Jane
- Kamper, Nancy
- Kauffman, Essie
- Kelly, Gordon
- Keegan, Donald R.
- Kriangles, Steve
- Krafon, ?
- LeRoy Latham
- Leehey, Andrea
- Laberl, Mrs. Robert
- Lowe, Mrs. Ben
- McGregor, Dereta
- Mcnamara, Genevieve
- Michael, N.J.
- Miller, Joseph A.
- Morgan, Mrs. Charles
- Mandt, Jerry
- Muchmore, Dick
- Murray, Bill
- Nielsee, Jens
- Ohligschlagler, Mary
- Ostermas, Mrs. Lucy
- Phillips, Pressel
- Phillips, Mrs. John
- Phillips, Beverly
- Pond, Cella
- Ricehio, Alex
- Shed, Sharon
- Serice, Hannah
- Schiegel, Aaron
- Smith, Dave
- Streitmatter, Dale
- Strempeke, Darwin
- Teufel, John
- Trotter, Myrna
- Wardeli, Tom
- Wise, Leona
- Wolfe, Emilia

- Admitted at Oelwein Mercy Hospitals:
- Mrs. Kathryn Beaman, good
- Emily Carlson, fairly good
- Mrs. Dorothy Flaucher, good
- Connie Francis
- Jason Francis
- Mrs. James Ingeis, fair
- Fred Ingeis, fairly good
- Mrs. Hazel Joses, good
- Mrs. N. J. Michael, fairly good
- Mrs. Leslie Ohl
- Ben Proctor
- Frank Schepple, fairly good
- Julie Trotter, fairly good
- Mrs. Marjose Trotter, fairly good
- Mrs. Viota Zacharias, fairly good
- Mrs. Hattie Zander, fairly good
- Admitted to Allen Memorial Hospital Waterloo:
- Mrs. Lloyd Major, 26 fair condition
- Dawn Major, 6, fair
- Mrs. Anna Steege, Maynard, 77, fair
- Mrs. Gordon (Geraldine) Kelly, Maynard, 28, serious, in intensive car unit
- Dale Streittmulter, 41, satisfactory
- David Schiader, 33, Marble Rock, serious, in intensive car
- Juli McKoon also reportedly hospitalized
- Treated and released:
- Gordon Kelly
- Mrs. Diane Libert, 25
- At Sumner Hospital:
- Galen Kelly 51/2, fair, Maynard
- Gary Kelly 3, fair, Maynard
- Gerald Kelly, 1 1/2 , fair, Maynard
- Julius Wegner, Fayette, 57, fair
- At St. Francis Hospital, Waterloo
- Mrs .Willian (Nina) Hicks, 54, good condition
- At Schoitz Memorial Hospital, Waterloo
- Mrs. Winfred Joyce, at 1st Ave. N.S., 71, left arm injury, condition good
- At People's Memorial Hospital, Independence:
- Florence Paulsen, 42, Oelwein, good
- Lucille Taylor, 67, Maynard, fair
- Russell Phillips, 10, Oelwein, fair
- Mrs. John (Alice) Phillips, 40, Oelwein, fair
- Henry Warseke, 82, Maynard, fair
- Oma Netzger, 54, Oelwein, fair
- LaVern Warthan, 66, Oelwein, fair

Members of the Iowa Highway Patrol and National Guard were turning back sight-seers at road blocks on all four sides of the city. Passes were handed out to officials to get in and out of the community.

Heavy damage was reported to Senior High, Junior High, and Central grade school. Sgt. Athry Sensor called school off until further notice.

Pick up began immediately. A center of communication was established in the basement of the telephone office, working in coordination with officials at city hall. Members of the national guard, highway patrol, city police, and other emergency units coordinated the work.

Construction materials and heavy machinery from Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, Independence, Cedar Falls, Volga, Strawberry Point, Oran, Fairbank were rushed in. A large amount of students from the University of Northern Iowa and Upper Iowa pitched in to help with numerous work activities. A few gas stations were able to pump gas with auxiliary pumps.

Today's issue of the REGISTER was published with the cooperation of the Independence Bulletin-Journal. The Oelwein Register press and equipment was stymied without electrical service.

Oelwein Mercy Hospital personnel expressed appreciation to those who went to the hospital to help care for the injured. Doctors and nurses, aides, Red Cross workers reported in great numbers.

This morning, people from all over were volunteering to help in any capacity. Drug salesman, dressing salesmen, many other salesmen, stopped to offer aid. Manchester Welfare service was there to offer assistance. Some people went to the hospital for necessary drugs.

Sister Mary Maureen, administrator, said "We're so grateful to so many people. Our sincerest thanks and God Bless you all."

Clean up crews were needed at the hospital to help clear the broken glass, downed tree limbs, etc.

Where Were You? The tornado winds hit the downtown Oelwein area at 4:57 p.m. Wednesday. The results of the storm will have side effects on each and every resident of the community during the next weeks.

City officials warned residents to be aware of unauthorized personnel in the city, working to "make a fast buck." CHECK before you agree.

PHOTOGRAPHS for this issue were taken by Earl Davis, Jim Leuck, and Lynn Arnold of the Register staff.