

1908 tornado in Bossier Parish

Written by Ann Middleton

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Frequently our researchers bring to our attention incidents in Bossier Parish history of which we might otherwise be unaware.

Such was the case several weeks ago when an out-of-town couple visited the Historical Center. They told us about an ancestor who had been injured, and who later died as a result of her injuries, in Bossier Parish by a tornado that swept through the area in 1908.

While we have considerable information on tornadoes that struck this area in 1978, 1999, 2000 and 2007, we had no knowledge of the 1908 tornado.

The month and day of the destructive storm were unknown to our researchers. When we checked internet sources, we discovered that the 1908 Dixie tornado outbreak was one of the worst tornado disasters in United States history. The outbreak produced tornadoes in 13 states on April 23, April 24 and April 25. The Southeastern United States suffered the worst loss of life. Traveling 150 miles through Louisiana and Mississippi, the tornado left 143 dead (although this number varies depending on the source consulted). For the entire month of April 1908 in the southeastern United States, 311 people lost their lives to twisters.

Knowing the month and day made it possible to search through The Bossier Banner to find out what damage was done in Bossier Parish. In its April 30, 1908 issue The Banner reported that "The most destructive and fatal storm in years swept portions of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama Friday." Having confirmed that the storm's destruction had reached Bossier Parish, we were then able to search for mention of specific damages done here.

In Rocky Mount The Bossier Banner wrote in its April 30th edition "This community was visited by a severe wind and electrical storm last Thursday night, the 23rd. Mr. J. M. Henderson's barn was blown down, killing five registered hogs that he expected to exhibit at the Parish Fair. Quite a number of fences were blown down, but the damage to crops was slight. People were up walking the floor in their fright, but no fatalities or accidents resulted from the storm."

In the same issue the paper reported that in Haughton "The storm of last Thursday night blew down twenty or more large oak trees in the lawn of Capt. B. B. Murff's home, completely

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blocking the yard, one limb piercing the roof. No other damage was done, except to fences, etc.”

The paper went on to say that “A severe wind, rain and electrical storm, lasting for about one hour, crossed our parish last Thursday night. One cabin on Buck Hall plantation and seven on Kingston plantation (south of Benton) were blown down. Other damage to property and live stock is mentioned in our correspondence column. No lives were lost.”

Despite The Banner’s claim that no one died in Bossier Parish, at least one person died as a result of injuries sustained in the 1908 tornado. Our out-of-town researchers were fairly certain that their ancestor had died. As we continued to search through the newspaper, we located an obituary for their ancestor. The obituary confirmed that the ancestor of our researcher had lived for some time but ultimately died of complications from the injuries that she received.

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