

1913 Tornado

Today marks the second anniversary of a series of tornados that touched down in Johnson County in 2006 most notably the F-2 tornado that swept through Iowa City. The storms caused historic amounts of damage to homes and businesses most significantly within Iowa City but wasn't the first time Johnson County residents experienced the fury of a tornado.

The photograph pictured here shows the aftermath of a storm which passed through Johnson County in 1913. The pile of lumber that is the focus of the photograph is what was left of the home of the Charles and Francis Kroul family after a ferocious wind whipped through their farm. The Kroul farm was located in Section 17 of Big Grove Township northwest of Solon about where the northern tip of Lake McBride is now. Unfortunately, we don't know if any of the family was seriously injured when their home collapsed but 1920 census records indicate the family did survive and so possibly waited out the gale in a storm cellar.

In the background, a group of four men and one woman survey the damage while two men in a horse drawn vehicle are either arriving or leaving the scene. Likely, the woman and one of the men are Mr. and Mrs. Kroul and the others are neighbors that have come to look at the damage and/or offer their help. In addition to the collapsed walls of the Kroul's house, a few remnants of what look to be household articles can also be seen in the picture. The only recognizable item is the seat, arms, and back of a wooden arm chair which is sitting upright on top of the rubble.

On the back of the photograph is written in pencil "Charley Kroul's house, Tornado 1913." Unfortunately, no exact date is given for the storm so we don't know for sure when the Kroul home was demolished. The March 25, 1913 Iowa City Daily Press carries a report of a "faint-hearted cyclone" that caused significant damage to several farms on Easter Sunday just two days before. It is likely that the damage shown in this photograph was caused by the same storm. If so, the storm that produced the mini-cyclone that ripped through the Kroul farm was probably part of the historic storm system that moved across Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana causing significant damage in many communities and spawning tornados that killed close to 150 people. Many of those

deaths were in Omaha, Nebraska where a devastating March 23rd tornado wiped out blocks of buildings and killed over 90 people.

Do you have more information about the storm of March 1913 in Johnson County? If so, contribute to the preservation of local history by dropping a note with what you know to us at JCHS, PO Box 5081, Coralville, Iowa, 52241 or e-mail us at leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org.