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**PICTURED STORY**  
OF THE  
**TORNADO.**

GREAT WESTERN Ptg. CO., ST. LOUIS

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UNION DEPOT RAILROAD CO'S POWER HOUSE

# Pictured Story of the St. Louis Tornado



The photographs between these covers are pictures of a tornado wreck, the most disastrous in the annals of catastrophes on the American continent. They are "views" that were taken in the first hours of the morning sunlight that glittered and shone in dazzling mockery over the blackened waste of the winds of the fearful night before, and truly represent the ruin and carnage that stunned and appalled, not only the 600,000 people of the great metropolis of the prosperous Southwest, but all Christendom, and brought mourning to thousands of hearts. It would be cruel to use the artistic phrase, "true to life"—rather are they true to death, for beneath every ruin lives were snuffed out in a twinkling, and the unfeeling mass of brick, mortar and broken timbers pinioned scores whose broken and battered limbs struggled to be free.

May 27, 1896, will ever mark a black epoch in the history of St. Louis. Nor will it soon be forgotten as a day of wrath to people throughout the civilized world, as one that brought death and destruction to one of the fairest spots on the map of a great empire, peopled by a race of men and women whose thrift, whose bravery, intelligence and zeal for all the virtues that make a people great, has challenged the admiration of the world.

It was a day that contained an awful hour—one which it seemed it endeavored to postpone into the darkness, where its vengeance would not be seen however much it was to be felt by its victims.

It was a sultry day; the skies were filled with ominous clouds and the heat was oppressive. There was no air astir, even though it was the balmy month of May. The Storm King had withdrawn even the mildest zephyrs from the relief of panting humanity, in order that none of his force would be wasted until the fatal hour when he should start forth on his wild ride of devastation and death.

It was a few minutes before 5 o'clock in the evening, the heavens were murky with mountains of clouds that rolled and tumbled, as if impatient for the signal when they should burst with all their fury and add their blinding streams to the fleet, fierce winds that would soon shatter their chains and, unbridled, sweep with the breath of death over the defenceless city.

No language can fitly describe the awful havoc that followed, but a faint idea may be gleaned by the reader of the force and fury of the wind from a simple outline of the premonitions of the storm and how the elements prepared for the attack.

It was not until 4:30 that the condition of the sky gave any indication of a serious outcome. The banks of green clouds to the north and the west took on a brighter hue, and hung closer to the earth. From out of the east drifted big, black, heavy shapes of vapor, laden with lightning, that flashed in sheets and forks. A cool breeze sprung up, a breeze that seemed to have in it an odor of burnt leather. Down in the streets the wind seemed to come from the north. From the tops of buildings, where the smokestacks of the city could be seen, it seemed to come from the east. Further up in the air, from the direction taken by the clouds, it seemed to come in some places from the southeast and in others from the northeast.

A few minutes before 5 o'clock the forces of the air began to marshal for the attack on the city. Long lines or clouds in array like trained soldiers suddenly ceased shifting from place to



place and took up a steady, swift procession for the west. Out of the southeast they came close to the earth, heavy and ominous looking, breathing lightning. Lighter, more flurried, but none the less dangerous in appearance, they slid in long lines from the northeast, swiftly circling on the edges on their way to meet the forces from the other side. Fortunately these clouds were at a greater altitude than the others. Had the two masses met at an equal height the consequences, judging from what they were under more favorable circumstances, would have been most horrible.

All the time the clouds were gathering in the west the wind was rising. Against a background of various tints of green, forks and sheets of luminous balls of fire, colored purple and red and blue shot out, accompanied by roars of thunder. All the while to the south the sky remained bright and nearly clear, bathing the tall towers of the city in a golden glow.

At 5:05 the advancing masses of clouds came together over the western part of the city. At the first contact the air grew darker and across the green sky there seemed to be torn a rent of white light twisting and turning from north to south that was visible nearly 10 seconds. It was blinding, but in the momentary glimpse that could be had of the attacking elements by its assistance it was seen that a long cloud, shaped more like a big sausage than anything else, was rapidly forming and that one end of it was descending toward the earth. All was confusion in the skies. Stray masses of cloud, floating away off from the center of disturbance, seemed to take life suddenly and fairly sail across the horizon to join the destructive mass in process of formation.

At 5:10, while darkness was swiftly settling down over the roofs of the city, a slight rain was seen coming from the south, the wind seemed to shift to the east and the great army of the elements suddenly took up the march away toward the west.

Buildings swayed and creaked in the powerful blast. The wind came down in the streets, picked up buggies and turned them over. It bounded to roofs, rolled up tin covering like scrolls and deposited them in telegraph wires. It filled the air with flying bricks and timbers and made the ears horrified with the crash of falling signs and breaking windows and the shrieks of men and women. And all over the city fire engines hurried to and fro and flames broke out in such a multitude of places that the hearts of the brave firemen sank within them when they contemplated the possibilities of a general conflagration. But in this the allied forces of wind and fire worked at cross purposes—for the rain served to largely undo the work of the other elements.

The rain continued to pour in torrents, but in half an hour the wind, tired out, subsided; only, however, to gather fresh strength, and twenty minutes later it came with the same thunderous rapidity—this time from the northeast—and lasted for fully fifteen minutes, adding to the wreck and ruin that its predecessor had so wantonly inaugurated.

The cause of the tornado and its lines of destruction may have been rigidly planned. If so, it was done by a captain who picked some of the choicest spots in the city upon which to leave the blight of his ruthless wrath. It commenced in the southwestern portion of the city and took a zigzag course for more than two miles long and quite a mile wide. Within this area starting down on Jefferson avenue it swept north crumbling great stone houses and residences, demolished the mammoth power house of the Union Depot Electric Railway on Jefferson and Geyer avenues and dashed across to beautiful Lafayette Park around whose broad squares stood long rows of palatial homes of stone and brick, filled with families happy in their luxuriance and comforts of life. The park was admittedly the most picturesque and charming of its size in the United States, finely set

in towering trees, platted with choice flower beds, with winding walks of macadamized pebbles, pretty retreats of shaded grottoes, and sparkling fountains. Not a tree on all the broad acres was left standing in its stately beauty, but they were torn up by the roots, twisted and torn from base to top.

Never was ruin more complete, and prostrated alike were all the magnificent residences that surrounded it.

Hurling and whirling with stupendous force into Chouteau avenue, leading east the winds tore along crashing and crumbling homes and toppling into a confused mass great factories of brick and mortar within whose walls hundreds of industrious people were just finishing the day's toil. Scores were killed outright and many scores more were battered, bruised and crippled for life. It is nearly a mile from the park to the river down broad Chouteau avenue, and every foot of the way bore sad evidences of the wind's unbridled might. But the same forces that wrought all this destruction had its merciless battalions moving with the same vengeful wrath over the two miles to the south and the populous area from Jefferson avenue to the river, more than a mile. Annihilation was the battle cry of the infuriated hosts of the storm-king, and they spared not life, limb nor property.

At Russell and Oregon avenues the onslaught was terrible to behold and life upon life was crushed out. Sweeping up compactly-built Seventh street, total destruction seemed to have been the watch-word, and all along for a mile or more dead bodies, bleeding bodies and broken and mangled bodies were picked up from the wrecks of the fallen buildings. At Seventh and Rutger streets—on either side of the street the wind seemed to have combined its avenging forces and from one big

building alone 13 dead bodies were unearthed. Just below on Broadway (so alive with thrift and engaging in traffic in all the wares that one needs or wishes for) the long lines of busy trading shops and massive business blocks reeled and crumbled like card houses, and in many places the dead and injured outnumbered the unscathed.

The splendid business house at Broadway and Soulard crashed down upon a half-dozen men who, perhaps, scarcely knew what had happened before they were lifeless. On from thriving Broadway, four blocks more to the raging river banks—along which stood towering elevators filled with grain and black with the smokestacks of mammoth factories in which thousands of hands earned bread for themselves and families—the devastating winds swept, bearing down upon them with an irresistible force that sent them crackling and crumbling to the ground. Nor did it stop at the river's bank, but with a bound of insatiable fury hurled itself upon costly palaces of the river and every humble craft that floated in its wake, spinning them on the water like tops, snapping fore-castle, spar and beam until the waters rushed in and finished the fiendish work, and boat, crew and passengers alike went down to arise no more, or struggling to waters' surface were beaten down by hurling timbers, buffeted from wave to wave; and then the winds stopped not, but sped on across the bulging river to strike a death blow to St. Louis' foster city on the Illinois side.

The elements had done their worst. They had triumphed over a proud city and wrapped it in sackcloth and ashes. Two hundred lives had been snapped in twain, more than a thousand had been wounded, many unto death; more than five thousand were homeless, bereft of kindred, of clothing, and all that they had. Ten million dollars will not replace the property destroyed. The wreck was complete.



LAFAYETTE AVENUE NORTH AND WEST OF PARK



WRECKED RESIDENCES IN LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT



BUSINESS BLOCKS ON CHOUTEAU AVENUE



ST. VINCENT'S INSTITUTION FOR THE INSANE, NINTH AND MARION STREETS





CHURCH RUINS AT EIGHTH AND NINTH STREETS AND LAFAYETTE AVENUE



SEVENTH AND RUTGER STREETS. WHERE GREATEST NUMBER OF DEATHS OCCURRED



PURINA MILLS TWELFTH AND GRATIOT STREETS



CHOUTEAU AVENUE AT THE LEVEE



ST. PAUL'S GERMAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH, SOUTH NINTH STREET



AT TOWER GROVE STATION SOUTHWESTERN PORTION OF THE CITY



ELECTRIC CAR BLOWN FROM THE EADS' BRIDGE



WRECKED RESIDENCES IN THE LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT





CORNER OF RUSSELL AVENUE AND OREGON STREET



RUINS AT GEYER AND JEFFERSON AVENUES



TRINITY GERMAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, LAFAYETTE AVENUE AND EIGHTH STREET



KOERNER'S PLEASURE GARDEN



WRECKED RESIDENCES IN THE LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT



DOUGLASS SCHOOL EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL.



ANOTHER VIEW OF CITY HOSPITAL



MOUNT CALVARY EPISCOPAL CHURCH, JEFFERSON AND LAFAYETTE AVENUES





WRECKED RESIDENCES IN THE LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT



SCENE IN THE RAILROADS YARDS



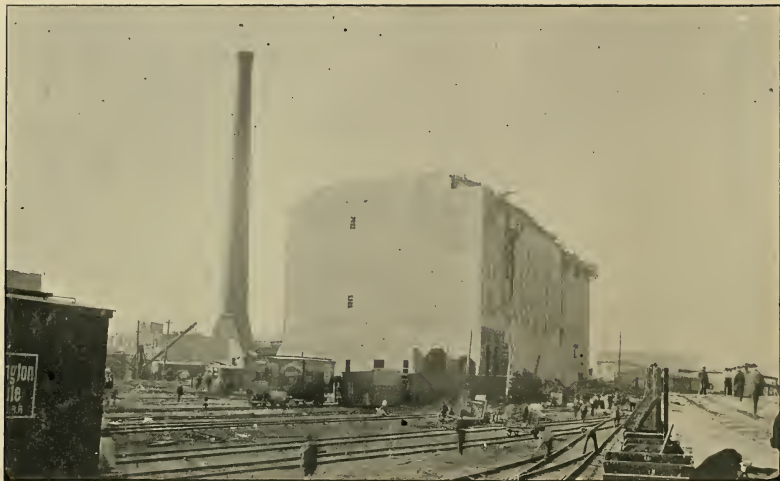
PLANT OF THE ST. LOUIS REFRIGERATOR AND WOODEN GUTTER COMPANY



WRECKED RESIDENCES IN THE LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE CITY HOSPITAL



ELEVATOR ON THE LEVEE.



RESIDENCE OF DR. STARKLOFF, COMPTON HEIGHTS



VIEW IN THE LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT





LOOKING SOUTHWEST FROM MISSISSIPPI AND LAFAYETTE AVENUES



ANCHOR HALL, PARK AND JEFFERSON AVENUES



WAREHOUSE ON TWELFTH AND GRATIOT STREETS



UNION CLUB, JEFFERSON AND LAFAYETTE AVENUES



CHURCH OF ST. JOHN OF NEPOMUK, SOULARD AND ELEVENTH STREETS



PEOPLE'S RAILWAY CO.'S POWER HOUSE



A SECTION OF THE LAFAYETTE PARK DISTRICT



CHURCH OF STS. PETER AND PAUL, SEVENTH STREET AND ALLEN AVENUE





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