

NEW ALBANY CYCLONE OF 1917

MARCH 23, 1917

Overview

The infamous myth that the Knobs to the west of New Albany, Indiana would protect the city from natural disasters was proven fatally wrong on the afternoon of March 23, 1917. This was one of the most disastrous days in history for the small town as a powerful F4 tornado caused unimaginable loss of life and destruction. Much of the town was forced to rebuild as homes and buildings were wiped off their foundations.

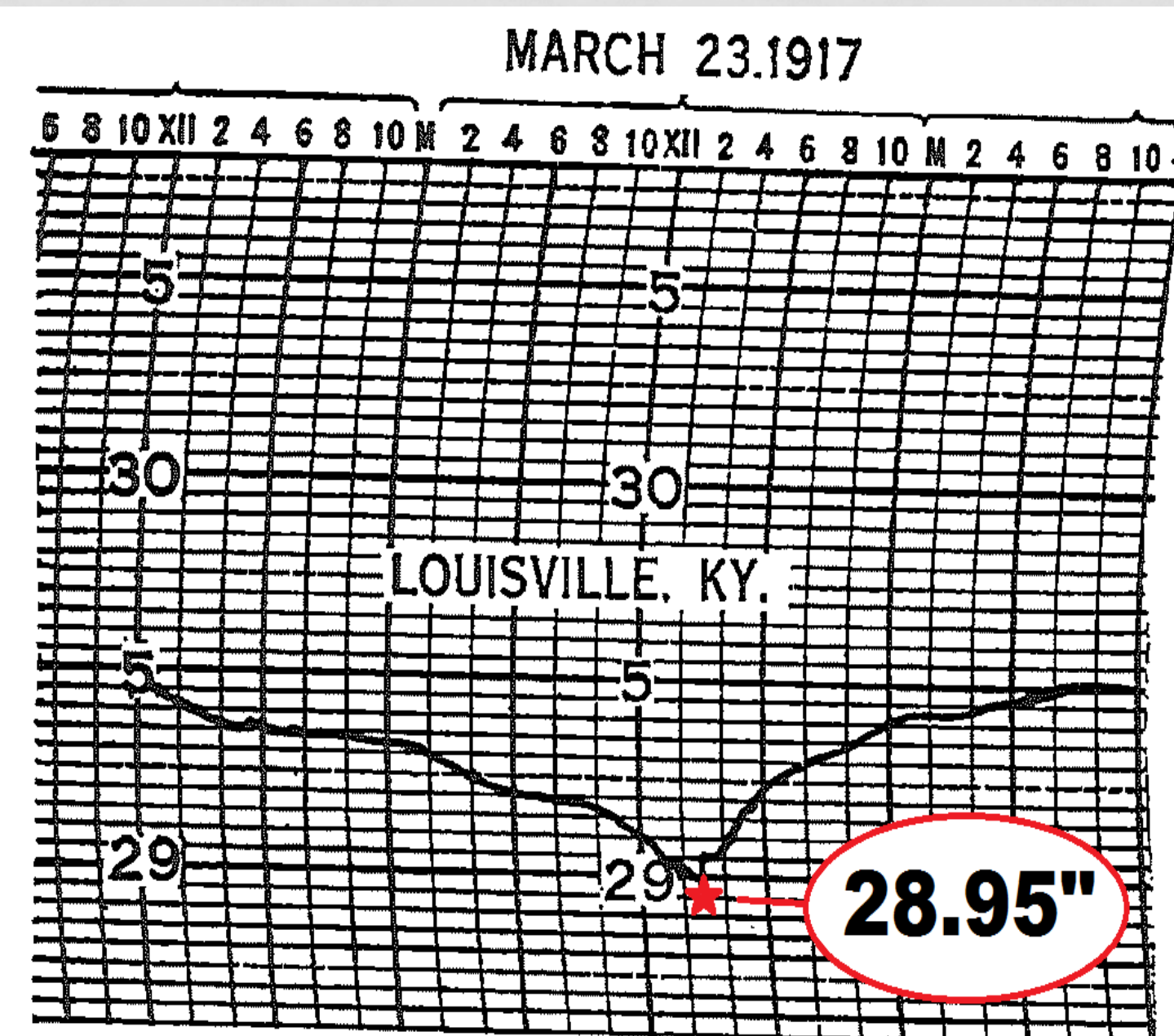
News about the tornado spread fast. Within an hour of the storm hitting, help from Louisville and surrounding towns arrived in New Albany. The Red Cross and National Guard worked around the clock helping those affected by the storm.



Front page of the Courier Journal the day after the tornado. Reprinted with permission, © [courier-journal](http://www.courier-journal.com)

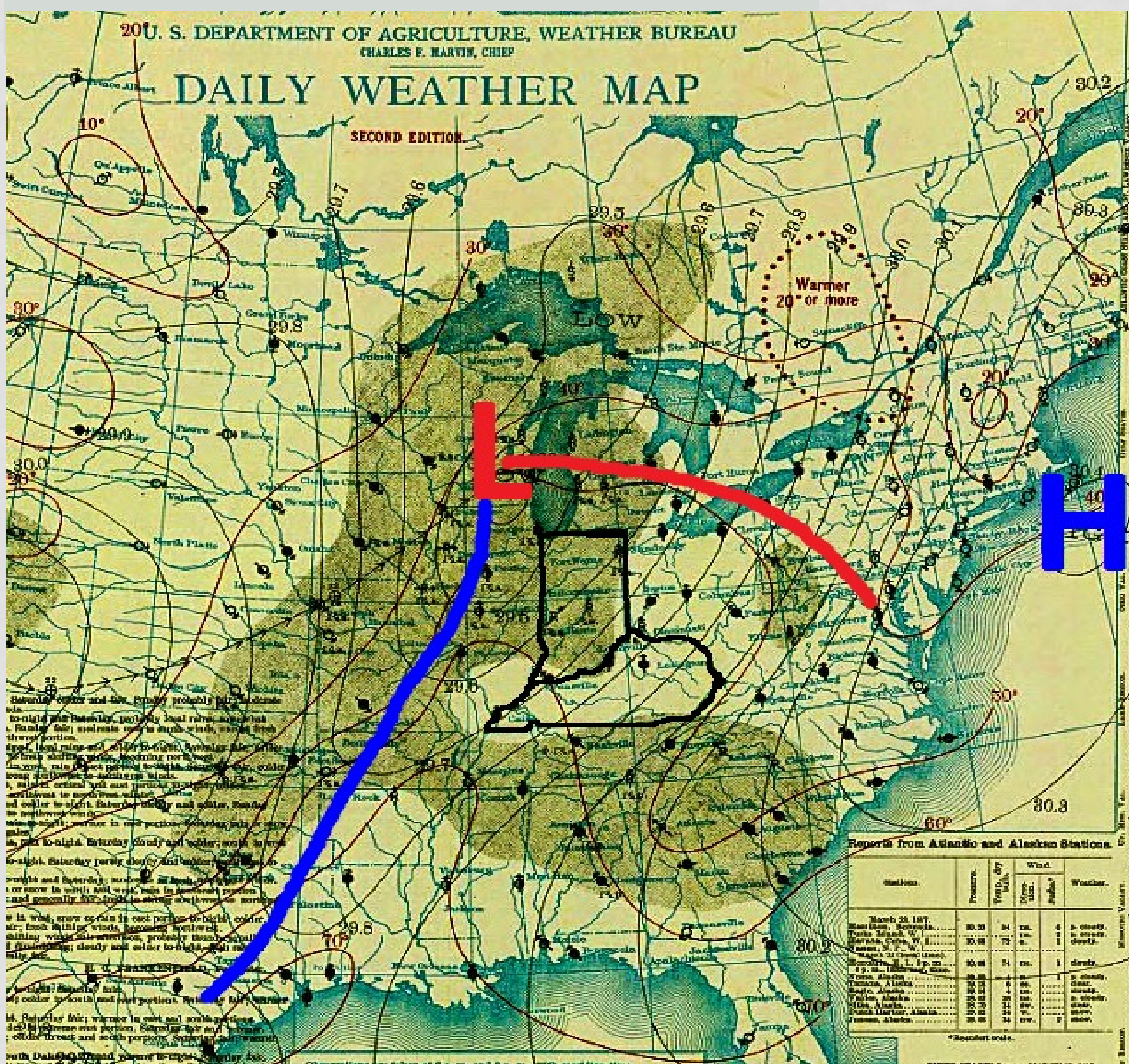
"...I never heard such a noise or went through such an experience as I did in the tornado Friday afternoon."

James Griswald, yard manager for the New Albany Lumber Company.



Barograph showing surface pressure (inches). Lowest near time of tornado. Courtesy NOAA Monthly Weather Review.

Near record setting low pressure was recorded in Louisville, KY at the time the tornado passed by a couple miles to the north.



Surface weather map on March 23, 1917. Courtesy NOAA Central Library.

Meteorology

Moist, unstable air from the Gulf of Mexico surged northward ahead of a low pressure system near Lake Michigan. Above normal temperatures and strong, changing winds with height in the atmosphere created perfect conditions for tornadoes. Meteorologists all across the Ohio Valley were concerned as they looked over the data that Friday morning.

Tornado Path

There are some discrepancies regarding the path of the tornado because of the lack of observations in rural areas in 1917. Despite this issue, it is believed that the tornado started about five miles west of Corydon, IN and continued for about 35 miles until it dissipated near Harrods Creek, KY.

Impacts

- 46 deaths
- 200 people injured
- \$1.5 M (\$28 M in 2017) in damage
- 500 homes and two schools destroyed
- Damage stretched over 75 blocks in New Albany
- Largest greenhouses in Midwest destroyed in New Albany



The Kahler Plant was destroyed by the tornado. Six employees were killed and 15 were injured. Courtesy of Gary D. Purlee.



Ruins of the Olden Street School where at least 5 (possibly 12) students died. Courtesy of Gary D. Purlee.