

Funnel cloud photographed by man

50. May 9/83

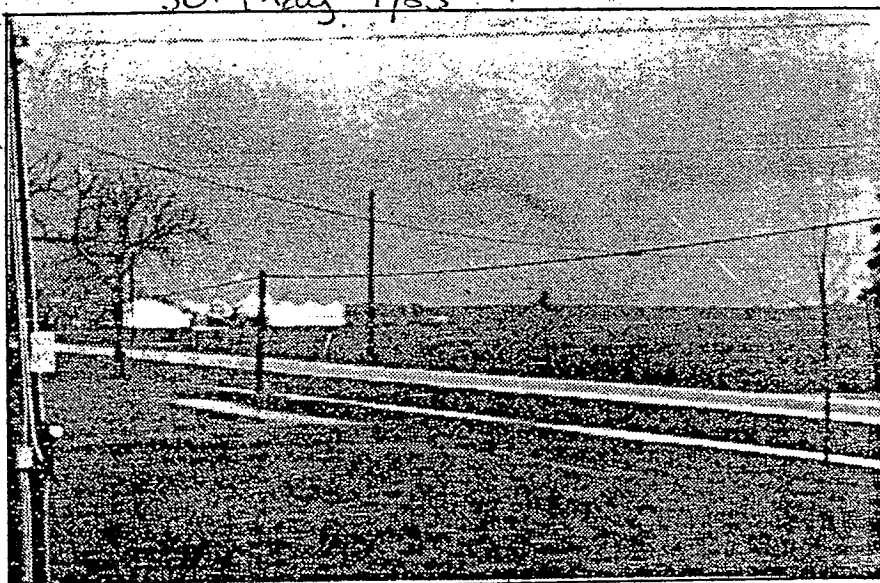
FOREST — Glen and Mildred Kernohan got about as close to a tornado last week as they'll ever want to get.

The Kernohans, who live on Warwick Concession 6-7 just east of Highway 21, have several snapshots of one of the twisters that struck Lambton County May 2. The tornado was about three kilometres away, southeast of the Kernohan property.

Mrs. Kernohan said Saturday that hydro crews were just passing her home about 1 p.m. when they saw the funnel cloud in the distance. They backed up to her home and her husband, on hearing the news, ran into the house to get a camera.

Fortunately, it had some film left in it and Mr. Kernohan got some pictures of the twister before it disappeared into the dark clouds above. It looked like it had touched down at some place, said Mrs. Kernohan.

She said she had never seen anything like it before. "That's as close as you want to get," she said. "It was going the other way...at the time, you don't comprehend it."



FUNNEL CLOUD

Sarnia Observer
May 9, 1983

Sarnia Observer June 15/83

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Sarnia
Observer
June 15
1983



THE FLEISCHER family raises a toast to the re-opening of their family restaurant, the Ranch House at Reece's Corners. From left are Rob, Ted, Paul and father, Walter, who spent the past six weeks working night and day to repair \$150,000 damage caused by the May 2 tor-

nado. Although the 16-room motel to the rear of the restaurant is not yet repaired, the family intends to rebuild it too. The Ranch House will be open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week now, as business returns to normal.

Observer Photo

Tornado ravaged restaurant reopens due to help from neighbors, friends

by MARY JANE EGAN
of The Observer

REECE'S CORNERS — The familiar aroma of freshly-baked bread filtering from the Ranch House Restaurant kitchen will seem a little sweeter to the old regulars today — mainly because they know the sweat and determination that went into it.

Only six weeks ago, the baking ovens of the popular Reece's Corners dining spot lay buried beneath a heap of smashed windows, shattered timber and felled ceilings — a vivid illustration of the force of the May 2 tornado which rocked this tiny community.

But at 6 a.m. today, the Ranch House became the first of several ravaged businesses to reopen after the storm which left 18 homeless and millions of

Mr. Fleischer Sr., who was in the real estate and construction business in Sarnia for 30 years before retiring and buying the Ranch House two years ago, admitted it took coaxing from his sons to begin the monumental task of clean-up.

"When I saw that mess I thought this is it, no more," he said.

But what eventually changed Mr. Fleischer's thinking was friend Willie Statton who was to have had her golden wedding anniversary dinner catered by the Ranch House five days after the tornado. While Mr. Fleischer hopelessly surveyed the ruins of the family business, Mrs. Statton came by to ask if he would still do the catering.

"That showed me," he said, shaking his head.

Phillip. The flags which had flown on the three poles outside the Ranch House were left in tatters in the storm.

Ray Price of Bright's Grove, a member of the tornado fund committee, thanked those who had given but said much more money is needed. He said the public shouldn't forget about the victims just because they are not as prominent in the press and urged everyone to continue to come up with donations and fund-raising ideas.

Meanwhile, the Fleischers plan to "make do" with the restaurant but will have to temporarily abandon plans for a major expansion which would have included putt-putt golf, a banquet room and a patio. And while the restaurant

lost out on the busiest day of the year — Mother's Day on May 11, Paul says it is some comfort to know Father's Day reservations can be accepted for this weekend.

Mr. Fleischer, who shielded two customers when the tornado struck because "they froze" and wouldn't lie down on the floor, is confident, as are his sons, that business will quickly pick up again.

And he adds the Ranch House is sure to be "more of a family place now" after the community help which made his re-opening possible.

"I tell you, it's like a religion," he says of the business. "You feed people well and they'll always be back."

But at 6 a.m. today, the Ranch House became the first of several ravaged businesses to reopen after the storm which left 18 homeless and millions of dollars damage in its wake.

Owners of the family business, Walter Fleischer and sons Paul, Rob and Ted, beamed Tuesday as they welcomed about 30 friends and reporters to the newly-repaired Ranch House. Around-the-clock labor and pressure of meeting a June 15 reopening date, meant Tuesday was the first night in six weeks the family could relax and look forward to a return to business as usual.

But the financial hardship and emotional scars are far from forgotten. Damage to the restaurant alone is estimated at \$150,000, about \$50,000 of which is uninsured. And the family hasn't even begun to estimate damage to the 16-room motel at the rear of the restaurant which suffered heavy losses.

To date, the Fleischers have received only \$32,000 from the insurance company and Mr. Fleischer Sr. believes the speedy clean-up may, in itself, prove a disadvantage for insurance reasons. He says a second adjuster was assigned to his case after repair work was well under way and therefore didn't see the full extent of damage.

The Fleischers had nothing but praise Tuesday for all who contributed to the Lambton County Tornado Relief Fund — now at about \$150,000 — but said the best immediate aid for small businesses faced with a similar disaster would be availability of low interest or free interest loans. Paul Fleischer said he appreciates the province's promise to match funds raised locally dollar for dollar, but said loans would solve the immediate problem of ready cash for repairs.

The family said without the help of friends and neighbors, they would never have met their targeted opening date. The restaurant's 25 employees worked diligently on clean-up as did friends, staff and various subcontractors. Friend Eric Norman built all new tables for the restaurant and others pitched in rebuilding partitions and walls.

Even a few hours before guests began arriving Tuesday, nails were still being hammered into place and last minute

surveyed the ruins of the family business, Mrs. Statton came by to ask if he would still do the catering.

"That showed me," he said, shaking his head. "Just that she still asked me...and the staff offered to do it out of their homes."

Although another caterer was obtained, Mr. Fleischer decided Mrs. Statton had the right type of positive attitude and concluded rebuilding the Ranch House was the only alternative.

That decision drew praise Tuesday from Lambton County Warden Dave Smith and Delores Ferguson who appeared on behalf of her husband Lambton-Middlesex MP Ralph Ferguson.

Warden Smith recognized "it's hard to take heart and start all over again," but said the Fleischers' decision not only shows faith in the area but is a necessary boost to the local tax base. He presented the Ranch House with a flag of Lambton County and Mrs. Ferguson presented a Canadian flag and picture of the Queen and Prince

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Tornado devastated Lambton 10 years ago

MAY 1 '93

1983
TORNADO

By DAN McCAFFERY
Of The Observer

There was virtually no warning. A power outage 20 minutes before it struck was the only hint that a tornado was about to devastate part of rural Lambton County 10 years ago this weekend.

The twister, which touched down at Reece's Corners shortly after 1 p.m. on May 2, 1983, sent 13 people to hospitals around the area and left 18 families homeless. Miraculously, there were no fatalities, although three of the injuries were serious and property damage was in the millions of dollars.

Although it was referred to at the time by local residents as the "Reece's Corners tornado," the storm also caused considerable damage in other parts of Lambton County. In fact, it first touched down on LaSalle Road in what was then Sarnia Township, about 11 kilometres (seven miles) south-east of Sarnia, heavily damaging the turkey farm of Andreas Franz, and several other buildings.

Proceeding northeast, it also damaged many homes and farm buildings along the second concession of Plympton Township (Confederation Street) west of Wyoming, particularly in the vicinity of Camlachie Sideroad. Indeed, the second line between sideroads six and nine was closed for a day.

High winds also damaged property in the Forest area and as far

downriver as Walpole Island. Forest OPP estimated damage near that town at \$800,000 to \$1 million.

An Observer newspaper story that appeared the next day noted the fierce windstorm left "a trail of destroyed homes, farms and businesses in its wake. Eyewitnesses say the storm lasted less than a minute. At least 14 homes and businesses were extensively damaged. At least two large chicken farms and a major Lambton County feedlot were destroyed." Less serious damage was caused to many other buildings.

Ontario Hydro crews from as far away as Niagara Falls worked through the night repairing damage in the aftermath of the storm, restoring power to most of Lambton's residents by the next day. Nevertheless, six rural schools remained closed a day after the tornado struck because of a lack of hydro.

Fortunately, no public or separate schools were hit by the twister, which set down at a time of day when schools were filled with students.

One man, Lawrence Coderre, was taken to Sarnia General Hospital in serious condition. He was a farmhand who was working on the Robert and Coleen Dobbin farm on Churchill Road when it was levelled by the twister.

Mr. Coderre, who recovered from his injuries and later went on to

work on a chicken farm near Norwich, had been painting a truck in a shed behind the house when the storm hit.

"Every bone in his face was broken," Mrs. Dobbin, who came to his rescue, recalled later. "He was in hospital a long time. He was in intensive care for quite a while."

Nadene Kerrigan, daughter of Dan and Phyllis Kerrigan of Reece's Corners, was taken to Sarnia General as well. First, reports listed her as being in satisfactory condition and she was later released.

At St. Joseph's Hospital, meanwhile, tornado victim Terry Thompson was brought in with injuries that left him in "stable and satisfactory condition." He also recovered later.

Ten other people received hospital treatment but did not have to be admitted. Eight of them were taken to Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia, which had seldom seen such a large influx of injured people at one time.

The cleanup lasted for weeks, with government agencies, church groups and ordinary citizens pitching in to help.

In fact, in an interview a year later, Ms. Dobbin said "the community was fantastic. It's something our family will never, ever forget. You couldn't have done it on your own. We would have had to walk away from it."



MUCH OF rural Lambton County in the Reece's Corners area of Plympton Township looked like a war zone after a tornado set down on May 2, 1983, destroying homes, businesses and farms. It was

only on the ground for about a minute, but the funnel cloud injured 13 people, caused millions of dollars in damage and left 18 families homeless.

Observer Photo

Neighbors survived twister huddled against cellar wall

It almost seemed alive.

That's how Nancy Chiasson remembers the malevolent tornado that came charging down on top of her like a runaway freight train exactly 10 years ago tomorrow.

Mrs. Chiasson, who had survived a brush with a twister as a school girl three decades earlier, was in the kitchen of a neighbor's home on the 6th Line of Plympton Township during the fateful afternoon of May 2, 1983.

Earlier in the day, she had noticed the weather seemed a little weird. "I remember saying to my son 'it's a funny day. The air feels really funny today.'"

Later, while she was making lunch, the hydro went out and it began raining. "It started raining really, really hard. It was a real bad storm. Then I noticed it was clearing and I walked over to a window to look outside." At that moment, she took in a heart-stopping sight she has never forgotten.

"I looked to the southwest and there it was, coming over a farmer's field straight for us — a funnel cloud."

The rampaging windstorm, she recalls, was black and incredibly tall — at least as tall as a 10-storey building. And it was bearing down at astonishing speed. "I screamed 'everybody get into the basement, it's a tornado!'"

Five people, including Mrs. Chiasson, barely had time to scramble up against a cellar wall before the twister slammed into the house, blasting it into a million pieces of separating junk.

Huddled in the basement, Mrs. Chiasson heard a thunderous roar that was so deafening she didn't even hear the house explode. "We couldn't hear the house being destroyed over the sound of the tornado. It sounded like a jet plane was landing on top of us. It just roared over. The house was flattened down to the floor but we had no idea what was going on above us."

Emerging moments later, she took in another terrifying spectacle. "We came out, looked to the east and the sucker was coming right back at us. It came back around and we went back into the

basement real quick. It was alive. There was a lot of life in that tornado."

Fortunately, the funnel cloud passed harmlessly by on its second pass.

When she emerged from the basement a second time Mrs. Chiasson discovered she was bleeding from the nose and her hair was caked in cement dust. Surveying the devastation, she "saw a truck had been flipped upside down with its turning signal on." The only thing left of the kitchen she'd been standing in moments earlier was one table leg and a chair.

"I said to Jenny (her neighbor, Jenny Verroen) 'my God, what will you do? Everything is gone.' She said right away 'we'll rebuild.'"

Everyone, she recalls, was happy to be alive. "We were all hugging each other. The others were all saying 'you saved our lives.' I said 'it wasn't a big deal, I saved myself.'"

The experience wasn't entirely new for her. "I saw the tornado that hit Flint in 1953. I saw it from a long way off. So I'd seen one before, but never that close. That's as close as I ever want to come again."

Mrs. Chiasson said she wasn't terribly frightened at the time because the whole thing was over in seconds. "You didn't really have time to be scared."

But for a many months afterward she had trouble coping whenever there was a storm, or even high winds. "Every time the wind would blow I'd sit on the bed and just shake."

As well, the 53-year old now believes she can sense tornadoes before they strike. "I just get a really weird feeling. I can sense it in the air. Every time I get that feeling there's a blurb on the (TV) screen with a tornado warning, or news that there's been a tornado. I had that feeling last week" when a twister struck in the American southwest.

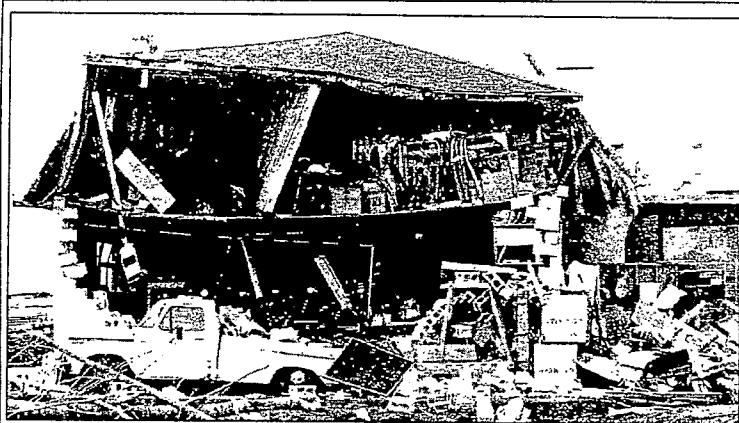
She credits her husband, Roger, with helping her get over her fears.

And she says some good came out of the ordeal because the whole community came together, with neighbors and even strangers lending a hand to help those who were left homeless.

And there was one other positive result. "It really brought home that life is precious. That was just a normal working day for us. Who would have thought it would ever turn out in that manner?"

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The couple and their children stayed with family until a mobile



THIS MOTORCYCLE dealership owned by Brian Sullivan was one of several buildings in Reece's

Corners flattened by the tornado of 1983. It took two years to fully rebuild the dealership.

Observer Photo

Motorcycle dealership destroyed

By PAUL MORDEN
of The Observer

Brian Sullivan said he would like to forget about the afternoon of May 2, 1983 but "you don't forget those kinds of things."

Earlier in the day, the radio warned that bad weather was on the way.

That afternoon, Mr. Sullivan and his wife Gail were working upstairs in their Reece's Corners motorcycle dealership. He looked through the front windows and saw that the sky had turned black.

Mr. Sullivan said he yelled for everyone in the shop to head for cover and they all went into a brick-walled washroom. "There was five of us in there hanging onto each other when the thing went through," he said. "It sounded like three freight trains running right over your head."

Within a few seconds the tornado had passed over Reece's Corners and left damage that in some cases took years to repair.

"It was just a mess," Mr. Sullivan said. "Fortunately, there

was very little personal injury involved."

The Sullivan's shop and the attached living quarters were right in the path of the tornado. Part of the building was still standing after the storm but it was damaged beyond repair and had to be pulled down.

The south wall of the building was ripped off. Glass and flying debris damaged several of the motorcycles in and around the showroom. Mr. Sullivan said walls were cracked and the building was knocked off its footings.

Some of the shop's stock was salvaged but the force of the tornado was so strong it blew motorcycles part-way up a flight of stairs, picked up a truck and tossed it into a field, and wrapped a car around a tree. "The people were great," Mr. Sullivan said of the community's reaction. Neighbors and friends came in to help victims clean up and find places to live.

The Sullivan's found a trailer to live in nearby and then went to work battling with insurance

companies to get the settlement they needed to rebuild. It took a year to build a new house and two years to rebuild their dealership.

Mr. Sullivan said that he no longer worries during bad storms but admitted, "You did for a while whenever you heard a freight train or a heavy wind."

He respects the power that tornadoes have and, whenever bad weather hits, he makes a point of figuring out where the safe places are in the building he is in.

Recently while watching television pictures of the damaged homes of Florida hurricane victims, Mr. Sullivan realized that while victims like himself are lucky when they lose only property and not their lives, "they lost part of their lives with their stuff."

Mr. Sullivan has a scrapbook with newspaper clippings from the tornado but said he doesn't spend much time now thinking about it. "It's not very productive."



NANCY CHIASSON examines photos from the tornado that swept through rural Lambton County 10 years ago tomorrow. Mrs. Chiasson, who lives today in Sarnia, got a point-blank look at the twister only moments before it destroyed the house she was standing in.

Observer Photo

Storm interrupted her 'perm'

At 1 p.m. May 2, 1983, Mary Vanderwielen was getting her hair done in a shop across the road from her Reece's Corners home when a tornado disrupted her per-

more than \$100,000." Mrs. Vanderwielen said, "I think my husband was a little more shook up than me."

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As well, the 53-year-old now believes she can sense tornadoes before they strike. "I just get a really weird feeling. I can sense it in the air. Every time I get that feeling there's a blurb on the (TV) screen with a tornado warning, or news that there's been a tornado. I had that feeling last week" when a twister struck in the American southwest.
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And she says some good came out of the ordeal because the whole community came together, with neighbors and even strangers lending a hand to help those who were left homeless.
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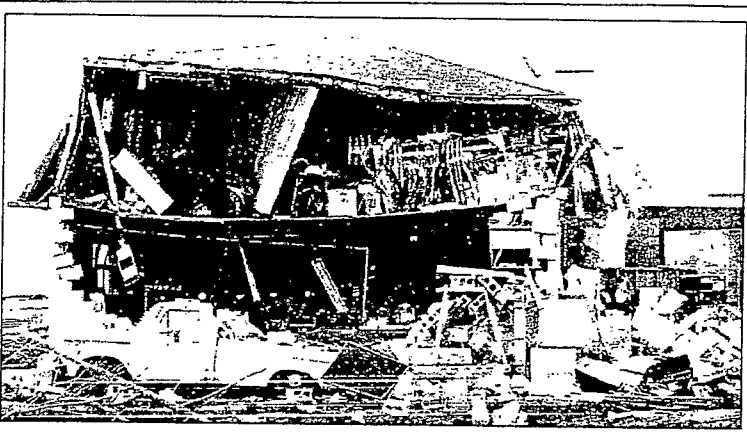
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Mrs. Vanderwielen said, "I think my husband was a little more shook up than me."
The living room wall in their home was blown in and the roof came off. "It was quite a mess."
But the hairdressing shop wasn't heavily damaged. After coming upstairs, Mrs. Vanderwielen said she saw the ground covered in uprooted trees and debris from the damaged buildings.
The family has eight children but some were grown and already living away from home. Luckily, the ones still living with them were in school or away for the day.
Mrs. Vanderwielen said one daughter was off work that day and could have been at home but she had decided to go into Sarnia.
The tornado's power still amazes Mrs. Vanderwielen. She said one of her daughter's shoes was found jammed behind electrical wires in a ceiling and the refrigerator was blown full of bits of insulation.
"My daughter's coat was found in Parkhill," she said. A farmer there discovered a coat in his field and believed that it must have been blown there by the tornado. By asking around, he eventually traced the coat to Reece's Corners

and brought it back to the Vanderwiens.
The couple and their children stayed with family until a mobile home could be moved onto their lot. Large numbers of volunteers showed up after the storm and within just a few days the debris from their home was cleaned up. "There was lots of help."
The community pulled together quickly to help the storm victims. Mrs. Vanderwielen said neighbors, friends, family and local churches all offered help. The couple's property was well-insured and they were able to rebuild quickly.
Just three weeks after the storm, Mr. Vanderwielen, a builder, had plans for a new home ready and was starting to rebuild. Within four months, they moved in and stayed in Reece's Corners until moving into Wyoming just a few years ago.
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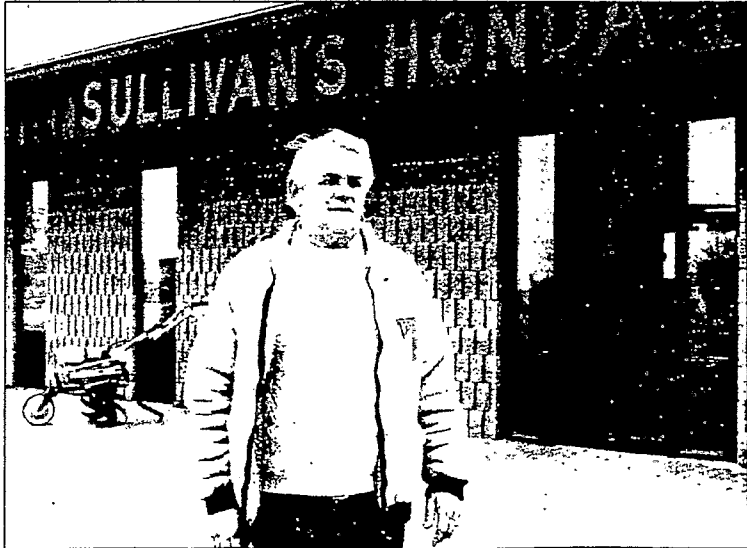
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BRIAN SULLIVAN was working in his motorcycle dealership when a tornado hit Reece's Corners May 2, 1983. It was two years before he reached a settlement with his insurance company and could rebuild. He is seen here in front of his present shop.
Observer Photo

They chose different methods of

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fourth in a series of articles by Observer reporter Terry Shaw on the anniversary of the devastating tornado which struck Lambton County with a vengeance May 2, 1983.

WYOMING — "I can still hear the house coming down. It folded like a matchbook."

Mary Nickels has lived in Wyoming since last July, but her thoughts often return to Reece's Corners where she narrowly escaped death during a few short, but destructive seconds one year ago.

She still marvels at the fact she wasn't injured while huddled in the basement clutching her small dog, as her two-storey brick home was torn apart above her. Rubble was strewn throughout the basement, but the tiny space she and her dog occupied was spared.

Before the tornado reached the Nickels' home, it made a brief stop a few kilometres to the southwest at the home of Robert and Carolyn Frayne. When the twister continued its journey it left behind a house torn in half and Mr. Frayne suf-

fering from several cracked ribs.

But Mr. Frayne was fortunate. Mrs. Frayne credits a tree behind the house with saving her husband's life.

Mr. Frayne had been working nights and was in bed on the upper floor of his two-storey house at 2776 LaSalle Rd. when the tornado touched down.

"I didn't like the way the wind was blowing, so I got up and walked to the doorway," Mr. Frayne said shortly after the storm had passed. "I went to open the door but I didn't get out of the room."

The entire side of the house, including the room in which Mr. Frayne was standing, was swept away, throwing him to the ground amid flying debris.

To this day, Mrs. Frayne is convinced the location of the tree prevented her husband from being lifted up and carried off by the twister. Portions of the bedroom wall and roof were imbedded in the tree's branches, which, she said, provided enough of an obstruction to allow Mr. Frayne to fall to the ground.

She was spared any injury, although she found herself trapped in a doorway in another part of the house, while much of the roof was ripped away and all the doors and windows were blown out.

While the two families shared similar horrors, they chose different roads back to a normal life.

Mrs. Nickels and her husband Rae rented a house in Wyoming and, two months later, decided to sell their Reece's Corners property and purchase a home a few streets from where they had lived for the previous eight weeks.

Rather than rent a mobile home, which were difficult to find at that time because of the number of homeless families, the Nickels

agreed the best move for them would be to buy a house elsewhere.

"I would have liked to have rebuilt (on the same location), but my husband thought it would have been too hard on me to live in a trailer."

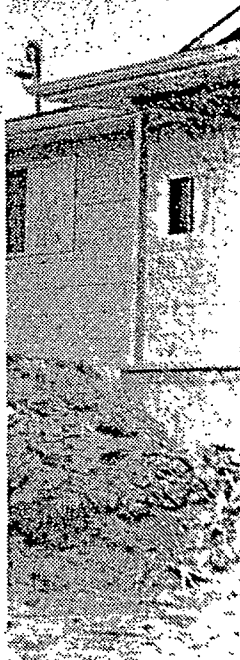
He didn't want his wife to be forced to live in their lot with the constant reminder of the destruction, while they rebuilt their home.

Their property was purchased by Brian and Gayle Sullivan, who own a motorcycle repair business which was located just two doors away and was also leveled by the storm. An attractive one-storey brick home has since been constructed on the former Nickels' property.



MARY NICKELS AND HER DOG SURVIVED ORDEAL

Observer Photo



CAROLYN FRAYNE

Sarnik
Observer
May 5, 1984

91A-M
1983

15, 1984

ods of piecing lives together

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ted on the former
els' property.

Mrs. Nickels estimated
damage at close to
\$150,000, but the family
was well insured and
recovered the vast ma-
jority of their losses. They
didn't qualify for compen-
sation from the tornado
relief fund, since it was
only made available for
people suffering unin-
sured loss.
The Frayne family
rebuilt — a long and what
turned out to be an expen-
sive proposition.
"We put out \$10,000 out
of our own pockets," said
Mrs. Frayne. "We're still
in debt from it."
Although their
damages totalled about
\$100,000, the family was
only insured for \$60,000,
so they had to rebuild
what they could with the
money they had, with no

help from the tornado
relief committee. She
said all they received
from their request for
money from the commit-
tee was a "nasty letter"
indicating they would not
be placed on the list of
those receiving compen-
sation.
"I still don't have towel
racks (in the bathroom)
because I can't afford
them," she said. "But we
have a nice home now."
They never would have
been able to rebuild,
without going "broke," if
not for the help of about 35
volunteers from nearby
Mandaumin United
Church and Petrolia
Masonic Lodge.
They arrived at the
scene one sunny Saturday
afternoon in mid-June in
the old barn-raising tradi-

tion and erected the shell
of a prefabricated house.
Mrs. Nickels also
credited friends and
neighbors with helping to
soften the blow and mak-
ing the cleanup not only
easier, but possible.
"You couldn't do it by
yourself," she said. "We
had things that needed
storage."
Mrs. Frayne was so im-
pressed with the outpour-
ing of compassion from
others that she intends to
return the favor to anyone
in the area in need of
assistance in the event a
similar disaster occurs in
the future.
"If it ever happens
again I hope I'm able to
help like they did. It's
people like that who make
the world go 'round."



CAROLYN FRAYNE CREDITS TREE WITH SAVING HUSBAND BOB'S LIFE

Observer Photo

Bill Ironside of The Free Press

am's face were among the survivors
basement, but their home had only

Years ago life-saver

cover I'd probably be dead. As I left the
back yard I could feel the pull. I would
have been swept away."

A few seconds later, when the twister
passed, the couple emerged unscathed
from their basement to find only minimal
damage to their home. Branches hung
from some nearby trees, small dents
scarred the house. To the west, about 15
metres (50 feet) into the path of the torna-
do, lay the twisted remains of a small
aluminum boat.

Farther west, residents weren't so
lucky.

The Dan Kerrigan home, his farm im-
plement shed and a helper's house trailer
were destroyed, almost beyond recogni-
tion. Kerrigan's barn was badly da-
maged. Still farther west along Highway
7, a number of businesses and residences
were in a shambles.

When the Dunhams rushed to their
neighbors' aid, they found bloodied faces,
trapped limbs and years of hard work
smashed to the landscape.

"It really shakes a guy up. We're very,
very fortunate," said Mr. Dunham.

One of his snakes from the front of his
one-storey house.

High winds also levelled several big
spruce trees on the property, with two trees
about 20 metres (65 feet) in length and
almost a metre (three feet) in diameter
coming to rest on their sides only a few
metres from the rear of Baker's house.

The storm left a field in front of Baker's
house and surrounding the levelled barn
and shed strewn with chunks of twisted
metal siding and shattered pieces of wood.
Power lines had touched down in two sepa-
rate places after a pair of hydro poles were
snapped, leaving the house without
electricity.

time and said the single-storey house shook
about 2:40 p.m. under the force of the wind.
"I ran downstairs and waited for the storm
to pass. The whole house was quaking. I
could actually feel it shaking." Several
rooms in the house were left littered with
broken glass after windows were blown in.
Nearby, Monte Facey of RR 1, Bright,
described howling winds that ripped up
large trees. "There was just a roar followed
by the sound of breaking windows. We
headed for the basement and you could
actually feel the pressure in the house drop
for about 30 seconds. We could feel our ears
popping."

WHITE, SWIRLING FURY

Witnesses saw funnels separate, then rejoin

WYOMING (Bureau) — Eileen Zinn
thought tornadoes were supposed to be
black, but it was a white, swirling fury that
she and fellow Lambton County employees
watched from their safe vantage point in
the county headquarters on the north edge
of this village Monday.

The secretary said "it was raining cats
and dogs" before the power went off in the
building just before 1 p.m. Employees
looked out the windows toward the Ontario
Hydro operation immediately to the south.
They saw Hydro employees run out of their
office and point to the north, she said, so the
county employees looked out their north
windows and saw the twister directly north
of their building, about a kilometre away.

"It looked like a white funnel and the sky
around it was so black that it looked even

whiter. It was swirling and separated into
two funnels, definitely two, and then went
back into one."

Zinn said the funnel seemed to be moving
slowly in a northeast direction. Just as she
figured it hit Reeves Corners to the north-
east, "suddenly we saw a building go up
into the air. It seemed to explode. There
were pieces flying around in the air."

She said county staff, shocked by what
they saw, tried to continue working but
found it hard to concentrate. Without elec-
tricity, they were unable to operate office
equipment so they finally were sent home
about 3 p.m. As she drove through Reeves
Corners on her way home to Sarnia, she
said the reports she had heard earlier did
not prepare her for the "unbelievable"
damage.

London
Free
Press
Thurs May 3, 1978



Disaster at Reece's Corners

They'll never forget that sound... 91A-M



For Bryan Sullivan of Reece's Corners 15 years of work lay smashed before him, the aftermath of a devastating twister that roared through the community Monday. Sullivan estimates damage to the building that housed his motorcycle shop at more than \$140,000. Stock and inventory will bring the final total considerably higher.



By: Heather Rath

It was as if a giant had suddenly gone berserk and swung his mighty fist across the land in a terrible rage.

The tornado of Lambton County, May 2, 1983. Accompanied by high winds and a torrential downpour, the twister struck mercilessly throughout the area.

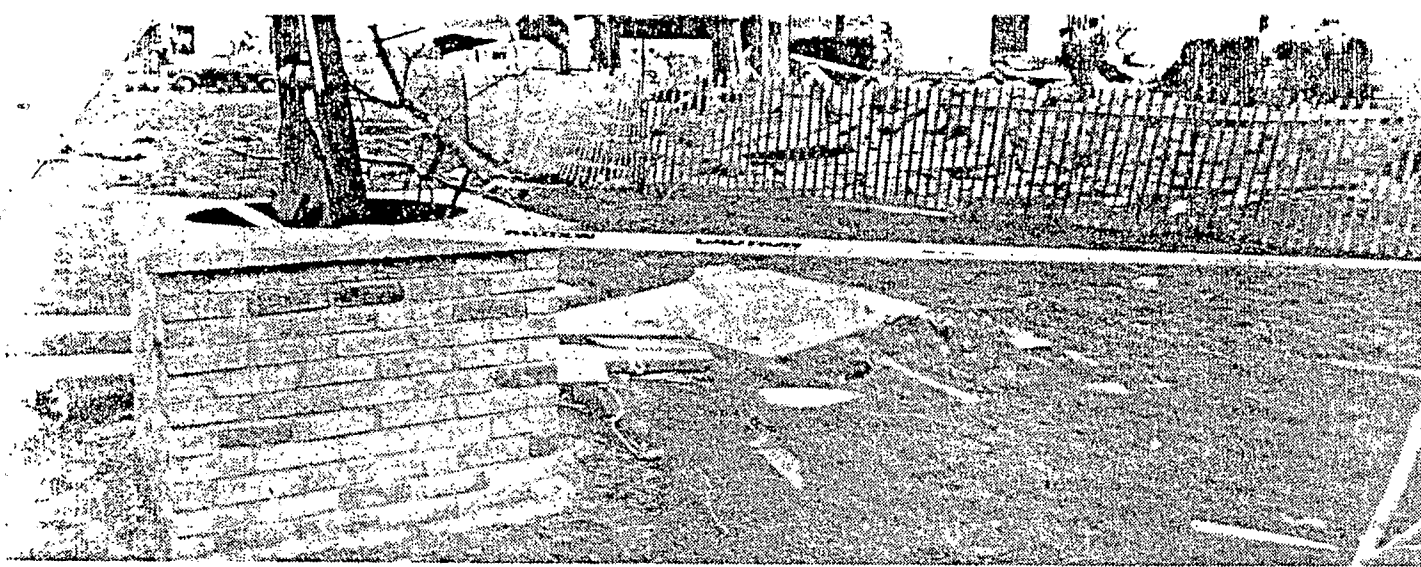
And in Reece's Corners, where half the hamlet was destroyed, perhaps it was Moses, a small, black cockapoo who sensed the impending destruction.

"At 3 minutes to one (p.m.), the clock stopped. The hydro had gone off. And Moses was crying," tells

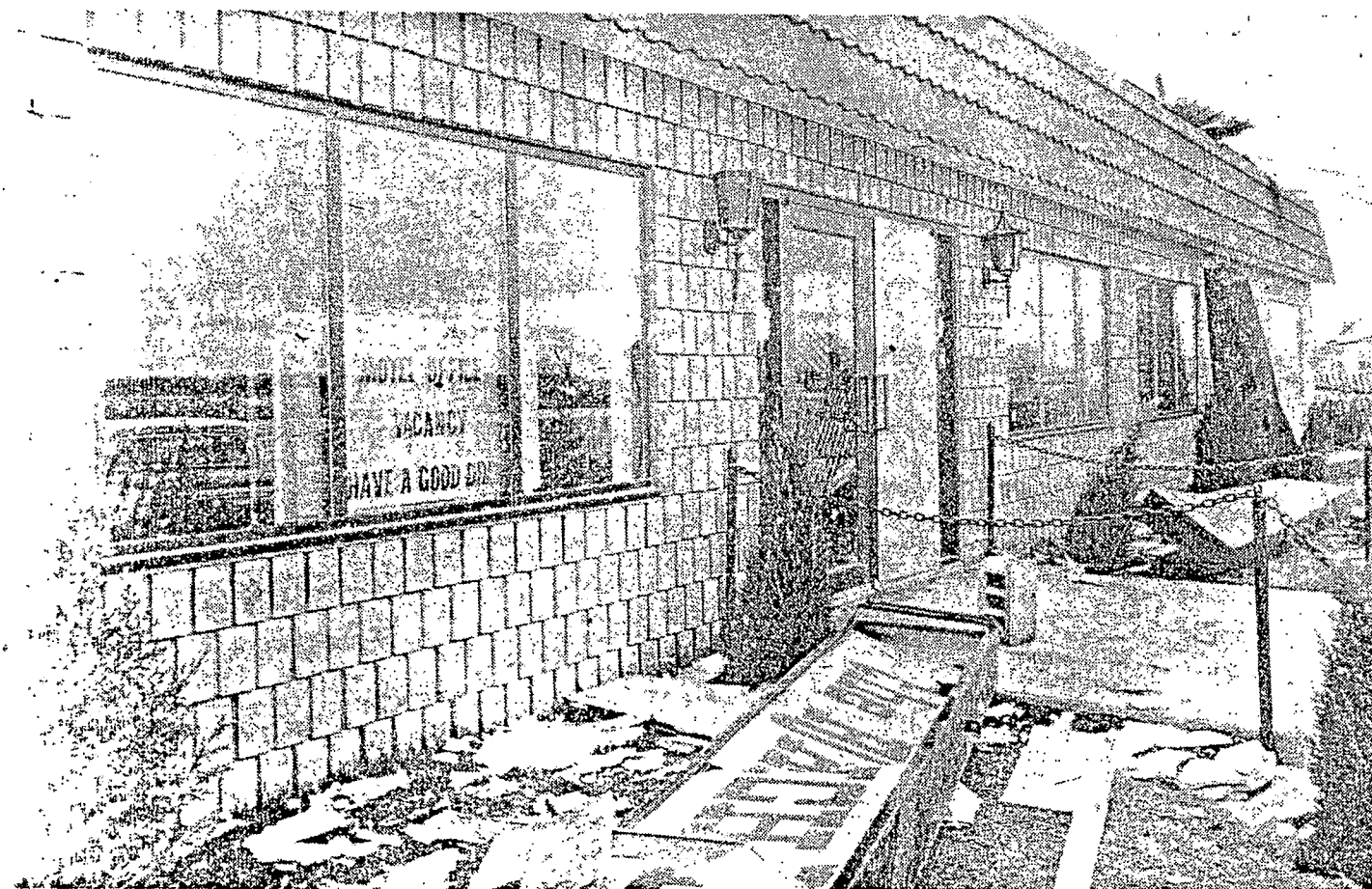
were lucky. The tornado missed them. Offering shelter to less fortunate neighbours, their concern now is for the missing Moses. Terrified and disoriented, the dog was last seen running down Highway 7.

"When we came back up," recalls Peggy, "we looked out the east window and could see the tornado heading slightly to the north and east. And then we saw Sullivan's (Motorcycle Shop)."

Before it hit Reece's Corners, the tornado hurtled across Lambton, touching down on LaSalle Road; and the Bob Dobbin farm, southwest of Wyoming, where it caused one million dollars damage.



While their wishing well escaped virtually unscathed, the Rae and Mary Nickel home at Reece's Corners shows the devastating effects of Monday's tornado.



it was an ironic site. Among the destruction at Reece's Corners an untouched sign in the window of the

Peggy Drage, owner of Moses and co-owner with her husband, John, of Studio Seven on the west side of Highway 21 at Reece's Corners.

"It sounded like a freight train that got stronger and stronger," Peggy knew that ominous sound; she had experienced the awesome Sarnia tornado of 1953.

Frightened, she, her daughter, Chris, husband John, visitor, Hope Morritt of Sarnia, and the whimpering Moses, headed for the southeast corner of the basement.

Groping their way in the darkness, they knew the twister had passed even before they had reached shelter.

"30 seconds. It must have been 30 seconds."

Added daughter Chris: "we saw it coming. White and grey swirling clouds."

And Hope Morritt: "hydro lines were the bad part. They were down everywhere. Trees sheared off. Twisted light standards. A transport overturned. I was scared."

But Studio Seven

then it spun dangerously towards Forest.

Bryan Sullivan, on the east side of Highway 21 at Reece's Corners, lost his shop of 15 years. "I got everyone in the washroom," he relates. It took just seconds for the twister to wreak its havoc and Sullivan saw it.

"I thought," he went on, "I hope it doesn't hit here." It did. After the tornado moved on, Sullivan and his son Larry were busy loading motorcycles into a truck. "The walls are falling down every which way," explained Larry. "It's amazing the building has stayed up as long as it has."

Sullivan's Shop was last appraised at \$140,000., and is only partially insured. His parting comment: "this doesn't happen often in a guy's life and I hope it doesn't happen again."

The home of Danny Kerrigan on Highway 7 was ripped from its foundation like a matchbox toy and then cruelly hurled on its side. Trees, debris, and per-

"It's like Woodstock all over again": Cop

By: Chris Cooke

"It's like Woodstock all over again." And for Petrolia Provincial Police Constable Paul Phillips it was.

Phillips, who was in Woodstock when a tornado ripped through that Oxford County city several years ago knows about disaster. Only this time it was Reece's Corners and the devastation was visibly apparent.

The noon hour twister had cut a swath through the hamlet damaging or destroying 14 buildings in its path. It took just seconds but for some a lifetime of toil lay in ruins.

Amazingly there were few injuries. Ambulances rushed people to Sarnia hospitals but only one was seriously injured. Lawrence Coderre, a farm hand on the Bob Dobbin farm at

route three Petrolia was hurt when an out-building collapsed. Dobbin's showplace

farm, estimated at \$2.5 million was flattened by the twister.

"It took just

seconds and came without warning," explained Peggy Drage whose Reece's Corners

studio and art shop narrowly escaped destruction.

Her tale about "the grey - white

funnel cloud" that sounded like a rushing train was to be recited over and over again by those who witnessed Mother Nature's fury.

Drage, like Phillips knows about tornadoes. She was in Sarnia 30 years ago when a much publicized twister rumbled through the downtown area.

"I recognized that sound" she explained, "so I told everybody (husband John, daughter Chris) and visitor Hope Morritt to head to the basement." She was lucky.

But a quarter of a mile away Bryan Sullivan wasn't as fortunate. By late afternoon a transport truck was being used to pick up the remains of his battered motorcycle business.

His \$140,000 building was twisted and broken and expensive motorcycles lay visibly damaged. Sullivan described

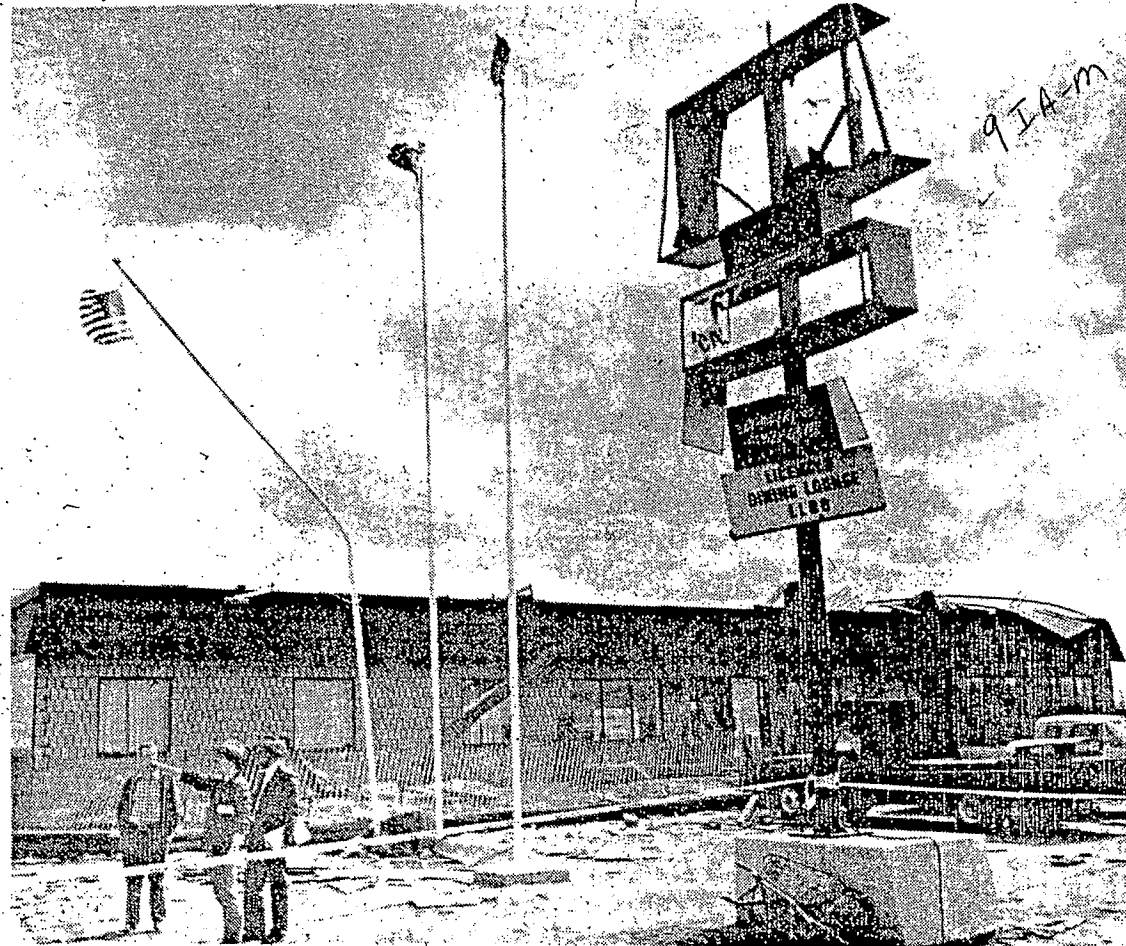
Two nearly new houses reduced to tangled wrecks remained while owners sifted through mounds of debris.

The neighbouring Ranch House Restaurant and Motel resembled a war zone. Its roof collapsed, noon hour patrons had narrowly escaped.

Across highway seven the roof had been sheared from Granny's Pizza Parlour. And at Kerrigan's Fruit Farm Allan Walker stood perusing the ruins.

Working in the basement of his undamaged home about a mile away he had missed the fury of the funnel cloud but had recognized the sound "like a big truck hitting a door."

With his six year old daughter Nadene hospitalized Danny Kerrigan wasn't anxious to discuss the disaster before him. His 15 year investment in the



A bent flag pole towers precariously over the remains of the previously bustling Ranch House Restaurant. Just hours before patrons narrowly escaped injury as the roof collapsed under pressure of a passing Tornado.



Granny's Pizza Parlour was reduced to an empty shell after Monday's tornado. The roof disappeared and the interior turned to rubble.

She just saw bricks flying from her fireplace

Continued from Page 3
sonal belongings were flung about haphazardly. Kerrigan stood silently in shock.

"I never knew anything had happened," he spoke quietly. "I was coming home from work in the truck. I didn't have the radio on."

He looked around him in disbelief. Kerrigan's 6-year-old daughter, Nadene, had been trapped in the rubble but is reported in Sarnia General Hospital in "good" condition. She had

been home from school with the chicken pox.

Kerrigan could not even imagine how much damage there was to his property. "How do you put an estimate on something like this?" he shook his head. For 15 years he had operated his fruit farm - his father 20 years before that.

The home of Rae and Mary Nickel was also in shambles. In fact, Mrs. Nickel, when she was brought to Studio Seven im-

mediately following the impact, was in shock. "She just saw bricks from her fireplace fly and when she made it to the basement she saw the furnace disintegrate."

The roof and top storey were torn from the Nickel home; trees, wood, and debris were strewn about the property. From the highway one could see green-carpeted stairs and a twisted staircase. Outside sits a wishing well, virtually untouched.

To the east of the

Nickel home lie the remains of the John Vanderwielen residence. The roof had disappeared; the top half was left tottering dangerously; neighbours were slowly boxing belongings.

A twisted and bent flagpole flying an American flag marked the exterior of what was once The Ranch Restaurant - its roof gone, its interior demolished.

Ravaged, too, was Granny's Pizza Parlour across the highway: win-

dows gaping, roof vanished, signs twisted.

According to Constable Paul Phillips, Petrolia OPP, Reece's Corners was "pretty well done...with 14 buildings severely damaged or destroyed. It's like Woodstock all over again."

John Lindeboom, Sr. of Wyoming, was driving home from work at Sarnia Concrete just after the tornado struck in the Confederation Road area.

"I came down Confederation and all of a sudden I hit the strong winds, a downpour, hydro wires were down, a couple of homes demolished. Trees were twisted. Barns flattened," he describes. "People were running out of a house. I stopped."

Miraculously, although there were injuries, no lives were lost as a result of the twister.

Eyewitnesses tell of bizarre happenings, though:

like chickens being driven through trees by the ferocious force of the wind; and a man in bed being dropped from the second to the first level of his home.

According to Sarnia meteorologist, George Garner, weather conditions were ripe for the tornado - warm air clashed with a sudden cold front.

Damage throughout the county is expected to run into millions of dollars.

skipped" across an adjacent field before slamming into his building. "I had only seconds to get everybody into the washroom."

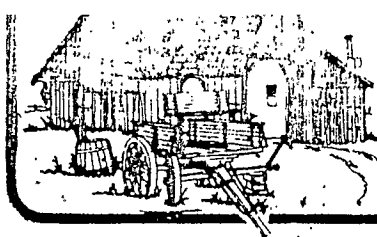
Asked about insurance he pondered, still in shock, and responded hesitantly "one can never be fully insured in a disaster like this."

Further down highway seven the fierce wrath of the twister became more apparent.

How do you put an estimate on something like this" he snapped tersely "come and see me in a couple of days."

But through it all there was the ironic. A perfectly untouched sign in one of the few remaining windows of the Ranch House Restaurant read invitingly "Motel office, Vacancy...Have A Good Day."

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"I saw it seconds before it hit"

**Len Dobbin and family take
cover as tornado strikes**

By Oscar Pimiskern

Len Dobbin looked through the kitchen of his father's home Monday May 2 and what he

saw pushed everything else from his mind; there was only one thing -- he and his mother Coreen and sister Lynn Dobbin

had to survive.

"I saw it two seconds before it hit. It looked like a wave. There was no funnel, just swirling white stuff everywhere. I didn't see it but the funnel must have been 300 feet wide.

"I couldn't believe it. It was unreal. We didn't think anything -- just basement -- that's it.

"The roar was like a train running over us. It lasted about 30 seconds. The house above us was gone."

After the tornado hit Bob Dobbin's place, son Len immediately looked across the Plympton-Enniskillen townline to see if his own home was still standing. Half of it was. Inside was Len's wife Janet and two-week old baby.

Len's wife and child survived and so did the other members of Bob and Coreen Dobbin's family. They survived a tornado that literally tore apart and spread their home and outbuildings across Plympton Township.

Looking over the rubble that was once a modern farmstead, this reporter asked Mr. Dobbin: "What can a person say when something like

surgery to remove glass; and needed 60 stitches for damage to his face. Shiela Kerrigan, seven-year-old daughter of Dan Kerrigan whose family-operated orchard was hit at Reece's Corners, was recently listed in satisfactory condition in Sarnia General hospital. She had been pinned under debris from a collapsed roof.

The twister also tornado battered Walpole Island homes and buildings. Downed trees and a pathway formed by sheet metal and other debris, pointed out the twister's path.

Touching down again in mid-Lambton, it bowled over a swathe at roughly a 45 degree angle to and from Bob Dobbin's home, over the Plympton-Enniskillen townline, over Confederation Road, to Reece's Corners and just south of Forest.

To the south and west of Dobbin's place, Amy Franz said she saw a straight column of air lift and drop a three-storey barn filled with 36,000 chickens. To the north and east of Bob Dobbin's on Confederation Road, neighbours and relatives were pick-

whether they were covered in situations commonly referred to as acts of God. A tornado is an act of God, he said, but it's an insured act. Tornado victims in Lambton County must now determine whether their present coverage is

high enough to cover rebuilding costs.

There's the possibility of help from government, but municipal affairs and housing minister Claude Bennet who toured the ravaged areas said municipal
(Continued On Page 2)

Bill Abraham says good-bye

"I am leaving the post of agricultural representative for Lambton County with mixed emotion."

"After 25 years in one location there is no doubt in my mind that the change in position will provide the office and farm organizations a welcome time for renewal of approach to the problems facing agriculture in the 80's."

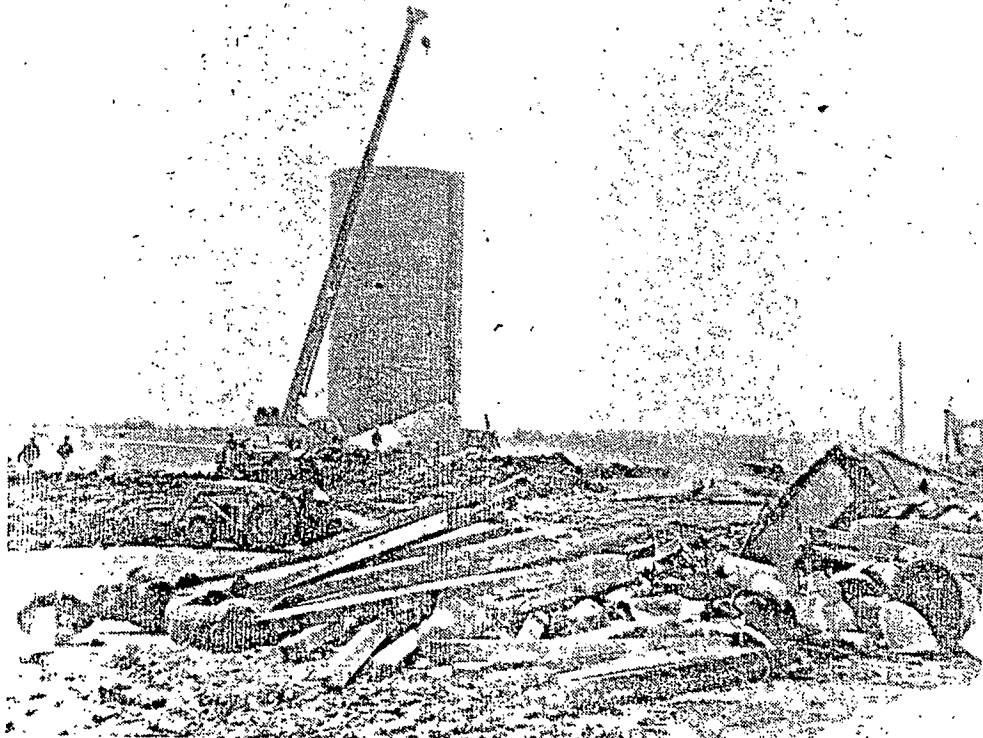
"Looking back over the years that I have had the pleasure to serve in the county, we have been pleased to note many changes made by our progressive farmers. The appearance of the county has improved tremendously. New homes and barns have replaced many of the rambling frame homes and many outbuildings of the past. Many new farm organizations have developed to assist farmers in working out the problems that occurred in many cases because of increased specialization."

"While the number of farms has decreased, production has increased due to changing technology and drainage that has been completed."



SAW THE APPROACH -- Len Dobbin standing in front of the rubble that was once a modern feedlot operation owned by his father Bob Dobbin, saw the tornado seconds before it demolished the Dobbin farmstead. Len's wife and two-week-old child huddled on the floor in their home across the street from the main farm.

(Staff Photos - O. Pimiskern)



A GRIM REMINDER -- Standing in mute testimony to Nature's destructive power, this concrete silo was about all that remained of the Dobbin feedlot

tornado that literally tore apart and spread their home and outbuildings across Plympton Township.

Looking over the rubble that was once a modern farmstead, this reporter asked Mr. Dobbin: "What can a person say when something like this happens."

"Nothing," he replied. "I'm lucky that I'm not going to any funerals today. We're lucky nobody's dead."

Dobbin's farmhand, Lawrence Corderre of RR 3 Petrolia wasn't so lucky. Working in a shed when the twister hit, Corderre required

to the south and west of Dobbin's place, Amy Franz said she saw a straight column of air lift and drop a three-storey barn filled with 36,000 chickens. To the north and east of Bob Dobbin's on Confederation Road, neighbours and relatives were picking all manner of debris from an alfalfa field owned by Murray Wilcox. All around the Wilcox place, trees were pushed over pointing to Reece's Corners. Across the road from Wilcox's, a small home and barn owned by Ross Dobbin, brother to Bob, was demolished. No one was in the rented home when the twister hit. The nearby Anderson home was twisted around on its foundation. Melvin Tuers lost half of his barn's roof. A barn owned by the Core Brothers was also crumpled.

Insurance coverage

Barry Hogan, manager of Gamble Insurance in Sarnia with offices in Lambton County said that a standard farm insurance package covers tornado related property damage. Damage through windstorm is standard coverage and it includes losses from hurricane and tornado. The point is to make sure that the amount of coverage is adequate to compensate for any potential loss, Hogan said and added that the Sarnia office phone rang off the hook Monday afternoon with queries from policy holders as to

replaced many of the rambling frame homes and many outbuildings of the past. Many new farm organizations have developed to assist farmers in working out the problems that occurred in many cases because of increased specialization.

"While the number of farms has decreased, production has increased due to changing technology and drainage that has been completed."

"New concerns are developing for farm people and their organization to wrestle with. Increased government regulations, and water conservation projects, pests that are resistant to today's control measures are but a few. However, there has never been a period when practicing farmers and their leaders have been as well trained to deal with the challenges.

"I want to say 'thank you' to the many, many people that have helped make my 25 years working with Lambton farmers a most rewarding experience and to realize there is lots of talent to meet any challenge of the future."

about people

Sam McCrea is one of many farmers who fear certain aspects of the province's revision to the tax reduction program. Ag. minister Dennis Timbrell, in the county recently, laid those fears to rest. Details on page 8.

also inside

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briefly

Bankers have verbally warned actors in the continuing saga of Ralph Ferguson's Bil C-653 that if passed in the House of Commons, farm lending will dry up -- and apparently they mean it. Story on page 18.

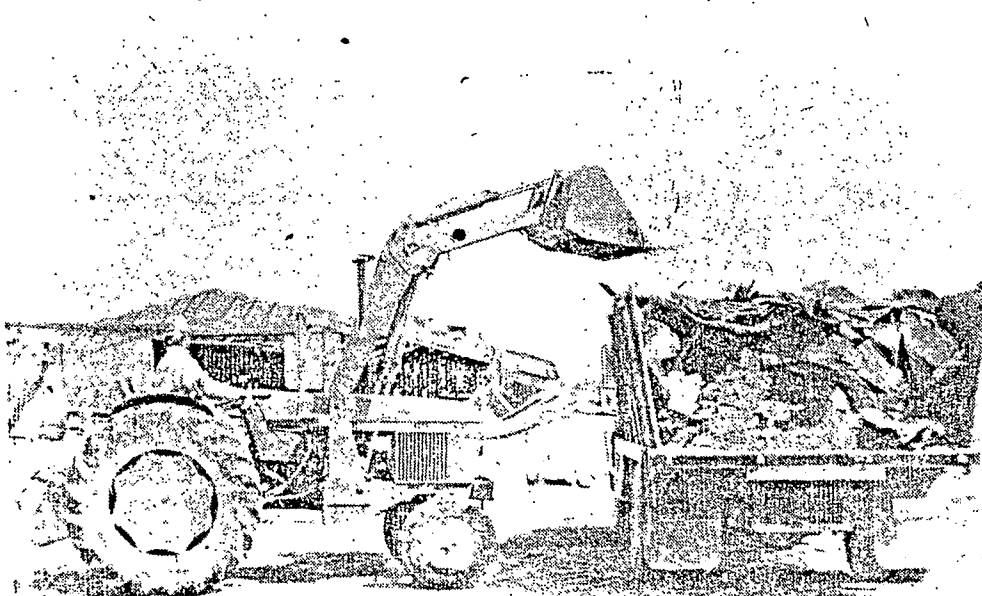
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say when something like and relatives were pick-

completed.



HELPING HANDS -- A group of farmers help clear Murray Wilcox's alfalfa field of debris.



"I saw it seconds before it hit"

(Continued From Page 1) government must request help from the province's disaster relief fund. Under the disaster relief fund, the province matches private donations. A request must receive cabinet approval and funds must be administered by a locally appointed citizen's committee.

Plympton Township reeve and county warden Dave Smith attended the tour with Bennet and Lambton MP and cabinet minister Lorne C. Henderson. Smith said it's each municipality's responsibility to request disaster relief money

from the government.

Meanwhile, hundreds of neighbours, relatives, total strangers and friends chipped in with the mammoth clean-up job.

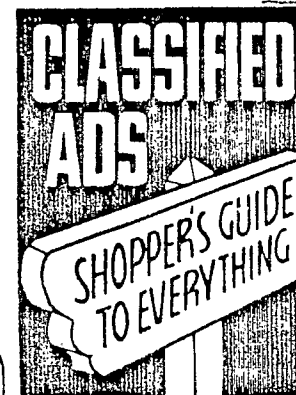
Dave McKellar of the Alvinston area, a cousin to the Bob Dobbin family, was one of the hundreds who showed up to help with the Dobbin clean-up.

"I hope it never happens to me," McKellar said while scanning the utter destruction of the Dobbin farmstead.

Jerry Huzevka who lives west of Petrolia on the 10th line says the

twister caught the back end of his farm while moving in its northeasterly path of destruction.

"Unreal," Huzevka commented while helping the Dobbin clean-up, "just unreal."



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DRESDEN RACEWAY

Guest Appearance by:
LUCKY LOTT



an 'witnesses miracle' s family escapes injury

by Al Chater
Chatham Bureau

WALPOLE ISLAND — Clyde Peters is convinced he witnessed a miracle Monday afternoon when he and his family escaped injury from the tornado which whipped through a small portion of this Indian community and caused extensive damage.

About a dozen homes, including Peters's three-bedroom frame house, were damaged — mostly blown-away shingles and shattered windows — along with a church, a senior citizen's apartment under construction and the reserve's police garage.

Two unoccupied mobile homes — one belonging to Peters and the other next door — were destroyed along with several sheds. More than a dozen trees were snapped and seven hydro poles downed, cutting off electricity to the reserve for most of the afternoon.

"We had a definite miracle from God," said Peters, who has lived on the island for about 20 years and called the damage the most extensive from a storm he has ever seen here.

Peters said a "blizzard of glass" circled his living room when the tornado hit around 3 p.m. With five other family members in his home at the time, including three small children, aged 22 months, 28 months and six years, he is amazed all escaped injury.

The tornado blew four windows out of his home, destroyed the 11-metre (about 36-foot) mobile home and an unattached workshop, both next to his house, and took his two aluminium fishing boats for a ride. He said the boats were found almost a kilometre (more than half a mile) away wrapped around a tree.

"I believe if the windows hadn't broken and the door blew open, our home would have exploded," said Peters, adding it was like a sandstorm inside the home when the tornado hit.

He said the force of the tornado threw 22-month-old Brent off the couch and onto the floor. Peters said he looked out and saw pieces of his aluminum mobile home 300 feet (91 metres) in the air.

Chief Const. Randall Soney of the Walpole Island police said he saw the tornado at 12:57 p.m. heading north on the St. Clair River. It entered the reserve at its central west side at Tecumseh and St. Clair River roads and headed northeast.

The tornado touched down at least twice on the reserve, first near Peter's home



where the apartment construction site and church are also located and then in a wooded area about 1.6 kilometres (about a mile) northeast where the dozen trees were snapped. One home was damaged by a tree.

Soney said the tornado looked like a huge water funnel, but could not estimate its size. He ran from the police station when he saw it and drove through Peter's neighborhood sounding the siren. At one point, Soney said, he almost drove into the tornado as it moved to the wooden area.

Next door to Peter's house, the tornado caused the only reported injury here when a quadriplegic received minor cuts from flying glass from a shattered window. Emerson Sands, 37, was taken to Public Gener-

al Hospital in Chatham where he was kept overnight.

Another of Peter's neighbors, Morris Fisher, said the tornado shifted a two-year-old addition to his home more than 30 centimetres (12 inches) from the foundation. His unoccupied mobile home next door was demolished and ceilings inside his home cracked. "We didn't have any warning at all," commented Fisher, who said it sounded like an explosion of glass.

The second-floor concrete block walls at the 20-unit senior citizen apartment complex under construction were toppled along with its roof trusses. The damage is expected to delay the mid-June completion date for the \$770,000 complex.

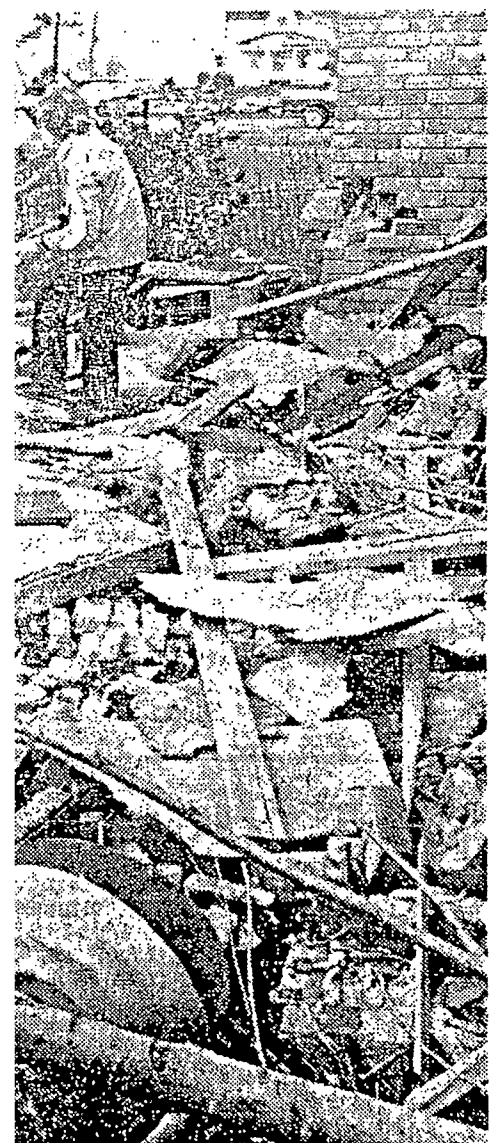
At St. John's Anglican Church, across the street from the apartment site, the more than 100-year-old tower was toppled. A portion of roof was also lifted from the nearby church rectory.

Band Chief Bill Tooshkenig said the reserve's \$40,000 police garage, built two years ago, will have to be rebuilt. He estimates the cleanup will take two weeks.

Boarding of windows began within two hours after the storm as did replacement of shingles. Tooshkenig said police will be doing extra patrolling to prevent looting.

The only other island resident taken to hospital was Emily Johnson, 76, who is at Public General for observation because her home was left without electricity and she is a recent heart patient. Her sister, Gail Williams, said Johnson was not injured when the tornado blew six windows out of their home.

In Wallaceburg, police said there wasn't any report of storm damage, though several street sections were closed because of backed up storm sewers.



Ed Heal of The Free Press

her dog. When she emerged, she found

A sense of unreality, scene of contradiction hangs over devastation

By Del Bell
of The Free Press

WYOMING — There is an eerie sense of unreality to it all, a roll of the incomprehensible dice of luck and contradictions.

Everywhere, contradictions.

The sun shines warm and healing on a row of crumpled homes at Reeces Corners, about a kilometre down the road from the main street of Wyoming which is also Highway 21.

Mary Nickels saw the twister coming. The swirling cone was grey and not black, but it wasn't something she had any time to contemplate.

And it had the deep, throaty growl of a freight train thundering out of a swollen sky.

She grabbed her dog and headed for the basement. She crawled up out of the great, sunken hole where her living room used to be after it passed.

As friends, neighbors and relatives helped salvage what could be saved from the mutilated home — "our bedroom used to be up there," Nickels says, pointing at blue sky — she seems calm and controlled.

There is a sense of what will be, will be. It is enough that no one was hurt. Now there is only the cleanup to think about.

Her husband Rae was at work when a supervisor told him he'd better head for home because a twister had touched down at Reeces Corners.

He figured a few shingles might have been lifted.

brick home and scooped a fishing rod intact out of the debris.

He marvelled at it for a long moment while some of his friends loading a truck kidded him.

His wife, meanwhile, opened a cardboard carton and found yet another of her collector's plates intact.

So much was gone but the fishing rod and plates survived.

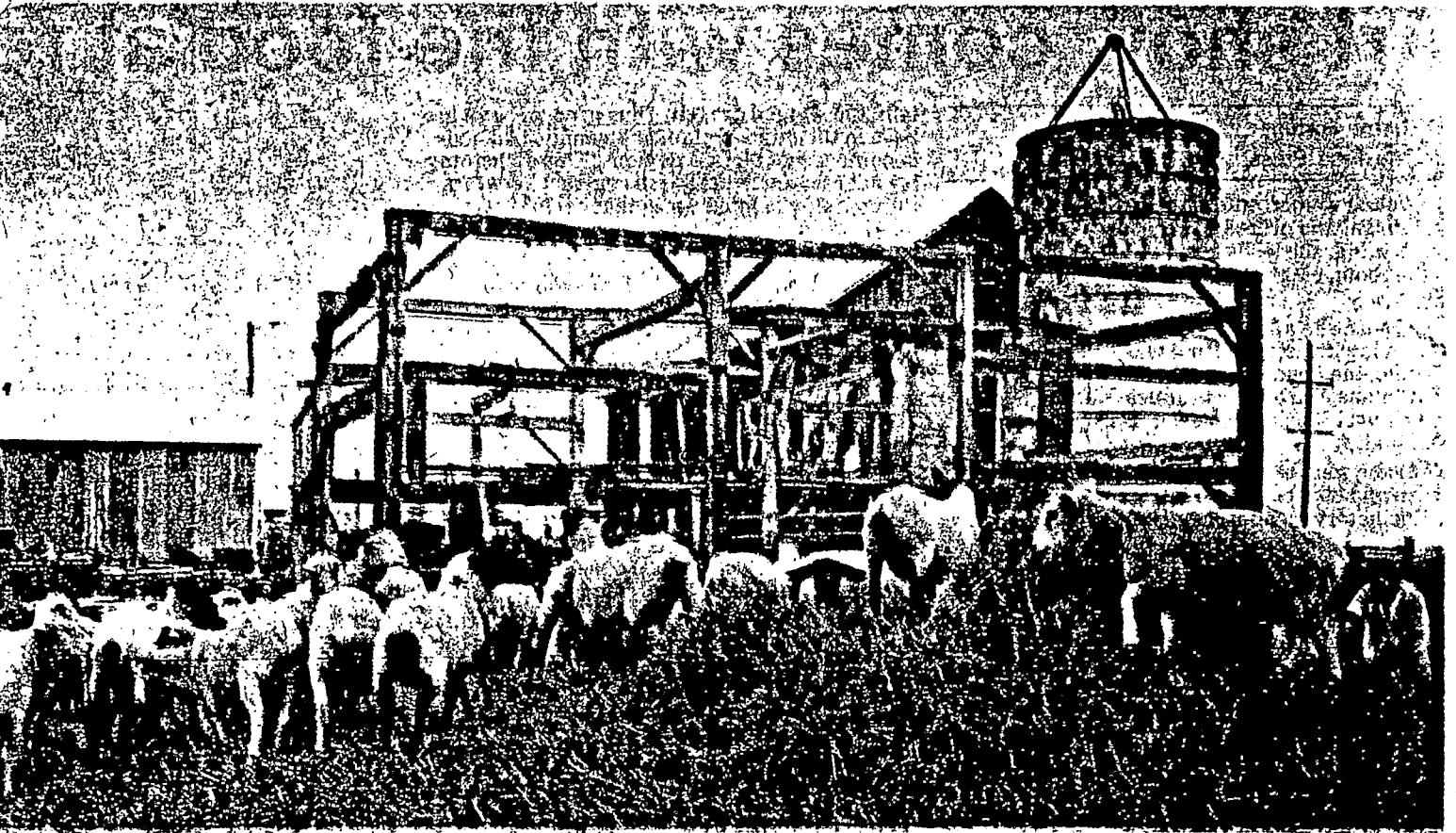
For a short stretch along Highway 21, on the way into Wyoming, there are broken windows and workmen tacking plastic into gaping holes in rooftops and trees downed like pickup sticks.

Then, just as abruptly, it ends and you are driving past a row of homes with even the television aerials intact. An old man picks up newspaper shreds from his front lawn and residents stand in little knots pondering the incomprehensible.

Abruptly, it ends; you are driving past a row of homes with even TV aerials intact

The school buses are just beginning to roll and about a kilometre from the devastation of Reeces Corners, there is Holy Rosary school.

It is so close and yet, happily, so far. The sun has wiped a slate of ugly, grey clouds out of the sky and only the OPP officers waving traffic past twisted traffic signals and the procession of utility trucks are left to remind you it is no illusion.



Morris Lamont of The Free Press

Like roar of a freight

By John Matsui
of The Free Press

REECES CORNERS — "See that little pile of lumber over there?" Jim Prudom asks as he points with the beak of his baseball cap toward a pea-sized patch of white in the distance.

"That's the top storey of the house. That's three farms away."

Then he whirls around in the opposite direction and notes the scatterings of debris that had been a barn roof.

On May 2, a tornado hopped along a path

from Walpole Island to this hamlet 22 kilometres east of Sarnia. The twister landed to the south of Reeces Corners about 1 p.m. and cut northeast through some farms, the hamlet and finally Prudom's sheep and cash crop farm on Plympton Concession 24.

By the time the whirlwind had gone, about 70 buildings were damaged and 18 families left homeless along its 35-kilometre trek. Insurance claims are expected to exceed \$10 million.

The tornado blew down Prudom's house and ripped the roofs off two barns on Prudom's 20-hectare (50-acre) farm. "And the drive shed that was standing there is two miles away in the bush."

The twister caused an estimated \$100,000 damage, "which is a small amount compared to others," Prudom's wife Verona said.

But, it's no small matter for the couple and their three children. The family and a host of volunteers and some builders have been straining to put things back in order, in the weeks since the tornado struck. And Prudom estimated, "It'll take all summer just to get close."

The family had been fussing and working on an addition to their house for four years and finally completed it around Christmas. The new house not only won't have an addition, but when it's finished in early this month, it'll be only half the size of the original house.

The Prudoms now live in a trailer — a borrowed one. The trailer they owned was in front of the house when the tornado came through. Only a flatbed on wheels remained.

Prudom didn't lose any of his 200 sheep, but without the fences, the animals can't graze. That means paying for feed.

Among the things sucked away without a trace were the registrations for purebred sheep that Prudom was using to improve his flock over the past five years.

"It just about doubles the value of the sheep if you've got that set of papers. And we've got no papers now unless we can get them out of Ottawa, (the) national live-stock records. We had a bunch of sheep that we bought over in the States and that's got to come from Missouri," he said.

But the couple seems almost happy with the way things turned out. Mrs. Prudom

joked with some of the housebuilders that "This is the first house I've had new."

Prudom, too, talks of the tornado with humor and amazement, partly because he was the only family member home when the tornado struck and was able to survive its destructive power.

Two of the children were in school, the youngest was with a babysitter and Mrs. Prudom was teaching 11 kilometres away. The worst injury was to a farmhand who appeared to be recovering well from a cut that required 15 stitches to close.

Prudom was working in the barn when he saw the tornado approaching. He went to the house and watched through a glass door as the maelstrom enveloped a neighboring farm owned by John Verroen.

The funnel came up to the barn and the structure blew apart "just like dynamite was inside of it . . . It was just a white wall comin'". The only thing we could really pick out was the drive shed . . . All you could see was sheet steel flying . . . It went around the corner of that bush and that's when it took his house."

As the twister approached and Prudom and his hired hands scrambled to get in the basement for shelter, they became conscious of its roar. It sounded "Just like a freight train. Even the ground was shaking."

The basement proved a precarious sanctuary. The house was yanked from its moorings and "We got cement blocks on our heads, a tree on our heads."

The injured worker was taken to hospital and the Prudoms began the seemingly endless job of cleaning up. "That's the worst job," Prudom said.

The task was made easier with the arrival of three busloads of volunteers from the Mennonite central committee in Kitchener and about 30 to 50 others who pitched in to clear rubble from the fields. Prudom said the farm buildings were insured to the maximum he thought they were worth, but because of their age, they weren't worth that much.

But Mrs. Prudom had another suggestion. She said weather reports should have warned that a tornado was coming. She said all that Canadian radio and television stations were forecasting was a severe storm. "We've always had severe storms around here," she said.



NO FATALITIES

Tornado levels area homes and farm buildings

by Dave Wilson

Like a bouncing ball the tornado moved through the area. Touching down long enough to destroy businesses, homes and farm buildings.

Monday's funnel of destruction came from the southeast, apparently originating in St. Clair County, Michigan. It bounded across Lambton along a 60 kilometer route, finally leaving sight in the proximity of Concession 6 and 12 Sideroad in Warwick.

Some 50 county residents were left homeless, 13 were injured and as of yesterday no fatalities had resulted from the twister.

Reeces Corners appeared to be hardest hit. Many buildings in the small community were levelled.

The storm came with such force a tractor-trailer was raised and set on its side.

Fred Dewitt, a summer resident of the area was dining at the Ranch

House Restaurant, when the twister made its way through Reeces Corners. "I never realized a natural force could be so powerful," said Mr. Dewitt. He was one of approximately 20 in the restaurant at the time. "We got down on the floor, under tables. I think that's what saved our lives", he said. The roof of the Ranch House was torn completely off.

The storm continued through Plympton and into Warwick leaving reminders of its force along the way.

Forest OPP have estimated damage in their detachment area at close to \$800,000.

The two storey home of John Verroen on Concession 6 in Warwick was completely destroyed. Two pig barns, two chicken barns and a truck were also damaged. The Verroen farm was one of the hardest hit in the area. Police have estimated damage at \$250,000.

Damage totalling an estimated \$100,000 was reported at the farm of James Prudum on Concession 7 in Plympton. The Prudum home was completely destroyed. A drive shed and barn were severely damaged as were two vehicles.

Listed to be either destroyed or damaged at the farm of Dave Shea on Concession 6 in Plympton were a garage, tractor, lawn mower, snowmobile and chicken barn. Estimated damage \$25,000.

Minimal damage occurred at the home of

Gordon McPherson, also on Concession 6. Police estimated it at \$500.

Hardest hit in Warwick was the farm of William MacKenzie. One large driveshed and pig barn were destroyed and the MacKenzie house received extensive damage. The damage has been estimated at \$250,000.

Approximately \$5,000 damage occurred at the home of Robert Davis in Warwick.

A large tree fell on the house damaging the roof and windows at the residence of James Mar-

tin on Concession 4 in Warwick. A trailer was also reported to have smashed against a garage. Police have listed the damage at \$10,000.

Damage amounting to \$25,000 occurred at the Concession 5 farm of Charles Moore in Warwick. Listed as destroyed were a garage and driveshed.

At the farm of Jim Brandon on Concession 5 in Warwick, a driveshed was completely destroyed, a large barn was toppled and the house was also damaged. Police have estimated

the loss at \$100,000.

The final farm to be hit was that of Joseph Wouters, also on Concession 5. A large grain bin and attached equipment came down. Doors to a driveshed were torn off. Damage has been listed at \$30,000.

Police have also listed damage resulting from the twister at the home of Raymond Dobroski in Plympton. Damage to the pool area at the Dobroski home was estimated at \$1,000.

No injuries were reported to the Forest OPP Detachment.



Tornado rolls another strike in twister alley

By Joe Matyas
of The Free Press

A severe tornado which hammered two separate tracks through Lambton County on Monday added another page to Southern Ontario's history of violent storms.

Southwestern Ontario is one of the most twister-prone areas in Canada and a double or triple whammy similar to Monday's touchdowns can occur any time during the April-to-October tornado season, weather experts say.

"It's not uncommon at this time," Linda McCallum, meteorologist at the London Airport, said. "These tornadoes were the first this year to touch down in populated areas. There were strong winds, temperature extremes, heavy rains and hail the size of golf balls in some areas. This caused injuries and property damage."

The tornado which kissed the earth violently in a band from Reeces Corners to Uttoxeter appears to be the same one which earlier cut a path from Walpole Island to Sombra after setting up its deadly whirlwind over Lake St. Clair, meteorologists at Windsor and London weather offices said.

The report of a second tornado striking a farm near Ratho in northeast Oxford County could not be confirmed by weather officials but Lloyd Rader at Environment Canada's London office said he "wouldn't be surprised" if one did. "There might have been a number" of twisters as the unstable squall line passed through Southwestern Ontario, he said.

McCallum said the tornadoes were spinoffs of a major thunderstorm caused by a cold front which came whistling in behind a warm front centred in Michigan and Ohio. A squall line about 80 kilometres in width developed between the two air masses accompanied by severe thunderstorms — and the tornadoes.

"What we had was a sharp contrast in wind direction and temperatures between two large air masses and a clash between them which was the squall line (storm front)," she said. "It lasted a long time because the squall line moved across the region from the southwest to the northeast. We got the length of it, not just the width."

McCallum said the thunderstorms raced across the region at speeds up to 140 kilometres an hour, dumped 30 millimetres (1.2 inches) of rain and lasted about 80 minutes.

Tornadoes emerge from revolving funnel clouds formed out of warm updrafts, cooling at higher altitudes and

STORM

subsequent condensation of moisture. The rotating funnels of air "move at incredible speeds," said McCallum. A funnel cloud isn't classified as a twister unless it touches the ground. It may have damaging winds a kilometre across although it may be only a few metres wide at its central point.

"You usually don't get much warning," McCallum said. "We issued tornado warnings about 45 minutes before the storm arrived," adding that an 11:30 a.m. weather watch was upgraded to a severe weather warning about 12:10 p.m. and a tornado warning at 1:25 p.m. The squall line hit London about 2:10 p.m., about 15 or 20 minutes after wrecking havoc in Lambton County.

There were 27 tornadoes in Ontario during 1982, average for the April-to-October season, according to the Ontario weather office.

Southwestern Ontario residents have been more aware of twister threats since the infamous triple whammy hit the Woodstock area in August, 1979, killing two persons, injuring hundreds more and causing \$13 million worth of damage. Cars, trucks and giant trees were hurled like matchsticks in that one and roofs peeled like bananas.

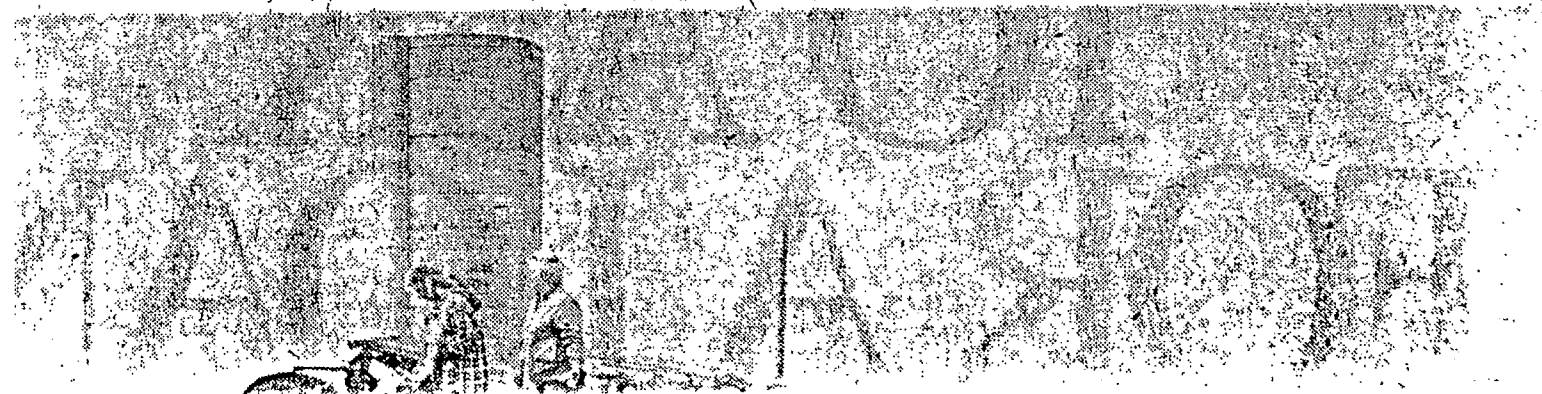
One of the region's worst tornadoes was in 1953, causing \$10 million damage in downtown Sarnia and in parts of Lambton, Middlesex and Oxford counties. Other incidents during the past 15 years include:

- 1967, an 80-year-old man killed near Dublin when "trees flew like birds."
- 1968, Long Point, Hamilton, London and Clinton areas hit with extensive damage, four persons hurt.
- 1968, St. Marys, three hurt, exhibition building demolished, fair cancelled.
- 1968, Ingersoll, minor damage, injuries outside town.
- 1974, Windsor, eight killed as curling roof collapsed.
- 1976, Thedford, farm building and equipment damaged.
- 1977, Washington, 32 kilometres northeast of Woodstock, two farms demolished.

One of the most frightening storms in Ontario history occurred in October, 1954, when Hurricane Hazel cut a 300-kilometre swath of destruction through the Toronto area, killing more than 80 persons and causing \$25 million damage. Thousands of hectares of prime farmland north of the city were temporarily turned into a lake

Ed Heal of The Free Press

erial photograph of their home
elow is what was left
ete silo still standing.



MR. AND MRS. Gandolfo Giresi pose proudly in front of their recently-renovated dining room at Granny's

Pizza and Spaghetti House on Highway 7 in Reece's Corners. The 107-seat restaurant was badly damaged when a

tornado swept through the community early in May. They spent thousands of dollars renovating in order to re-open on Wednesday. They will continue to repair the building which was originally built in 1881 as a school. Observer Photo

Another firm reopens after reconstruction from tornado damage

REECE'S CORNERS — Life is quickly returning to normal here following a devastating tornado in May.

Throughout the community, there are signs of rebirth. The latest is the re-opening of Granny's Pizza and Spaghetti House here Wednesday.

Owners Gandolfo and Eleonora Giresi say insurance covered only part of their loss. They have spent \$70,000 to reconstruct the 107-seat restaurant on Highway 7 but expect the final repair bill may hit \$150,000.

The Italian food restaurant is attached to what used to be School Section 7 built in 1881. The old school house was to have been the family's living quarters. That part of the building has yet to be completed.

In the meantime, the family remains in a home they own farther west along the highway.

Mrs. Giresi said the twister made a dramatic dent in the family business.

"We lost everything," she said. "The restaurant, kitchen, the living quarters."

"We saved one wall of the dining room. The rest had to be reconstructed. We've spent \$70,000 on reconstructing the building. Then, you have to add the cost of furnishings

and decorating. We have all new fixtures, lights and chairs."

The restaurant had been shut down for three months since the tornado. At the time of the windstorm, both Mr. and Mrs. Giresi were in the building along with Mrs. Giresi's cousin and her two-year-old daughter. A waitress was also in the restaurant at the time.

Mrs. Giresi was the only one injured.

"I got 12 stitches in my head," she said as she showed the scar through her hair. "It's a little something to remind me of the day."

"Thank God my son was in school at the time."

The family-operated restaurant serves a broad range of Italian dishes including pizza, spaghetti, lasagna and gnocci. Mrs. Giresi says the food is all homemade.

She hopes the remainder of the reconstruction can be carried out soon but said the restaurant business will have to pay for the repairs.

"There may be one good thing come out of the tornado. It might make us a little more popular."

In addition to the Italian restaurant, the Ranch House Restaurant and Motel has re-opened. Next door, John Vanderweilen has almost completed the rebuilding of his home.

Why does Canada's unemployment remain so high?
Indust. Pens. 3.91
Mack Eqty 1.88
Mack Mkt Inc 1.05

Sarnia Observer
August 11, 1983



MARY AND JOHN Vanderwielen are happy enough now, as they stand in front of their new home in Reece's Corners, but they retain vivid memories of the tornado which ripped through Lambton County one year ago today. Their five-year-old, two-storey home was levelled and most of its contents were damaged beyond repair. Mr.

Vanderwielen, who estimates his losses between \$190,000 and \$200,000, built this home himself on the same spot where he spent more than a week clearing rubble last May 2. All but about \$2,100 of his losses were covered by insurance. See story and more photos on page 17.

Observer Photo

New buildings replace rubble left in last year's tornado

by TERRY SHAW
of The Observer

REECE'S CORNERS — One year ago today a tornado cut a swath of destruction through Lambton County.

The storm subsided in a matter of moments, but the people affected spent months piecing their lives back together.

Damage ran well into the millions of dollars. Reece's Corners was hardest hit, with several homes and businesses levelled or badly damaged.

But the tornado's wrath was not limited to that tiny community. Buildings were toppled from Walpole Island north to Forest, with the most serious destruction inflicted on the farm of Bob Dobbin, where the only distinguishable feature remaining on the landscape was a badly leaning concrete silo. The silo's twin was left strewn on the ground, along with the Dobbin's home and barn.

About one kilometre to the southwest the home of Robert Frayne, on LaSalle Road, was torn in half while Mr. Frayne was in the bedroom and his wife Carolyn was downstairs in the livingroom. Neither was seriously hurt, despite the fact Mr. Frayne was thrown several metres to the ground when the side of the house was swept away.

Only hours after the storm had passed a regiment of volunteers was on the scene helping to clean up. The Salvation Army provided food and other assistance to the victims and dozens of Menonites from the Kitchener area arrived a few days later to help clear the debris.

A tornado relief fund was established to collect the thousands of donations from citizens and industry. A total of almost \$365,000 was collected from a variety of sources and distributed to

victims not covered by insurance.

Private donations of \$221,000 were augmented by \$63,000 from area municipalities, \$70,000 from the Ontario government and \$10,000 in accrued interest.

Miraculously, no one was killed — a fact which still amazes Mary Vanderwielen, whose two-storey home in Reece's Corners was destroyed. Mrs. Vanderwielen said she considers herself and the rest of the tornado victims especially fortunate, considering the death toll from tornadoes which ripped through the U.S. Midwest over the last week.

"It gives you a funny feeling when you see what's going on in the States," she said.

A total of 13 people were injured, but only three seriously enough to require hospital treatment.

Although the tornado inflicted little in the way of physical injury, the psychological scars still remain on those who lived through those terrifying few moments shortly after 1 p.m. on May 2, 1983.

Sarnia Observer
May 2, 1984

Tornado turned them into habitual 'skywater'

This is the first in a series of articles by Observer reporter Terry Shaw on the anniversary of the devastating tornado which struck Lambton County with a vengeance May 2, 1983. The articles outline how the victims of the storm pieced their lives back together.

REECE'S CORNERS—Life is returning to normal for Gayle Sullivan, but she can't shake the uneasiness which overcomes her whenever the weather begins to take a turn for the worse.

And her next-door neighbor in this tiny community, Mary Vanderwielen, is haunted by the same feelings.

Both women took more than a passing interest on Monday when gale-force winds pounded their recently-built homes. Although no damage was done, they admitted they worried that nature had

turned back their calendars.

Both of their homes were levelled one year ago today when a tornado swept through Lambton County. The storm had subsided within minutes, but the two families spent months picking up the pieces of their shattered lives.

The Sullivans have a new home, but Gayle's husband Brian has yet to return to an even keel. His motorcycle retail business continues to operate from temporary, cramped quarters leased just south of Wyoming, several kilometres from its original location.

Before last year's tornado, the family occupied the rear portion of a building on what is now a vacant lot. The business was operated from the front of the building.

After the storm the family moved in with their son in Wyoming for a month, before renting a mobile home, which they lived in until they could

build a new house. They moved into their home last November and plan to rebuild the motorcycle shop this summer at its original location.

The Sullivans built their new home around the corner from their former home, on a lot once owned by Rae and Mary Nickels. The Nickels owned a large two-storey house on the lot until it was devastated by the tornado. The Nickels have since bought another home in Wyoming.

Mr. Sullivan said he is still receiving contractors' quotes on the new building for his business and he hopes construction can begin within the next month.

Mary and John Vanderwielen rebuilt on the same property and moved in last September after they, too, spent more than four months in a 60-foot house trailer with their three daughters.

John, who estimates the tornado caused between \$190,000 and \$200,000

damage to his home and contents, took a year off from his job as a house inspector (he admits there is a certain amount of irony involved in his line of work) and built the home himself.

All of his losses, except for \$2,168, were covered by insurance, although he said he was "a little disappointed with the tornado relief fund," which provided him with a cheque for \$130.

He said he never complained to the organizers of the relief fund about the amount of his compensation, but he still feels he was shortchanged.

The tornado ripped the top floor from their five-year-old, two-story home and badly damaged most of the furnishings. To this day Mrs. Vanderwielen still does not know what became of her bedroom suite.

"We found the bedspread, but not the mattress," she said.

She said she was "a lit-

tle worried about the wind" on Monday and has been "watching the weather" for the last 10 months.

John, however, takes a more philosophical attitude toward the future.

"I don't think it will happen again," he said. "If it does, so what? There's nothing you can do about it."

The Vanderwielen and Sullivans both built one-storey ranch-style houses this time. Mrs. Sullivan said there is "no way" would have a two-storey home again after seeing the destruction of a year ago.

Mr. Vanderwielen said there is no significance to the design of his new home, since he is sure a similar twister would destroy his work as easily as last year's storm levelled his former home. He built a smaller bungalow this time, he said, because his family does not need a larger house.

Mr. Sullivan wouldn't disclose the extent of his



GAYLE AND BRIAN SULLIVAN WERE FINALLY ABLE TO MOVE FROM A RENTED TRAILER INTO THEIR NEW HOME LAST NOVEMBER, MORE THAN FIVE MONTHS AFTER THE TORNADO STRUCK

Observer Photo

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1983

Sarnia Observer
May 2, 1984

1984

l'skywatchers'

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Mr. Sullivan wouldn't disclose the extent of his

losses, but he said he was well insured. Collecting the insurance money, however, has been difficult. In fact, he has yet to receive any compensation from the insurance company, although he said the claim was "finalized" this week.

On Monday he received word from the insurance company that he could begin selling the motorcycle parts which were in the building at the time the tornado hit. He has had hundreds of these parts stockpiled in his leased quarters for the last year, but has not been able to sell them until they were cleared by the insurance company.

It was only through the co-operation of his bank manager that he was able to finance the construction of his new house, he said.

He received a small amount of money from the tornado relief fund to finance half the cost of cleaning out a fresh water pond behind his home. The pond feeds two wells on his property and he was especially concerned about the debris deposited in the pond by the tornado.

Despite the minor compensation, he said he was satisfied.

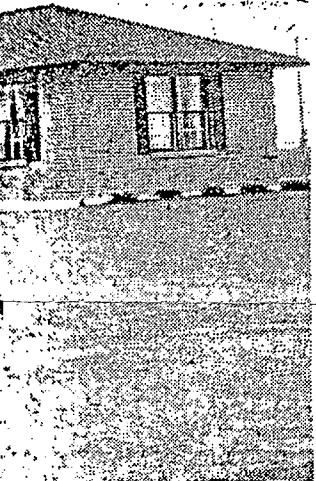
"We were covered with insurance. The relief fund was set up for people without insurance coverage."

Mrs. Sullivan said she has heard statistics which indicate another tornado is not likely to hit the same spot for another hundred years, but that hasn't eased the apprehension she feels when the wind whips up, such as occurred last Monday.

She admits she will likely continue to be a "skywatcher" for some time yet.



BRIAN SULLIVAN PLANS TO REBUILD HIS DESTROYED MOTORCYCLE SHOP THIS SUMMER. SINCE THE TORNADO HIS BUSINESS HAS OPERATED FROM LEASED QUARTERS IN WYOMING



MOBILE TRAILER INTO TORNADO STRUCK
Observer Photo



COLEEN DOBBIN'S NEW HOME IS ALMOST COMPLETE, ALLOWING HER FAMILY TO END ITS 11-MONTH STAY IN THE BASEMENT
 'COMMUNITY WAS FANTASTIC' SO, May 3, 1984

Observer Photos by Franco Luberti

Storm helped family appreciate value of caring people

This is the second in a series of articles by Observer reporter Terry Shaw on the anniversary of the devastating tornado which struck Lambton County with a vengeance May 2, 1983.

WYOMING — Coleen Dobbin and her family are still living in the only portion of their house left intact after last year's tornado devastated their farm.

Mrs. Dobbin, her 15-year-old daughter Lynne and son Lennie fled to the basement of their two-storey home moments before the twister struck. When they emerged they found the storm had destroyed in seconds everything the family had built over the previous two decades.

Mrs. Dobbin's husband Bob was tending the family's other farm outside Port Huron and did not learn until a few hours later of the destruction.

The Dobbin family continues to live in that same basement, while construction of their new home carries on above them. The single-storey brick house is almost complete and the family hopes to move upstairs within a matter of weeks.

The Dobbins suffered perhaps more destruction than any other Lambton County family. Lennie estimated damage to be in excess of \$750,000.

It was only after walking up the stairs from the basement after the tornado had passed that Mrs. Dobbin and her children realized their hired hand, Lawrence Coderre, had been seriously injured.

He had been painting a truck in a shed behind the house when the storm hit and was bleeding badly when they reached him. Mrs. Dobbin and her daughter kept Mr. Coderre warm with blankets while Lennie called an ambulance.

"Every bone in his face was broken," said Mrs. Dobbin. "He was in hospital a long time. He was in intensive care for quite a while."

She said Mr. Coderre has recovered from his injuries and is currently working as a hand on a chicken farm in Norwich, Ont.

The rebuilding operation is complete now, except for the house, but the ordeal has been long and trying. Mrs. Dobbin said the cleanup would have been impossible if not for help from friends, neighbors and people she had never met before.

"The community was fantastic. It's something our family will never, ever forget. You couldn't have done it on your own. We would have had to walk away from it."

A family which depends on the land for its livelihood must set its priorities straight when planning such a major rebuilding.

"The house was the last to be done."

nado relief fund, although she wouldn't divulge the amount.

She admitted she was frightened last Monday when gale-force winds up to 110 km-h (68 m.p.h.) lashed the county.

"Monday was a pretty scary day. I think the whole community was on alert."

She has difficulty expressing her initial feelings when confronted by the damage a year ago. She said she experienced the natural reactions of "shock and disbelief," but was more concerned with the safety of her family and friends and "too busy" helping Mr. Coderre, so there was little time to coherently assess everything that had happened.

Life for the Dobbins has still not returned to normal, she said. But they're considerably closer to that goal than they were in the months immediately following the disaster.

For Lennie, his life is coming together slowly. The home in which he and his family lived prior to the tornado remains a heap of rubble and twisted metal — a stark reminder of the destructive power of the storm.

He plans to rebuild, but he's not sure when. In the meantime, he is living in a rented townhouse in Wyoming.

His wife Janet and daughter Jennifer — who was a week old at the time — were in their house when the tornado struck but neither was hurt.

Sarnia
 Observer
 May 3, 1984

9 I.A.M.

...of the devastating winds which struck
Lambton County with a vengeance May 2, 1983.

WYOMING — Coleen Dobbin and her family are still living in the only portion of their house left intact after last year's tornado devastated their farm.

Mrs. Dobbin, her 15-year-old daughter Lynne and son Lennie fled to the basement of their two-storey home moments before the twister struck. When they emerged they found the storm had destroyed in seconds everything the family had built over the previous two decades.

Mrs. Dobbin's husband Bob was tending the family's other farm outside Port Huron and did not learn until a few hours later of the destruction.

The Dobbin family continues to live in that same basement, while construction of their new home carries on above them. The single-storey brick house is almost complete and the family hopes to move upstairs within a matter of weeks.

The Dobbins suffered perhaps more destruction than any other Lambton County family. Lennie estimated damage to be in excess of \$750,000.

Only one concrete silo remained standing on what had been a show place farm. The silo's twin and another smaller one lay crumpled on the ground. A new tractor was left in a mangled heap in the field, several hundred metres from where it had been sitting prior to the storm.

Mrs. Dobbin said one of Bob's prize breeding bulls was found later sprawled behind a neighbor's barn, two farms to the east.

"We're not sure how he got there, whether the wind picked him up or he got scared and ran that far. There were no fences (left standing) to stop him."

...the devastating winds which struck
Lambton County with a vengeance May 2, 1983.

Lawrence Coderre, had been seriously injured. He had been painting a truck in a shed behind the house when the storm hit and was bleeding badly when they reached him. Mrs. Dobbin and her daughter kept Mr. Coderre warm with blankets while Lennie called an ambulance.

"Every bone in his face was broken," said Mrs. Dobbin. "He was in hospital a long time. He was in intensive care for quite a while."

She said Mr. Coderre has recovered from his injuries and is currently working as a hand on a chicken farm in Norwich, Ont.

The rebuilding operation is complete now, except for the house, but the ordeal has been long and trying. Mrs. Dobbin said the cleanup would have been impossible if not for help from friends, neighbors and people she had never met before.

"The community was fantastic. It's something our family will never, ever forget. You couldn't have done it on your own. We would have had to walk away from it."

A family which depends on the land for its livelihood must set its priorities straight when planning such a major rebuilding.

"The house was the last to be done."

The first structure to rise from the rubble — less than a month later — was the cattle barn, since the family's remaining livestock required shelter.

A large shed was next, in order to house the farm implements and tractors which weren't damaged beyond repair.

After a month in a borrowed motor home the family moved into the basement which had provided life-saving protection during those terrifying seconds when the house above them "exploded."

Mrs. Dobbin said the family was well insured and received "very good" compensation from the tor-

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gale-force winds up to 110 km-h (68 m.p.h.) lashed the county.

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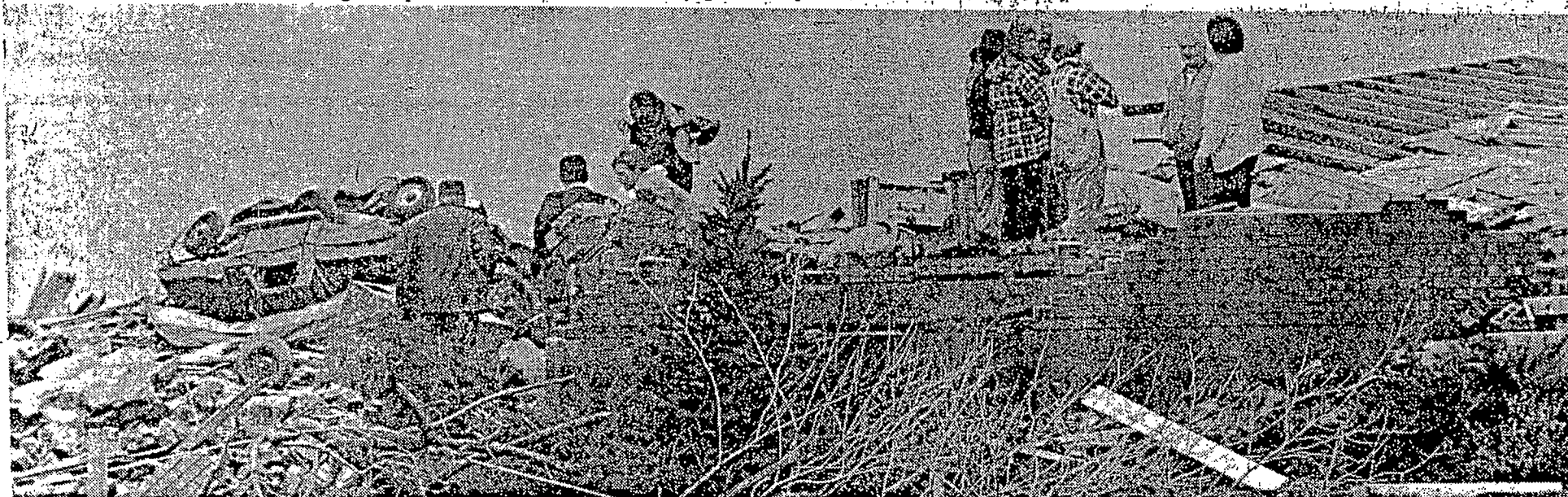
He plans to rebuild, but he's not sure when. In the meantime, he is living in a rented townhouse in Wyoming.

His wife Janet and daughter Jennifer — who was a week old at the time — were in their house when the tornado struck, but neither was hurt.

Lennie was at his parents' farm, a few hundred metres across the road from his home, when the tornado approached. There was only enough time for him to warn his mother and sister and flee with them to the basement. It was only after the storm had passed that Lennie was able to determine the condition of his wife and daughter.

When the black cloud approached, Mrs. Dobbin said the roar of the wind "sounded like Grand Central Station."

She hopes a long time passes before the train makes another stop at her front door.



LAST YEAR'S TORNADO LIFTED THE DOBBINS' HOME FROM ITS FOUNDATION, WHERE THE FAMILY HAD TAKEN REFUGE

Photo by Glenn Ogilvie

"I know what we'll do, but we'll just do it day at a time." She said the couple has five children with homes of their own in the area "so we have lots of places to stay."

**Photos by
Bill Ironside
of The Free Press**

In a matter of moments, John and Mary Vanderwielen's two-storey home roared through, tearing it apart.

London Free Press May 3, 1983



Looking for salvageable possessions, John Vanderwielen carefully toured what used to be the upstairs of his home.

Farm scene of grisly horror as 10,000 hens dead, dying

By Mary Kehoe
Sarnia Bureau

REECES CORNERS — It was a horrifying, sickening scene at the John Verroen farm just northeast of here Monday night where 10,000 laying hens were dead or dying in the aftermath of the tornado that swept through the area.

Thousands of the hens were trapped in wire mesh that was left in a huge heap by the twister after it carried away two large barns where they had been housed. As they desperately clucked for help, hundreds of others — their bodies stiffened in casings of mud — staggered slowly across the barnyard to finally fall over dead in the grass.

Metal from the barns was wrapped around the mutilated remains of trees like pieces of ribbon. Pieces of metal, insulation material and glass could be seen in bushes, fields and trees for hundreds of metres to the northeast — obviously carried along in the twister's path.

Jennie Verroen stood shivering, wearing a light jacket borrowed from a friend, as dozens of volunteers from the neighborhood and the family's Christian Reformed Church worked to retrieve remaining belongings and set up a generator to provide electricity.

She said she, her husband, son Fred and hired help Bill and Nancy McKee were in their large, two-storey brick house on the 95-acre (38-hectare) farm as "it was raining and thundering." Her son suddenly said it sounded like a tornado was outside, she said, and Nancy McKee looked out the window and yelled that a tornado was coming.

Everyone ran down to the basement and huddled close together against a wall. "Stones and cement were falling around us. It was scary but it all happened so fast."

Mrs. Verroen said she couldn't describe the noise they heard but when it was quiet they crawled out.

Their house, where they had lived for 12 years, was gone. She said friends told her they watched the twister pick up the entire house, which seemed to explode into tiny bits in the air.

Their car and two trucks were destroyed by the debris. The roof was torn off one of the pig barns, which she said contained about half their 140 sows and hundreds of piglets — more than she could count. None of the pigs was killed and several neighboring farmers quickly brought trucks to transport the animals to their own farms for safekeeping.

Volunteers were setting up a generator Monday night so the family could continue to care for pigs in the remaining barn. A friend brought over a small trailer where the couple would stay, she said, and neighbors offered to keep the four of their 10 children still at home.

Mrs. Verroen, who said she came to Canada with her husband 32 years ago from their native Holland, vowed the family would rebuild. Even though "our living is gone (their main income was from egg production as well as the pigs), we'll never give up."

She recalled they rebuilt a barn after it was destroyed by fire about six years ago. As now, she said, friends were there to help.

One of the helpers, Plympton Township Coun. Ron Gillatly, said a township road

grader had to be sent in after the twister hit to clear the mass of debris that blocked the road.

A biting, cold wind whipped across the area and the sky hung heavy and black as the cleanup effort continued. Telephone and hydro poles were either lying on the ground or were leaning over and lines lay everywhere. Dozens of cars filled with curiosity seekers rolled bumper to bumper along the narrow gravel road.

To the northeast, another crew was recovering what little remained of the Jim Prudom house. It also had been levelled.

Gillatly said township council was meeting in the township offices, just west of where the twister hit homes in Reeces Corners, when it swept through. He said council members, called by a secretary, ran outside to see a mass of swirling wind heading toward them.

"It roared like a jet . . . it was thousands of colors," he said. Figuring they were in its path, the township officials ran down to the building's basement. They looked out a window "and all we could see was trees, branches and steel going by."

In what seemed like less than 30 seconds, it was over. They went outside and saw the destroyed homes of Rae Nickels and John Vanderwielen just a few hundred metres to the east. Gillatly said he went immediately to the Nickels house, where Mary Nickels was walking in her stocking feet, holding her pet poodle.

"I put my arm around her and did she ever cry."

At nightfall, provincial police still blocked Highway 7 leading into the community as hydro and other emergency crews continued working.

Couple's home torn in half, man escapes major injuries

by TERRY SHAW
of The Observer

WYOMING — Robert Frayne, whose home was torn in half when a tornado swept through Lambton County Monday, said he and his wife Carolyn, who were home at the time, are lucky to be alive.

Mr. Frayne had been working nights and was in bed on the upper floor of his two-storey home at 2776 LaSalle Rd. when the tornado touched down shortly after 1 p.m.

"I didn't like the way the wind was blowing, so I got up and walked to the doorway (of the bedroom)," Mr. Frayne said, as he surveyed the destruction. "I went to open the door but I didn't get out of the room."

The entire side of the house, including the bedroom in which Mr. Frayne was standing, was swept away. Mr. Frayne was thrown to the ground amid flying debris, but he escaped with a cut on his arm and a sore back. After being taken to hospital for treatment, he returned to what was left of his home.

Mrs. Frayne was in the other part of the house, which remained standing, although much of the roof was lifted off and all the windows and doors were blown out.

"I was stuck between two doors," said Mrs. Frayne, who escaped unhurt, "which is probably why I wasn't blown away."

"I don't have any clothes. All my clothes are gone."

Mrs. Frayne said her dog and budgie also survived the ordeal.

"The budgie flew out of the cage, but a door slammed shut (trapping the bird in the room)," she said. "Later we just caught the bird and put it back in its cage."

Behind the house a shed containing a house trailer and a tractor was levelled and Mr. Frayne said he still did not know where his trailer had disappeared to, more than three hours after the storm had passed.

Mr. Frayne said the wind "sounded like sandpaper." He said the destruction was over within minutes, but he admitted he has no idea how long it will take to clean up the mess.

"I don't even know where to start," he said, pointing to portions of the roof of his house strewn across several hundred metres of farmland to the north.

Mr. Frayne's car, which he had purchased just a few weeks earlier, was badly damaged from flying trees and debris from a nearby farm.

As the Fraynes spoke, an insurance adjuster was on the scene taking note of the extent of the damage. Mr. Frayne said he is unsure whether the insurance company will reimburse him for all of his losses.

Mr. Frayne's mother, who was helping to pick up some paperback books from the rear yard, said she is relieved no one was badly hurt.

"It's a shame," she said. "They had just fixed this house up nice and then this happens."

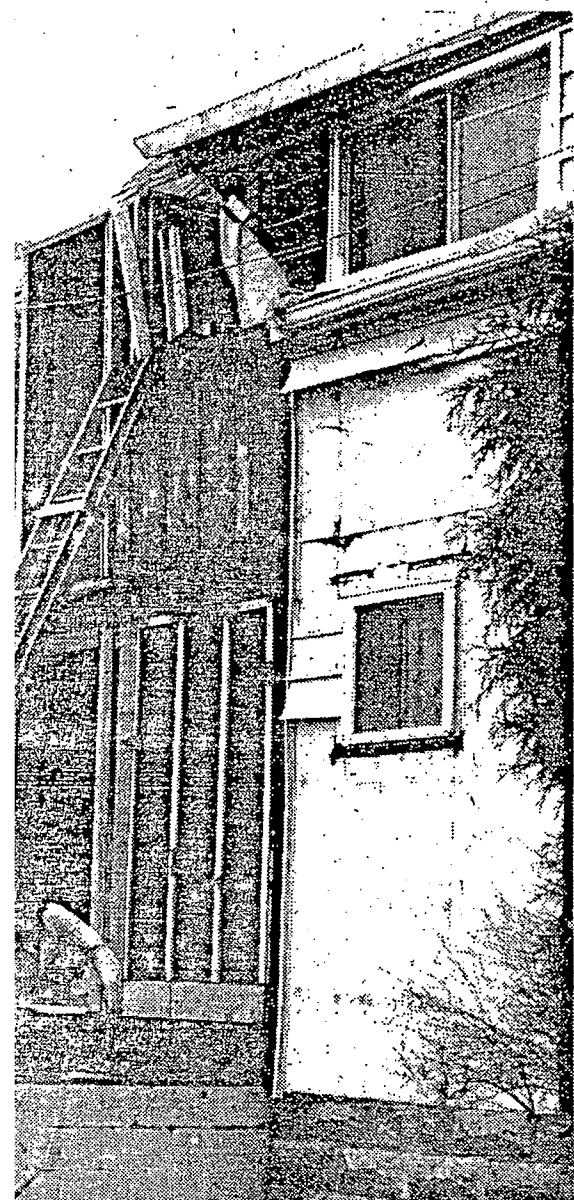
About one kilometre to the north, on Lambton County Road 14, the farm house and barn of Bob Dobbin were destroyed. All that remained of the house was the foundation and a new tractor was left in a mangled heap in the field, several hundred metres from where it had been sitting prior to the storm.

Mr. Dobbin had not yet arrived at the scene, but an onlooker, Gerry MacDonald, of Oil City, said he couldn't believe the destruction.

"I was just driving by here yesterday and I was saying what a nice place it was," he said.

One large concrete silo on the Dobbin farm was flattened and another was left leaning badly. It was the only distinguishable feature in the area.

The swath of the tornado was only about 600 to 700 metres wide. A home just to the east of the Frayne residence was not touched by the violent storm.



F. MR. FRAYN SUFFERED MINOR
HOUSE

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Kee's warn-

ing, the same tornado which had touched down minutes earlier at Reece's Corners struck the Verroen farm. Huddled in the corner of the basement, Mrs. Verroen, her husband John and son Fred and Mrs. McKee and her son Bill, listened as the wind roared above them "like a jet taking off."

When the noise ended, they emerged to find the house flattened. The adjacent barn which had seconds earlier housed 10,000 chickens, was also levelled, and dead chickens were scattered 70 metres (200 feet) in all directions. Others limped about the yard which was littered with glass, wood, nails and chicken feathers. The birds which hadn't been hurled out of the barn lay still in tilted cages.

The Verroen's pig barn, destroyed by fire in 1976 and re-built at a cost of some \$60,000 had its roof ripped off but the 600 pigs inside were uninjured.

Mrs. McKee, who is credited with saving those inside the house, pointed to a twisted pile of wood and debris saying "that's where I was standing" when the tornado was sighted.

"I looked out and saw it was dark and raining and then I turned to the east and saw light with this great big black funnel," Mrs. McKee, still shaking, told The Observer.

Mrs. McKee, who witnessed a tornado in Michigan a few years ago, said she "knew right away what it was."

Fred Verroen, 29, pointed out the only part of the debris which was recognizable as a house, saying "that's where we ran to." Only a small area of the basement was not thick with debris and fallen bricks. Mr. Verroen admitted he feared for his life while the group crowded into the basement.

Mr. Verroen Sr. was not available for comment. He had left to try to find a place to put his pigs.

Mr. Verroen Jr. said he couldn't begin to estimate the amount of damage. He said the family had lived 12 years in the farmhouse and had done extensive im-



The Vanderwielen: Life saved by timely telephone

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By Mary Kehoe
Sarnia Bureau

REECES CORNERS — A telephone call from his sister-in-law saved John Vanderwielen's life Monday.

He was in his spacious, two-storey house on Highway 7, just east of Highway 21, when his sister-in-law, Dorothy Donkers, phoned from her home in Wyoming and told him to get to the basement because a tornado was heading his way.

He raced downstairs, listened to a roar, and when it was over came up to find his home of six years devastated.

His wife, Mary, said she was across the road getting her hair done by local hairdresser Ramona Berkers when they heard "all this noise and something hitting against the window." Frightened, they ran to the basement of Berkers' frame house and looked out to see trees felled.

When the noise stopped, Mary Vanderwielen said the women heard screaming. It was her husband, crying out in fear for his wife's life.

The Berkers house seemed to have been shifted as the tornado passed, but damage was minimal compared with the destruction at the Vanderwielen's four-bedroom home. The top floor had virtually disappeared. The main floor was a shambles. A pickup truck parked in the driveway was smashed, apparently by flying debris.

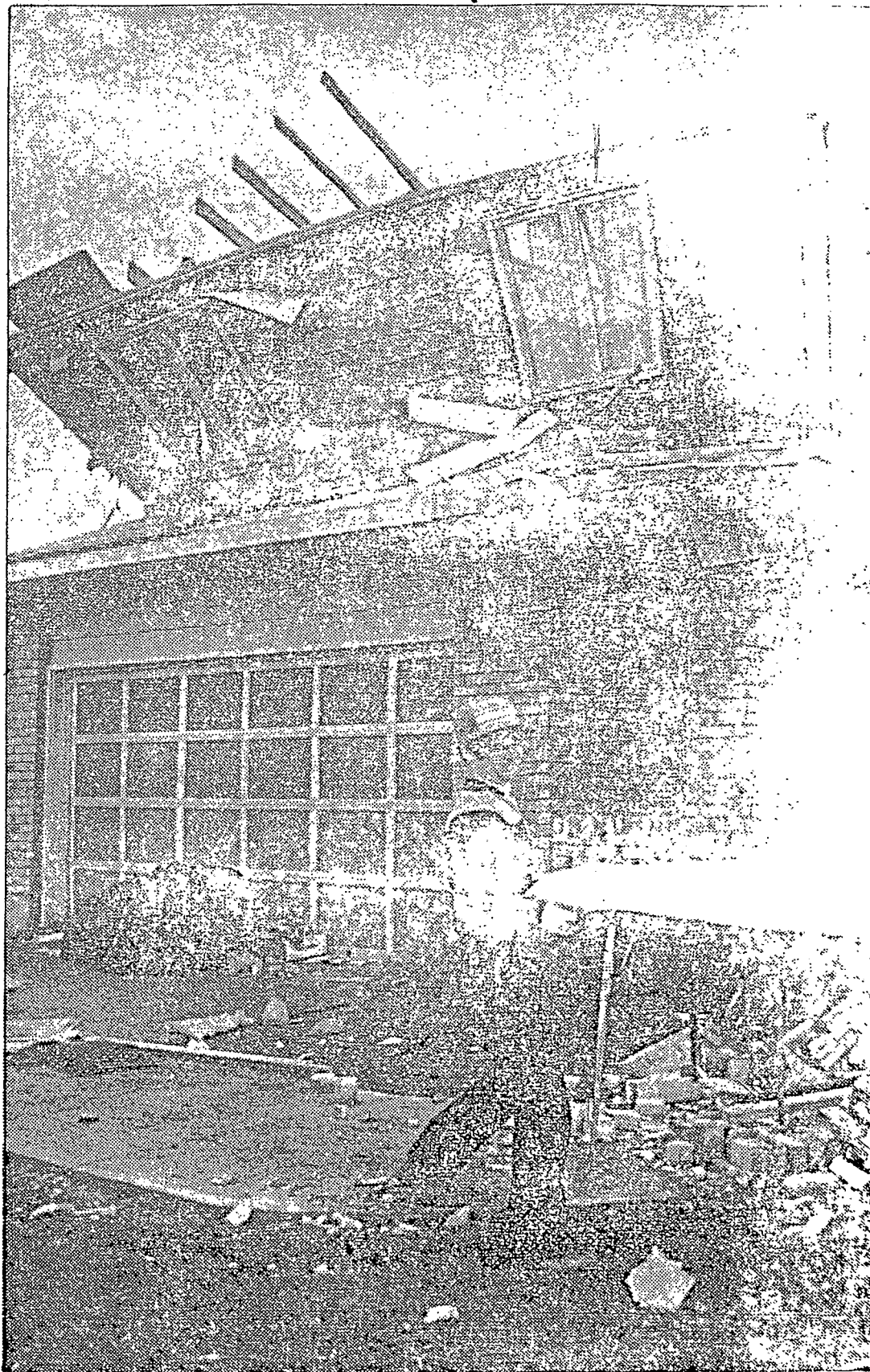
As he worked later in what will be a massive cleanup effort, Vanderwielen said he had insurance but that didn't matter. "The most important thing is that we can look it over, standing on our own legs."

His wife, wearing a borrowed coat and her hair still wet from the unfinished styling, comforted three daughters who had arrived home from work and school about 2:30 p.m. Standing in the stiff winds that were whipping clouds through the ever-changing sky overhead, she kept reminding them: "We're alive, that's the main thing."

"Just look for what's precious to you," she told them, pointing to their muddled possessions strewn across the large green lawn. As she spoke, a neighbor walked up with a photo album, soggy but still filled with family pictures, and a daughter clutched it against her and walked away. "Now that's what's precious," her mother said.

"I don't know what we'll do, but we'll just take one day at a time." She said the couple also has five children with homes of their own in the area "so we have lots of places to stay."

**Photos by
Bill Ironside
of The Free Press**

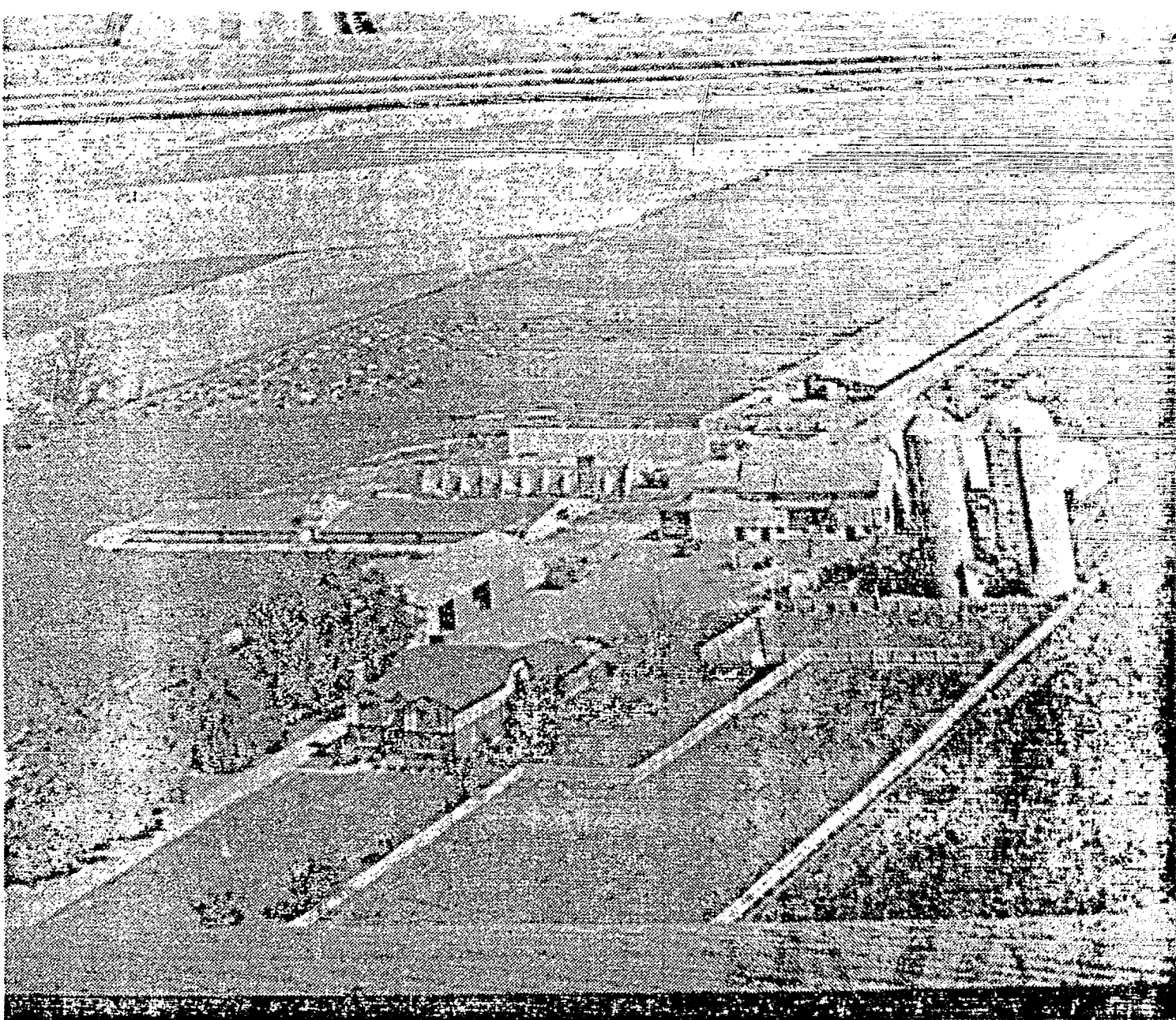


In a matter of moments, John and Mary Vanderwielen's two-storey home roared through, tearing it apart.



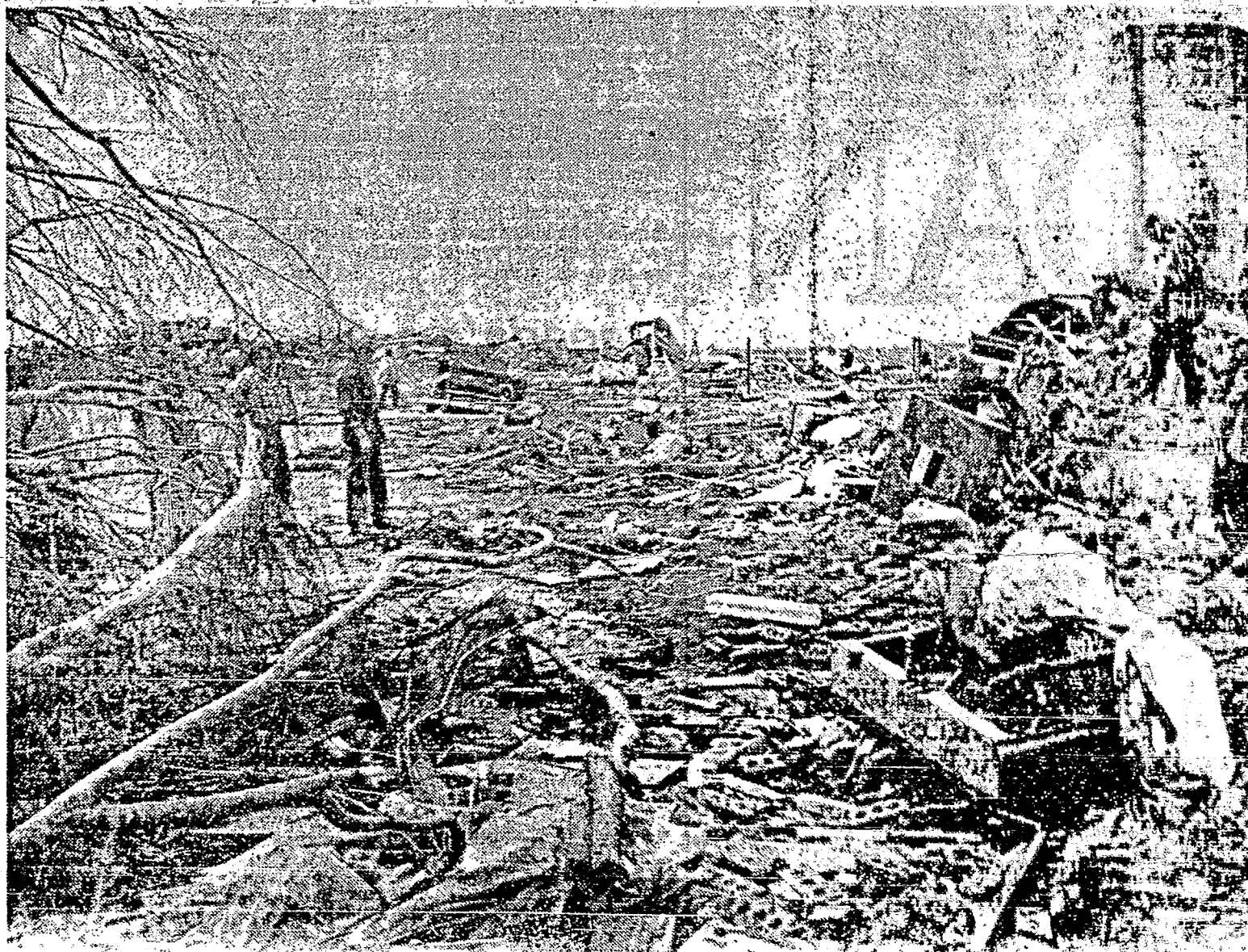
Ten seconds of tornado terror





Ed Heal of The Free Press

Lynne Dobbin, 14, top, and the rest of her family still have the color aerial photograph of their home and farm the way it used to be — the picture survived the tornado. Below is what was left of the property itself when the storm had passed, with only one concrete silo still standing.



and turn the way it used to be — the picture survived the tornado. Below is what was left of the property itself when the storm had passed, with only one concrete silo still standing.

funnel clouds formed out of warm updrafts, cooling at higher altitudes and terminated north of the city were temporarily turned into a lake



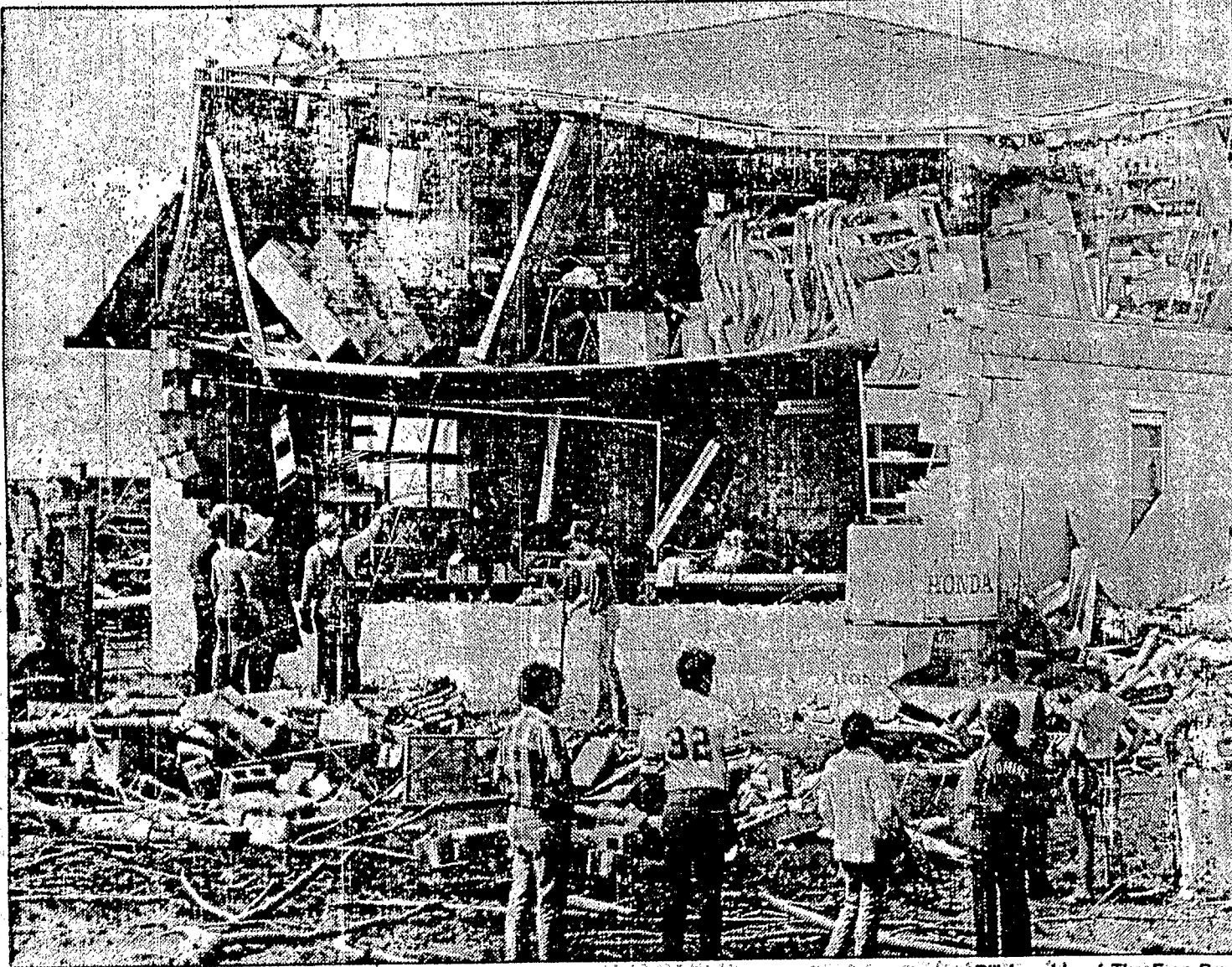
Disaster at Reece's



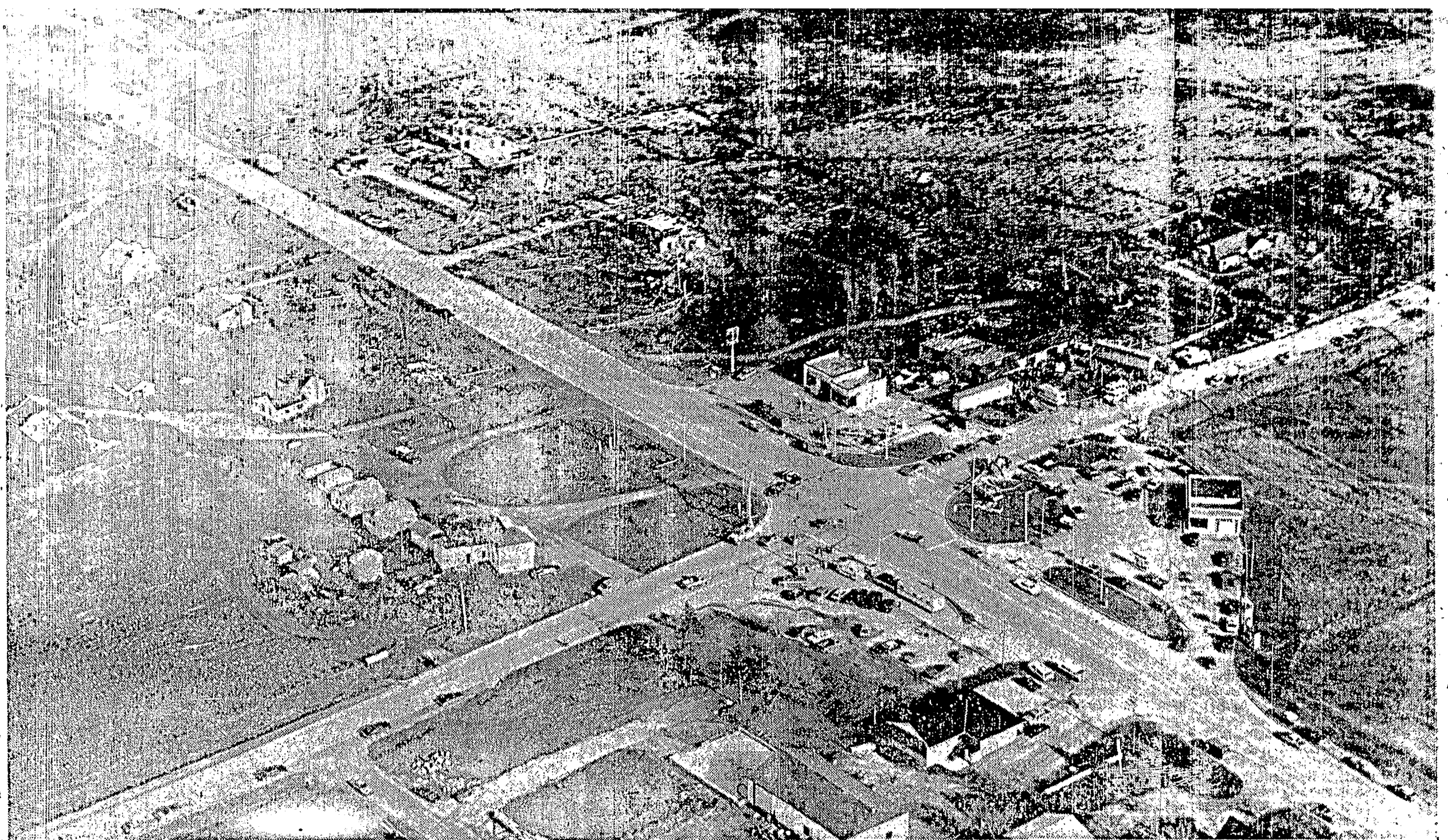
For Bryan Sullivan of Reece's Corners 15 years of work lay smashed before him, the aftermath of a devastating twister that roared through the community Monday. Sullivan estimates damage to the building that housed his motorcycle shop at more than \$140,000. Stock and inventory will bring the final total considerably higher.



It's never happened before and if it never happens again it'll
too soon for the residents of Reece's Corners. Provincial po
say it'll take at least a week to clean up the debris left fr
Monday's tornado. Within hours of the disaster heavy consti
ion equipment arrived to complete the demolition of parti
ated buildings. At Sullivan's Materials. Then the twir



Owner Bryan Sullivan estimated damage at \$1 million when his motorcycle dealership building was ripped apart, a storage building was destroyed and his home heavily damaged at Reeces Corners.



Mike Jordan of The Free Press

Like the trail left by a marauding army, shattered buildings and splintered trees trace the path of a tornado that slashed through Reeces Corners early Monday afternoon. This aerial view looks southeast across the hamlet, 30 kilometres east of Sarnia.



Ed Heal of The Free Press

"Mary Nickels, foreground, saw the tornado coming and headed to the basement with her dog. When she emerged, she found a pile of brick and lumber where her house had been."

A sense of unreality, scene of contradiction hangs over devastation

By Del Bell
of The Free Press

WYOMING — There is an eerie sense of unreality to it all, a roll of the incomprehensible dice of luck and contradictions.

Everywhere, contradictions.

The sun shines warm and healing on a row of crumpled homes at Reeces Corners, about a kilometre down the road from the main street of Wyoming which is also Highway 21.

Mary Nickels saw the twister coming. The swirling cone was grey and not black, but it wasn't something she had any time to contemplate.

And it had the deep, throaty growl of a freight train thundering out of a swollen sky.

She grabbed her dog and headed for the basement. She crawled up out of the great, sunken hole where her living room used to be after it passed.

As friends, neighbors and relatives helped salvage what could be saved from the mutilated home — "our bedroom used to be up there," Nickels says, pointing at blue sky — she seems calm and controlled.

There is a sense of what will be, will be. It is enough that no one was hurt. Now there is only the cleanup to think about.

Her husband Rae was at work when a supervisor told him he'd better head for home because a twister had touched down at Reeces Corners.

He figured a few shingles might have been lifted.

Now he sat in the rubble of what used to be the second floor of his contemporary

brick home and scooped a fishing rod intact out of the debris.

He marvelled at it for a long moment while some of his friends loading a truck kidded him.

His wife, meanwhile, opened a cardboard carton and found yet another of her collector's plates intact.

So much was gone but the fishing rod and plates survived.

For a short stretch along Highway 21, on the way into Wyoming, there are broken windows and workmen tacking plastic into gaping holes in rooftops and trees downed like pickup sticks.

Then, just as abruptly, it ends and you are driving past a row of homes with even the television aerials intact. An old man picks up newspaper shreds from his front lawn and residents stand in little knots pondering the incomprehensible.

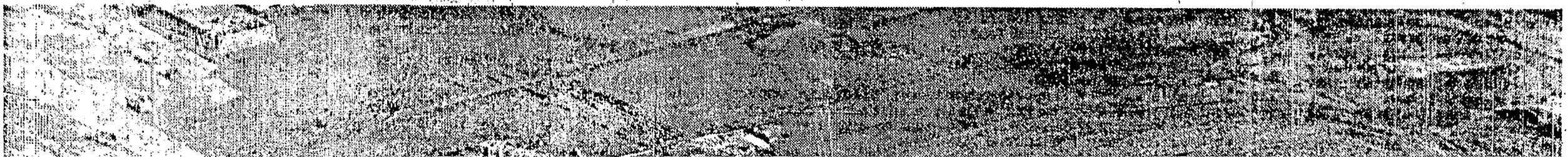
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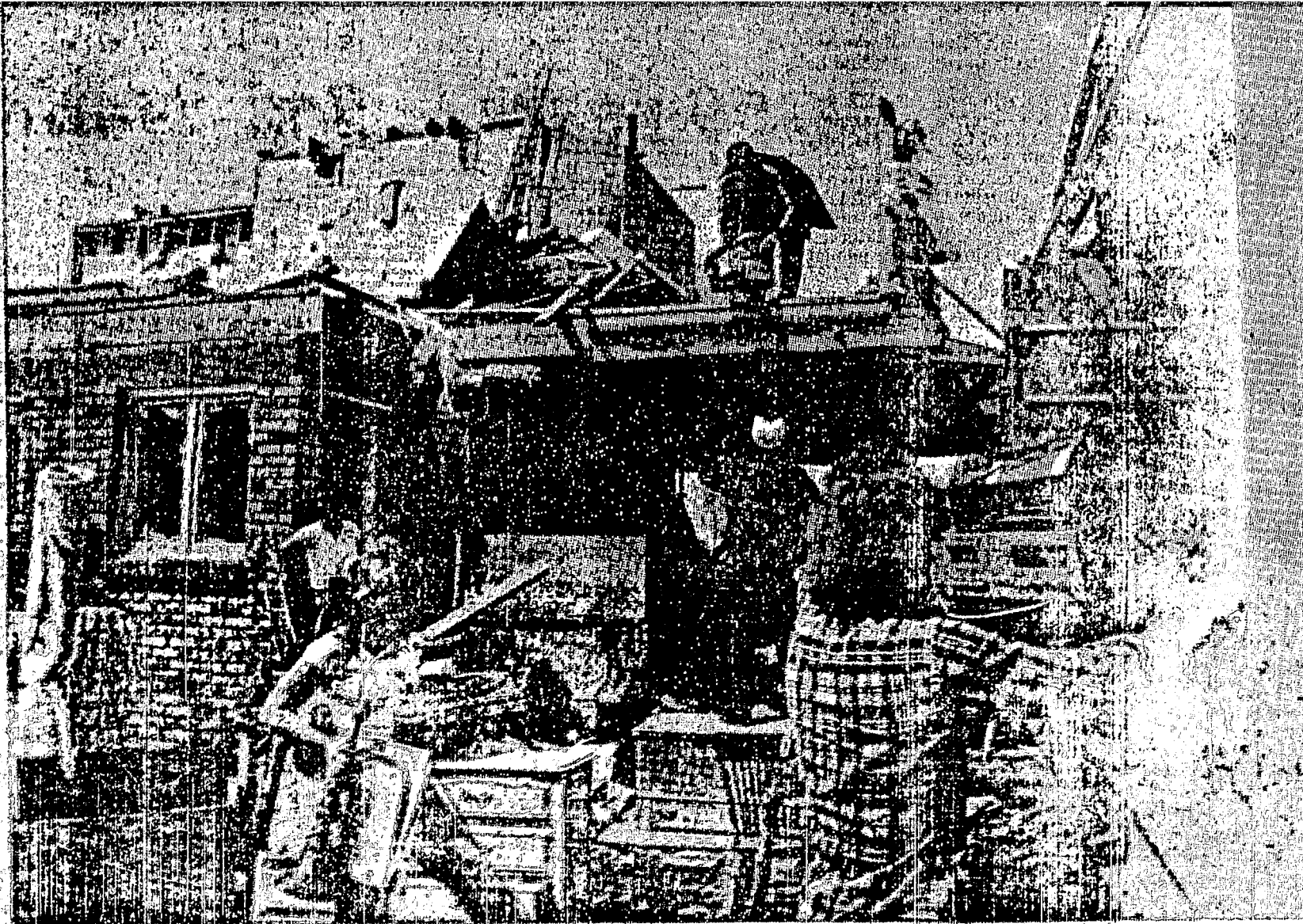
The school buses are just beginning to roll and about a kilometre from the devastation of Reeces Corners, there is Holy Rosary school.

It is so close and yet, happily, so far.

The sun has wiped a slate of ugly, grey clouds out of the sky and only the OPP officers waving traffic past twisted traffic signals and the procession of utility trucks are left to remind you it is no illusion.

Just another contradiction.



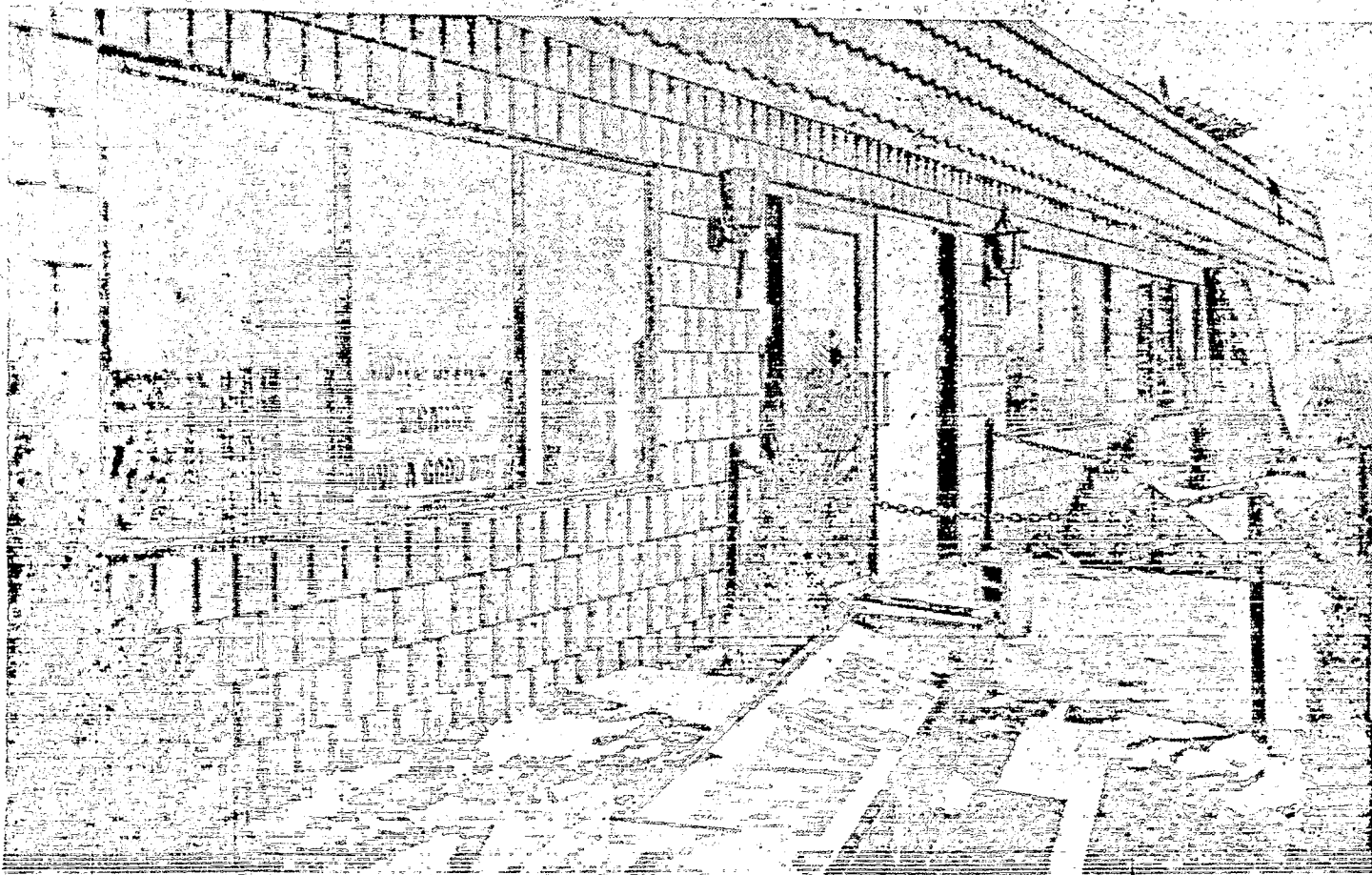


Ed. Hall of The Free Press

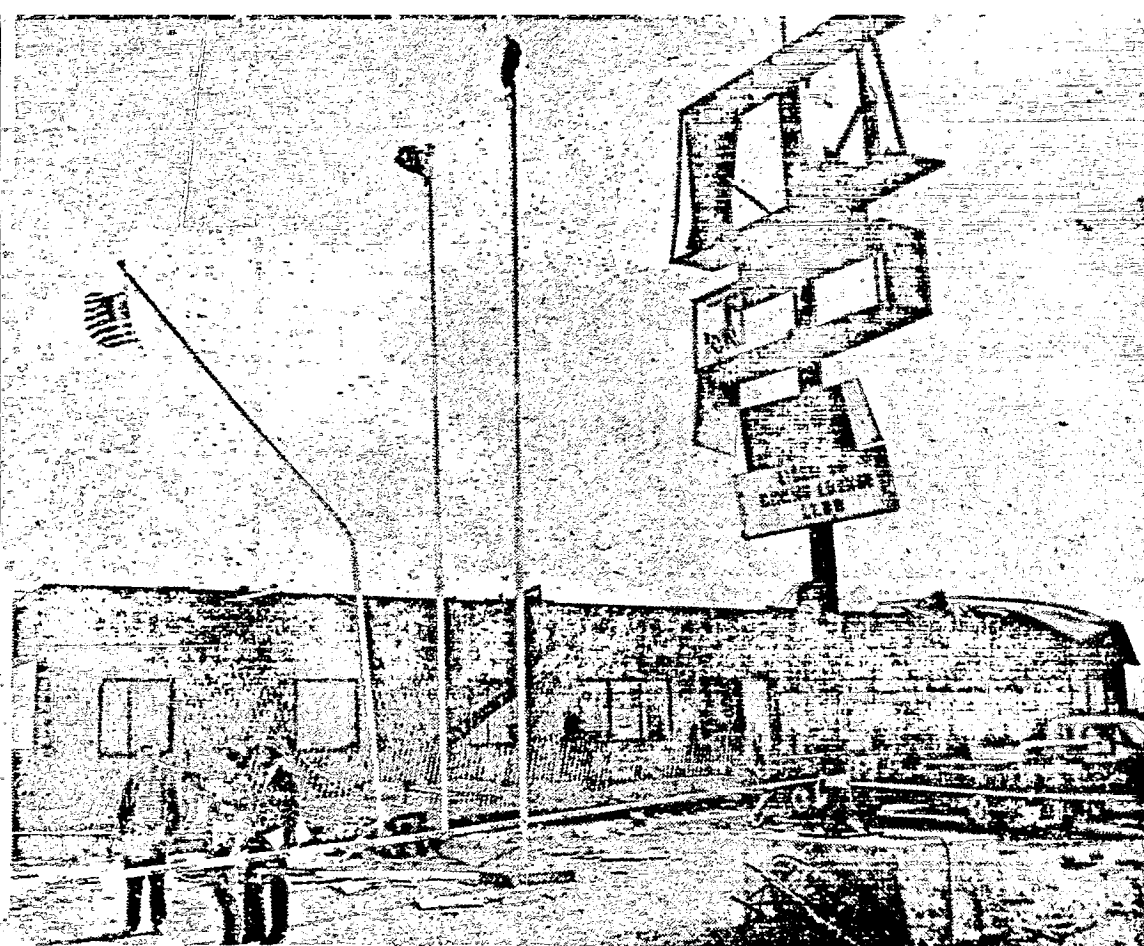
When calamity in tornado form destroyed Ed and Mary Nickels' home at Reeces Corners Monday, friends, neighbors and family turned out to help salvage possessions the twister didn't get.



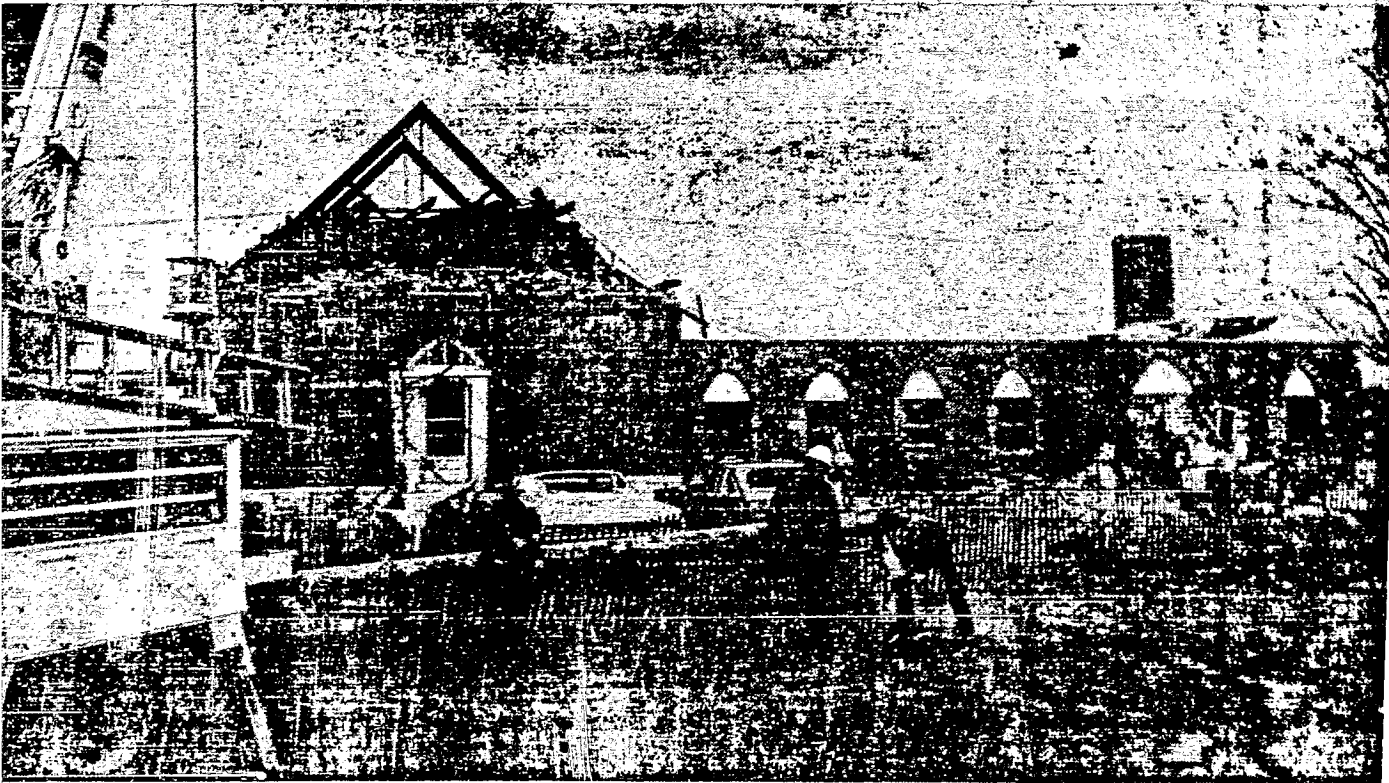
While their wishing well escaped virtually unscathed, the Rae and Mary Nickel home at Reece's Corners shows the devastating effects of Monday's tornado.



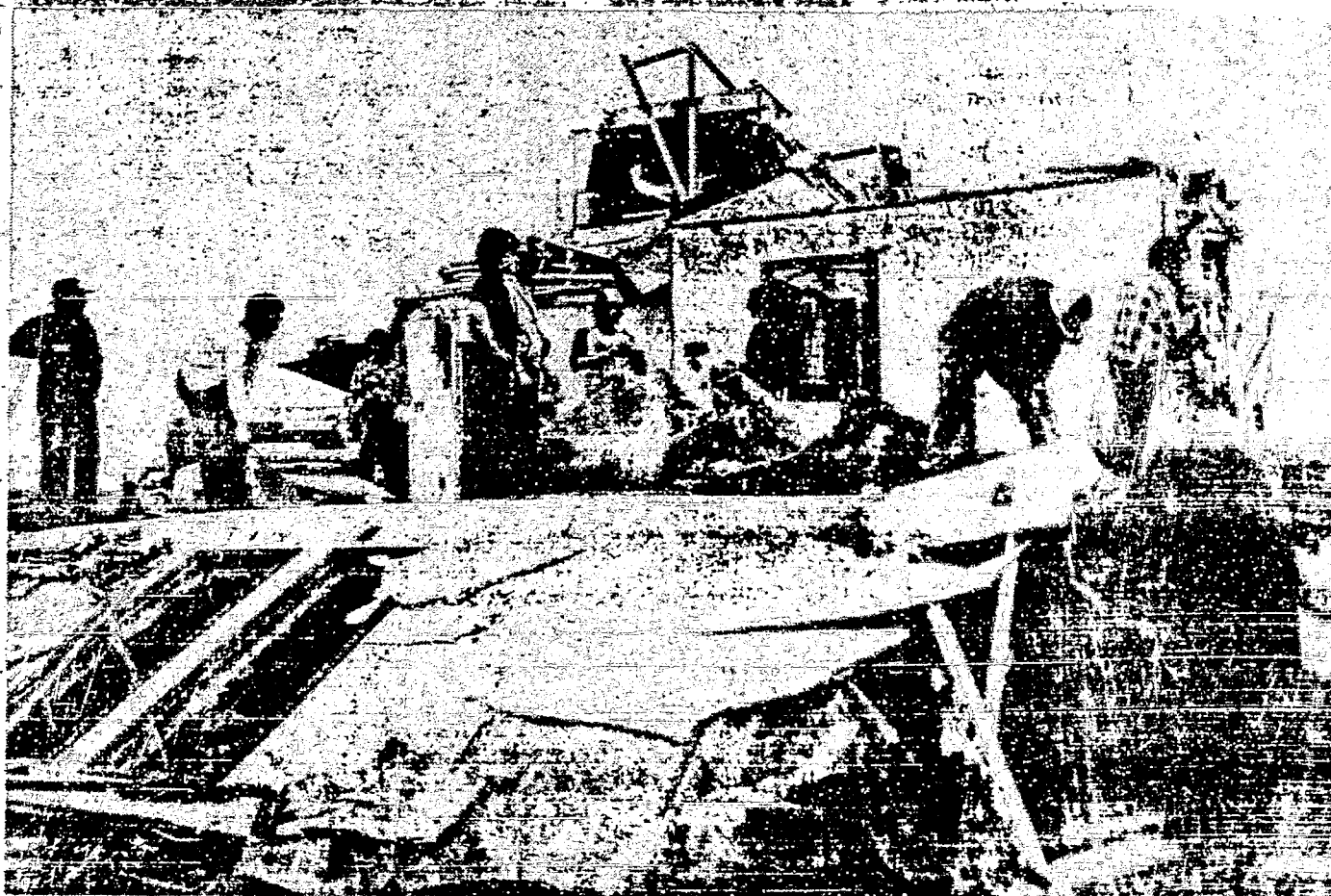
It was an ironic site. Among the destruction at Reece's Corners an untouched sign in the window of the Ranch House Restaurant read "Motel Office, Vacancy...have a good day."



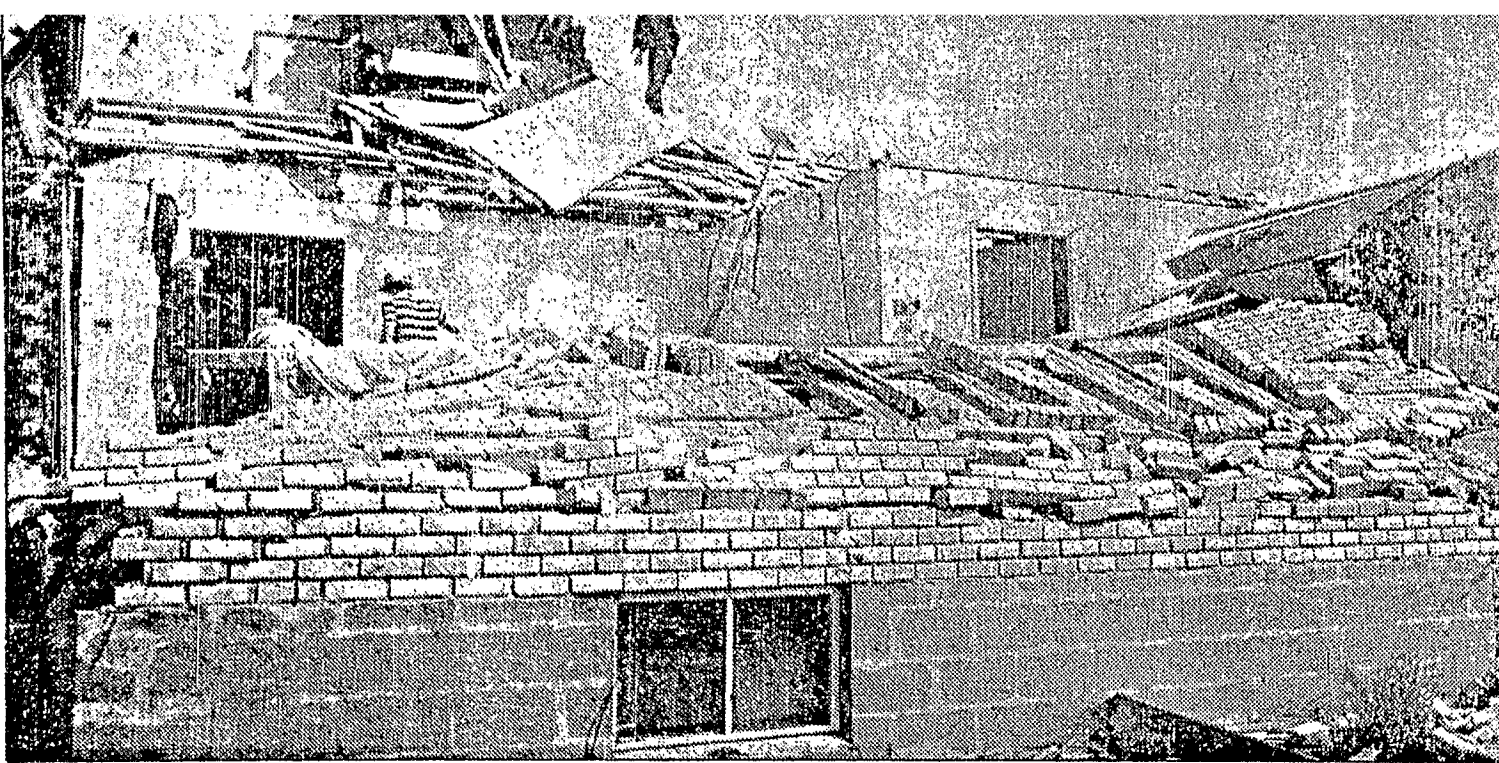
A bent flag pole towers precariously over the remains of the previously bustling Ranch House Restaurant. Just hours before patrons narrowly escaped injury as the roof collapsed under pressure of a passing Tornado.



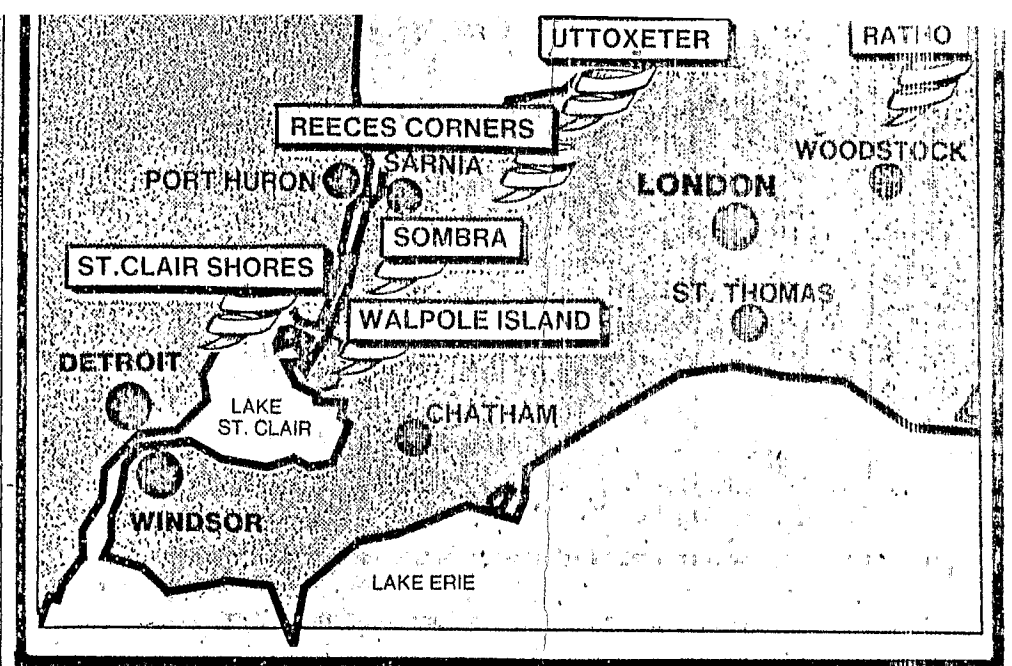
Manny's Pizza Parlour was reduced to an empty shell after Monday's tornado. The roof disappeared and the interior turned to rubble.



Immediately following the twister's touchdown, friends and neighbours pitched in to help the John Vanderwielen family salvage as much as possible from what had been their home. The Vanderwielen residence was located on Highway 7 at Beebe's Corners where it is believed to have been destroyed.



Looking for salvageable possessions, John Vanderwielen carefully toured what used to be the upstairs of his home.



Farm scene of grisly horror as 10,000 hens dead, dying

By Mary Kehoe
Sarnia Bureau

REECES CORNERS — It was a horrifying, sickening scene at the John Verroen farm just northeast of here Monday night where 10,000 laying hens were dead or dying in the aftermath of the tornado that swept through the area.

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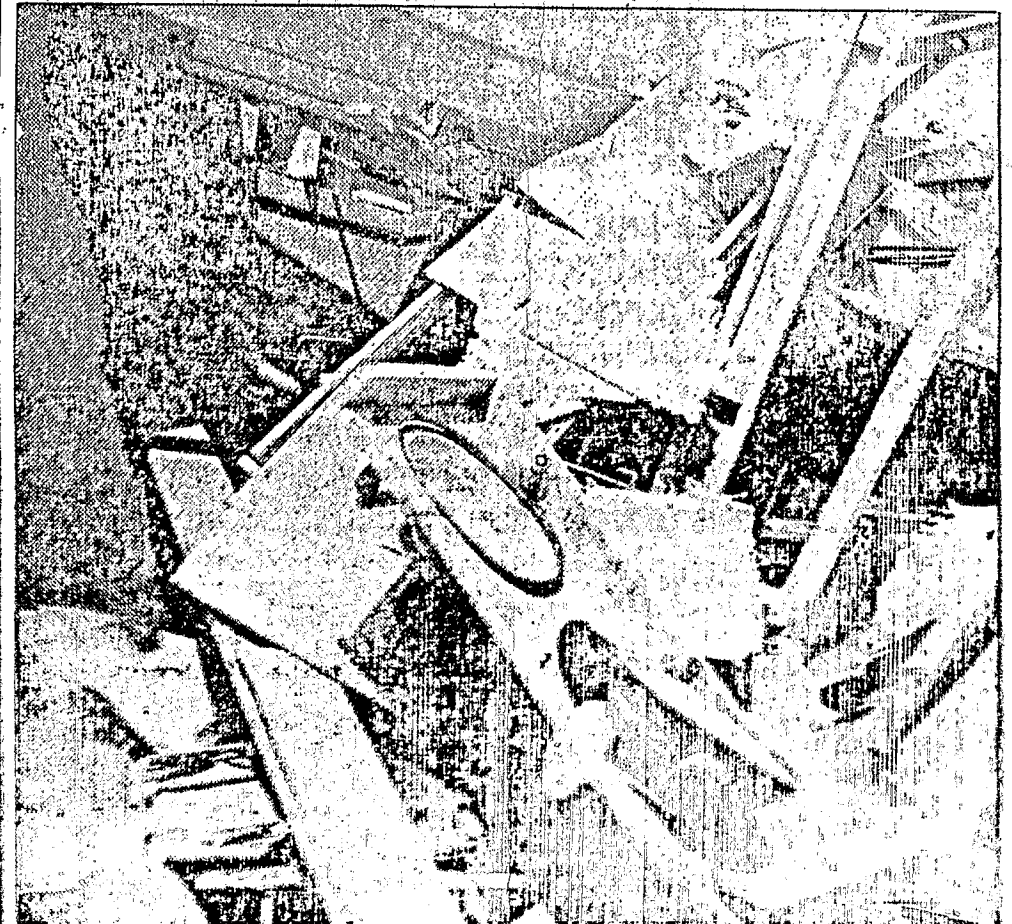
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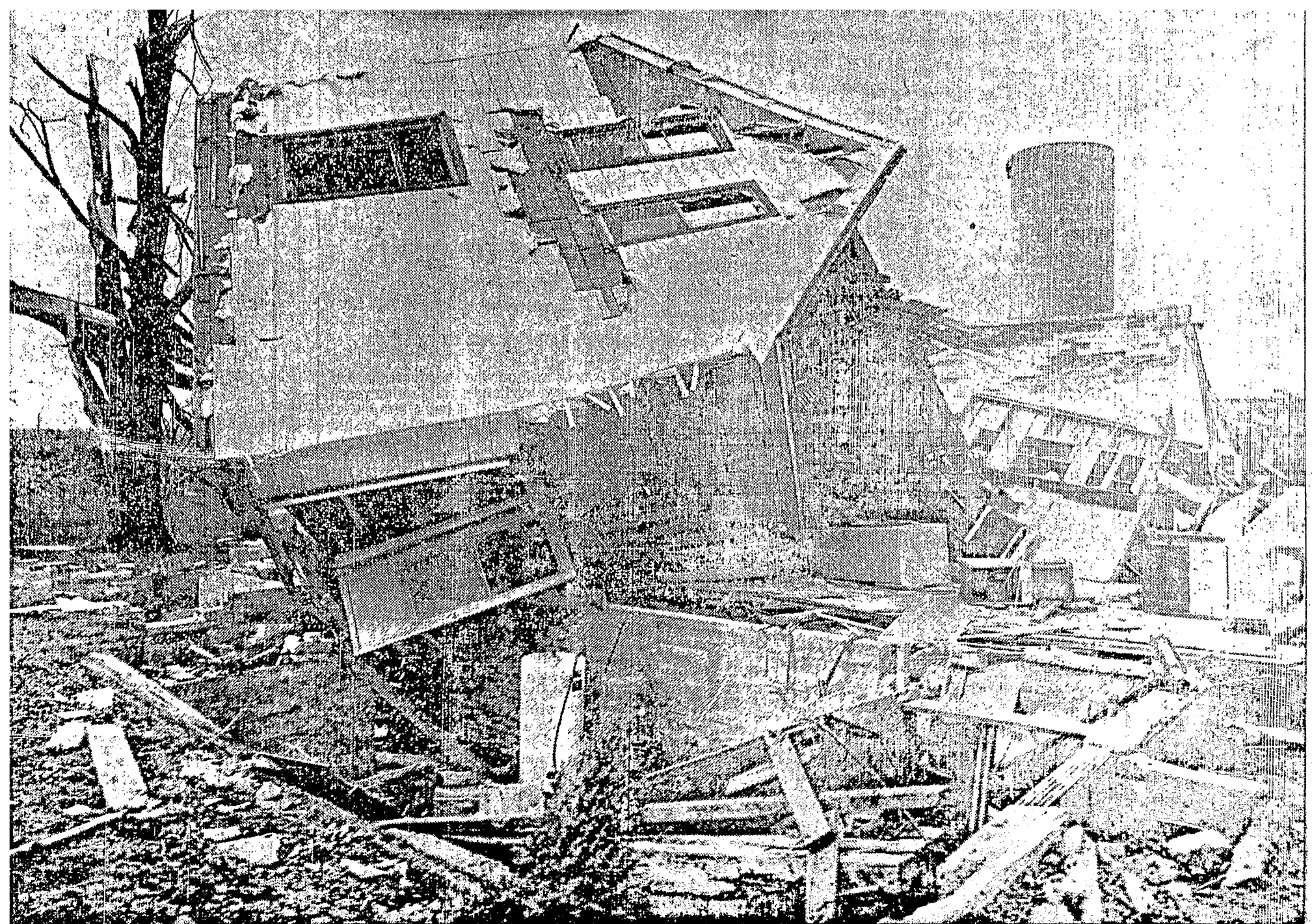
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Gillatly said township council was meeting in the township offices, just west of where the twister hit homes in Reeces Corners, when it swept through. He said council members, called by a secretary, ran outside to see a mass of swirling wind





Bill Inside of The Free Press

Schoolgirl pinned

Seven-year-old Nadene Kerrigan was pinned in the wreckage of her family's home in Reeces Corners Monday, when the tornado picked the house up and dropped it on its side. Home ill from school, she suffered a minor leg injury.

By Mary Kehoe
Sarnia Bureau

REECES CORNERS — A telephone call from his sister-in-law saved John Vanderwielen's life Monday.

He was in his spacious, two-storey house on Highway 7, just east of Highway 21, when his sister-in-law, Dorothy Donkers, phoned from her home in Wyoming and told him to get to the basement because a tornado was heading his way.

He raced downstairs, listened to a roar, and when it was over came up to find his home of six years devastated.

His wife, Mary, said she was across the road getting her hair done by local hairdresser Ramona Berkers when they heard "all this noise and something hitting against the window." Frightened, they ran to the basement of Berkers' frame house and looked out to see trees felled.

When the noise stopped, Mary Vanderwielen said the women heard screaming. It was her husband, crying out in fear for his wife's life.

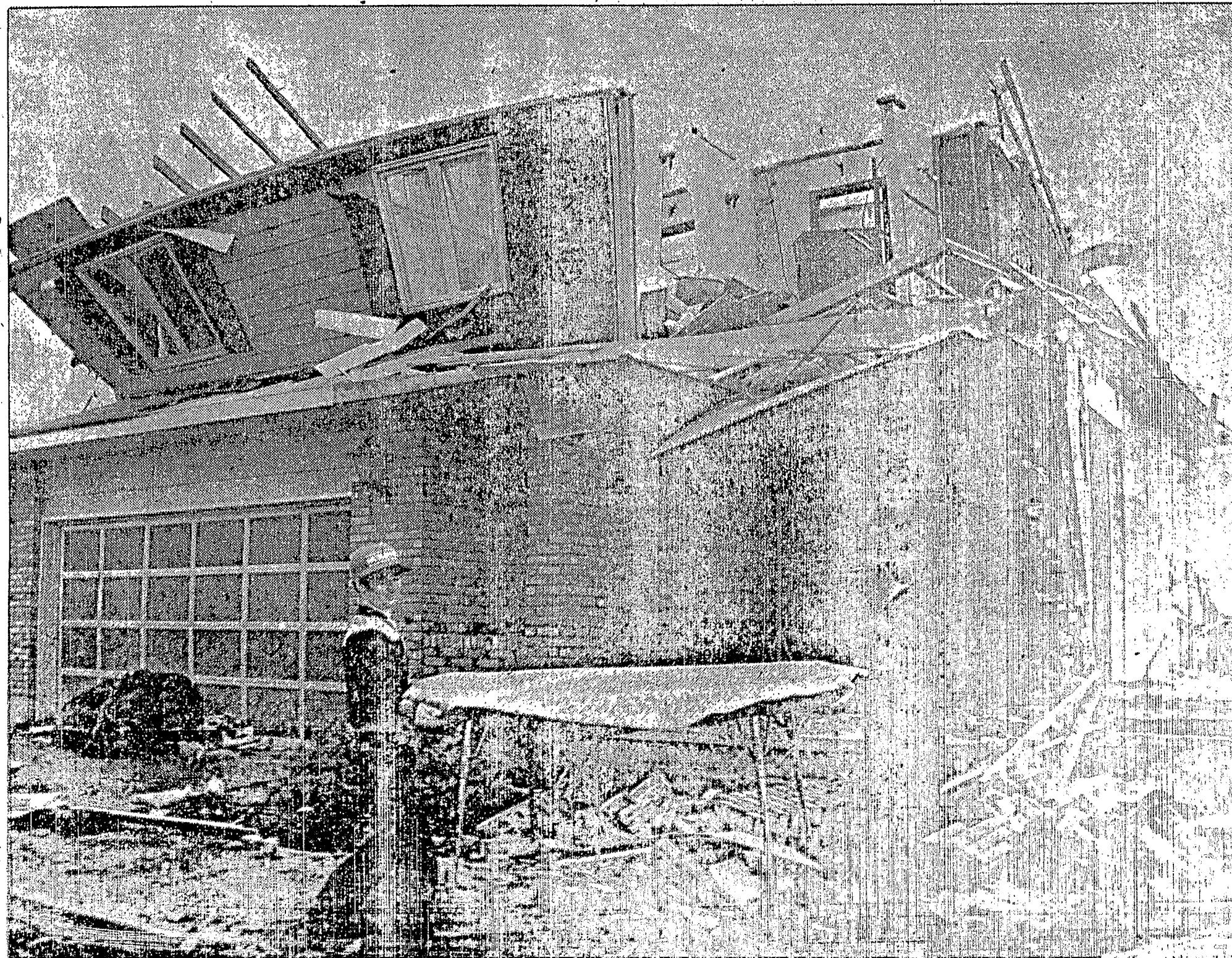
The Berkers house seemed to have been shifted as the tornado passed, but damage was minimal compared with the destruction at the Vanderwielen's four-bedroom home. The top floor had virtually disappeared. The main floor was a shambles. A pickup truck parked in the driveway was smashed, apparently by flying debris.

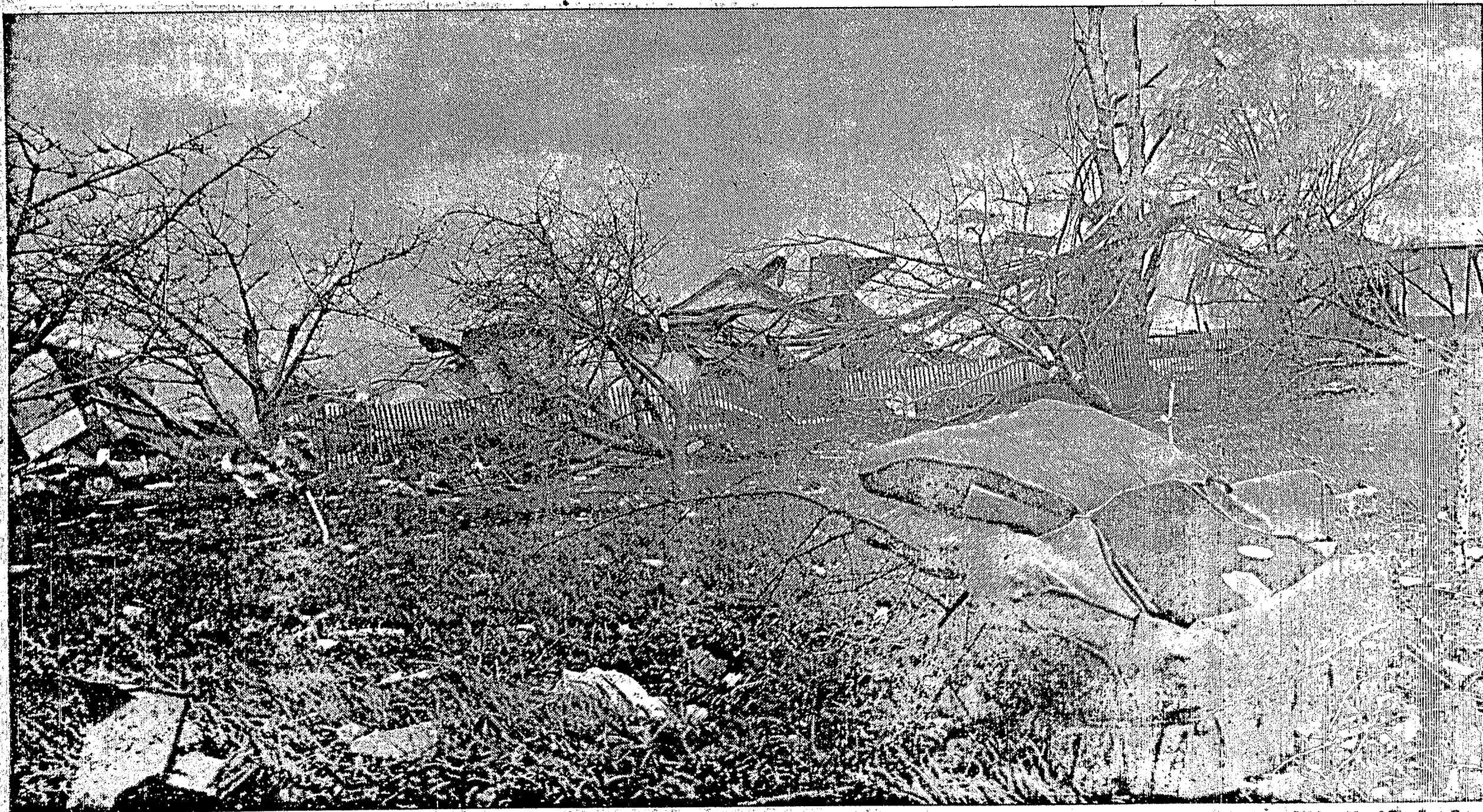
As he worked later in what will be a massive cleanup effort, Vanderwielen said he had insurance but that didn't matter. "The most important thing is that we can look it over, standing on our own legs."

His wife, wearing a borrowed coat and her hair still wet from the unfinished styling, comforted three daughters who had arrived home from work and school about 2:30 p.m. Standing in the stiff winds that were whipping clouds through the ever-changing sky overhead, she kept reminding them: "We're alive, that's the main thing."

"Just look for what's precious to you," she told them, pointing to their muddled possessions strewn across the large green lawn. As she spoke, a neighbor walked up with a photo album, soggy but still filled with family pictures, and a daughter clutched it against her and walked away. "Now that's what's precious," her mother said.

"I don't know what we'll do, but we'll just make one day at a time." She said the couple and their three children with homes of their own in the area "so we have lots of places to stay."





Bill Ironside of The Pine Press

A chair blown out of the tornado-smashed Danny Kerrigan home at Reeces Corners sits amid shattered apple trees in the wake of the tornado.