

= 1899 New Richmond tornado =

The 1899 New Richmond Tornado was an estimated F5 tornado that nearly destroyed the town of New Richmond , Wisconsin , on June 12 , 1899 , killing 117 and injuring 125 people . More than \$ 300 @, @ 000 (USD) (\$ 8 @, @ 533 @, @ 000 in today 's dollars) in damage was reported .

= = History = =

June 12 , 1899 , was the day of the Gollmar Brothers Circus , which drew hundreds of visitors in addition to the town 's 2 @, @ 500 inhabitants . Around 3 : 00 p.m. , clouds began to build , and the sky became quite dark . As the circus ended for the day around 4 : 30 PM , a heavy rain , with some hail , began to fall . The rain let up around 5 : 00 PM , and people began to head home for the day . By 6 : 00 PM , the streets of New Richmond were full of tourists , travelers and residents .

Meanwhile , the tornado had already touched down to the southwest . It began as a waterspout on the east bank of Lake St. Croix , about 15 miles (24 @. @ 1 km) from New Richmond , at around 5 : 30 PM . The tornado was described as a " boiling cloud " , which seemed to skirt the hills to the east of Lake St. Croix , and then head straight for New Richmond . Passing over mostly open country , it destroyed several farm buildings near the rural communities of Burkhardt and Boardman as it traveled northeast . Three people were killed there .

There was little warning in New Richmond . The tornado was completely illuminated by lightning , but it was visible for only a few minutes before it reached the town . Homes and businesses were demolished and torn from their foundations , flying debris filled the air , and people were swept away . The brick , three @- @ story Nicolett Hotel was completely leveled by the tornado . Some barely had time to scramble for shelter in storm cellars , but many were caught in the streets . Even some who did take refuge were killed anyway , such as those who ran into the O.J. Williams dry goods store . The store was swept away , and the people taking shelter in the basement were pelted to death by flying bricks and timbers . Most people who could not find shelter were killed . Debris of all sorts flew through the air at tremendous speeds . A 3 @, @ 000 pound safe was flung a block from its original location . Trees and timbers were hurled " like javelins " through the air , and the intense winds swept people up and threw them against walls or the ground . The northern residential section of town was completely obliterated by the tornado , with nothing left but small pieces of debris scattered about . Every home in that area was leveled or swept away . The tornado dissipated shortly after exiting the town .

Shortly thereafter , another storm with strong winds swept through , sending people back into their shelters . It is likely that some died in fires while potential help was hiding from the possibility of another tornado .

= = Aftermath = =

All but the extreme western end of the town was obliterated by the tornado and subsequent fires . More than 300 buildings were destroyed , and the only significant surviving structures were the Catholic and Baptist churches . The town 's electrical plant and water facilities were destroyed , so fires ran rampant through the scattered debris . Many bodies found in the aftermath were burnt beyond recognition ? it was impossible to tell if they died from the tornado or from being trapped and burned alive .

Twenty @- @ six families experienced multiple deaths , and six reported four or more deaths in the family . After order was restored , authorities determined that a total of 117 people had been killed (64 in the town itself) and more than 150 injured . This is the ninth highest death toll for any single tornado in American history . The New Richmond Tornado is generally assumed to have been an F5 tornado , with winds in excess of 261 mph .

The town was so completely damaged that it had to be essentially rebuilt . Damage claims exceeded \$ 300 @, @ 000 (\$ 7 million in 2006 dollars) , however , damages may have been as high as \$ 600 @, @ 000 (\$ 14 million in 2006 dollars) .

