

= 1878 Wallingford tornado =

The Wallingford Tornado was an F4 tornado that struck the town of Wallingford , Connecticut , on August 9 , 1878 . The violent tornado destroyed most of the town , killing about 34 people ? estimated totals varied ? and injuring at least 70 , many severely . This was the deadliest tornado ever to strike the state of Connecticut , and the second deadliest ever in New England , after the Worcester tornado of 1953 .

= = Before the storm = =

The storm system that eventually spawned the Wallingford tornado produced damaging winds and at least one tornado far before it reached the town . The first tornado from this storm system touched down in South Kent , unroofing houses , blowing down barns , and uprooting and tossing trees into the air . It moved steadily southeast for 12 mi (19 km) , moving just south of New Preston , and then through Washington , before turning north and dissipating . The next path of damage started further north along the Shepaug River . It is unknown whether this was a tornado or straight @-@ line winds , but the damage path continued southeast for three miles before disappearing again . More damage was reported near Waterbury , where a house was unroofed two miles west of the town . In the town itself , branches and chimneys were damaged .

As the storm approached Wallingford , observers described a black , rolling funnel , with clouds blowing in from all directions . This system passed directly over Cheshire , producing a strong wind at the surface which caused some minor damage . The storm then moved directly towards Wallingford .

= = The Wallingford tornado = =

In Wallingford , the day prior to the tornado was clear , and said to be " one of the loveliest [days] of the season " . At around 5 p.m. the sky began to get dark , and by 5 : 30 p.m. the air was very black . At around 6 p.m. , the air at the surface was calm , but lightning began to fill the sky , and the clouds began moving at a very rapid pace , frightening some residents into shelter .

The tornado started at 6 : 15 p.m. local time as a waterspout over Community Lake , just west of town . It then moved through the center of town along Christian Street , damaging almost every structure as it went . The tornado tore houses from their foundations , throwing some more than 600 feet (180 meters) . A receipt from the town was later found 65 miles (105 km) east in Peacedale , Rhode Island . Large trees were uprooted and snapped , and those that were still standing were stripped of small limbs and leaves . The Catholic Church was blown to bits , and heavy tombstones in the nearby cemetery were tossed around . The brand @-@ new brick high school building was almost completely destroyed . The tornado 's path through town was only two miles long , but the damage path was up to 600 feet (180 meters) wide .

More tornadic damage was reported in southern Durham and Killingworth , with some homes severely damaged , but there were some minor injuries , one young woman in Killingworth was injured by shards of glass from a breaking window . Some sources insist that the Wallingford tornado dissipated a few miles west of the town , and this was an entirely separate tornado , but without a modern damage survey it is impossible to tell . The parent storm finally moved out over the ocean around 8 PM .

= = Aftermath = =

A district schoolhouse was converted into a temporary morgue immediately after the storm ; 21 bodies were discovered and placed there that night . One person was found dead 3300 feet (1 km) from where he had been standing . The tornado brought down telegraph lines and poles around the area , so assistance from physicians in nearby towns took more than an hour . More than 50 special police were sworn in to prevent looting , and to control the crowds of curious onlookers who had

come by train from surrounding cities .

Thirty five homes were completely destroyed , with many more being unroofed or receiving some sort of damage . Damage estimates were around \$ 150 @, @ 000 from buildings alone ; utilities and railway facilities received a lot of damage as well . Final estimates were around \$ 250 @, @ 000 (\$ 5 @. @ 3 million when adjusted for inflation) .

Tornadoes are not very uncommon in the state of Connecticut , but tornadoes of this power are rare . Though tornadoes have only been officially rated on the Fujita scale since 1950 , this tornado has been estimated to be of F4 @-@ intensity on the scale . This would make it one of only three tornadoes of this intensity to ever affect the state , as of 2008 . Thirty @-@ four people were killed by the tornado ? thirty @-@ one more than the second @-@ deadliest Connecticut tornado ? and 70 others injured .