

Tornado Overturns House in 1908

No serious injuries suffered by Kennedy family

Editor's note: The following article was written from information from Ruth Kennedy Gautier, a longtime Lubbock art instructor who now resides in Washington state. The data was supplied to the Beacon by Mary Lou Bollman.

Tornados are not new to the South Plains. In fact, they have been around West Texas longer than civilization.

"An ominous cloud" was visible in the southwest while James Hiram and Josephine Aiken (Pheona) McGehee were visiting from Lamesa with a daughter, Logan and Ethel McGehee Kennedy and their offspring, Joe 6 1/2, Laura, 2 1/2, and Ruth, four months. Their house

was located 1 1/2 miles south of Lockney.

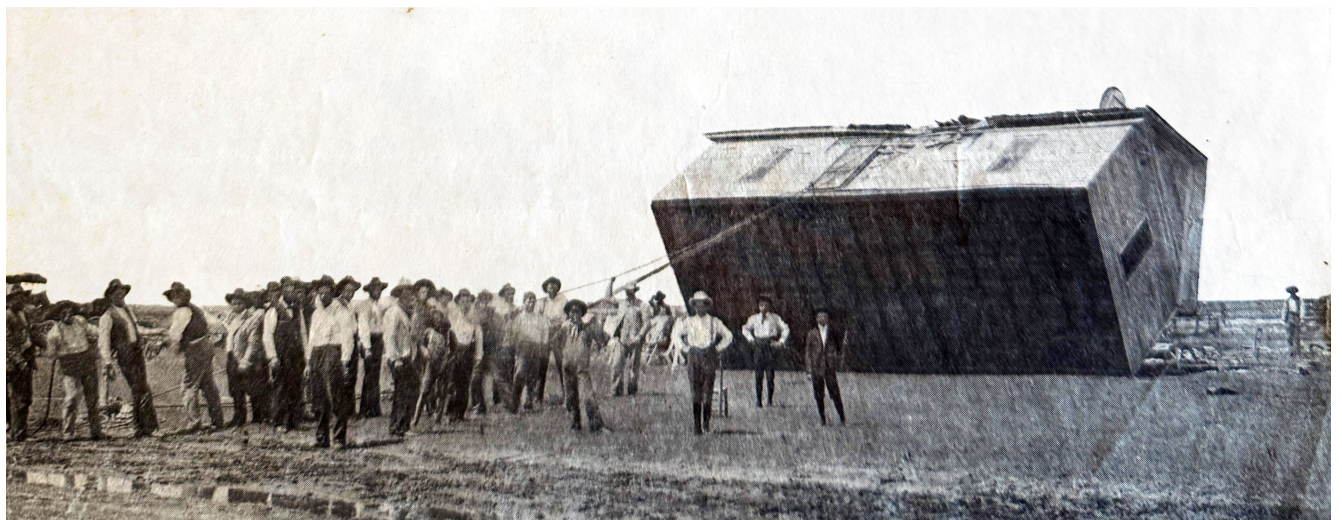
The McGehees had made their "headquarters" for the local visit with their oldest daughter, Margaret and Lloyd Nichols, about three-quarters of a mile "across the pasture" from the Kennedy community residence. The McGehees' also had two sons living in the Lockney community.

"Grandpa and Grandma intended to spend the night with us (Kennedys) on Saturday night; but due to the ominous cloud in the southwest, "they decided to go back to Aunt Mag and Uncle Lloyd's"

Ruth Kennedy Gautier remembers that "At 2:30 a.m., the storm struck our house, turning it over 2 1/2 times and leaving the windows over our heads." That was the "first Sunday in June," 80 years ago.

The former Ruth Kennedy continues that, "Father piled up anything he could find to stand on and swung himself up and finished breaking a window so he could get out.

"He walked barefooted and in his underclothes to Uncle Lloyd's to get help. He always slept in his underclothes)



He was forced to wait until daylight to walk across the pasture.

Forehead Gash

"Mother was not hurt, but had toothpicks and molasses in her hair. I was caught between the mattress and the springs, with coal oil (now called Kerosene) pouring over me. Joe had a gash in his forehead and it was bleeding profusely.

"All that Mother could do in the dark was to try to hold the sides of the wound together.

She could not find Laura so she called to her and Laura said, 'Here I am.' She was sitting on a pile of glass, unhurt."

The family was "situated after about a week. They were so thankful that no lives had been lost."

Grandma McGehee "didn't want to leave until we all had our picture made together." Logan Kennedy hadn't shaved since the storm and insisted that he not be in the picture. However, he relented after his mother-in-law insisted.

"All of the McGehee children lived in the area, so they were in the picture, too.

Myrtle wasn't married so she had no children. She was the youngest. All of the others and their families were: Uncle Lloyd Nichols and Aunt Mag and their two children, Edgar and Josephine; Uncle Will and Aunt Kate Nichols McGehee (she was the sister of Lloyd Nichols) and their three children, Helen, Wallace and Lucy; J.H. McGehee Jr. (we called him Ti) and his wife, Maggie, and their one-year-old daughter, Marie."

Unbelievable

Mrs. Gautier states that "Some unbelievable things can happen in a tornado. There was a tubful of rainwater in the yard and not a drop of it had been spilled!"

She says, "I don't remember hearing what happened in that week from the time of the storm until the picture was taken. We needed a place to live, food to eat and clothes to wear. It helped to have our relatives near, and people in the area exhibited that spirit of caring and giving that is still practiced today."

Men and boys of the community manually uprighted the house (see accompanying photo).

Mrs. Bollman says the Kennedy house which was

struck by the tornado is the "front part" of a house which is still located about 1 1/2 miles south of town.

"There is no difference (except terminology) between a cyclone and a tornado." Mrs. Gautier explains. "Early in the century, and even before that, they were called cyclones, but now we call them tornados." Now 80 years old, she considers herself fortunate to have survived that "first Sunday in June, 1908" tornado and to have recorded this historic event.

She concludes that, "My parents had a deep faith in God which they imparted to their children. So with His help, they rebuilt their lives, both physically and spiritually.

With a faith like that, it would take more than a cyclone to destroy it."

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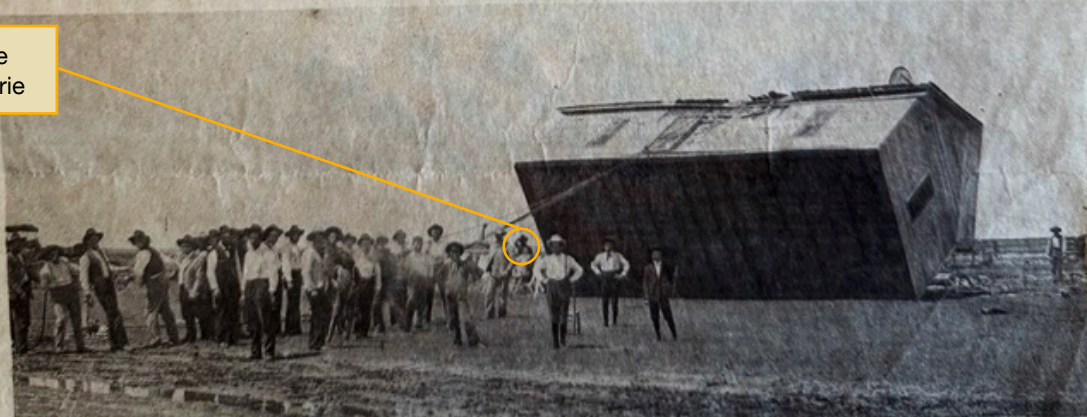
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Ti & Maggie
with 1 Yr Marie

MANPOWER -- Men and boys of the community gathered to manually upright the Logan Kennedy house after it had been overturned "2 1/2 times" by a June 1908 tornado. The house was located 1 1/2 miles south

of Lockney, and it forms the front segment of a house presently located south of town. Notice the ropes fastened to the dwelling. This photo was given to The Beacon from Mary Lou Bollman.

you may be in this picture