

ROSS, ELIZABETH

TORNADO NEAR TALLEQUAH.

#7948

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Elizabeth Ross, Investigator.
October 19, 1937.

TORNADO of 1879.

On an afternoon in September 1879, after rain had fallen at intervals for more than an hour, a tornado swept in from the southwest, over the crests of the hills just west of the Bald Hill prairie, about five miles south of Tahlequah. The roar of the swiftly traveling storm was audible for considerable distance away, and the flashing of lightning was continuous. People living some miles away noticed the appearance of the clouds and realized that a storm of more than usual magnitude was passing through portions of the Tahlequah District.

It is recalled that Judge Riley Keys whose home was in the vicinity of the present village of Welling, was present at our home on that day. He and my parents, my brothers, and I, stood on our west porch and watched the terrific clouds as they swept north-eastward.

Directly in the path of the advancing tornado stood the Cherokee National Asylum for the blind, in -

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sane and indigent. This building, a large brick structure, two stories in height, stood upon an elevation in an open section near the road leading south westward to Fort Gibson. All the helpers and inmates of the institution were assembled in the dining room in the lower portion of the building when the tornado struck with great force. The roof was torn from the building and the corner of the south wall was damaged to some extent but no

one was injured. Portions of the metal roof of the building were found two miles distant on the lower slope of a high prairie ridge, and small pieces of splintered plank littered the ground for some distance in the path of the storm.

A residence, some two miles distant, northeast of the Asylum, was overturned, a woman and child being inside the house, but neither received injury. Near this house a log building was completely demolished. An old man and his family who had been occupying the log house had removed to another section of the district on the previous day.

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An old negro woman, on her way to a house nearly a mile beyond the house in which the woman and child were staying, heard the rumble and roar of the coming tornado and whipped up her horse, thinking to reach the frame house and find shelter until the storm passed over, but the old horse suddenly refused to go farther and turned in the opposite direction. As "Aunt Sophie" Campbell, ~~the old woman,~~ vainly whipped her horse and tried to force the animal to proceed down the slope of an elevation, the tornado swept through the lowland below and disappeared in the distance. The old woman's horse soon turned and carried her down the slope, when she saw that the house was blown over and the woman was just in the act of crawling out, carrying the small child and crying "Oh, Lord." The old woman then realized that her old horse had shown ~~more~~ sense than she had, for had the animal advanced at her command the house would have been reached just as the tornado struck.

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The tornado swept toward the northeast but so far as was ascertained did no great damage beyond breaking down or uprooting trees. It missed the town of Tahlequah, passing more than a mile east of the old capitol of the Cherokee Nation.

The house occupied by Mrs. McSpadden, in the small prairie northeast of the Asylum, was also blown over, one of her younger sons being slightly injured.

Old residents of the localities through which the tornado swept were reminded of severe storms and tornadoes of long past years. Authority; personal recollections, Some incidents connected with this narrative were related in my presence by Sophia Campbell who died years ago.