

Floyd twister gets its place in history

By **CHRIS MORRIS**

Chris.Morris@newsandtribune.com

— On Friday afternoon, Floyd County officially unveiled its 16th state historic marker at the Children's Academy of New Albany — located at 1111 Pearl St. The dedication marked the 90th anniversary to the day of the largest storm to ever go through the city.

The marker was placed on the site of the old Olden Street Colored School, which collapsed during the storm, trapping teachers and students.

On that deadly March day, the storm rolled through the north side of town, affecting roughly 90 blocks. The tornado killed at least 45 people, injured hundreds more and destroyed approximately 300 homes and buildings.

It left more than 2,500 people homeless and did more than \$1 million in damage. One-third of the city was destroyed.

Floyd County Historian David Barksdale, along with Robyn Davis Sekula — who co-authored a book detailing New Albany's history in postcards — researched the storm and completed the "extensive" application to make Friday's event possible.

There are about 500 historic markers throughout the state — according to Jeremy Hackerd with the Indiana Historical Bureau — and each one costs around \$1,700. A Caesars Foundation grant, along with funds from the Floyd County Historical Society, paid for the tornado marker.

Gary Purlee, who recently released a book titled "The Cyclone of 1917," said the storm made national headlines from New York to California.

He also said if the storm took the same path today, it would affect the Wal-Mart in Corydon, New Albany and Providence high schools, Kroger, Kmart and the Greentree Mall in Clarksville, as well as many subdivisions in Jeffersonville.

"This was a major event," Purlee said. "At the time, only the great San Francisco Earthquake and the Ohio flood were bigger disasters."

However, despite its destruction, Purlee said New Albany residents quickly forgot about the tornado and turned their attention to World War I.

"The people of New Albany did not want to revisit it," he said.

Tom Reaugh, with the National Weather Service in Louisville, has researched tornadoes that have struck Southern Indiana and Central Kentucky.

He said the first tornado on record occurred in 1830 in Utica. He said since 1950, 29 tornadoes have come through the area with four hitting Floyd County. The 1917 storm, he said, is one of the top four to ever occur in the area.

Barksdale said two more historical markers will be unveiled this year in the county. In July, a marker will be placed at Cardinal Joseph Ritter's home on Oak Street as well as one to mark the New Albany-Salem railroad along Culbertson Avenue.

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