



View from the cellar

Up from the Cellar

THE APRIL 9, 1947, TORNADO formed just northeast of Amarillo near White Deer. By the time this terrible storm pulled back into the darkened sky, it had cut a devastating 1.9 mile swath across three states tracking 220 miles.

The tornado's path followed the railroad northeast, plowing up tracks, but there was no warning system in place to get the word up the line. Pampa, Miami and Canadian were spared, but Glazier, a small town 10 miles northeast of Canadian, would not be that fortunate. When the storm hit, Glazier was obliterated. The tornado rolled on.

The folks 15 miles away in Higgins knew a storm was brewing that Wednesday from the look of the dark clouds and heavy air. The roar coming down the tracks sounded like one of the many locomotives that passed through town. By the time they realized the roaring wasn't coming from a train, most families had no time to get to the cellars. The tornado hit Higgins about 7:45 p.m. Explosions and fireballs went up all over town as gas lines blew. Leila Litchfield, trying to account for her husband and seven of her children in the dark after their house blew up around them, was convinced the world was coming to an end.

The storm continued into Oklahoma. Woodward, where 120 people died, was hardest hit. The tornado crossed the Kansas line before it finally dissipated. The official death toll in Higgins is listed as 45. The local count has always been 53 killed. Glazier counted twelve dead. Davy Wright's brother-in-law, Tom Hext, was one of those killed. The jail was the only structure in Glazier that didn't suffer complete or partial destruction.

Weather on the High Plains has always been a study of extremes marked by storm events of horrible, epic proportions like the '47 tornado. Citizens of the region, born skywatchers all, tend to mark the passage of lifetimes in relation to these events, such as, "before the tornado" or "after the tornado." The great awful dusters of the Dust Bowl in the early 1930s—and especially the "Black Sunday" storm of April 14, 1935, when day turned to night—defined a whole generation.

Always the extremes: whole trains buried by a spring snow; hail large enough to kill livestock; howling south winds for days on end, followed by a blue norther and a 60-degree temperature drop, only to be followed by calm days with deep blue skies. The wet years of the late 1940s were followed by the stranglehold drought of the 1950s. The warm humid day of March 22, 1987 spawned a large

tornado that scribed an arc around

Lipscomb that was followed on March 23 by a blizzard with four-foot drifts.

Winters of sparse moisture are

contrasted with the 60-inch snowfall total for the winter of 1992-93.

High Plains folks are philosophical and proud of their contrary weather.

When even walking upright is difficult

on certain windy days, the old cattleman will squint toward the windmill and allow that it sure is a good day to pump water. And if a complaint is raised about a crippling blizzard, he replies, "But, just think of the good grass in the spring."



Cellar remains

The cellar was old when Kenzy Turner was growing up on the Moore place in the 1930s. His dad Bill warned him not to "ride" his stick horse across the cellar top, for fear the roof might cave in with him. But Kenzy had to gallop across it once more. That time, no warning, he got a spanking.

By the time salvage on the Moore house began, the cellar roof stood open to the sky. The skeletal sill boards that flanked the door are again paired together to frame "Up from the Cellar." New door parts have been ripped from the wide boards of the old house's west doorjamb.

