

Bits of Cambridge History

May 22, 2011, a deadly EF5 tornado hits Joplin Missouri, killing 157 people. A few days later, tornadoes strike the communities of Agawam, Charlton, Monson, Oxford, West Springfield, Westfield, Wilbraham and Sturbridge, MA killing four, and causing an estimated \$200 million dollars in property damage and severe prolonged power outages. And who hasn't heard of the famous Worcester Tornado, which occurred on June 9, 1953. But, you say, it can't happen in Cambridge! Well, it did!

On August 22, 1851 an extremely destructive tornado hit West Cambridge (in what is now Arlington) and portions of Medford. There was a great deal of property damage and several injuries. If you want to read a newspaper account of the tornado, the Cambridge Public Library now offers the Cambridge Chronicle online in the Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection. Coverage of the Chronicle is from 1846-1923. Here you will find an article written in the Cambridge Chronicle on August 23, 1851, which gives a full account of the damage, destruction, injuries and losses it caused. All you need to do to get access to this database is go to the [Cambridge Room page](#) on the Cambridge Public Library's website and click on the "Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection" link.

Want to learn more about this unusual weather event? Visit the Cambridge Room at the Main Library and take a look at the book, *The Tornado of 1851*. Written by the Reverend Charles Brooks, this little gem of a book gives a detailed account of the movement of the tornado and all the damage it caused. Brooks tells us that there were five or six individuals injured and even states that, "Mrs. Caldwell was taken up by the wind and carried over fences and trees through a distance of one hundred and fifty feet, and safely deposited by the side of a neighbor's barn."

Please visit the Cambridge Room or try the Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection database. Who knows what fascinating tidbits you may discover about the history of Cambridge!