



The Great Hellertown Storm

This was provided by member, **Lenny Szy**, from a book of

old newspaper articles. This story is from a newspaper article in the South Bethlehem Star, July 18, 1890.

Shortly after 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon a peculiar stillness and calm was noticed by residents of Hellertown, and many of the older people predicted a severe storm. A STAR reporter who was in the town at the time was among the number who prophesied the storm's approach and his worst fears as to its severity surpassed prediction. About 4:30 o'clock dark clouds came sweeping down over the Lehigh Mountain from the northwest and from the southeast a similar approach was noticed. The two met in Saucon Valley between

Hellertown and the Grim's mill. The opposing forces seemed to diverge and the cloud from the northwest, which was of a funnel shape, swept on in its course. It struck the barn of **Levi Riegel**, along the railroad, above the furnace, unroofing it. Next it struck and carried away part of the overhead bridge on the railroad, tore the roof from the stockhouse at the blast furnace, and leveled trees, fences and outhouses along its course for a space of half a mile. A freight car standing on a side track at the furnace was swept along until it reached the switch, where it was thrown from the rails. The field of corn east of the railroad station, one of the finest in the Valley, was stripped to the ground as if cut with knives.

Next in the storm's course was a large frame barn of **Charles Stever**, which was leveled to the ground. It contained the season's crops. An immense hay stack on a hill on the same farm was carried away, the hay being strewn along the storm's path for miles.

The storm seemed to gain in fury every minute and as it struck the fine new 3-story brick building of the Hellertown Agricultural Works it was at its height. The men within ceased to work as the storm approached, but little realized their peril. When the whirling cloud struck the building it drew the structure up with its great suction, twisted it and smashed it to fragments from top to bottom. Many of the heavy timbers, large pieces of the tin roof and even the bricks were carried off, while others crashed down on the heads of the terror-stricken employees, burying them in the confused mass. Every person in the building was more or less injured. Those who could do so set to work in the drenching rain and hail to rescue their fellow workmen.

A sad sight met the eyes of the rescuers as they proceeded with their work. John, the 10 year old son of **Dr. E.J. Freeman**, of Freemansburg, who had been spending several days with **Charles Barba**, the son of Foreman Barba, was in the mill when the storm came and was caught under the falling mass and instantly killed. His head was terribly crushed and his body frightfully mangled.

The following is the list of injured: **William H. Barba**, general manager of the works, badly injured about the hips and internally. **Samuel Soliday, Jr.**, forehead badly gashed and body bruised. **Frank Bodder**, cut about head and body bruised. **Samuel Soliday, Sr.**, body bruised se-

verely. **Charles Soliday**, boss moulder, head lacerated and badly bruised. **William Reiley**, head badly cut and otherwise injured. **Harry Kline**, carpenter, both hands lacerated and body bruised.

Several of the men who were caught in the yard of the works were picked up by the storm and carried several hundred yards into adjoining fields, but were little injured. A faint idea of the force of the storm can be had when it is told that portions of the tin roof weighing hundreds of pounds were twisted into balls and carried a thousand yards, one of them lodging in the yard of **David Bodder**, on Main Street.

The storm cloud continued on in a southeasterly direction, striking the frame slaughterhouse and barn of **Jacob Hagey**, tearing them to pieces. Mr. Hagey and several members of his family were at work in the slaughterhouse at the time and made miraculous escapes. Two horses, which were in the barn, were buried under falling mass but, strange to say, were taken out unhurt. The large barn of **Milton Bright**, near by, was lifted into the air from its foundation and twisted to pieces. The lumber yard of Hess & Bro. was turned into a chaotic state. The lumber was carried off, and after the storm great quantities of it hung on trees in a near-by orchard. Hess & Bros. planing mill escaped with the big doors being blown in and the windows smashed by the hail. A large frame stable of **Mrs. Kreidler**, on Main Street was leveled, and the roof and top story of a 2-story brick building belonging to John Moyer, of Bucks County, and occupied by **Titus Ruch**, was carried off and the house flooded. The family was at supper at the time and none of the members was injured. The tin roof of the residence of **Elwood Ball** was torn off and the house deluged. The steeple of Christ Union Church was torn off and lodged in a yard nearby. The roof of Odd Fellows' Hall was also badly damaged.

Among other properties damaged are: Hellertown Park Hotel, **Dr. A. Brown's** residence, the handsome residences of **Jere. S. and Milton J. Hess**, the residences of **Constable Moyer**, **Miss Mary Rentzheimer**, **John A. Geissinger**, **I.T. Hartzog**, **Dr. Wm. F. Detweiler**, **George B. Deemer**, **Jacob Nickum** and others. But few houses escaped damage, and there is hardly a house on Main Street from which the chimneys were not knocked off.

When the storm passed and the news of the fatality at the Agricultural Works, and the great destruction wrought had become