

Appendix 4

The Goderich tornado, August 21, 2011

On Sunday, August 21, 2011, at approximately 4:00 p.m., a powerful storm developed across Lake Huron and spawned a waterspout that changed into a terrifying tornado, which was later reported to be of a category F3 strength. The worst category is F5.

The tornado quickly advanced in a direct path towards the lakeside town of Goderich and engulfed the surface buildings of the salt mine at the entrance to the commercial harbour. The mine storage huts, conveyor belts and three headframes suffered considerable damage, and the brick office building collapsed. The worst part was the destruction of the salt off-loading derrick and, despite an evacuation order, there was one fatality. The rapidly moving funnel cloud crossed the harbour and struck the main grain warehouse; stripping the cladding off the structure, before being redirected by high cliffs immediately behind.

The storm then hit the first of several residential neighbourhoods – annihilating the stand of trees at the top of the cliffs and dropping down onto the houses in St. Georges Crescent, Arthur Street and St. Patrick Street. Jim and Mary Frayne’s house was virtually demolished with Jim trapped inside. Other neighbouring houses, including the heritage Seegmiller house, suffered a similar fate. In a matter of seconds, the vortex travelled along West Street straight towards the centre of the town. Commercial properties – opticians’ practice; architects’ office; Town Works Department, and insurance company buildings – on West Street collapsed like a house of cards. Further along the street, century-old brick buildings crumbled as roofs were ripped off, and façade rubble collapsed into the road and buried parked vehicles.

Next to bear the brunt was The Square – the town centre and commercial heart with its many shops, cafés, banks, iconic court house and surrounding parkland. Virtually all the trees, many over 100 years old, were torn out by the roots and tossed around like matchsticks. The heritage buildings that ring the court house suffered incredible damage with roofs delaminated and most windows blown out. More façades crumbled into the street and several older structures just became flattened.

The tornado continued along St. David Street totally wrecking the Victoria Street United Church in its path. Many of the private houses along St. David Street and neighbouring Park Street were virtually destroyed and, everywhere, trees and power line poles were snapped and splintered. After crossing Picton Street where the car body repair shop and car wash buildings collapsed under the force, the funnel cloud ravaged the old Volvo factory building and Sifto Salt evaporator plant, scattering cement blocks and cladding over the entire area.

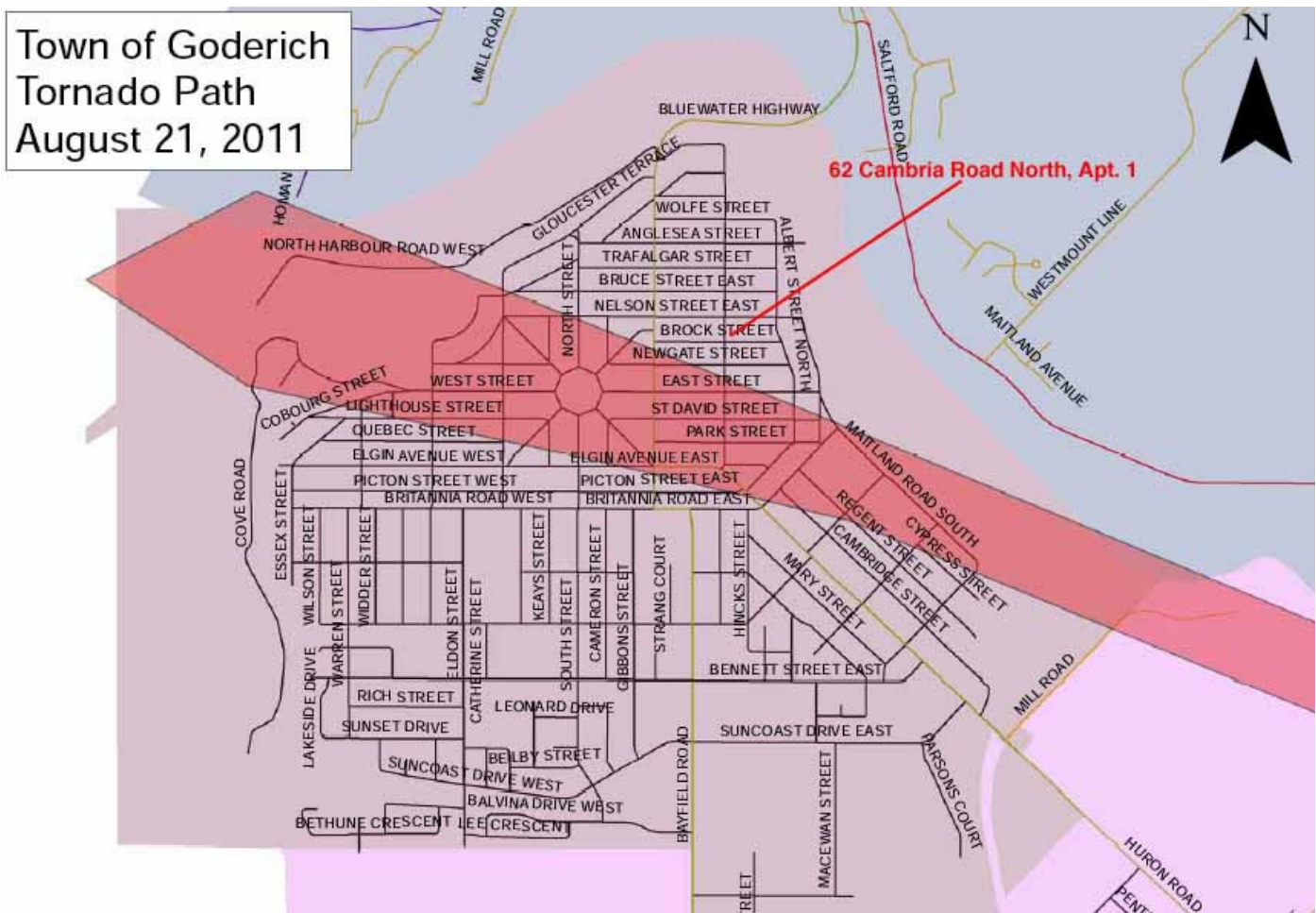
On its way out of town, the storm cut a complete swath through acres of woodlot behind the cemetery, and then continued into the country where it demolished several homes and outbuildings in the nearby hamlet of Benmiller.

From our perspective

Our first indication of the approaching storm was when the electricity supply was cut off, and it was five days before power was restored. The second was when hailstones – the size of golfballs – started to rain down and this was the precursor that alerted us to seek immediate shelter. The best place was the bathroom in the centre of the apartment and, hearing the characteristic roar of the tornado, we hid in the small room until the noise of the falling hailstones on the roof ceased.

We emerged and found our immediate surroundings unscathed. However, we discovered that the neighbourhood four streets away had been totally devastated by the tornado. The scene was reminiscent of any community that had been ‘blitzed’ and, indeed, a familiar sight in post war Europe. Over the next few days, I helped clear the debris, which was considerable. It was sad to see so many personal items thrown on the ever increasing piles of waste alongside the road.

With so many heritage properties damaged or destroyed, a special team, which I was part of, was assigned to oversee the reconstruction. Special funding was made available and, fortunately, some of the foremost experts in the field were at our disposal. I was also involved in some of the decision making to ensure that the heritage element wasn’t overlooked.





Devastation in The Square as Seen from the Top of West Street with Ninety-nine Percent of all the Trees in Courthouse Park totally Destroyed or Extensively Damaged, and the Huron County Court House Having Sustained a Direct Hit from the Tornado's Vortex.



The Top of West Street Showing the Destroyed Façade of the Masonic Building and Rubble Strewn Across the Road. A Scene Reminiscent of a War Zone.



Storm Cell and Waterspout Approaching Goderich Harbour, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.



Destruction Caused to the Sifto Salt Mine Storage Sheds, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.



Destruction Caused to West Street, The Square and Court House, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.



Destruction Caused to the Victoria Street United Church, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.



Destruction Caused to the Sifto Salt Evaporator Plant, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.



Funnel Cloud Cutting Across Huron County on the Outskirts of Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.