2014

Wilder Weather: Laura Ingalls Wilder and Her Famous Tornado

Barbara Boustead
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, barbara.boustead@huskers.unl.edu

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Laura Ingalls Wilder's Story

- On a hot, humid, and gusty summer day shortly before their wedding (in August 1885), Laura Ingalls and Almanzo Wilder take a buggy ride south of De Smet.
- Laura and Almanzo "sense" storminess in the air and watch towering clouds develop. They turn back toward home.
- While the storm moves from the northwest, they drive the horses toward the northeast and away from the path.
- Laura and Almanzo return to Laura's house. Almanzo and Pa (Charles) Ingalls set out to assist anyone struck by the tornado.
- Returning later that night, Almanzo and Pa report that a homestead was struck. Two boys on mules were hit, and one of the boys died. The homestead was destroyed, but the front door was lifted high and fell to the ground, intact, at the home site shortly after the tornado had passed.

August 28, 1884 Tornado Outbreak

- 5 significant tornadoes (Grazulis 1993)
  - 1: Miner County, from near Carthage to 3 miles west of Howard. Death of a boy unconfirmed. F2
  - 2: Beadle-Sanford Counties, 3 miles north of Huron southeastward. 1 killed on a farm. F3
  - 3: Sanford-Miner-Hanson, from 5 miles north-northwest of Forestburg to Long Lake. 2 brothers caught in open, one killed. May have been 2 separate tornadoes. F4
  - 4: Hanson/Hutchinson Counties, from near Alexandria southeastward. 4 killed on a farm, 3 died in the open. F4
  - 5: Minnehaha County, from 6 miles northwest of Sioux Falls. One man killed in the open. F2

Laura and Almanzo almost certainly saw the tornado near Howard, roughly 10 miles from their buggy ride path. **This is the same tornado photographed by Robinson (left)** **

Why are there differences between Laura’s description and other evidence?

- What did Laura get “right”?

Truth Vs. Storytelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truth</th>
<th>Storytelling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date: August 28, 1884</td>
<td>Date: Summer 1885</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appearance: Multiple-vortex and/or three funnels intermittently touching down</td>
<td>Laura often compressed or altered timelines to make the story flow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance: Closest tornado to Laura and Almanzo was tornado 1, about 10-15 miles away at its closest.</td>
<td>Appearance: Three funnels intermittently touching down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impacts: 2 boys on a mule struck, 1 killed, by tornado 3 near Forestburg. Multiple homesteads struck by tornadoes in the outbreak.</td>
<td>Distance: Tornado was &quot;about 10 miles&quot; away from Laura and Almanzo when it touched down. Pretty good for estimating distance!</td>
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Laura and Almanzo were tornado 1, about 2 miles southwest of Howard. Impacts: 2 boys on a mule struck, 1 killed – that part is verified. However, tornado 3 was longer than an afternoon trip away, making it unlikely that Pa and Almanzo assisted that family. Unknown which homestead was described (could have been the same family, or Laura could have combined stories of damage at one homestead with fatalities at another).

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