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Tornadoes not all that uncommon for CNY

By: Bill Carey

For days, we have been watching the cleanup of damage from that killer tornado in Missouri. YNN's Bill Carey says killer tornados are rare in the Syracuse area, but they have hit in the past.

ONONDAGA COUNTY, N.Y. -- *"Oh my gosh. There it is. There it is."*

The scenes, shocking as they are, have become familiar this week. The utter destruction of a massive tornado that touched down in Joplin, Missouri.

Enough, again, for New Yorkers to feel some relief that while twisters that touch down here are dangerous and can do their share of damage, they tend to be much less severe than their Midwestern brethren.

"We don't have that real strong clashing of the air masses, with that very cold, dry air coming out of the Rockies, clashing with that very hot, humid air coming up out of the Gulf of Mexico. Tornados, they're definitely dangerous here in New York State. They do happen. But, fortunately, they're a much weaker variety," said YNN Chief Meteorologist Michael Gouldrick.

For every rule, though, there is an exception. In the Syracuse area we need only to look at Longbranch Park in Liverpool.

Longbranch Park is a quiet place. Hard to believe that this was once home to a bustling resort. Harder still to believe that this was the scene of one of the area's deadliest tornados.

Starting in the 1890s, city dwellers would board steamers and trolley cars for the ride to Longbranch where hotels, amusement rides and beaches awaited them. It was the perfect place to spend a summer day, until Sunday, September 15th, 1912, when disaster struck. A tornado ripped through the park, tossing trolley cars, tearing down buildings and continuing on a five mile path of destruction.

"The tornado that touched down in Longbranch Park was rather erratic. It hopped. It touched down and then it lifted up and then it touched down again and lifted up. It did that about five or six times in this five mile path, so it sort of created these divots of destruction as it moved toward the lake," said Tom Hunter of the Onondaga Historical Association.

In the end, three people were dead. Dozens injured. Longbranch Park would never return to its heyday.

There have been storms since, but, as in Joplin, it often is not how severe a storm is, but where it strikes, that makes the difference.

While the Joplin tornado was listed as an F-5, at the very top of the tornado scale, most of the storms that strike in Upstate New York range from F-0 to F-2 with winds ranging from about 50 miles an hour up to the 150 mile an hour mark. On average, the region can expect to see about five to seven tornados pass through each year.

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