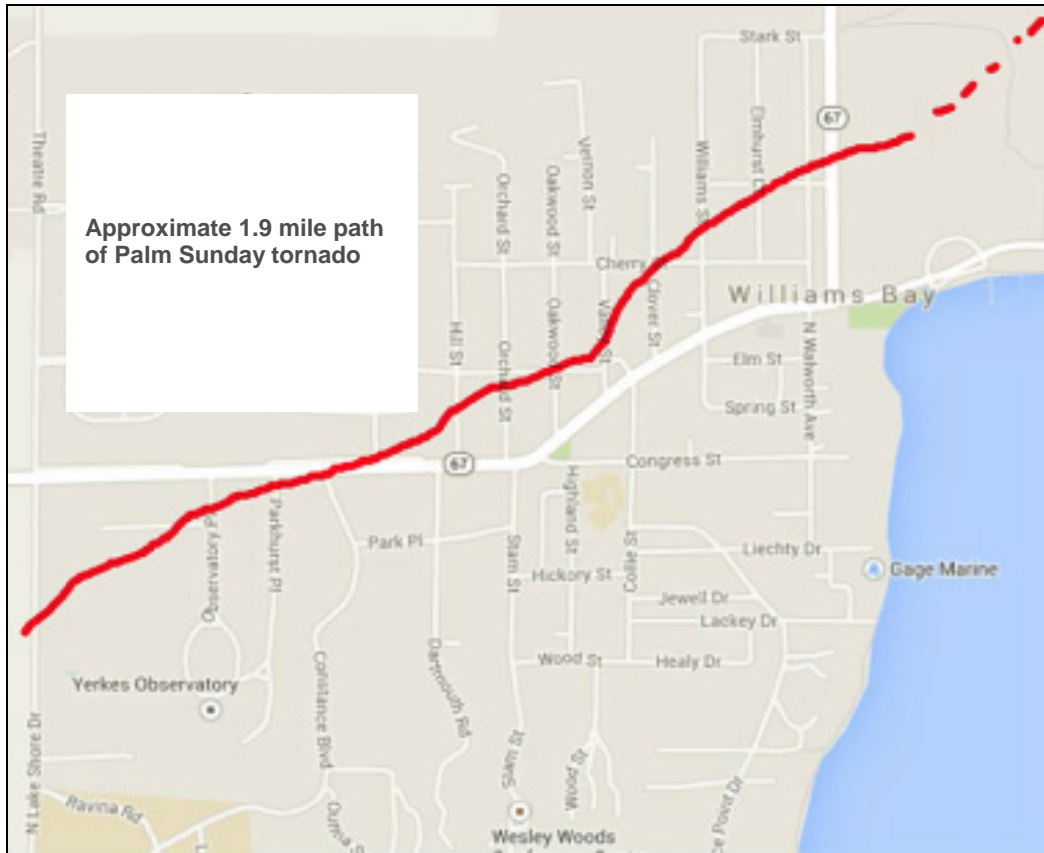


# Palm Sunday Tornado

April 11, 1965

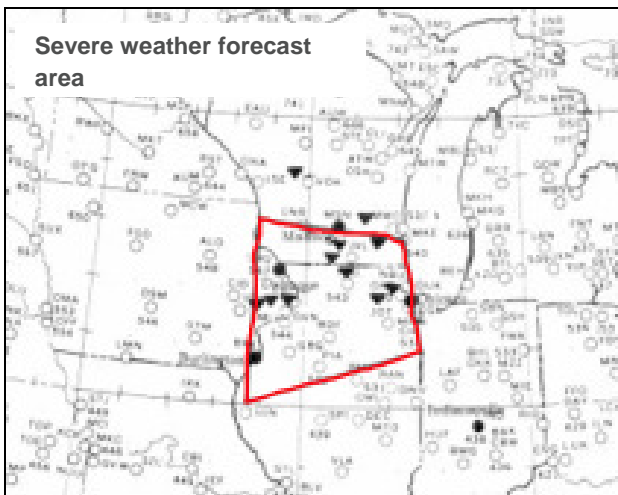


For those living in the Midwest fifty years ago, the Palm Sunday tornadoes are ingrained in their memory. One of the 47 confirmed tornadoes struck my hometown of Williams Bay shortly after 3 p.m.

The 1965 Palm Sunday weekend began quite chilly as a large cold front moved across the Great Lakes area and into the Ohio Valley. Sunday dawned with beautiful skies and warm temperatures. People around the Great Lakes were eager to enjoy the balmy spring day after the long cold winter. All across

the Midwest, people were making plans to enjoy the day or attend Palm Sunday services. There was no hint of the disaster yet to come.

The Severe Local Storms Center (SELS) in Kansas City, MO., issued the following severe weather forecast at 1 p.m. C.S.T. for extreme eastern Iowa, extreme southern Wisconsin, and portions of Northern Illinois:



"A few severe thunder-storms with large hail, damaging winds, and one or two tornadoes are expected from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m. C.S.T. this Sunday afternoon and evening in an area bounded by the points 40 miles south of Burlington, Iowa to 50 miles west of Lone Rock, Wisconsin to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to 40 miles south east of Chicago, Illinois back to the point 40 miles south of Burlington, Iowa."

Severe weather warnings in the 1960s were first issued to local weather bureaus, which then put the warnings out to the public. In the mid-1960s, tornado warnings were not issued until a tornado had been positively identified by visual sighting or confirmed radar

detection.

Charles (Buzz) Wright observed the start of the storm in a low lying cloud at the southwest edge of the village. The cloud changed into the ominous funnel cloud that slammed into the village leaving a

path of destruction. The tornado first destroyed a building on the College Camp golf course and then a garage at the home of Joe Herman as it moved into the village.



Richard Monier Home

The home of the Richard Monier family was severely damaged by the tornado, as were trees along Observatory Place. The roof of the Harold (Mac) McCarthy home on Geneva Street was lifted off and set back down, leaving the roof out of place by about a half inch. The Monier and McCarthy families were not home at the time the tornado struck.

Windows, structures and hundreds of trees in the tornado's path were damaged or destroyed. The roof on the new east wing of Sherwood Rest Home was ripped from the walls and disappeared with the twister. Amazingly no residents were injured.



Sherwood Rest Home



The twister left boats in the trees



Looking south on Elmhurst Court

The tornado continued through the village, destroying the buildings of Peterson Cabinet Shop and Case Plumbing and Heating. On the opposite side of Elkhorn Road, the horse owned by Joe Herman was in the field untouched by the storm.



What was left of Peterson Cabinet Shop



Les Case and the remains of Case Plumbing and Heating building



Joe Herman's horse Billy

Although no warning siren was heard in Williams Bay on April 11, 1965 no one was seriously injured or killed. Regrettably, the same couldn't be said elsewhere in what was one of the deadliest tornado outbreaks in U.S. history up to that time. Forty-seven confirmed tornadoes struck Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio on April 11, 1965, killing 271 and injuring over 1500 more.

Written by Michelle Bie Love

Photo Credit: Lake Geneva Regional News  
The Times - Williams Bay, Fontana and Walworth  
Delavan Enterprise  
NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)