

From the Archives

The early members of the Academy made meteorology one of their special concerns, along with agriculture and “the various soils of the Country...” Henry L. Eustis, a professor of engineering at Harvard University and a Fellow of the Academy (elected in 1850), drew a “Plan exhibiting the Ravages of the Tornado of August 22d 1851, Embracing so much of its course as is included between the base of Wellington Hill in Waltham and Mystic River” to illustrate his article on the tornado (an excerpt is reprinted below). The pupils of the Engineering Department of the Lawrence Scientific School assisted Eustis in creating the map. Unfolding to over 14 feet, the map is mounted on linen and shows the path of the tornado in great detail (tree by tree); a portion of the map also appears below.

Meteorology is every day gaining a stronger foothold, and taking a higher rank among the sciences of modern times. It would be no great tax upon our powers of retrospection, to look back to the period when its deductions were regarded, by most persons, as the mere speculations of scientific enthusiasts, having no tests whereby their fallacy or accuracy could be demonstrated, and therefore possessing little practical value. . . .

To those who have lived where the hurricane or the tornado is an event of common occurrence, it would be impossible to convey any idea of the intense excitement caused in this community by the tornado of August 22, 1851. It swept through the towns of Waltham, West Cambridge, and Medford, prostrating in its path orchards, fences, forest-trees, and buildings, and involving in a few instances the loss of human life. While multitudes visited the scene of its ravages from mere motives of curiosity, and stood appalled before the exhibition of such wondrous power, scientific men sought to explore its mode of action, and to find there a corroboration or a refutation of their preconceived views. It was in obedience to the call of many of this latter class, that I undertook the survey whose results are embodied in the accompanying map.

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