

John P. Finley Tornado Forecasting

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thought.” “ Without a moment’s warning.” “ It moved no faster than a horse gently galloping.” “ I just saw what it was and then all was over.” “ Before I had time to turn about in my tracks it flashed by me.” “ It seemed to remain almost motionless, as if held to the ground by some mysterious force.” “ I shuddered, held my breath, and the monster had vanished.” “ It seemed to move no faster than I could run.”



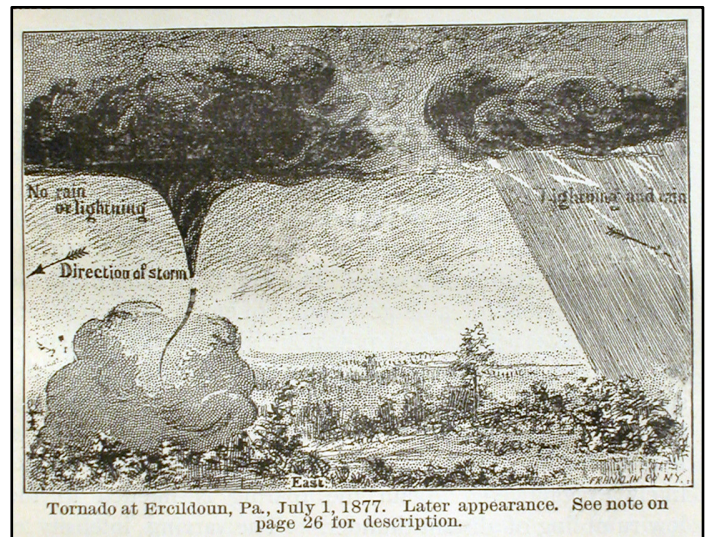
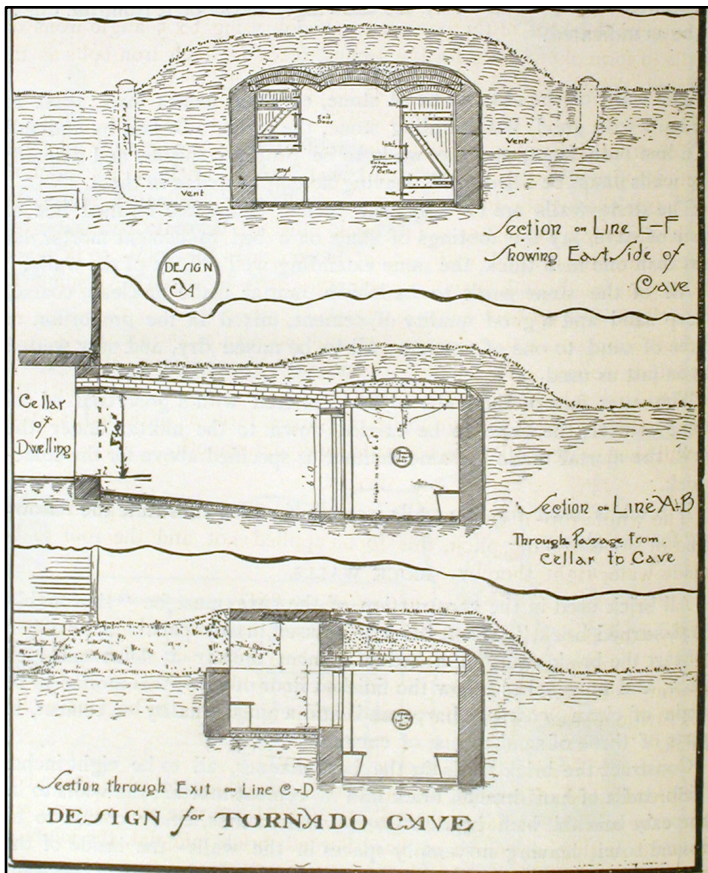
Tornado-cloud as seen at Howard, Miner Co., Dakota, Aug. 28, 1884. Photographed by F. N. Robinson. The cloud passed 22 miles west of him in a southeasterly direction, remaining in sight over two hours. Several people were killed, and all property in the path was destroyed.

John P. Finley, *Tornadoes: What they are and how to observe them* (New York, 1887).

Exhibit: Galileo's World | Gallery: Copernicus and Meteorology | No. 13

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What challenges might Finley have faced? What about those who made use of his information?



Early American Tornado Forecasting

This is the first book written in English devoted to tornadoes. Finley served in the US Army Signal Service, which was tasked with weather forecasting in 1870. Oftentimes traveling to locations after a tornado, Finley would record the observations of witnesses and as a result established a sequence of weather conditions surrounding a tornado. In particular he noted that the signal corps ought to establish a manned station in Kansas City during the months of May, June, and July.

By the 1880s, Finley was widely recognized within the military as a tornado expert. Although tornado forecasts were not allowed during the time of Finley, he nevertheless issued many unofficial tornado forecasts. He remained as a meteorologist for the military until the 1940s.

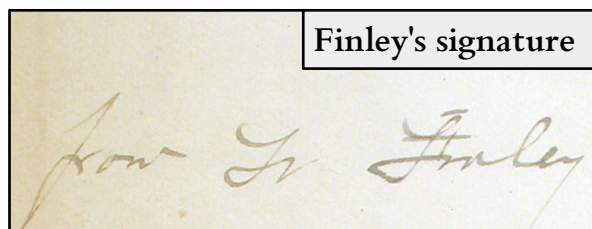
This OU copy is signed by the author and a gift of Edwin Kessler III. The OU History of Science Collections also holds two other works by Finley: *Report of the Tornadoes of May 29 and 30, 1879* (1881) and *Tornadoes: Their special characteristics and dangers* (1882).



Distribution of Known Tornadoes in the U.S.

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Developed from Brittany's class project in HIST 4083, Fall 2016, University of Oklahoma



Finley's signature

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