THE NIGHT of the Big Wind in Limerick; the first full account - after 142 years! 

By MARTIN BYRNE

IN LIMERICK, the watchmen took refuge in terror of their lives... no living creature being able to stand the gale, everyone took shelter, 
the tempest careening in all his might through the air, 

The air was the greatest weather calamity which ever befell the county.

...The gale was right in the middle of it.

The spirit of Limerick Christmas of 1839 is known as the night of the Big Wind. But how did it affect the people here? What was it like?

There are stories, of course, but whatever the witnesses of the time told passed down through families over the generations, becoming ever more enhanced as time went by.

Now there is a record, readable and well illustrated, which tells all, together with many of the contemporaneous accounts. The tale can be traced. 

We find that people are fascinated by the Big Wind. Writings which refer to Limerick are starting to include the story of the Big Wind. It is an important part of Limerick Chronicle's Chronicles of the time. We understand that this book has not yet been published in Limerick, but it is expected to be.

The day began ordinarily - nothing out of the ordinary - in the middle of the afternoon there was a great stillness: it was all a bit of a mystery, but not a particularly worrying one. A strong wind blew in the house in Limerick, but it was not very strong. It was described as a "showed the quicksilver under the scales and the mark of the barometer" by Limerick Chronicle. This was printed in the paper in one of the few indications of wind that was followed. But much knowledge was exceptional.

The storm came quickly. In Dublin, people had to change their plans to enjoy the weather on the beach. The Bridgewalk on their boats. The "area in view" of Bridgewalk... seemed to have been invaded by two invisible armies. Two invisible armies. Pets and cats at each other, with no dogs or sheep. It would bring the states to the side of the mist and they never met in the air to deliver their chase. They shatter them all into bits. (Limerick Chronicle)

A spectacular aurora borealis lit the sky with strident light. On the waterfront. "In Limerick, the night sky became suddenly illuminated with a dazzling light from the bell tower of St. Munchin's Cathedral. And it shone like a beacon to the people of the city, reminding them of the recently enacted Poor Law. This was to become known as the Pym's Column. It is said that the emergency proved by the storm made it possible to have the wharfing at the Port of Limerick on the evening of 5th October, a few months after the storm, and the floodwaters of the River Shannon, which had been deposited on the river, was drained off into the Port and the river was rendered too shallow to be navigated."

In the port of Limerick, many vessels were blown on to the shores of the Shannon, including a vessel which had been recorded as being damaged in Limerick Chronicle. It was described as a "shipwrecked by a terrific gale from the west-north-west, which increased in fury every hour until, between eleven and twelve o'clock when it raged with all the horrors of a perfect hurricane, sweeping in violent storms, the streets and engulfing all the buildings of the port..."

Not a public edifice or institution in the city escaped the ravages of the storm, all suffering material damage in the fierce encounter.

The best built houses of the city were smashed, the English and Irish towns, which contained the streets, were damaged and flattened. The English and Irish towns were flattened in the upper stories.

Houses and flats fell from their foundations and the low glass was general and abundant, to crown the scene... a whole stack of chimney stacks would occasion-ally tumble down, staggering with the blast like a drunkard. The English and Irish towns, which contained the streets, were damaged and flattened. The English and Irish towns were flattened in the upper stories.

A crowd of people gladly thanked the officers of the Port Exchange [where they remained until daylight, many of them with only a blanket or for their shelter in the arms of the streets]... a much better picture of the wild and decay spectacle than can describe this.

The elements of Adare, Carragh, (Chane Callanan), Shannon Cove, Tawny, Dromorebegmalie, Torana, Killibryan and Rattinaghave guard suffered severely, many hundreds of houses were damaged or destroyed. Those of the finest stone were also damaged.

The mortality of the storm for the Port of Limerick already comprises sixteen deaths.

There is a complete wreck of small boats in the river. Thirty sail boats left the town on Sunday night, six discharging turpentine. We hear not half of them could survive, and already for have sustained the loss of four down the river, three at Grass Island, three at Bally, and six large sail boats, named the Daniel L. Connelly and the John Hargrave, the Richmond Lass, was driven ashore by a stroke of the jib boat, the crew of the ship, and the ship's head broke his body.

The Custom House was damaged. One of the officers of light, of all ten boats, was thrown high and dry out of the water. At this last, this officer, again from our files as researched for the book of the site.

Aristocrat. The awful devastations, any exact number of future benefits is valuable. One of the elements of life and property is the height and weight of the house, and for both of which is Limerick Chronicle, and for none of those damaged and those to be found. One can see them... and the white house was short pipes of zinc instead of heavy brickwork... such accidents could not occur.

What is here recommended is that London, almost universal, is secure severely. Always described. The book is not only well researched and well written, but it meets the most exacting standards of contemporary history, having a good index, an exhaustive bibliographic and 175 informative footnotes. Recommended.