

# Storm that killed 3 came closest in years to proving existence of 125-year-old myth about OU

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NORMAN, Oklahoma – Storms that ripped through central Oklahoma April 19 came the closest in years to proving a myth that Native American beliefs may have protected the University of Oklahoma for more than 125 years.

The storms, which resulted in three deaths in nearby Cole, split into two separate storms in what is called a Fujiwhara effect as the main storm bore down on Norman and the OU Campus.

“Certainly sounds like evidence for the myth! Now if we could just find the cause,” Jeff Provine, OU Ghost Tours guide and folklorist, said about the recent storms.

Provine is familiar with many myths supposedly protecting OU from tornadoes. He has researched many of the tales, including the National Weather Center using secret technology, Mount Norman diverting tornadoes and even a Native American burial ground under OU’s campus. As for the latter, Provine has not found concrete evidence.

“From that myth, I have not been able to find any specific Indian burial grounds.”

Historically, Norman is kind of a crossover between Osage and Comanche and a little bit of Kiowa,” Provine said, referring to the Native American tribes..

OU recognizes these tribes and the land it resides on, along with the 39 total tribal nations in Oklahoma, through its land acknowledgment. Even if researchers have yet to pinpoint a specific Native American burial site, the University of Oklahoma still rests on sacred ground.

Gordon Yellowman, Chief of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, said all lands are sacred to Native people.

“When they refer to it as ‘sacred lands,’ that’s the connection that comes with who you are as a Native person, a Native member, and a Native tribe,” Chief Yellowman said.

Chief Yellowman said although land can be destroyed, it remains because it is both Native Americans and the University of Oklahoma’s foundation.

“Our ancestors were here first, and then we followed, and the future students will follow again,” Chief Yellowman said.



A funnel cloud hovers over OU’s campus. It never touched down on campus and provided evidence for a historical myth. (Gaylord News photo/Michael Buchanan)

Being in Tornado Alley, Oklahoma is no stranger to severe weather. Still, a tornado has never directly hit OU. One came close almost exactly 10 years ago that sent students and faculty fleeing to the lower levels of the Bizzell Library as it hopscotched across Boyd and Main streets.

An OU graduate student said it is not nature's intent to "single out" specific locations.

Theresa Tsoodle, who is pursuing her master's degree in environmental science, is combining her indigenous wisdom with her work on climate change.

"It gives you another way of knowing or understanding or explaining what's happening when it can't be explained by science," Tsoodle said about consulting traditional knowledge.

On the night of April 19, OU's campus avoided yet another tornado.

An OU meteorology student reporting on the "tornado outbreak" for OU Nightly. Catherine Liberta, an OU Nightly meteorologist, said that although the tornado's northward shift was not rare, she had never seen the Fujiwhara effect prior to Wednesday's storms.

"It's very strange how tornadoes just seem to kind of either go right or left of campus," Liberta said.

Liberta said that the recycling of the supercell is what pushed the storm north and left, away from campus.

"It kind of makes you wonder why that happened," Liberta said about the diversion from OU.

Whether OU's immunity is luck or legend, sacred knowledge speaks for itself.

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