



**DICK FRIENDLY OF SELDEN** drove his Volkswagen under the marquee on the car from the hail's weight. The storm damaged many businesses and of the Farmers State Bank to avoid hail damage, but the marquee collapsed homes, as well as crops.

## Attorney remembers Selden hail storm

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Many Selden residents have memories of a freak hailstorm which struck the small town 50 years ago today, but a Nebraska man who as a small boy saw it, gives a child's point of view.

Terry Rogers, a lawyer in Lincoln, Neb., and a 1972 graduate of Decatur Community High School, said he remembers that day vividly. He sent this account:

Wednesday, June 3, 1959, brought Selden another typical, summerish day: green trees, green grass, blue sky, hot sun. My only concern was with having to wait a whole day before turning 5 years old, and I was completely oblivious to the approaching calamity that would make this one birthday no one would celebrate.

Before evening, the sky clouded over and it became strangely dark. I was soon confined to our basement house and watched family members who were increasingly preoccupied with the developing storm. Soon we were deluged with torrents of hailstones. The tumultuous clamor on our flat roof was impossible to ignore.

I was expressly forbidden from even going near the tiled, concrete stairs that led down from the entryway. But, in this state of general confusion and panic, I still managed to sneak up and look out on what was happening.

Headlights from barely-moving cars illuminated a blanket of white beneath a black sky. Frantic people scurried around while getting pelted with hail. Soon men became obsessed with shoveling, as the melting hail started to create a moat around the house.

Throughout the evening, the hail continued. Friends and neighbors were recruited to help shovel hail away from the entryway, to reduce the amount of water running into the house and to keep scooping the hail off the roof so it wouldn't collapse from the sheer weight.

Despite their efforts, a steady stream of water began cascading down the stairs of our entryway and spreading out across our tiled floors. My sister Shirley was planning to be married in the Methodist church across the street on Sunday. She and my mother, Tressie, were intent on saving her wedding dress and various household items from water damage.

By late evening, when my mother took me to a neighbor's home to spend the night, the water on the floor was ankle high. Men took turns shoveling throughout the night. I woke up in the morning to a bright blue sky. Our roof had not collapsed and only a few inches of water covered the basement floor. The wedding dress, which hung folded in the closet, was unharmed. Permanent water stains ringed the legs of our dining room table.

When we went sightseeing, deep piles of what looked like winter snow covered every landscape. The grass was covered and the leaves were gone. Trees with only bare branches completed the deception. Many buildings were damaged and some destroyed by collapsed roofs. A former business, the Dew Drop Inn, on the west side of main street, was now rubble. Peering at it from our passing car, I remember seeing chairs and a pop machine sitting in the sunlight amid fallen rafters and shingles.

An estimated 18 inches of hail had fallen, earning Selden a story on that night's *NBC Huntley-Brinkley Report*.

In addition to crop loss, livestock care, water damage, revising wedding plans and helping neighbors, my parents also had to contend with my wrath, as I reminded them, "Nobody acts like it's my birthday!"

Selden and the surrounding farm land in an area of about 12 square miles had been pelted for two hours while the wind alternated in all directions, suspending the hail cloud above the town, according to a story in *The Oberlin Herald*.

Damage estimates ranged from a quarter million dollars in Selden proper to a half million in the entire storm area.

Crops in nearby fields were obliterated and torrential rains flooded most basements. Roofs of several businesses collapsed and the grade school gymnasium was extensively damaged.

High School Principal James Stewart received minor injuries when the Farmers State Bank marquee collapsed, and the parish priest, Father P. L. Cronin, suffered a sprained thumb helping cafe owner Velma Mountford through hip-deep ice and water after the roof of her business caved in. Pauls Furniture Store suffered several thousand dollars damage, as did Rome's Grocery



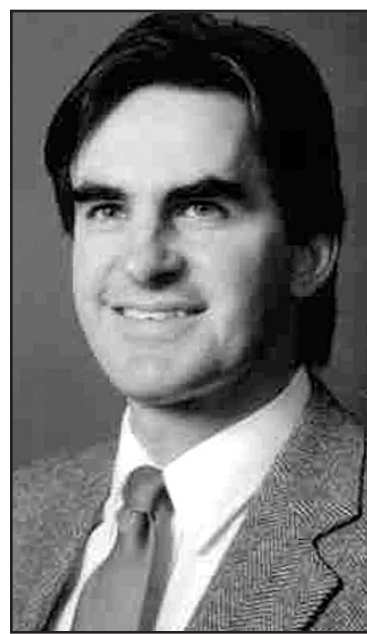
**ICE WAS BULLDOZED** into piles against the background of the sagging awning of the Farmers Union building in Selden. Men worked to clear hail from streets and debris from collapsed sections of buildings.



Terry Rogers, 1959

and other businesses.

The National Guard was called from Colby and spent the night and the next day in Selden to direct traffic and prevent looting. Traffic was stopped until bulldozers and other



Terry Rogers, 2009

machinery, mostly from area towns, could clear the roads and streets.

About 40 residents who fled their homes spent the night in the telephone exchange.

The storm had many bizarre

aspects. Temperature at Selden the following morning was a chilling 38 degrees. Steam caused by the sun's heat rose from the hail, adding a surrealistic effect to the scene.

Following the storm, August Karls, owner of Karls Store, said, "I've been here 37 years but I've never seen anything like it."

An area farmer added, "There'll be slim pickings around here next year."

"The wind kept circling and circling and all the hail dropped in one place," Mayor Ted Andrews said.

Cecil Drake, owner of the Norton Greenhouse, offered the town 4,000 tomato plants, and the mayor's wife was in charge of distributing them.

Mr. Drake said when he went to Selden, there seemed to be a big lake in the east side of town as a result of the melted hail, and it sounded like there were 40 million bullfrogs in it.

After the storm, the community worked together to repair the damage, and new businesses and homes have been added since that eventful day in 1959.