On April 27, a light rain had just started falling in an otherwise typical Wednesday morning. At 8:32, the wind picked up a bit, and then suddenly, without warning, branches began to snap and fly. Intense winds from the south blasted through the Berry campus and surrounding communities at tree-top level, snapping 60-foot pine trees in half like toothpicks and toppling massive 800-year-old oaks from the roots up.

In less than three minutes, hundreds of majestic trees were felled on the main campus, at the Virginia Webb House (the president’s home) and at Oak Hill, as well as in adjacent fields and pastures. Particularly salient was the loss of the regal “graduation tree,” the magnificent willow oak that provided Berry’s commencement in recent decades. Based on an initial aerial survey, thousands of pine and hardwood trees were also downed in the Berry forests.

At 8:35, the light rain continued with a mild wind. By 9:15 the skies were clearing and the morning was eerily calm and pretty. Given the storm’s abruptness and severity, it is astounding that no one on campus was injured and that no major buildings were damaged. Dorothy Cottage, which served as Dr. Stephen R. Briggs

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