

HURRICANE

Special Commemorative Issue

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Anniversary of 1938 Hurricane

All prints loaned by Ed King of Southampton.



A rear view of the Harris residence in Southampton.



Front view of St. Andrew's Dune Church in Southampton.



The organ from the Dune Church, approximately 1000 feet from the church.



The Meadow Club in Southampton.

Our sincerest thanks to the following who so generously loaned their priceless pictures of the 1938 Hurricane: Alice Bishop Corcoran, Mrs. Helen Kampf, Mrs. Josephine Davis, Mrs. Daniel Squires, Mrs. Virginia M. Curtis, Ed King, Martin Fink, Tom White, Capt. Ralph Hyde, and the late George Raynor.

A Personal Account of the Hurricane

by George E. Burghard

The late George E. Burghard, radio pioneer and stamp expert, who died in 1963, wrote a very personal and yet highly accurate and detailed account of the 1938 Hurricane. This account was loaned to us by Bingham W. Morris of Southampton, and we are deeply indebted.

In the following, I have tried as nearly as possible to give an accurate account of what happened during the hurricane of September 21, 1938 at Westhampton Beach, Long Island. I do ask indulgence, however, as to exact time, since the confusion was so great that no two stories I have heard, agree in every detail.

Oddly enough, a good storm at the Beach, under normal conditions, was always an invitation for those who liked the sea to drive miles and watch the breakers, and, in a perhaps childish enthusiasm, cheer them on to come over the dunes and do some damage. It was this very recklessness and love of the surf which stood us in good stead a little later on, or, as some say, almost cost us our lives through procrastination.

My wife and I had rented the Byrne cottage on Dune Road for the summer, in order that I might carry on some radio experiments, as I had been doing in this location for several years. For this purpose I had installed a good deal of apparatus, and several large poles (two over 50 ft. in height) to support the various antennae.

Tuesday, September 20th -

To give a true picture of what happened we must go back to Tuesday, September 20th.

In the afternoon there was a light changeable breeze from the south and southwest. The sea was very high, in fact as high as I had ever seen it in 20 years of experience at Westhampton Beach. I phoned my cousin, Bill Ottmann, who also had a house for the summer, about a half mile east on Dune Road, and asked him to come over and spend the afternoon watching the surf.

We watched the good old ocean all afternoon, and challenged it with glee to try and wash out the dune steps where we were sitting and rating the waves as 2, 3, and 5 steppers, according to their height.

The wind was spasmodical, and with every good puff from the south the surf came up higher, but never quite reached the top of the dune. The tide was high at about 5:00 p.m., E.D.T. Then the wind died out and the waves lost their strength, although some of them were as high as 30 ft. to our best judgment. But the show was over, and the sea receded with the change in tide.

Bill went home, and later we picked him up and all had dinner at Cancee Place Inn. Coming home at about 1:30 a.m. there was very little wind, and the surf, though heavy, was merely spraying the dunes. The storm had blown itself out, instead of developing into a good southwester as we had expected.

Wednesday, September 21st -

At this point it may be well to give the location of the house, as well as a description of its occupants. The Byrne cottage was a twin of the Livermore house, which was situated about 100 ft. to the east. Both houses were about 75 ft. from the top of the dune on the south, and 100 ft. from the Dune Road on the north. On the west about 100 yds. was the Coast Guard Station No. 75. It was in the vacant space between, that the radio poles were located. Both the houses were well built, with concrete foundations and wooden bulkheads on the surf side. The distance from the bulkhead to the normal water's edge was about 200 ft., thus making the distance from the road to the surf normally about 150 yds. The dune itself was about 8 ft. high. Between the two houses was a large bath house belonging to the Livermores, and each house had a board walk to the dunes. The Byrne house as well, had a smaller bath house and shower on the west side of the walk between the house and the dune.

There were four people in the house - my wife, Mabel, Carl Dalin and his wife Selma - old people of 67 and 66 who took care of the house and had been with us for many years - myself, and two dogs - a wirehaired fox terrier named "Bitzie" and a cocker spaniel named "Peter." The Livermore house was vacant, as they had gone to town for the tennis matches, but their 30 ft. cruiser was fast on her mooring in the bay, right off the dock between the houses.

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Thirty years ago this past Saturday, September 21, as the war clouds were gathering over Europe, the first hurricane that this area had experienced in 123 years battered the six Northeastern States and wreaked havoc at this end of Long Island.

The beachfront in Southampton bore the brunt of the blow. From the Southampton Bathing Corporation to the Municipal Beach only two cottages were left intact, those of Count Di Coppola.

St. Andrew's Dune Church was ruined. The east side of Miss Dorothy Schieffelin's house was washed across Dune Road, and the Henderson cottage nearby was demolished and parts of it deposited on the lawn of the Meadow Club.

In East Hampton Village nearly all the beautiful, big trees on both sides of Montauk Highway were downed, and the bathing pavilion was left a shambles.

In Bridgehampton the damage caused by the three-hour blow topped \$100,000, fortunately without loss of life. In Sag Harbor the towering steeple of the Presbyterian Church, over 100 feet high and a village landmark, was wrecked as it and part of the roof were torn away.

Two days after the storm subsided the streets in Bridgehampton were covered with the wreckage of fallen trees; there was no electricity, water supply was limited, and telephone service was uncertain.

At the height of the storm the Long Island Rail Road's crack train, the Cannonball, was derailed in Westhampton, and for three days the mails were sent by truck to and from Speonk.

The Bridgehampton Community House lost one half of its roof, the Methodist and the Catholic churches lost their steeples, and the railroad's freight house was totally destroyed.

Most of the roof was blown off the H. F. Hendrickson house, and 10 modern poultry houses were lost, along with about 1,000 fowl. Potato growers were heavy losers as the undug tubers were either washed away or buried hopelessly beneath several feet of earth or sand.

In Bridgehampton the most spectacular loss was that of the trees. In three hours the fury of the storm ruined the work and care of 100 years, and residents predicted it would be at least another 50 years before the streets looked as they did in the hazy sunlight before the big wind.

Structural damage was terrific. Many barns were down and many damaged. Many houses had their roofs blown off. One of the worst sufferers was the William D. Halsey home, where a tree tore away a chimney and almost all of one end of the attic.

The storm brought the highest tide seen in the area in 80 years. It was 10 to 15 feet above normal high water. Between Mecox Bay and Sagg Street it made a clean breach through the dunes in four or five places.

The hurricane came almost without warning. At noon on Wednesday of that week there was only a fairly strong breeze from the Southeast, and the radio weather reports told of nothing

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