

History of Hurricanes in New England

Dates to Records of Plymouth Colony

New England, directly in the path of the tropical storms which sweep up from the West Indies, has a long history of disaster caused by hurricanes from the earliest records of the Plymouth colony.

Fall River has suffered from cyclones, blizzards, winter gales, ice storms and hurricanes in its 175-year history.

The granddaddy of all storms, the 1938 hurricane, will live forever in the minds of all those residents who weathered the fearful blast and who lost property, friends and relatives.

The nature of the "September Gales" which have always plagued this area were described by William Bradford as long ago as 1635 in his diary, "Plimoth Plantation."

Bradford's account follows: "This year the 14 or 15 of August (being Saturday) was such a mighty storm of wind and raine as none living in these parts, either English or Indian, ever saw. Being like (for the time it continued) to those hurricanes and tuffons that writers make mention in the Indies.

"It began in the morning, a little before day, and grew not by degrees, but came with great violence in the beginning to the amazement of many.

"It blew down sundry houses and uncovered divers others; divers vessels were lost at sea, and many more were in extreme danger. It cause

the sea to swell in some places southward of Plymouth so that it rose 20 feet right up and down.

"It began in the southwest and veered sundry way, but the greatest force of it, at Plymouth, was former quarter; it continued not in extremity above five or six hours, before the violence of it began to abate; the marks of it will remain for many years in those parts where it was sores."

The September gale which struck Fall River in 1869 was described as a "fearful storm" by the News. It followed the similar pattern of the 1635 hurricane, beginning in the afternoon with rain and wind tearing up trees, blowing down chimneys and destroying much valuable property.

No deaths were reported. Flood tide and wind caused an unidentified schooner to be stranded in a pasture on the west side of Hog Point, beyond the Providence Depot.

A tall chimney at the soap works of C. Hargraves and Son, near the Toll House on Pleasant Street, was Blown over, and in falling went through the roof and into a kettle of 10,000 pounds of soap.

A. Homer Skinner, in an article written for The Herald News, in 1940 recalled a storm which is probably the same Sept. 9 gale.

"I well remember the

September gale which struck the city about 70 years ago. It was almost a counterpart of the hurricane we had here a couple of yeras ago (1938). The wind was from the same direction. The height of the storm was at four o'clock in the afternoon and at the same time the shcolars were being dismissed from the schools.

At Cook Borden's lumber yard the gusts of winds would strike the piles of lumber and away the boards would fly, Skinner wrote, as tier after tier was stripped from the piles and blown into the river.

The steamer Bradford Durfee, which was on a trip from Providence to Fall River, was blown ashore at Poppysquash Point at Bristol Harbor but not badly damaged.

On the river all the vessels anchored in the harbor were driven ashore on the west side and the vessels that were tied to the wharf were blown away from them as the lines all parted.

The vessels were also blown to the west side of the river.

The Iron Works Co. had

just landed a cargo of wood nail keg staves on its wharf and they all floated away and the West beach of the river was piled up with them.

All the small crafts that were in the river were wrecked and all the boats laid between Rodman's Wharf and Cook Borden's Wharf were blown under

the lumber piles and smashed to pieces.

Although the tide was much above normal it was not nearly as high as in the hurricane of 1938.

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