

Hurricane Donna Fel

A thankful Fall River area, hit by a combination punch, but averting a knockout blow, turned to putting its house in order after a visit by Hurricane Donna on Sept. 12, 1960.

Expected flood waters failed to materialize, to any great extent, thus eliminating the water-front tragedies which marked the 1938 and 1954 hurricanes.

The highest wind gust was measured at 93 miles per hour by weather observer Richard C. Brigham. A little less than two inches of rain fell.

Donna fainted at this area shortly after 1 p.m. Between 3:30 and 4:30 the wind died as the eye of storm passed westward through Connecticut.

Then as Donna turned in a more easterly course she took a second vicious swipe at this area with her trailing winds. Between 4:30 and 6 the waters boiled and frothed but the tide luckily had turned outward.

Although missing the full fury of the tropical storm, which left millions of dollars of damage strewn in its wake, this area suffered a major power failure and other moderate to heavy damage.

One man was killed as an indirect result of the hurricane. The North Dartmouth resident died after the top of his car was sheared off when it struck a fallen tree in that town.

Power remained the major problem, with many areas without electricity. All major roads were closed by felled trees and public works employees worked around-the-clock to clear the debris.

Even after the storm had breasted the city and passed on in a northerly direction, abnormally high tides were still tearing boats from their moorings in part of Sakonnet and Tiverton.

While downtown residents were thankful that they had missed the brunt of the storm, a summer cottage on Main Road, Tiverton, was

slapped by winds and tides and with a crunch rolled over into the above 10-foot porch of the marina went under water.

The cottage next door tottered and strained at its foundation throughout the battering but was still standing angle-wise on its haunches the morning after Donna's departure.

At Standish Boat Yard, just down the street from the doomed houses, even at 2 p.m., workers there had enough water in the back yard of the stir site to row a large skiff.

Water was rising rapidly, and before the eyes of boatowners, the large float there was torn to pieces and the front porch of the marina went under water.

Larger craft with extra mooring lines rode out the storm, only a few broke away only to be dashed to pieces on the old railroad bridge at Sakonnet.

A few teenagers in a daring maneuver boarded a grounded power boat off Old Stone Bridge and got the motor started, and brought the boat to safety.

Somerset and Swansea residents fared well despite a day of hectic preparation, anxious waiting and finally the start of a giant cleanup in the wake of Hurricane Donna.

Some 150 persons were evacuated from Swansea shoreline property and spent the night at Case High School.

Tidal flooding caused the closing of Routes 6 and 103 leading to the city as Donna drove into the Lees River and Coles River valleys.

Boat owners worked feverishly to secure their craft and some who were unable to get them out of the water sank them to save them from the angry waters. A few rode out the storm aboard their boats.

Limbs began to fall steadily at about 2:40 p.m. Lees River and Pearse roads in Touisset began flooding at 3 p.m. By 3:30 p.m. the police radio crackled with reports of downed trees and wires.

A lull in the pelting rain

and roaring wind at 3:45 p.m. gave some brave souls a chance to venture outside their homes to assess damage.

It was but a brief respite, however, and at 4:15, the storm's intensity increased as Donna lashed anew with winds laden with salt and shredded leaves. By 5 p.m. the strongest winds of the day whipped the area.

In Somerset, 100 persons rode out the storm at the high school and at Wilbur School where they were fed and cared for by Civil Defense workers.

Some 150 evacuees at Case High in Swansea, gathered in groups to discuss their plight, laughed, joked, played games, watched movies—but mostly hoped their


homes would escape the damage.

The roaring winds tore shingles from buildings, wrenched loose TV antennas, toppled chimneys and buckled and smashed plate glass windows. Police were kept busy guarding stores where display windows had given way before the lashing storm.


Telephone company officials said that 1,000 stations of some 45,000 were knocked out by the storm, principally by fallen trees.

Montaup Electric Co. suffered little damage. Salt spray knocked out a few insulators but the flow of power was not affected.


A power failure in the city was caused by salt on the main distribution line



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at the Hathaway Station. Circuits on the other side of the river were still operative although the entire city was blacked out.

The power situation in Tiverton was reported good, with only the north end of town experiencing an outage.

In Westport some power held up throughout the storm.

Church spires, normally fair game for other hurricanes, stood the test although it was reported that the towers on Notre Dame Church were heavily assaulted.

Only a few slates were disrupted, however, and the big clock hands on the edifice had been prudently removed before hand.

City streets were all but deserted when great sheets of rain commenced the storm shortly after noontime. A few pedestrians scurried from door to door and busses with few if any passengers crawled through Main Street.

Bus service to Providence was stopped when that city was closed to traffic because of flood threats. Buses to all outside points were stopped when high winds reached the city shortly after 2 p.m.

As Donna hit her peak at about 3 p.m., a few windows flew out on Main Street and the large sign over the Durfee Theater began to sway.

Police blocked Main Street north of Bedford

Street due to sign threat. The few persons in the street were hustled to shelter by police and auxiliary police who braved the drenching rains and high winds in order to keep traffic moving.

In outlying areas the tree limbs began to fall taking with them power lines. Power went out area by area as the wind increased in intensity.

Police cruised the city throughout the storm and at one point dispersed sightseers in lower South Park.

Several roofs were ripped off by gusts, including one on 13th Street. A large gasoline station sign on Pleasant Street began to sway perilously

and that section of the street was blocked off.

Sections of Plymouth Avenue and Stafford Square were flooded for a time, making driving hazardous in those areas, Shingles flying from roofs crashed through windows in many sections of the city.

Main Street windows began to go on Donna's second go round, when gusts zoomed through the area at 5 p.m. The sound of shattering glass was a familiar one in the downtown area.

Three pleasure boats were lost at Howarth's Marina on Davol Street. A 38-footer owned by a Swansea man broke loose and drifted about a half-mile before smashing into Slades Ferry Bridge.