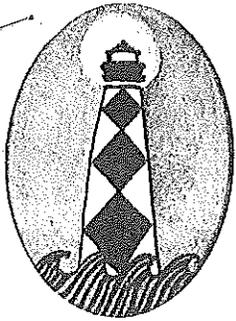


JUL - 6 1984

UNC SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM
MARINE ADVISORY SERVICES

N.C. Marine Resources Center
Kure Beach, N.C. 28449

Marine Agent (919) 458-5498
Coastal Engineer (919) 458-5780



RG ✓ DE ✓ RE ✓ AH ✓ CH ✓ RH ✓
BL ✓ BK ✓ BM ✓ AP ✓ DS ✓ WS ✓

Return to WIC

2 July 1984

Mr. Al Hinn
National Weather Service
RFD #6, Box 50
Wilmington, North Carolina 28405

Dear Al:

Enclosed is a first hand report on Hurricane Hazel I had not seen before. The letter was recently made available by Harry Warren of the New Hanover County Museum and I thought you might be interested.

Please call if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Spencer M. Rogers, Jr.,
Coastal Engineer

enclosure

HURRICANE HAZEL

Friday
October 15, 1954
9:45 P. M.

Dearest Mother and Daddy,

I'm copying a letter that I started to you this A. M. It's so scribbled you'd never make it out.

Let me say this first - - Aunt Mary is all right. Her trailer withstood the storm all except water on her floor. She is at the beach now. I saw her tonight. I took her some water and asked her if she didn't want to come back here with me - but she didn't want to leave the beach.

9:00 A. M. - I'm sitting in the Health Department with the rest of the Nurses, waiting in case we are needed for disaster calls. Some of the nurses didn't come in because it was too bad. I called in before coming to work to see if we were to go. The schools didn't open and several mills and stores did the same, but Dr. Davis wanted us at the Department in the event we were needed.

When Mrs. Fowler and I got up this A. M. there were no lights. The wind was blowing gale force and we had a little blowing rain.

The latest forecast from Miami weather bureau given at 8:55 to the broadcasting system here, WGNI, was that the storm, Hazel, was 40 miles southeast of Myrtle Beach moving north-northwest at the rate of 35 miles per hour. High winds near the center are 135-145 miles per hour. The eye of the storm is to pass over Wilmington around 10:00 A. M. if it continues on the same course.

At 8:55 in Miami, the forecast was received here around 9:30, the storm was 32 miles S.E. of Myrtle Beach wavering north. The eye of the storm is to pass over the Cape Fear region of N. C. at 10:00 A. M. The storm was to be at Myrtle Beach at 9:00 A. M.

The winds are increasing in velocity and it is raining more. The trees outside the office window are bending very heavily under the force of the wind. One tree limb cracked in our parking lot but no damage was done. Everyone is very excited and a little scared, but we are well protected and are in no danger.

The reports this morning were that Johnny Mercer's Pier has been destroyed, the natives of Wrightsville Beach were evacuated at midnight and a little after last night. The residents of Carolina Beach were asked to leave but were not forced to evacuate. The refugees from the beaches are at different churches and schools that have been set up for the purpose of bedding and feeding these homeless lot. The police department asked that no one go uptown because of shattering glass and trees falling on the road.

The lights here at the Health Department are going off and on and the radio is having trouble staying on the air.

10:00 A. M. , this time is not exact, but around this time the radio station went off the air. The lights are off for good it looks like. Just before this happened we had coffee and doughnuts and buns downstairs. One of the reporters from the Star News dropped in on us.

11:00, 12:00, We've been keeping in contact with the Police Department, it is located in the Court House right at our back door - patrol office too. They don't know the storms position and there is no way of finding out now that the radio is off the air.

A lot of the refugees are in the courthouse. I went over to the courthouse with Dr. Davis around 11:00. The Red Cross had helped a lot of them by giving them clothes, etc. One man who owned one of the largest apartment houses on the Southern part of Carolina Beach, the Johnston Apartments, told us his tragic story: The way he told it - it seems that he and his wife didn't evacuate because they thought the radio people and all were just getting alarmed like they did for little hurricane Carol that didn't do anything. He said that he slept off and on during the night awakening around 4:00 A. M. with the water in the second story of his house and nearly up to his neck. He said that he had to break the window in the house to get out and swim to safety. His wife was very difficult, a little hysteria, you can imagine. The last time he saw his little dog he was lying on top of a table and the water was so high he couldn't get to the little fellow. His furniture was floating here, there and everywhere. When he got outside his house he could see the High Point Apartments across the street from him and the waves were coming over the roof. He lost his teeth in the confusion plus everything he ever owned.

One man from Kure Beach said the last he saw of the flat beach it wasn't there anymore and Fort Fisher had been completely demolished.

12:15 P. M., Three destroyers have broken loose from their stable and are heading toward the large bridge going into Wilmington from Bolton. The highway patrols are worried about them, afraid they will put the bridge out of commission.

Speaking of patrolmen, Col. Smith of the State Highway Patrol, just happened to be down at the beach on vacation and is in the office here now helping or should I say taking charge.

Babies Hospital is being evacuated. The bridge at Wrightsville Beach is impassible. It is floating in about three feet of water. There are some families still on the beach that refused to leave the beach early this A. M. and now they can't get to them.

Mrs. Fisher, one of our PHN's, was on the beach this morning, asleep, and didn't know anything about the beach being evacuated last night until she woke up around 6:30 and discovered that all the cars were gone and people too. Her husband is on the Mendota, a Coast Guard Ship, and she called him. He had to go through a lot of red tape in order to get permission to go on the beach to get her. She said that when she left the waves were coming way over into the streets.

Bradley Creek, Hewletts Creek and Masonboro Creek have overflowed and make transportation across them an impossibility. Janie's Oyster Roast down on the sound was floating with water was the latest report.

There is a Paramount news reporter running around here in the courthouse trying to get some pictures and stories. There is a Charlotte Observer writer here also. They both had been covering other stories nearby and were called to cover this one.

The people staying in the court room on the second floor just gave us a scare. The glass in the room shattered and broke and everyone started screaming and running. I thought someone had been blown out the window or the second story had been blown off the way they were screaming. It sure left everyone weak.

Dr. Davis is going to Carolina Beach to see the sanitation condition and what needs to be done. The two sanitation officers are going and he had said that I could go too.

12:30: There seems to be a calm. The wind has almost stopped completely. The clouds are gray and look as if they are traveling real fast. They look as if they are swirling and changing position. The eye of the storm is apparently a few miles west of Wilmington and we are getting the outer winds. This calm lasted about 15 minutes and then the wind increased very much and seems to be stronger than the first blow. Windows are breaking in the stores and office buildings.

The Highway Patrol keeps running in and out to the radio in their patrol car. They are keeping in touch with Raleigh. This seems to be the only communication we have with the outside.

1:00 P. M.: I am in the car headed down Market Street at Front. The river is vicious looking up above her banks on the street up above the Customs House and flooding the stores on Front Street. Some of the cars are stalled in water.

We can't go by the usual route on the Carolina Beach road to get to Carolina Beach but are having to detour by Lake Village. Greenfield Lake, which was being drained this week to clean it out and had no water in it in places and not over two to three inches in any place, has overflowed its banks and makes the road impassible.

Trees are down blocking the road in several places in Lake Village. They are large thick pine trees - completely uprooted. Benches are turned upside down in front yards and limbs are scattered in nearly everyone's yard that has a tree in a block of their house. Antennas are twisted and broken on the roofs, side boards are demolished.

The ice house on Third Street has had its roof blown off and is laying on two of their pickup trucks in front of the building.

The B. F. Goodrich Store in the 100 Block of North Third Street has had its show windows shattered leaving their store completely open.

On the road to Carolina Beach there was evidence of storm damage. Trees knocked down on roofs causing destruction - large trees uprooted, screen doors blown off of houses, etc.

The bridge at the inlet before getting to Carolina Beach is out of line. They won't let any cars go over. Dr. Davis and the Sanitarian walked across and a highway patrolman took them on the beaches.

Cars were lined up and down the highway ..sightseers, residents of the beach and tourist. Some of the natives got impatient and started walking to the beach. They were eager to see if they had anything of their possessions left.

The highway department got the bridge fixed and the other Sanitation Officers and I went across in search of Dr. Davis.

It didn't look so bad going into the beach, but when we hit what was supposed to be Carolina Beach it looked like a city you've seen in the newsreel that has been hit by a bomb. To describe the destruction this hurricane has caused could not even be done by a writers choice words. One just can't imagine such absolute destruction unless you see it with your own eyes.

The water had gone all the way back to the School house (4 blocks). The wind and water had carried furniture, fixtures and houses way back and left them as it passed.

There is an inlet now where the fresh water lake used to be and water is pouring in every which way. The inlet is about 50 yards across or about as wide as a street. The highway has been completely torn up and asphalt scattered over the sand. Wires are laying all over everything. Gas lines are leaking and several houses have blown up due to this. The sewer had been torn up. The beach front houses have been destroyed - little pieces of wood - roofs - sides of houses with furniture seen in rooms - pots and pans scattered around - the boardwalk is gone - some of the beachfront business section too. Water completely covered some of the rooms in the houses that stood the storm. The beach portion looks as if someone has taken it in their hand and squashed it. It is almost impassible.

You can't get to the northern section. The Yacht Basin water is very high. The ocean is rough to say the least. You can't imagine the destruction unless you could see it. I wouldn't believe it unless I had seen it with my own eyes.

Kure Beach and Fort Fisher and those little beaches are destroyed.....

11:00 P. M.: The house is fine, there are some wires down but that is all. The water from the sound had been up to the trees circling the house - there is debris - bottles, drift wood, etc. left up there by the water. The corn field is full of water.

I saw Aunt Mary when I went down to the beach this afternoon and she was alright. She stayed in the school during all the storm. Her trailer is standing fine. There are no lights, water or sewage on the beach. I went down around 6:30 tonight to see if she didn't want to stay with me but she didn't want to. I took some drinking water to her. I'll probably go down tomorrow.

Coming back I noticed a large fire appearing light coming from the northern extension. I don't know what that was. Some explosion probably.

I'm fine.

Let Bill Crosswhite read this. I don't want to write it down again and I want him to know. Mail this letter back to me -- Dr. Davis wants a copy of it.

Love,

Gary Nell

Return to: W. L. Reynolds
Route 3, Box 146 A
Wilmington, N. C.