

DONNA WAS THE WORST STORM WE EVER HAD

We who were here on Saturday, Sept. 10, 1960, always thought Hurricane Donna was the worst storm ever. Just how bad was it?

In its 5,000 mile sweep from the Leeward Islands through the length of Florida and north to the Gulf of St. Lawrence she did one billion dollars damage and killed 143 people in the U.S., fortunately none in this county but four in Lee County to the north and 10 more in Florida.

"The most destructive storm ever to hit the United States" said the county Civil Defense report, concluding she had a peak energy equal to a hydrogen bomb fired every eight minutes.

To Naples she brought 13 inches of rain, tides nine to 12 feet deep that swept three miles inland, and winds up to 180 miles an hour. Other areas reported 192 mph winds.

After careful preparation and hard work by dozens of public workers and volunteers there were no deaths and few injuries in Collier County but my conservative estimate from underwriters' claims and city and county building permits was a total \$25 million loss "of record" but much was never listed.

That loss was equal to one sixth of the county's 1960 total \$152,623,277 taxable value, which compares with today's \$12,799,152,534 total tax roll, according to Property Appraiser Sam Colding.

Donna didn't sneak in. Her progress was checked so well that the Civil Defense Council was activated Sept. 8. United to operate the county were the county commission, mayors of both cities, the school superintendent, and the sheriff and police

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chief. They ran the county for 10 days, with after-storm help from the National Guard and Broward and Dade County sheriff and fire groups.

Continuing broadcasts from Radio Station WNOG, until it was destroyed, gave confidence to local people as Sheriff E.A. Doug Hendry, Commissioner Dick Goodlette, radio man Bill Ryan and Walter Donovan, CD director, told of the storm progress, shelter plans and evacuation orders.

Evacuation wasn't a perfect job. A city policeman couldn't get a lady to leave Gordon Drive. "What can I do?" he queried by radio.

"Just ask for her next of kin," he was told, and it worked.

The Friday night gusty winds brought a CD meeting at Naples city hall where one official proposed sending school buses 37 miles across the open, wind-whipped Tamiami Trail to evacuate Everglades.

"you go over in that corner and sit down and hush," Sheriff Hendry politely ordered and the official obeyed.

By Saturday morning the steady 60 mile northeast winds were making problems. The 200 black residents of McDonald's Quarters had been evacuated from their homes or the Carver School shelter to the ACL depot at 4:30 a.m. and fled from there at 9 a.m. when the roof started lifting. They made it to safety in a nondescript straggling parade of police and private cars to the bowling alley five miles north in Pine Ridge.

One of those lucky people, Mrs. Verdleen Williams, recalls after they got inside the alley she looked out and saw the car

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} of her father, James Williams, "spinning like a top" in the parking lot until it fetched up against a tree and stopped.

Their refuge ^{WSUN} almost a disaster area when the wind turned southwest and workers had to reenforce the weak west wall, led by Norbert O. Siegfried, a Port Royal resident.

Radio station WSUN was then reporting 129 mile winds at Sanibel and Captiva but it didn't seem that strong in Naples.

The combination of a low tide at 8:59 a.m. and the wind blowing into the gulf pushed the water out to empty Naples Bay and bare the bottom offshore at distances estimated up to six miles. Then came the eye of the storm and blissful silence at 11:45 a.m. that lasted until 1 p.m.

The barometer had dropped to 28.18 inches as the wind swung southwest and pushed the water back with a rush that filled downtown Naples in a solid sheet from the gulf to the bay, pouring through beachfront homes and even a few inches into Fifth Avenue stores.

It was incredibly worse at Everglades where no eye came in 13 hours of storm winds, clocked at 140 miles an hour when the gauge blew away, and an 11 foot tide flooded every home and store. Blacks occupied the courthouse "first floor" nine feet above ground and whites were on the floor above.

"As the water rose, we integrated," joked one survivor, but that was about the only laugh in the area for Everglades was a soggy mass of grey river bottom mud that would take weeks to clean. Smashed trailers and truckloads of debris were hauled out and dumped at the Trail crossing at Carnestown. Luckily

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} there were no fires for the city fire truck was buried under the collapsed timbers of the big garage.

People sheltering in the beachfront Naples home of Dr. Daniel Langley at 20th Avenue and First Street, South, now Gulfshore Boulevard, wondered where the gulf went before the eye. "After the eye, we knew, it was in our living room" one said.

In Port Royal a 65 foot grouper boat was safely grounded on one of the many vacant lots. At the beach the 1,000 foot pier had only a few staggered piling left and mullet draped the city hall shrubbery and were caught in the Cambier Park baseball backstop where the war memorial now stands.

All over the county houses with roofs stripped to bare boards were a common sight, their asphalt strip roofing often seen to have lifted and flown away in one piece like a big bird.

The school system, just completing a massive expansion, was rudely shoved back into old buildings and double sessions. The new Shadowlawn Elementary in East Naples lost eight classrooms when the roofs folded back and left them open to the sky.

Naples High, just moved into its new home Sept. 8, went back temporarily to Gulf View Middle School.

Damage was heavy all over Naples, beginning at Gordon's Pass where tides swept away the fishing camp and trailer park, a settlement dating to 1874.

Countywide there were 1,722 homes damaged with 50 badly damaged but fixable and 50 more that couldn't be repaired. In the city 10 of the 22 worst damaged places couldn't be fixed, including the charming Welkin-by-the-Sea home of J. Wells Kincaid

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at 32nd Avenue, South, on the curve in Gordon Drive.

The most complete loss was up north where my personal check showed severe damage to every one of ^{the} 43 structures between Vanderbilt Beach and Naples Park including 38 homes, two motels and two marinas. A real estate office at the beach disappeared along with the west 50 feet of the Vanderbilt Beach Road.

The furniture of the Vanderbilt Beach Motel ended up in a vacant lot in Naples Park a mile away.

Sparsely peopled Bonita Beach was even worse off. The month-old home of Marian Buchanan of Naples was gone, as were several others, and 26 new trailers at the Mobile Homes Village washed across the bay and smashed into the mangroves. Another beach frame house floated two miles inland and dropped on a road.

There were three storm deaths at Bonita, where gulf waves flooded one and a half miles inland. A.A. "Lindy" Lindeau, 75, chose to stay in the trailer behind his restaurant and George Brainerd, 54, went back to check his general store during the storm's eye. Their buildings were destroyed and their bodies were found two days later close together a mile from shore.

Just after the storm on Saturday C.J. Doell, 70, died of a heart attack. A truck driver also died at Fort Myers as his semi was swept off the Edison Bridge.

While 80 per cent of Naples main Fifth Avenue business area was damaged, there were exceptions. Former Mayor W. Roy Smith's real estate office at Eighth Street lost no windows even though they had been left unboarded, and the Church of God on 10th Street, North, lost only one pane out of its new stained glass

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window.

All over town coconuts and other trees were down but many were saved, propped up by city crews. The pier would be rebuilt with \$104,000 from Dellora and Lester Norris, a small part of the \$29 million they gave our area over the years, which included the Norris Center in Cambier Park and DelNor Park's land.

The Red Cross sheltered 1,350 people in Immokalee and 200 at Everglades and provided \$105,198 in help for 618 needy families in a county whose population then was 15,753 with 4,655 in Naples. Today's population, according to the 1989 figures of the Chamber of Commerce, is 20,625 in Naples and 144,721 in the county.

It was a sidelight that made national news wires when Gov. LeRoy Collins flew in to survey the damage and joined City, later Circuit, Judge Harold S. Smith to free Willie Boyd and Bobby Otis McNeal from their jail terms for being drunk and disorderly. The two black men had swum through chest deep water to save six women and children who were trapped on the city fire truck when it drowned out while evacuating city hall at the height of the storm.

It was 30 years later that James Lorenzo Walker, former county commissioner and later state representative, recalled a graphic Donna memory.

"I looked out of my North Trail office window and saw a refrigerator tumbling across the road, four feet off the ground," he said. "I don't know where it went."

A novel mail-order honor-system ticket sale plan working for the first-ever Old Naples historic homes tour is ~~working~~
says Mrs. Dean Earl, tour chairman for the Collier County Historical Society.

"We had never had a historic homes tour before and we weren't sure about the amount of interest there would be," Mrs. Earl said. "We have found that a lot of people want to visit and view the odd houses in the place where Naples began. We have also had fine cooperation from owners and residents of the houses and from society members who will ~~aid~~ in the tour."

The walking tour will be from 1 to 5 p.m. on Easter Sunday, April 10. It will make a 10-block swing from the old hotel site at the end of 12th Avenue South down to the pier and back to end at the Old Naples Building, home of the Colonial Cheese and Gourmet Shop where refreshments will be served. Participants will receive a map of the tour to guide them and society members will be on hand at the seven homes and in other areas to explain their background and history.

To get tickets out ~~as wide a range~~ ^(of residents) as possible they were mailed direct to members of Naples civic associations on the honor system with a request that payment be made or the tickets not used.

"We've had a ~~good~~ good response so far and more ~~payments~~ payments are still coming in," said Mrs. Helen Pardee, society secretary. "We have had a few complaints from people who were sent single tickets and wanted more, ~~and~~ ~~were~~ ~~had~~ ~~would be done~~ who sent a check but didn't sign it."

More

George Huntoon, president of the society, said there is great interest among Neapolitans, many of them newcomers, in the people who were ~~the~~^{first} to come and the city they ~~had~~ founded.

"We hope that this interest, supported by the facts we have already uncovered in preparing for the tour, may create a continuing interest in the old Naples area and help in its preservation," Huntoon said. "This would be the best kind of living history for Naples, ~~and it's too early~~."

There was also interest in the tour from Bill McGowan, Naples Chamber of Commerce executive vice president, who sees it as an answer for visitors who want to know more about Naples but don't ~~quite~~ know where to start.

"This is the sort of 'Naples image' event which ~~can~~ could fill a real need for the city and the Third Street area," McGowan declared. "It is something that could be a great help to visitors and might lead to a permanent historic walk ~~marked~~ be with historic markers that would ~~make it~~ self explanatory without being obtrusive or out of character for our low-key community."

McGowan offered any aid the chamber could provide and placed a small block of tickets on sale in the office at Fleischmann Boulevard and the Tamiami Trail. Tickets have also been placed at the Beach Club Hotel, ~~the~~ Cove Inn, and Colonial Cheese and Gourmet, plus the Barnett Bank of Naples and First National Bank. The \$5 ticket covers the tour and the refreshments at the end.

HURRICANES

The following list consists of hurricanes that directly affected Collier County since the National Weather Service in Miami has been keeping track, (1871).

- 1) October 6, 1873
- 2) October 19, 1876
- 3) September 25, 1894
- 4) October 17, 1910
- 5) September 18, 1926
- 6) September 10, 1960

Hurricanes are whirlwinds that may grow to be more than 300 miles in diameter. As they spin over the ocean, converting heat from the sunwarmed water to wind, hurricanes release more energy each minute than the largest hydrogen bomb. Once these winds start moving, they feed on energy from the warm, moist air over which they travel. As long as the hurricane is over warm water, it usually continues to build. While moving over the ocean, it lifts billions of tons of water everyday and dumps most of it back as rain in the next 24 hours. When the storm moves inland or over colder water, the loss of heat energy from the ocean eventually causes the hurricane to die.

The photographic exhibit covers the 1926 and 1960 hurricanes.

September 18, 1926. This fast moving storm hit Miami on the morning of September 18 and was battering Everglades by noon of the same day. Storm winds blew the water out of the Barron River and Chokoloskee Bay and then surged back into the waterfront town to the height of over eight feet.

The townspeople who did not evacuate rode out the storm on the second floor of the Everglades Inn. As they watched from the Inn's window, the storm quickly rearranged the landscape of the town. Houses were blown off their foundations and either floated or sailed across town. Others were ripped apart by the winds. Parked automobiles were filled with muddy salt water and sea creatures. Those animals trapped in cars later died when the water subsided leaving a stench that lingered for weeks. All the cows that were pastured in Everglades drowned for lack of an elevated shelter. At the north end of town, Port Dupont with its

repair complex for Barron G. Collier's steamship line and road building equipment for the Tamiami Trail, was leveled.

In a truly pioneering spirit, only a few people chose to leave the area. Barron G. Collier sent his yacht, the Baroness, to pick up survivors and to bring emergency supplies a few days later.

The damage from this storm was very severe in the Miami area and from Pensacola into Southern Alabama. 243 people lost their lives in this hurricane.

PHOTOGRAPHS

These photographs are from Everglades City, Florida.

- 1 - High winds and flood waters in Everglades City during the 1926 storm.
- 2 - Buildings were damaged from the winds, flooding and surges.
- 3 - Aerial view of storm damage looking east down Broadway. The Administration Building is on the left, Everglades Inn is on the far right, the Everglades Club and Central Garage are in the top right and the jail in the center in the background.
- 4 - View along Broadway West with Central Garage in the center and the Bakery to the far right with a trolley parked in front.
- 5 - High flood water after 1926 storm.
- 6 - View from the water tower looking along Broadway West showing the State Road Department on the left, which was torn from it's foundation and blown into the street coming to rest near the Everglades Inn.
- 7 - Street flooding.
- 8 - View from Broadway West as seen from the roof of the Rod and Gun Club. Everglades Inn is on the left, Administration Building on the right with the Barron River in the background.
- 9 - Ed Scott's Ford standing in a flooded street in Everglades City, 1926.
- 10 - Ed Scott seated on a row boat that is tied to the rail of the Rod and Gun Club.
- 11 - Woman and her dog standing in flooded street.
- 12 - Storm damage and flooding. Western Union Office to the far right.
- 13 - Work crews begin the clean-up.
- 14 - Oscar Lybass leaning on the fender of his partially submerged automobile parked in front of the Everglades Club.

"IT'S AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NO ONE A GOOD CASE OF SCOTCH"

If a case of perfectly healthy and robust Scotch came floating into your life - would you, or would you not turn it over to the "proper" authorities , presuming that the authorities are "proper" in this respect? Or would you "turn it up?"

This is the condition of mind of D.C. Griffon, Everglades' premier plumber.

It all happened like this:

The storm raged, the plumber plumbed the depths of despair. His door blew open and, presto, a square box came floating more or less bumpily, but majestically, into his place of business.

Now, it is related, Mr. Griffon had never seen such a box before; so he scrutinized it closely and decided he had better investigate its contents, which he did. It proved to be twelve perfectly good bottles of an approved brand, with a little water outside but none inside.

Mr. Griffon's first impulse was to rush out with this contraband and carry it posthaste to the nearest Volsteadian official; but there was water in the streets, and Mr. Griffon, it is related, hated to get his feet wet. Also the wind was blowing, and he doesn't care much for wind. So he sat him down and considered.

There are those in Everglades who believe that he is still considering. If he has sought legal advise, it is not a matter of public knowledge. Everglades attorneys to a man are said to believe that when a box of happy hooch drifts thus into a man's place of business, he is not manufacturing, transporting, or otherwise breaking the 18th Amendment; while mere laymen believe that this amendment has been broken so often that there is not enough of it left to find a piece large enough to break.

The Collier County News, Everglades, Collier County Florida.
Thursday, September 23, 1926.

September 10, 1960 : Hurricane Donna. "Special Collier County Hurricane Forecast. Winds and squalls will increase steadily this evening reaching hurricane force by midnight. Due to the northeast and east winds, the tides will not rise much until the hurricane center passes abreast of Collier County. The movement of the hurricane has been erratic during the last several hours and a more precise forecast of the maximum winds and tides will have to wait until later this evening. At this time, all persons in Collier County are urged to make necessary hurricane precautions. No evacuation seems necessary at this time. However, all persons should keep in touch with further advisories and bulletins over their radios." Leonard Pardue, Spokesman for Miami Hurricane Center. This bulletin was aired on September 9, 1960, things would change on the 10th.

September 10, 1960 : A broadcast beamed to Collier County indicates that Naples and Collier County will receive the full brunt of Hurricane Donna. Sheriff Doug Hendry broadcasts from Civil Defense Headquarters: "Emergency action will be required on the part of the people living in the Naples area. It is recommended persons living south of 8th Avenue, South, or along the beach and west of 1st Street, south of 5th Avenue, South and east of West Lake Drive, east of 9th Street from 5th Avenue, South to 8th Avenue, North, please prepare for an orderly evacuation. This evacuation must be completed by 7 a.m. this morning. Red Cross shelters are available at the Naples High School, the Masonic Hall and the old Railroad Depot. If you plan to leave town, please register at the Naples High School first. Stay calm. Do not get excited."

Donna is heading straight for Naples. Gusts are reported at 166 mph. Evacuation bulletins are announced for Marco, Goodland, Isles of Capri, Everglades, Chokoloskee Island, East Naples, Naples Park and Vanderbilt Beach. Throughout the day bulletins increase in frequency and urgency.

A tropical hurricane with its counter clockwise circulating winds is dangerous for three reasons: heavy rains with resulting flooding, high winds and high tides, and always, there is the possibility of a tidal wave.

"This is an extremely dangerous hurricane. You will be safe if you take action as requested now. Please remain calm." Sheriff Hendry.

The last ham radio report is received at 7 a.m. in Everglades City. Winds are 120 mph. The storm is coming but noone knows when the maximum winds will arrive. At 7:45 a.m., Civil Defense Headquarters is evacuated to the Red Cross shelter at the high school.

8:00 a.m. winds are at hurricane force. The roof begins to peel off the Railroad Depot Shelter - people inside are moved to Pine Lane Bowling Alley.

Communications are failing. UPI Network has blown down. The final contact with the weather bureau if by phone at 8:30 a.m. The eye is nearing Everglades City. The eye will pass over Naples, according to the weather bureau radar, between ten and eleven a.m..

By 9:30 a.m. any communication out of the city is non-existence. The barometer proves to be the best indicator of Donna's location.

The eye passes over Naples at noon, it lasts one hour. By 1:00 p.m., the winds are picking up again, this time from the opposite direction. Now the high tides are coming in. The southwesterly winds are bringing in the water that was blown out of the inland waters earlier and returning them forcefully with new gulf waters over the wind-battered mainland. Homes that survived the winds are now giving way to a nine and a half foot wall of water.

6:00 p.m. The winds have calmed. Donna is gone but not forgotten.

Fortunately, no lives were lost from Donna's passage over Collier County.

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 15 - Palm tree outside Naples residence twisted by Donna 1960.
- 16 - Gordon Pass Fish Camp in Naples. The camp never re-opened.
- 17 - Corner of 5th Ave. and 3rd St. in Naples blocked by fallen trees.
- 18 - Damage to home on Vanderbilt Beach. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 19 - House trailers, some submerged, blown from Bonita Beach trailer park across Fish Trap Bay. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 20 - Trailer park on Bonita Beach. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 21 - Anthony Frederici's home on Vanderbilt Beach. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 22 - Furniture from the Vanderbilt Beach Hotel litter the beach. Photo by Tom Morgan.

- 23 - Naples Airport. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 24 - Naples City Docks -- some boats smashed on to dry land. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 25 - Two automobiles swept off Gordon Drive into Naples Bay.
- 26 - Naples Marina
- 27 - Erosion and damage done to a seawall on Naples Beach.
- 28 - Broken pavement lying on Naples Beach. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 29 - National Guard troops come to Everglades City. Photo by Tom Morgan.
- 30 - Naples Pier. Photo by Tom Morgan.