

Prior hurricane seasons brought no harbingers of things to come

A History of Hurricanes

By M.L. Baron

Photos from the archives
of M.L. Baron

Special to the Neighb News

In 1953, Hurricane Carol made landfall in the Canadian maritime province of New Brunswick, however her name would go down in infamy as a hurricane again a season later. Carol, the first named hurricane to impact Southeastern New England made landfall on Tuesday, August 31st, 1954. The procedure of retiring names was put into place that year. Overall, 1953's season will be remembered by the early bird arrival of Tropical Storm Alice in May and the very late Hurricane Carol (yes, a different Carol) in December that impacted, of all places, Nova Scotia!

This is the very first list of official hurricane names that started to be issued beginning in 1953. Those marked with a * were assigned to hurricanes and tropical storms that year. Many tropical systems that met the criteria went un-named.

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|---------|-----------|------------|
| * Alice | * Barbara | * Carol |
| * Dolly | * Edna | * Florence |
| * Gail | * Hazel | Irene |
| Jill | Katherine | Lucy |
| Mabel | Norma | Orpha |
| Patsy | Queen | Rachel |
| Susie | Tina | Una |
| Vicki | Wallis | |



A gull's eye view of the apex juncture of Alder and Balsam Streets, West Island, after Carol swept through on Tuesday, August 31st, 1954, about 1:30 p.m.

The 1937 Hurricane Season was mediocre.

This season goes down in the weather books as being so inactive that Halifax got most of the headlines for tropical storm activity. In fact the Canadians had more tropical weather action than all of the Gulf and East Coasts of The U.S. combined in '37.

The '38 Hurricane: 70 years later

They've gotten over it — we should too.

After countless recollections I've heard of and documented on the '38 Hurricane, the storm soon takes a back seat towards the pleasant reflections of a better time. It's almost as if this was a brief distraction to the more memorable sentiments of the pre-war era way of life. The bad times weren't that bad, and the good times were a hell of a lot better.

There isn't one '38 survivor I've talked to that wouldn't have given anything to go back in time. The remaining generation I listen to now

were mostly in elementary school and ended the school day the time the storm struck. The memories by these 80+ year olds are still very detailed and explicit some 70 years later. They are the last generation to have experienced one of the most extraordinary meteorological events in

modern U.S. history.

They are as precious as the last survivors of the *Titanic*, all who have passed on. The elderly have a story to tell as only they can — a living portal eager to share their experiences even without being in a hurricane. A good blizzard story would be just fine.



Be prepared: See pg. 22 for a hurricane to do list

This dismantled catboat named "ECHO" lies hard aground on the southwest corner lawn of FHS after the 14-foot tidal surge dissipated from the '38 Hurricane.

1943: Another slow hurricane season, but an historical one anyway

As we turn back the clock to 1943, add a couple of beers, a bet, and a hurricane, and you know this story has Texas written all over it.

At the pilot training camp at Bryan Field in Houston, Texas, British student pilots were somewhat taken aback by the frenzied efforts the Americans were taking to shelter the AT-6 trainer planes from an approaching hurricane.

They began to question their structural integrity. Lead pilot instructor Col. Duckworth had enough of their criticism. (You'd think after the Lend-Lease Act the Britts would have shown a little humility).

The Colonel made a bet that he'd fly a trainer right smack into the raging storm and come back to collect his winnings — drinks on the loser. Some tried to talk him out of it, but he strapped himself in the small aircraft along with weather officer O'Hare. The plane flew off and disappeared into the

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turbulent clouds, soon only the noise of the storm could be heard. There were second thoughts as time dragged on as to why this stunt was encouraged.

Then suddenly the roar of the single engine trainer could be heard as it burst through the storm clouds and landed safely. After much excitement and jubilation another successful flight was made into the category 1 hurricane. This proved that penetration into a hurricane by aircraft was plausible, thus ringing in the birth of the Hurricane Hunter aircraft as we know it today.

1944: no names yet

"The 1944 Hurricane caused more wind and tree damage in Fairhaven than 1938," stated the tree warden in the 1944 Annual Town Report.

Losses to wartime maritime vessels and lives were catastrophic — 344 sailors were lost at sea.

1954: The named ones cometh

Carol was the first named hurricane to strike New England. She arrived on August 31st, 1954. Locally, 68 were killed. A peak wind gust was recorded at 135 mph on Block Island. Southcoast had winds to 110 mph. Over 6,000 cars and boats were destroyed along with thousands of buildings. Carol



A 1940 Pontiac Special Six, wood-bodied station wagon (like inset photo) lies crushed and hidden beneath a huge elm tree in front of the Fairhaven Town Hall. The Trinity-Lutheran Church on the west side sustained serious structural wind damage. The very heavy and ornate weather vane atop town hall that survived '38, came crashing down the night of the Sept 14, 1944 hurricane.

was the costliest U.S. hurricane in history up to that date.

1955: Diane

Hurricane Diane was the costliest hurricane in United States history up to that year. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of this system

was the incredible amount of rain it dumped on the Northeast. The rain came down fast and heavy, devastating an already drenched region from above average rainfall.

Diane — who's name was retired — skirted the south coast of New England as a downgraded tropical storm, yet she is on record as the wettest named storm — ever — on record, to impact Southern New England.

1960: Donna

Hurricane Donna goes down in the books as the "Energizer Bunny" of hurricanes. She just wouldn't quit, keeping a hefty Category 3 status for the longest period of time. For almost a 10-day stretch Donna packed 115 m.p.h. winds or greater.

At one brief moment she exploded in the Atlantic into a Category 5 system, with winds exceeding 160 m.p.h.! Many Southcoast hurricane survivors



Carol, 1954: When the prevailing southwesterly winds settled in, the massive debris field in New Bedford Harbor drifted ashore on the Fairhaven side. This photo is taken from the Route 6 bridge looking east. The popular Skipper Restaurant (in background) had its new addition tossed onto Middle Street. The little building to the right was Mitchell's machine shop.

will tell you that Donna was equal to or worse than 1954's Carol.

Donna killed 364, and caused well over 7 billion in damages (2008 dollars), making it the 9th costliest hurricane in U.S. history. Hurricane Donna remains as the hurricane to impact the most land mass areas in the U.S.

Hurricanes Bob and Gloria first left their marks in 1979

The year 1979 marked the end of the disco era and the beginning of alternating male/female names for tropical storms. (For a tropical storm system to earn a name it has to reach winds exceeding 39 m.p.h.)

These were the first set of male/female alternating names in 1979. Those marked with a * were used.

* Ana	* Bob	* Claudette
* David	* Elena	* Frederic
* Gloria	Henri	Isabel
Juan	Kate	Larry
Mindy	Nicholas	Odette
Peter	Rose	Sam
Teresa	Victor	Wanda

Other name changes and procedures included using English, Spanish and French variations. Interestingly, the letters Q, U, X, Y and Z are not used because there aren't enough names to choose from according to the World Meteorological Organization.

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In 1979, the original practice of reusing (un-retired) names every 10 years changed to every 6 years. The 1979 Hurricane Bob had one similarity to his recycled namesake in 1991. Both systems were early birds in the season. Bob '79 formed in the Gulf of Mexico in mid July and caused over \$55 million in damages. It was the earliest hurricane to form in the gulf in twenty years. Bob '91 was the earliest hurricane to impact Southern New England, on August 19, 1991. Causing 1.6 billion in damages, the name Bob would be retired that year.

Gloria had all the ingredients to become a powerful hurricane as it came off the coast of Africa and passed along the Cape Verde Islands, but its large size placed her in an unfavorable northwesterly course. This doomed system struggled to gain tropical storm status and briefly became Hurricane Gloria. Drifting slowly for about 6 days, the dying hurricane was able to sputter out a gust to a little over a 100 m.p.h. and disappeared into the Atlantic.

Storm of the Century?

On Friday, September 27th, 1985,

The Storm of The Century was forecasted to wreak havoc and devastation along the East Coast of the U.S. The media frenzy hurled coastal inhabitants from the Carolinas to Southern New England into one of the most hurricane-hyped, on-the-edge weather cliff-hangers of all time. Millions evacuated. This was "the big one," maybe worse than '38.



1944: Bridge /Green Street looking east

And then she came. Gloria brought us a wind gust to 90 mph, and 1.27" of rain. That was it. However the power was out in many areas for quite some time due to some wind damage and salt spray from the mostly dry storm. The salt spray — being a good conductor of electricity, apparently shorted out many

transformers in the area. A large metal section of the roof at Fairhaven Lumber blew into some high tension lines near the property causing additional power outages. Gloria's name was retired that year.

Costliest U.S. Atlantic hurricanes

Rank Hurricane Season Cost (2005 US\$)

- 1 "Miami" 1926 \$157 billion
- 2 "Galveston" 1900 \$99.4 billion
- 3 "Katrina" 2005 \$81.0 billion
- 4 "Galveston" 1915 \$68.0 billion
- 5 "Andrew" 1992 \$55.8 billion
- 6 "New England" 1938 \$39.2 billion
- 7 "Pinar del Río" 1944 \$38.7 billion
- 8 "Okeechobee" 1928 \$33.6 billion
- 9 "Donna" 1960 \$26.8 billion
- 10 "Camille" 1969 \$21.2 billion

Hurricane Beth?

And, yes there was a Hurricane Beth, in 1971.

Beth formed off Florida about August 10 and eventually reached tropical storm strength and sped north up the coast only to impact Nova Scotia as a minor hurricane. However, in defense of Beth, it is remarkable that she kept her hurricane status through the cold waters of the northeast.

The 2008 Atlantic hurricane season ends 11/30

A sneak peek at next year's names:

Ana	Bill	Claudette
Danny	Erika	Fred
Grace	Henri	Ida
Joaquin	Kate	Larry
Mindy	Nicholas	Odette
Peter	Rose	Sam
Teresa	Victor	Wanda

For more on local weather visit www.westislandweather.com

Editor's Note: M.L. Baron's official title is weather spotter for the national weather service. But, as you can tell from this article (in our opinion), he is THE local expert on all things weather in these parts.



Cars, boats and debris after the hurricane of 1954.