

Remembering Hurricane Carol in 1954

By Joseph D'Aleo CCM

I remember Hurricane Carol as a small boy. I grew up in New York City (Brooklyn). Each summer, my family would rent a beach house on Long Island Sound and my brother and I would spend the summer on the beach. The rest of the family would come out on Friday's and spend the weekends.

The summer of 1954 was a summer I will always remember. It was late August and we had not yet packed up to move back to the city for the fall and winter with Labor Day holiday still ahead.

I remember awakening to the roar of wind and driving rains on August 31. Our beach house was on a little peninsula out into LI Sound. The only road off the peninsula went past the police station right where the peninsula connected to Long Island. We were the last house on the road next to the marshes and right on the beach.

The waves began breaching the sand dunes that protected the beach homes from the ocean and flooding the yard. I recall seeing our toys and lawn furniture floating in the lake of salt water. I recall my frantic family calling the police station for advice whether to leave. The police told my family it was too late as the water had flooded the much of the road and they were abandoning their posts and heading inland.



The storm center passed over Long Island between Hempstead and Westhampton after 8:30 a.m. Gusts of 90 miles an hour were reported at the Republican Aviation plant at Farmingdale.

The strong northeast winds and storm surge had pushed water into Long Island Sound with a storm surge of 5 to 8 feet.

The police told us to go to the top floor and pray.

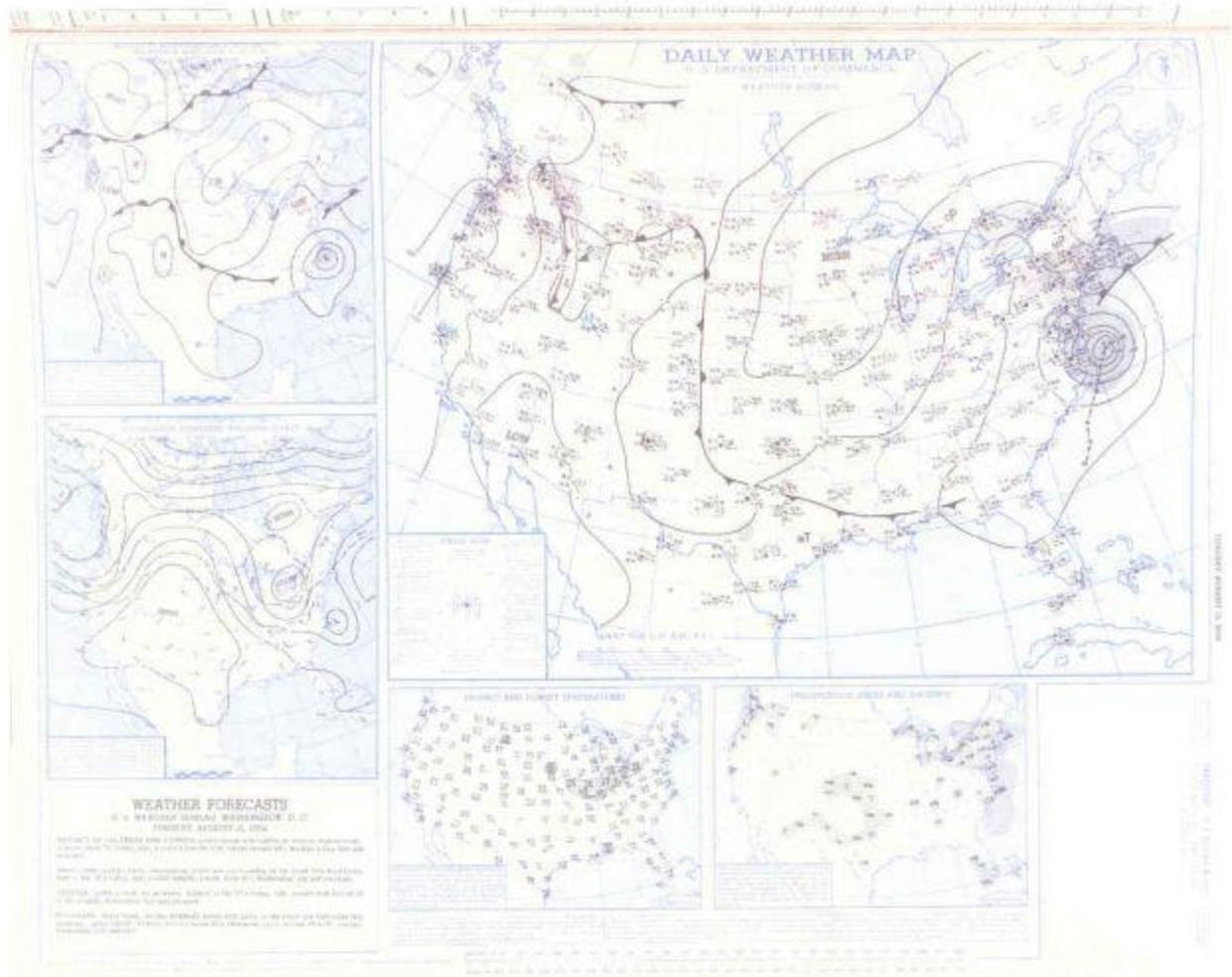
Water flooded the first floor before the center of the storm passed and wind switched from northeast to southwest and the water sloshed back out to sea. When the rains and strong winds on the backside of the storm abated, I recall walking with my family and the other families to the beach. The water that sloshed out to sea, left water levels many tens of feet lower than the lowest

tide we had ever experienced there. Mollusks and many minnows and other fish were very confused by the event, even more than us humans, adults and young children alike.

It was the worst storm for the northeast since 1944 and the great hurricane of '38, which we wrote about earlier. Edna and Hazel followed before 1954 was done. We travelled back out after Hazel to see whether more damage was done. Carol had the greatest impact on Long Island. The next year Connie and Diane produced massive flooding in the northeast.



The daily weather map for August 30, 1954.



These events tend to cluster. That is what has JB and I concerned. The northeast is overdue. Here is an account of Hurricane Carol from David Vallee and Michael Dion, NWS Employees in Taunton, MA office.

Hurricane Carol

CAT 3- August 31, 1954

On the morning of August 31, Hurricane Carol, the most destructive hurricane to strike Southern New England since the Great New England Hurricane of 1938, came crashing ashore near Old Saybrook, Connecticut, leaving 65 people dead in her wake. Carol had developed in the Bahamas several days earlier, making only slow progress northward. Carol began her rapid acceleration during the evening of August 30, while passing just east of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Carol made landfall on eastern Long Island and southeastern Connecticut about 12 hours later, moving at over 35 mph.

Sustained winds of 80 to 100 mph roared through the eastern half of Connecticut, all of Rhode Island, and most of eastern Massachusetts. Scores of trees and miles of power lines were blown down. Strong winds also devastated crops in the region. Nearly 40 percent of apple, corn, peach, and tomato crops were ruined from eastern Connecticut to Cape Cod. Several homes along the Rhode Island shore had roofs blown completely off due to winds which gusted to over 125 mph. The strongest wind ever recorded on Block Island, Rhode Island occurred during Carol when winds gusted to 135 mph. The National Weather Service in Warwick, Rhode Island recorded sustained winds of 90 mph, with a peak gust of 105 mph. Lowest recorded pressure was at Suffolk County Airport on the south shore of Long Island with a reading of 28.36. Block Island reported 28.51 while Quonset Airport in North Kingstown, Rhode Island reported 28.72.

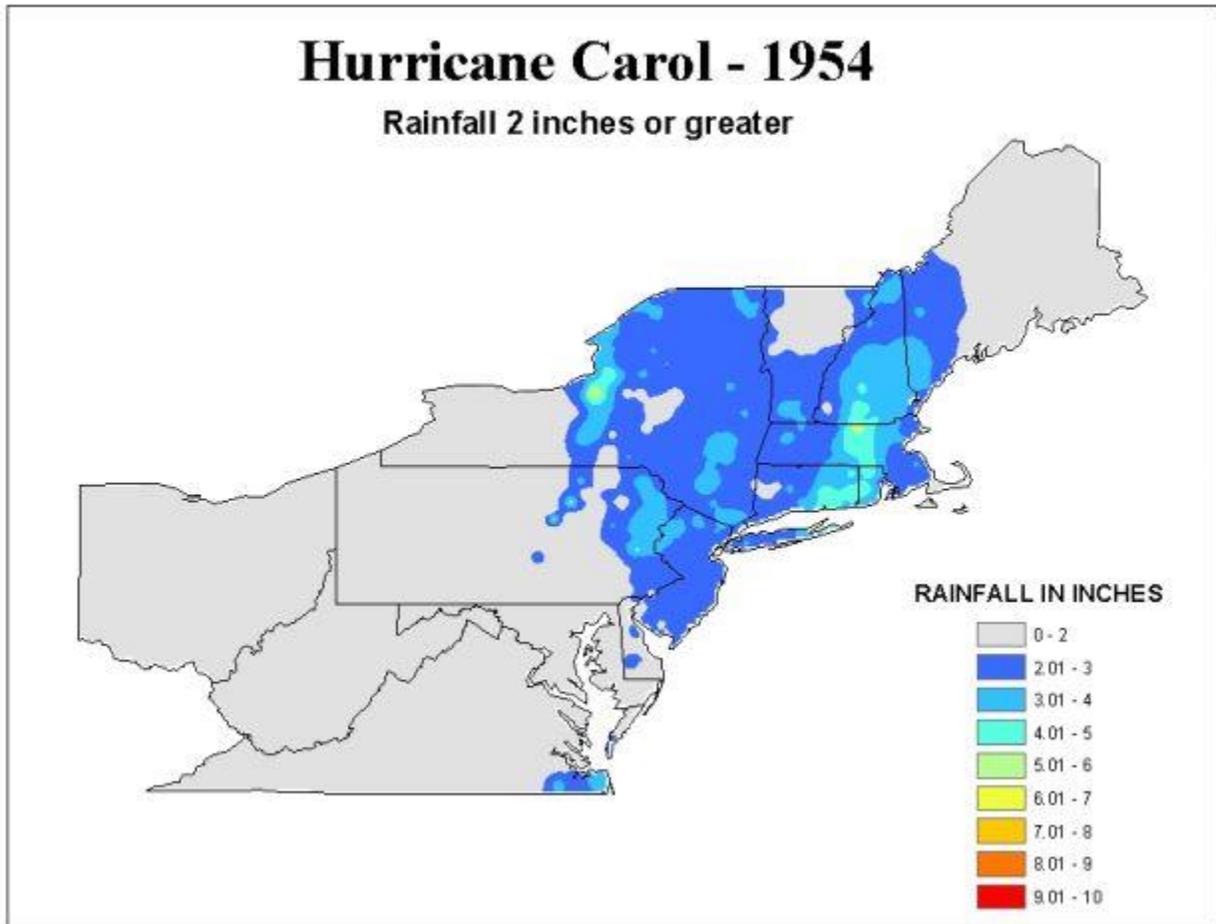


Edgewood Yacht Club withstands the storm surge from Carol in [Edgewood, Rhode Island](#).

Hurricane Carol arrived shortly after high tide, causing widespread tidal flooding. Storm surge levels ranged from 5 to 8 feet across the west shore of Connecticut, and from 10 to 15 feet from the New London area eastward. Storm tide profiles show, as in 1938, how dramatically the tides increased just before landfall across Narragansett Bay, the Somerset, Massachusetts area and in New Bedford, Massachusetts Harbor. Narragansett Bay and New Bedford Harbor received the largest surge values of over 14 feet in the upper reaches of both water ways. On Narragansett Bay, just north of the South Street Station site, the surge was recorded at 14.4 feet, surpassing that of the 1938 Hurricane. However, since Hurricane Carol arrived after high tide, the resulting storm tide was lower.

Coastal communities from central Connecticut eastward were devastated. Entire coastal communities were nearly wiped out in New London, Groton, and Mystic, Connecticut, as well as from Westerly to Narragansett, Rhode Island. Once again, as in the 1938 Hurricane, downtown Providence, Rhode Island was flooded under 12 feet of water.

Rainfall amounts ranged from 2 to 5 inches across most of the area. The heaviest amounts, up to 6 inches, occurred in the New London, Connecticut area in the vicinity of landfall, and across extreme north central Massachusetts.



Hurricane Carol destroyed nearly 4,000 homes, along with 3,500 automobiles and over 3,000 boats. All of Rhode Island, much of eastern Connecticut and much of eastern Massachusetts lost electrical power. In addition, as much as 95 percent of all phone power was interrupted in these locations.

This information was taken from "*Southern New England Tropical Storms and Hurricanes, A Ninety-eight Year Summary 1909-1997*", by David R. Vallee and Michael R. Dion, National Weather Service, Taunton, MA.