

Today in Our History

August 14-15, 1635

'A Mighty Storm of Wind and Rain'

Predictable seasons of the year are fall, winter, spring and summer, but the Pilgrims did not plan for the unpredictable, "season", hurricane season. The year of 1635 had been a busy one, with new settlers coming ashore; but August 15 was an unforgettable day for them all. They did not know then, what we know today. Hurricane season is between June 1 and November 30, and most of the storms that have reached the New England coast have struck during August and September.



Photo is courtesy of Plimoth Plantation

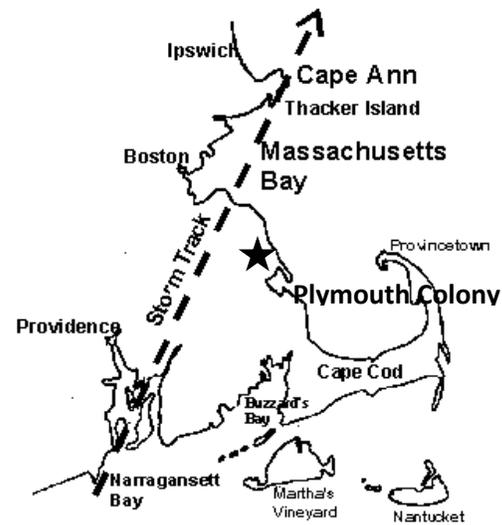
over the land and no possible way to know that walls of water twenty feet high were about to wash over their colonies. History was about to be made in New England.

The fierce storm first entered land at Narragansett Bay and passed between Plymouth and Boston. The first "recorded" New England storm was about to leave a huge path of destruction. The tremendous winds and storm surge caused wooden ships to break apart. Homes, crops, livestock and lives were lost on land and in anchored ships. It had been nearly sixteen years since the Pilgrims painstakingly built their modest homes by hand, and now they were in pieces.

The damage that the high water and powerful winds caused is described below and gives a great understanding of just how bad the 1635 storm was. Plymouth Colony Governor William Bradford described what must have been a nightmare to the Pilgrims and English settlers:

"This year the 14th or 15th of August being Saturday was such a mighty storm of wind & rain as none living in these parts either English or Indians ever saw...It blew down sundry houses & uncovered others, diverse vessels were lost at sea and many more in extreme danger. It caused the sea to swell to the southward of this place above 20 foot right up & down and made many of the Indians to climb into trees for their safety. It took off the boarded roof of a house which belonged to the plantation at Manomet and moved it to another place, the posts still standing in the ground...It blew down many hundred thousands of trees turning up the stronger by the roots and breaking the higher pine trees in the middle and the tall young oaks & walnut trees of good bigness were wound like a withe, very strange & fearful to behold..."

Of course, the colonists had no warning that a fierce storm was about to blow



PATH OF THE GREAT HURRICANE OF 1635

A hurricane is a wide and powerful storm with high-speed winds, sheets of rain and rising water that can last hours, or even days. Governor Bradford wrote that the August storm lasted about five hours. He also explained how the sea “swell to the southward of this place above 20 foot.” He was describing a storm surge, which we now know is caused when fierce winds change the level of the sea water near ocean shores. The winds push huge amounts of water up and out of the sea.



Internet photo

When this happens, the water has nowhere to go but onto the land, where it does tremendous damage to anything in its path. Governor Bradford wrote that many Native Americans climbed into trees hoping to escape the fast-rising water.



Internet photo

William Bradford was among the first to record this historical New England hurricane. Reverend Richard Mather, a passenger on an anchored ship named the *James*, wrote in his journal that “...trees...in pieces...and others turned up by y rootes ...”; John Winthrop, leader of the Massachusetts Bay Company, also recorded this horrific event, writing that the storm “blew down many hundreds of trees ... overthrow some houses and drove ships from their anchor.” Without these eye witness accounts in hand-written journals, we would know very little about any of the historic events of the

1600's in Plymouth and New England. Governor William Bradford's interesting personal journal notations can be read today in the published book, *Of Plimoth Plantation: 1620-1647*.

Before the unexpected storm hit the southern coast of New England, several ships were along the coast, bringing new settlers and supplies, also called provisions, from England. Among the ships were, the *James*, the *Great Hope* and the *Angel Gabriel*. There were more than one hundred passengers on the *James*, and all of them survived. Some of the settlers who had been on the *Angel Gabriel*, had gone ashore before the hurricane, but the nine crew and passengers that remained on the ship, did not survive. Smaller ships, including the *Mary*, the *Bess* and the *Diligence*, outran the storm, and sailed ahead of it, landing in Newfoundland.

Life was different for the settlers who continued to risk so much to begin new lives in New England. Fortunately, another such hurricane did not happen there again until 1815.

“... The signs and marks of it will remain this hundred years in these parts where it was sorest. The moon suffered a great eclipse the second night after it.”

-William Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation: 1620-1647*



Sources:

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