

November 5, 2012

Dear Friends,

I remember as a child hearing the grownups speak about the Hurricane of 1938. It was a big one. The hurricane killed 800 people and destroyed 57,000 homes. They called it: *The Yankee Clipper, the Long Island Express, or the Great New England Hurricane*. Most people referred to it simply as the *Great Hurricane*.

That was seventy-four years ago. Few alive remember it today. It formed off the coast of Africa on September 10th, 1938. By September 20th, the storm was centered east of the Bahamas. Two weather systems would determine its path north: a deep trough over Appalachia and a high pressure system north of Bermuda.

The weather experts predicted cloudy skies and gusty conditions, but no hurricane. At 8:30 in the morning of September 21st, the storm was located one hundred miles off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The storm raced north. By 9:00 a.m., it was over the Virginia Tidewater. By noon, it was off the New Jersey coast. The full force of the hurricane hit Long Island at 2:00 p.m. The eye of the storm made landfall at Bayport in Suffolk County at 3:00 p.m. By 4:00 p.m. it was crossing Long Island Sound to wreak havoc in New England.

It was a huge storm. Most people living on Long Island were of immigrant stock. They heard of hurricanes, but associated them with the tropics. The last big hurricane occurred way back in 1869. Much of the damage was a result of storm surge and wind. The East River was pushed three blocks inland. The Empire State Building swayed in the wind. Eastern Long Island suffered the worst. The Dune Road area of Westhampton Beach was washed away. Even a movie house was swept three miles out into the Atlantic with its unsuspecting occupants. Montauk Point became an island for a while.

People wouldn't forget a storm like that. Remnants were everywhere. In Sag Harbor, the storm toppled the steeple of the landmark, Old Whaler's Church. It was never rebuilt. The Shinnecock Inlet today was created by the surging waters of the *Great Storm*. The town people of Westhampton Beach changed their team's name from the Green Wave to the Hurricanes.

Until late in the 1940's hurricanes were not officially named. I imagine that the destruction wrought by Hurricane Sandy last week will never be forgotten either. People will speak about it for years to come. Most of us have family up north. Many of us used to live there. Their suffering touches our hearts too.

Let us remember them in our prayers. Let us also be supportive of the relief efforts taking place in thousands of communities. The Red Cross received mixed reviews, but there are other relief agencies that can help. Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Charlotte is collecting funds on behalf of hurricane victims. We can help by making a gift at church this week marked "Hurricane Sandy Relief."