

The Day Before the Hurricane
September 13, 1944



To Fellows And Friends
Afar And Abroad

Thursday afternoon in Provincetown.

Dear Friends,

For two days now there has been a feeling of ominous foreboding in Provincetown. Rain started falling in a very quiet and small way Tuesday night about 8 and then continued, off and on, with heavy, down-pouring showers until this morning. Yesterday was dank, heavy and sultry, and so very, very quiet. Towards five in the afternoon layer after layer of fog settled over the end of the Cape and the waters around it, so thickly that cars with bright headlights moved slowly and cautiously. Into the midst of this piled up fog, pierced a heavy down-pour. And all the time the air was heavy and untasty. Sweat came without effort and stayed. In spite of the fog bells that boomed or jangled and the boats that blew or bleated, that quietness was in everything, and it wasn't somehow natural.

Long stretches of the shore were carpeted with bright green sea growth churned up by a nor-easter, and the gulls looked different as they strolled about on verdant sand. Slow rollers came in, broke on the shore and belched an old odor of dead clam flats.

For a time last night the skies were clear, but they quickly clouded up and more rain came. This morning the sun came out finally, but a heavy atmosphere of deadly quietness permeated everything. Throughout the morning there was scarcely any movement in the air at all. The harbor was quiet. The shores of Truro clear. About midmorning two square red flags moved up to the top of the staff on Monument Hill. They have square black centers, and they mean HURRICANE.

The Coast Guard has called all of its men back from leaves and liberty to their stations—to Wood End, to Race Point, to Highland, and to the other stations along the Cape. Fishing boats have tied up to their moorings and those who haven't any are using government moorings. Practically all of the boats stayed in today, except Captain High Stericks with the Silver King and Captain Dick O'Donnell with the Cormorant. Captain PeeWee may be out, too.

All Navy craft left this morning for the shelter of the Canal and those whose pleasure sailboats are in the water have put down double sea anchors.

So we wait in absolute quietness for the night and what it may bring. Night high tide comes at 9:22 and it's a nine-foot-five tide, which isn't very high, and if the storm hits when the radio says it will, the tide will be going out.



Here's the Signal Station
September 13, 1944
with its ominous message
to the fishermen --- The
Hurricane Warning!

Storm Signals

Storm warnings flown from the mast near Pilgrim Monument and posted at Coast Guard stations, lighthouses and weather bureaus tell fishermen and sailors of weather changes forecast by the U.S. Weather Bureau. Red, white and black flags are used in the daytime, lanterns at night. Signals are:

Red triangular flag—warning for small boats. Moderately strong winds dangerous to small craft only. No night warning.

Red triangular flag over square red flag with black center—Northeast storm. Night: two red lanterns, one above the other.

Square red flag with black center over red triangular flag—Southeast storm. Night: one red lantern.

Square red flag with black center, over white triangular flag—Southwest storm. Night: red lantern above white lantern.

White triangular flag over square red flag with black center—Northwest storm. Night: white lantern over red lantern.

Two square red flags with black centers, one above the other—Hurricane on the way. Night: two red lanterns with white lantern in between.

Hurricane Lashes

Cape Cod

**11 States Hit
By Hurricane**

Howling into New England near Fishers Island, off New London, Conn., at 10.45 p. m., the storm center marked by wind gusts close to 100 miles per hour, hit Westerly, R. I., at 11.20 p. m., continued across Rhode Island to reach Providence at 12.10 a. m., and then swung into Southeastern Massachusetts through Attleboro and Brockton, passing out to sea at South Weymouth, at 1.05 a. m. hugging the coast, the storm center skirted Rockport at 2.30 a. m., passed Portland, Me., at 5.30 a. m. and Bar Harbor, Me., at 7 a. m. to roar on into Canada. The Boston Weather Bureau estimated that strong winds were felt along a belt possibly a hundred miles wide, reaching peak violence near the storm center. Approximately four inches of rain deluged much of the area in the path of the storm.

A fleet of 42 fishing druggers docked at Provincetown started to break up about 11 p. m. Two of the fleet, the Serefina 2d and the Elizabeth, were washed ashore. A 30-foot catboat, the Blue Gull, owned by Albert Avellar Jr., was cast onto Hilliard's wharf. Coast Guard auxiliary crews raced for the wharf, but were unable to reach the craft because of blown down electric-light wires.

Most severely hit were southern Massachusetts and Rhode Island communities with considerable damage also reported on Cape Cod, where many towns were isolated for hours.