

The Hurricanes

Fort Myers Beach and Lee County have had their share of bad storms. Probably the one causing the greatest loss of life around here was September 18, 1926 -- the storm that took so many lives at Moore Haven and other parts around Lake Okeechobee. A Cuban fishing boat, wrecked off Estero Island, lost six men, only the captain and a young boy were saved. Two women were drowned by high waves at Punta Rassa. In news stories of that date,, little mention was made of the Beach but since there was a great deal of damage all over the County, there was no doubt plenty here.

Prior to this, in 1910, a bad storm raked the southwest Florida coast and created havoc from Key West north. Few people today remember that hurricane but George Underhill of the Beach, relates that one of his earliest recollections was of his father nailing boards over the windows even as the water was coming in all around the building.

In 1944 and in 1947 bad blows struck here putting water over the islands, tearing out docks and piers, setting houses askew and doing a great deal of damaging to trees and shrubs. Many Australian pines were blown down all over the county by both these storms. These shallow rooted trees topple so easily and are so dangerous in high winds that many cities have passed an ordinance against planting them.

In 1960, Hurricane Donna hit the Beach with winds estimated at 140 miles an hour. Many houses, built in the 50's by northern residents or builders who did not realize what a hurricane can do, took a bad beating. Donna was probably one of the worst, dollar-wise, that Florida has ever seen.

People who have never been through a hurricane sometimes express the desire to ride one out -- to see what it's like. Don't do it! It would scare the hell out of you and you would stand a good chance of getting in b-a-a-d trouble.