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September 2018



**Marking the 80th Anniversary
of the Hurricane of 1938**

Calendar of Events 

Centerfold Tourist Map Guide 



Peconic Bay SHOPPER

...preserving North Fork History

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Reader Feedback

A letter from Bob Kaelin:

I remember the building shown on page 3 of the August issue as having been some sort of a meeting hall for the Presbyterian Church (directly across the street) when I was in grade school in the 1940s. There was a sign out front that read "Parish House of the First Presbyterian Church" (or maybe it was Parish "Hall"). It was probably used for church suppers, Christmas pageants, etc. and I remember the Presbyterian kids having gone to Sunday School there. After the addition on the southeast corner of the church in the early sixties, it was then that this became the Town Hall. Later on it was moved up near the railroad track, east of where the Post Office is now and west of where the Old Grange Hall was. The town fire siren was on that site for many years before that.



— We thank Bob for sharing!

On the Cover—

Greenport, September 1938:

E. N. Terrell Fish Market, viewed from Claudio's Restaurant on the south Main Street dock. Photo from the PBS archives, courtesy of Mike Richter.

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HURRICANE OF 1938



9/22/38 Long Island Sound Town Beach, Southold. Jack's Shack on the beach. Photo from the PBS archives, courtesy of Paul Hunter.

September 21st marks the 80th Anniversary for one of the most devastating hurricanes ever to hit eastern Long Island. This was before the hurricanes were given names, and is often referred to as "The Hurricane of '38" or locally "The Long Island Express." It was also preceding the present day sophisticated weather forecasting and communication systems and therefore struck the North Fork of Long Island in the early afternoon without warning. It also arrived at high tide and carried with it sustained winds of over 120 miles per hour.

There are many stories that can be told by the area residents about that day and how they survived. A couple of the more scary ones are about the lighthouse keepers of Long Beach Bar and the steamship *Catskill*.

Bill Allen was at the Long Beach lighthouse with his grandfather when the hurricane struck. As one can imagine the winds and waves were fierce and they feared for their lives, at one point not expecting to make it. The wind and seas broke some of the windows, knocked off the top of the chimney, and flooded the lighthouse cisterns with salt water. It also swept away the lighthouse's boats, isolating them both until help came from passing fishermen a couple of days after the storm.

Another extremely scary episode and close call occurred aboard the steamship *Catskill*. Mrs. Edward King, as told by her daughter, Fran Demerest, had driven their car aboard the ferry at Orient Point en route to visit family in Newport, Rhode Island. The *Catskill*, operated by the New London Ferry's Management, Inc., was under the command of Captain Clarence Sherman of Shelter Island. The steam ship had difficulty leaving its dock at Orient Point shortly after noon because of the wind and sea conditions. That everyone survived the height of the hurricane is certainly a tribute to the skill of Captain Sherman. He was able to anchor the steam ship for a while in the western part of Fisher's Island Sound. As the eye of the hurricane passed over the steamer was turned around and dragged its anchor and later started taking on water. One can only imagine the frightening experience of the eight passengers standing in water hour after hour wondering if they were going to survive. After over ten hours en route the *Catskill* finally made it into New London Harbor about midnight, and were told by the Coast Guard that there was no place in New London to land, but to go to the coal dock in Groton. The next day the passengers of the *Catskill* discovered that they were the only large vessel afloat in New London Harbor.

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Greenport Basin and Construction Company, Railways #2 and #3. Photo from the PBS archives, courtesy of Mike Richter.

Greenport and Orient were especially heavily damaged as one can see by these photographs. Especially damaged was the buildings in Greenport Basin & Construction Company, now Greenport Yacht & Shipbuilding and Claudio's. Over 600 trees were reported down in Greenport, the roof of the theater was torn off, and many boats sunk including the 50 ft. yacht, *Clever Girl* and the houseboat

Filene. The menhaden steamer *Ocean View* was lost in Long Island Sound along with eight members of the crew, with only the Captain surviving.

One cannot help but wonder what would happen if a sequel to the Hurricane of '38 should strike this area again. Hopefully we would have adequate warning, but the results could be nearly as devastating.

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Greenport Movie Theater. . Photo from the PBS archives, courtesy of Mike Richter.

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Flooding of lower Main Street, Greenport (Claudio's Restaurant on the right). Photo from the PBS archives courtesy of John Rusch.

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Hurricane damage on Main Street, Greenport. Photo from the PBS archives, courtesy of Mike Richter.

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The ominous sky over the wharf in Orient during the Hurricane of '38 reflects the powerful threat of nature's forces and reminds us of the seriousness of hurricane warnings. Photo from the PBS archives, courtesy of James Monsell.



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Hurricane damage to the Orient Potato Dock — now the Orient Yacht Club. Photo from the PBS archives courtesy of John Rusch.

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