



1921 Hurricane Inundates West Florida

Fact Sheet

Event date: October 20 - 30, 1921
Peak winds: 140 mph
Death toll: ~10
Minimum Pressure: 941 mb

Landfall winds: 120 mph
Max winds in Tampa: 75 mph
Landfall pressure: 951 mb
Max storm surge: ~10.5 feet in Tampa Bay

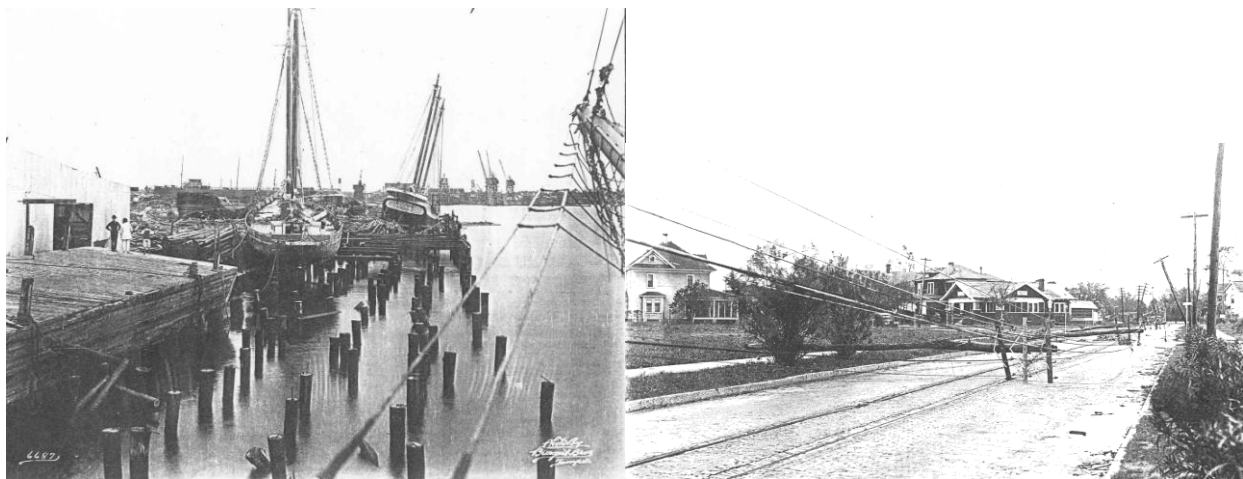


Figure 1: Damage at Tampa ports and Bayshore.

Summary of event:

The morning of the event a small column on the front page of the Tampa Times was dedicated to warning the public of the impending disaster. The final statement given by Meteorologist W. J. Bennett at 11:30 on October 24, 1921 was that, “we are apparently in the apparent path of the storm, but in the past in practically identical circumstances, similar storms have always veered either to the north or the south of us, and probably this one will do likewise.” The last advisory at the time of printing said, “Tropical storm central near latitude 25 north, longitude 85 west and moving slowly north northeastward, attended by gales over east gulf and winds of hurricane forces near its center.” Approximately 42 hours of rainfall preceded landfall, and the rainfall for the event totaled 8.53 inches at the Tampa weather bureau. The highest amount of rainfall fell in St. Leo and totaled 11.7 inches. The estimated highest tide above mean low water was 10.5 feet in Tampa Bay.

After the storm had passed, the damage to the Tampa Bay area was extensive. Rumors circulated that Pass-a-Grille was wiped out, with total losses estimated at around 5 million dollars. Of those that survived the fury of the storm, several harrowing stories came to light. One elderly man clung to a palm tree throughout the night with his wife in his grasp. Unfortunately he was unable to save her from the pounding waves and she was lost to the storm. Another man climbed a tree and stayed there for the night in order to escape surge



waters. A woman rode out the storm in a cockleshell rowboat for 11 hours. She was swept 10 miles across the bay. Another man swam the estimated half mile from his house to dry land with his two-year-old child on his back after the flood waters inundated his house. He enlisted the local firefighters to rescue the rest of his marooned family from the second floor of his house.

It appears the final loss was estimated at less than \$2 million and the state of Florida sustained the loss of three lives. At 10:30 on the morning after the hurricane's landfall Red Cross supplies were sent to hard-hit cities. Homes along Bayshore in Tampa were devastated, and there was significant property damage in Pass-a-Grille and surrounding coastal areas.



FIG. 1.—Track of tropical hurricane, October 20-28, 1921.

Figure 2. Proposed storm track by the Weather Bureau.

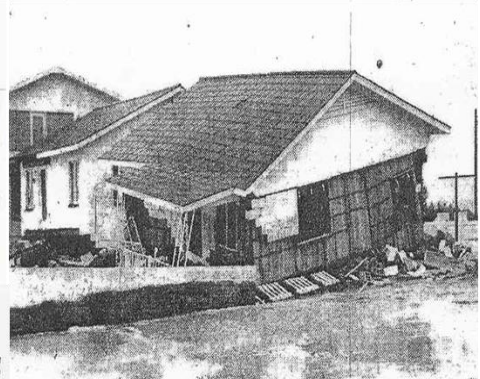


CITY HELD IN DISMAL GRIP OF GALE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

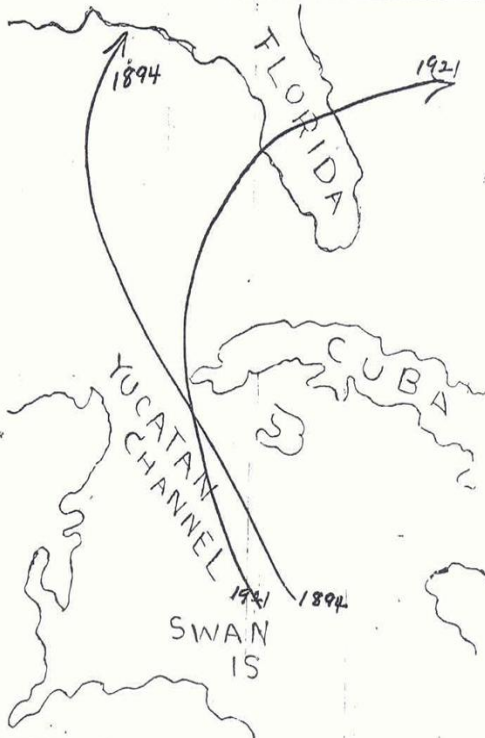
Deluge of Rain and Wind of 60 Mile Intensity Envelop Tampa and Vicinity, Carrying Death and Huge Property Destruction in Wake

YBOR CITY, PORT TAMPA AND BAY SHORE SUFFER

Great Gaping Sections of Seawall Torn Away; Bayshore to Port Tampa Is One Long Stretch of Desolation.



COURSE OF THE RECENT TROPICAL STORM



DRYS PROTEST LETTING DOWN OF BEER BARS



In Rowboat for 11 Hours At Mercy of the Storm

MRS. C. W. GREENE HAS HARROWING EXPERIENCE — IS BLOWN TEN MILES ACROSS THE BAY IN A COCKLESHELL

STORM SCARES BUILDERS OFF

Only Handful of Permits Issued; One for 'Greasing Station'

100-mile Wind at Punta Rassa When Storm Was at Height; Heavy Damage

BRIDGES TO ISLAND POINTS SWEEP AWAY—LOSS OF LIFE IS SMALL—EAST COAST AND NORTH FLORIDA HAVE GALES.

ESTIMATED LOSSES MORE THAN MILLION DOLLARS

Citrus Crop Damage Piles Into Tremendous Total, But Correct Estimate Must Await Detailed Inquiry by Experts.

TWO DEAD AT ST. PETERSBURG; TWELVE ARE TRAPPED ON ISLAND

Hurricane Centers Its Attack on Pass-a-Grille, Clearwater, St. Petersburg and Other West Coast Towns; Death Rides on Winds.

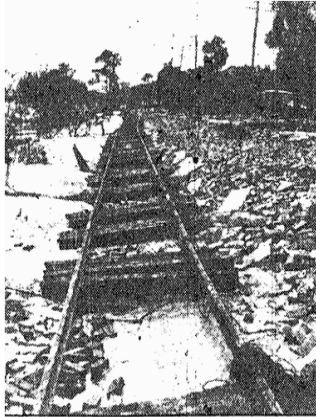
Meteorologist W. J. Bennett last night made up the above map showing the whence and the whither of the disastrous storm which swept across the state Tuesday. To show how erratic the path of the storm was, he has drawn the path of a typical West Indian storm, taking as his example the one of 1894. Discussing the storm, Mr. Bennett said he is to be expected for some time to take the warnings of this one seriously. Tampa has boasted that it is usually. We should prepare for the

Figure 3. Newspaper headlines and more damage pictures from various local newspapers.



TAMPA

Aged Man Clinging to Tree, Sees Wife Lost



RECORDS PROPERTY LOSS ARE SMASHED

WORST FORMERLY IN OCTOBER, 1910

After clinging all night long to a palmtree on the exposed promontory at Rocky Point, J. D. Wilder, aged seventy years, early yesterday saw his wife, aged eighty-five years, swept from his grasp, to her death in the waves, which were sweeping to the northeastward. The two had clung to the tree through the long night hours. Mr. Wilder for the last several hours holding his wife. At last the strain was more than the aged man could bear and in a moment of inadvertant relaxation of his grasp, the end following.

DEVASTATION ALONG BAYSHORE BOULEVARD

DR. J. B. WALLACE'S HOME, BAYSHORE BOULEVARD

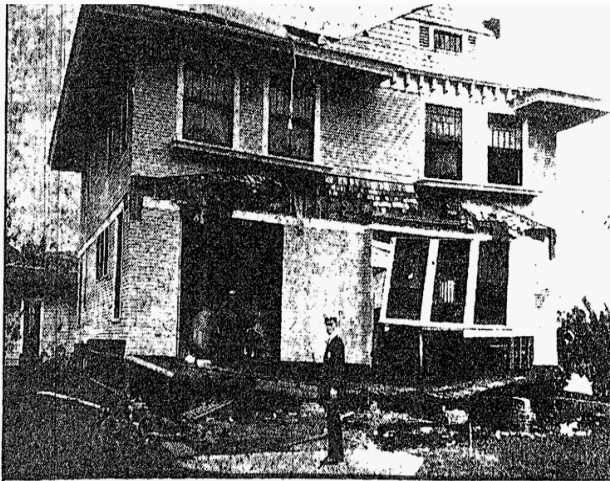


Figure 4. Newspaper clippings and damage pictures from various Florida newspapers.



STORM *St. Petersburg Times* EXTRA

St. Petersburg, Fla., Wednesday Morning, Oct. 26, 1921

TROPICAL STORM SWEEPS CITY

Property Damage May Reach \$5,000,000; Two Men Die

RUMOR PASS-A-GRILLE WIPED OUT

With property loss estimated at \$5,000,000, and two known dead, the water front a sea of debris and sunken ships, St. Petersburg Tuesday was swept by the worst tropical storm in the history of the West coast, striking about 3 o'clock in the morning and lasting until late in the afternoon, unroofing hundreds of hotels, apartment houses and homes, tearing down power lines and isolating the city completely from the outside world.

Communication was completely cut off from Pass-a-Grille, where reports estimated the loss of life from 15 to 150, with the resort under five feet of water.

TWO MEN DIE

Figure 5. Headlines from the St. Petersburg Times of October 26, 1921.



CLEARWATER SWEEP BY FURY OF STORM

OCT OBER 27, 1921.

CITY RECOVERING FROM GALE'S GRIP

CITY RECOVERS FROM GRIP OF TROPICAL HURRICANE

County Suffers Property Damage, Estimated at Less Than \$2,000,000, With Known Loss of Two Lives



TENTED CITIES REMAIN INTACT

Canvas Domiciles
Withstand Ravages
of Storms

CITY COMES UP SMILING AFTER STORM PASSES

Clean-up Work Begun
As Citizens Give
Forth Thanks

WHINERS TO GET LITTLE HEARING

Rebuilding and Repair
Seen on All Sides,
Reports Show

St. Petersburg came up smiling.

TAMPA IS HARD HIT BY STORM; THREE DIE DURING HEAVY GALE

Worst Hurricane in City's History — Build-
ings Damaged, Docks Submerged and
People Driven From Homes By Water

Two Schooners at Sea Believed to Have Been Lost

Figure 6. More newspaper headlines and damage pictures from various Florida newspapers.

Links for more information:

<http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/general/lib/lib1/nhclib/mwreviews/1921.pdf>.

<http://www.baynews9.com/content/36/2009/10/22/536870.html>.

Acknowledgments: NOAA Monthly Weather Review 1921, The Tampa Morning Tribune, The St. Petersburg Times, The Tampa Daily Times, The Plant City Courier, and The Burgert Brothers Collection.