

THE CAYMAN ISLANDS - HISTORY OF SIGNIFICANT HURRICANES

1751 August – Cartographer George Gauld notes that the sea breached the coast near Pedro and crossed the Island in a remarkable hurricane.

1784 31st July – The Political Magazine reports a dreadful hurricane blew down all the houses in Grand Cayman except Mr. Eden's which was only unroofed. The provisions were totally destroyed.

1785 27th August - Historian George Hirst relays oral accounts of a storm so terrific in its force that it tore up all but one tree at South West Point. Every house except the stone house at Pedro was blown down. A tidal wave occurred and after the recession of the wave it was possible to walk on dry land from West Bay to South West Point. He adds that many lives were lost by the falling of houses and trees and also in the tidal wave. (Hirst got his information from oral accounts, and while it does appear there were indeed hurricanes in both 1784 and 1785 it is possible he is describing the effects of the 1784 hurricane)

1793 20th and 21st October - The West end of the island (Grand Cayman) was overflowed by the sea, and several houses washed away. At Boatswain's bay, every house was destroyed. The plantain walks and provision grounds, in general, are desolated, and such was the violence of the tempest, that the coconut trees were torn out by the roots. The inhabitants are in great distress for provisions, from this calamity, and look up to Jamaica for relief. A schooner belonging to Mess. Clark and Bodden of that island was lost in the gale, and two men drowned, one of whom was Wm. Davis (Source: The Royal Gazette, 21st December, 1793 Marine Intelligence Section)

1837 (x 2) “We (your Majesty's subjects of the Caymanas) suffering from two violent hurricanes on the 28th September and the 25th October, have now to entreat the sympathy and charitable consideration of

your Majesty's Government. By these visitations St. George's Church, has been blown down, the other (church) seriously injured; upward of 100 dwellings have been totally destroyed, and not a single one has entirely escaped injury. Out of 18 vessels belonging to the island, and by which the inhabitants draw their principal means of support, 13 have been wrecked; every plantation and provision ground utterly destroyed; and unless Christian sympathy be awakened and Christian benevolence extended, many of the inhabitants will be involved in the deepest and bitterest distress.” (Source: Memorial from the Custos, Magistrates, and Inhabitants of the Island of Grand Caymanas)

1846 October - On October 9th a fearful hurricane, almost unexampled for violence broke out and raged till the 12th, committing dreadful havoc at the Caymanas. The schooner the ‘Wave’ was lost in this hurricane and it was carrying the Reverend William Niven who had been sent by the Presbyterian Church in Jamaica to help get Rev. James Elmslie established in the Cayman Islands. (Source: Minutes of United Church Mission Board)

1876 12th to 17th October - “All the churches and most of the houses were totally destroyed while those that remained standing were so badly damaged they were scarcely habitable. All of the vessels in the different harbours were either driven ashore or broken up. Two schooners moored in Duck Pond in the Great [North] Sound parted their moorings and broke up on the outer reef. Some portions of them were found on the shore near the South Sound after the storm. “A large foreign ship drove ashore at West Bay, with masts, deck and cargo gone; evidently she had rolled over and over.” (Jamaica Gleaner)

1903 11th and 12th August - “The schooner Ready Call from East End brought first news of the terrible havoc wrought by the hurricane. The Captain reports that in what was once a populous district there are not three houses left standing and immense damage was done to coconut groves. The cyclone also visited Cayman Brac and Little Cayman,

inflicting considerable damage to property, and causing the loss of three lives. The schooner Active, which was anchored off West End of Cayman Brac, parted her moorings and capsized, two brothers named Yates, belonging to West Bay, Grand Cayman, and a Customs Officer named William Hurlston being drowned. Their bodies were cast ashore on Little Cayman. The vessels which were driven out to sea from George Town Bay have not been heard of and grave fears are entertained as to their safety (14 died on these vessels – J.H. O' Sullivan). At West bay two churches and fifty houses were destroyed.” (Jamaica Gleaner)

1909 24th August – The ‘Bertha,’ a Schooner from Cayman Brac was lost at sea with all hands. 12.32 inches of rain was recorded in East End in a 24 hours period. Roads were reported to be under 3 feet of water. The schooner Blomidon wrecked at Cottage near East End but no lives were lost in this wreck. (Commissioner George Hirst)

1910 12th and 13th October – Two Cayman Brac vessels (The ‘W. K. Merrit’ and the ‘William Bloomfield’) were lost with all hands. The Norwegian Barque, the ‘Pallas’ wrecked in South Sound but no lives were lost. Roads along the waterfront in George Town, Spotts and Red Bay were washed away. The roof of the West Bay school was carried away and the West Bay pier was demolished (Commissioner George Hirst)

1915 13th August – (Cayman Brac) “At about 11 a.m. we had the final gathering of the clouds which brought a dense darkness as of night all over the island. The destruction of everything then came and this was completed in about 10 minutes. Everything seemed as the end of time had come. After the great darkness cleared, it was a dreadful scene to behold, the earth strewn with fallen trees and the ruins of buildings. The waves rose up like mountains and swept the entire coast. What was not carried away by them was destroyed by the terrific winds. It was a

great astonishment that only two persons were killed; but a large number was injured. During the storm a large three-masted schooner called the 'Caroso' was thrown up against the east end of the Bluff which is about 140 feet in height. Pieces of the ship and cases of kerosene oil were found on the top of the Bluff 140 feet above the sea level after the storm." (Jamaica Gleaner)

1916 16th August - All the plantations destroyed on Little Cayman and Cayman Brac.

1917 24th September - "Hundreds of people rendered homeless, all forms of vegetation blown away and every vessel at the dependency either sent to the bottom or driven ashore. The unfortunate people, scores of whom are living in caves are facing starvation. The wind blew with the utmost fury, destroying a large number of houses and sweeping away wide areas of cultivation. Two lives were lost." (Commissioner Mr. A.C. Robinson)

1932 7th and 8th of November - The '32 hurricane was of outstanding violence and destruction and resulted in loss of 109 lives and the almost total demolition of houses on Cayman Brac. It began at 6 am on Monday, November 7 and lasted for 52 hours. The wind velocity was estimated at 150-200 mph, but it was the storm surge and waves that claimed most of the lives. (Colonial Report 1933)

1935 28th September - Houses destroyed on Cayman Brac.

1944 16th and 17th October - The velocity of the wind was estimated at 100 mph. Extensive damage to homes and Government buildings. The Government wharf at West Bay was destroyed and great destruction wrought to the front streets of Bodden Town, George Town and West Bay. All crops were completely destroyed. The schooners 'Albion,' 'Gravina,' 'Armstice' and Kirksons were wrecked.

1952 24th October - Hurricane Fox pounded Grand Cayman with 120 mph winds while moving up from the south.

1980 6th August - Hurricane Allen pounded Cayman Brac and Little Cayman with winds of 135 miles per hour. There were no casualties, but 17 houses were damaged and 70 per cent of the utility poles were down. Several government buildings and hotels were damaged.

1988 13th September - Hurricane Gilbert caused no loss of life, but severe damage occurred to crops, pastures, and trees. Some homes were also damaged.

2001 3rd November - Hurricane Michelle passed 130 miles away but the waves caused significant damage

2004 11th and 12th September - Hurricane Ivan tracked just to the south of Grand Cayman with winds of 155 mph. Storm surge was estimated at 8 to 10 feet. Many homes and businesses severely damaged. Two deaths in Grand Cayman.

2008 8th November - Hurricane Paloma hit Cayman Brac and Little Cayman with 140 mph winds resulting in extensive property damage, some injuries, but no deaths.

HAZARD MANAGEMENT CAYMAN ISLANDS

HISTORICAL HURRICANES 1751 - 2008

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