

# The Hurricane History of Coastal Virginia

## THE HURRICANE HISTORY OF COASTAL VIRGINIA

*(source: Norfolk Department of Emergency Services)*

Continuous weather records in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia go back to 1 January 1871, when the National Weather Service was established in downtown Norfolk. Prior to 1871, records of storms have been located in ships' logs, newspaper accounts, history books and other writings. The residents of colonial coastal Virginia were very much aware of the weather. They were a people who lived near the water and many derived their livelihood from the sea. To them, a tropical storm was a noteworthy event. The excellent records left by some of Virginia's early settlers and official records of the National Weather Service are summarized here.

## SEVENTEENTH AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

**1635** August 24 - First historical reference to a major hurricane that could have affected the Virginia coast.

**1667** September 6 - This hurricane may have caused the widening of the Lynnhaven River. The Bay rose 12 feet above normal and "many people had to flee".

**1693** October 29 - From the Royal Society of London, "There happened a most violent storm in Virginia, which stopped the course of ancient channels and made some where there never were any".

**1749** October 19 - Tremendous hurricane. A sand spit of 800 acres was washed up. and with the help of a hurricane in 1806 it became Willoughby Spit. The Bay rose 15 feet above normal.

Historical records list the following tropical storms as causing significant damage in Virginia: 1649, September 1761, October 1761, September 1769, September 1775, October 1783, September 1785, July 1788.



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## NINETEENTH CENTURY

**1806** August 23 - Called the "Great Coastal Hurricane of 1806".

**1821** September 3 - One of the most violent hurricanes on record.

**1846** September 8 - Hatteras and Oregon Inlets were formed.

**1876** September 17 - Average 5 minute wind speed at Cape Henry was 78 mph; 8.32 inches of rain.

**1878** October 23 - Cobb and Smith Islands on Eastern Shore were completely submerged. Average 5 minute wind at Cape Henry 84 mph. 18 lives lost when the A.S. DAVIS went ashore near VA Beach.

**1879** August 18 - Tide in Norfolk 7.67 feet above Mean Low Water. Average 5 minute wind at Cape Henry 76 mph; gusts estimated at 100 mph.

**1887** October 31 - Average 5 minute wind at Cape Henry 78 mph. The storm caused a record number of marine disasters.

**1893** August 23 - Average 5 minute wind speed at Cape Henry 88 mph.

**1897** October 25 - Lasted 60 hours. Tide in Norfolk 8 feet above Mean Low Water

**1899** October 31 - Average 5 minute wind at Cape Henry 72 mph. Tide in Norfolk reached 8.8 feet above Mean Low Water.

Noteworthy storms also occurred June 1825, August 1837, August 1850 and September 1856.

## TWENTIETH CENTURY

**1903** October 10 - Average 5 minute wind at Cape Henry 74 mph; tide in Norfolk reached nearly 9 ft. above Mean Low Water. One death.

**1924** August 26 - Average 1 minute wind 72 mph at Cape Henry. One death.

**1924** September 30 - Fastest 1 minute wind speed in Norfolk 76 mph.

**1926** August 22 - Average 1 minute speed at Cape Henry 74 mph.



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**1928** September 19 - Average 1 minute speed at Cape Henry 72 mph. Tide reached 7.06 feet above Mean Low Water in Norfolk. One death.

**1933** August 23 - **Record high tide for the area** -- 9.69 feet above Mean Low Water. 18 people died. Highest 1 minute wind speed in Norfolk was 70 mph, 82 mph at Cape Henry and 88 mph at NAS.

**1933** September 16 - Highest 1 minute wind was 88 mph at NAS Norfolk, 75 mph at the National Weather Service City Office and 87 mph at Cape Henry. Tide reached 8.15 feet above Mean Low Water.

**1936** September 18 - Highest 1 minute wind was 84 mph at Cape Henry and 68 mph in Norfolk. Tide reached 9.19 feet above Mean Low Water.

**1944** September 14 - Highest 1 minute wind was 134 mph at Cape Henry, the highest speed of record in the Hampton Roads area. Gusts estimated 150 mph. The NWS Office recorded 72 mph, gusts to 90 mph

In **1951** hurricanes began to be named according to the phonetic alphabet (Abel, Baker, Charlie, etc.). In 1953, it was decided to use women's names. Since 1979, both male and female names have been used.

**1953** August 14 - BARBARA - Highest 1 minute wind was 73 mph at Cape Henry, 63 mph with gusts to 76 mph at Norfolk Airport. One death.

**1954** October 15 - HAZEL - Highest 1 minute wind 78 mph at the Airport, the highest recorded at that location. Gusts estimated to be 100 mph. A reliable instrument in Hampton recorded 130 mph.

**1959** September 30 - GRACIE - Passed through western Virginia. 6.79 inches of rain in 24 hours.

**1960** September 12 - DONNA - Highest 1 minute wind at Norfolk Airport was 73 mph, 80 mph at Cape Henry and estimated 138 mph at the Chesapeake Light Ship. **The lowest pressure of 28.65 inches is the lowest ever recorded in a tropical storm.** Three deaths.

**1962** March 5-9 - ASH WEDNESDAY STORM - *Not a hurricane, the storm was the most massive northeaster in recorded East Coast history. From Florida to New Jersey, thirty-four deaths and more than \$200 million in property damage were reported.*

**1964** August 31 - CLEO - A storm noted for its rain, 11.40 inches in 24 hours, the heaviest 24 hour total since records began in 1871.

\***1964** September 13 -DORIA - Gales gusting to 61 mph. Tides 3 feet above normal.



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**\*1969** August 16 - CAMILLE

**\*1971** September 29- GINGER

**1972** June 23 - AGNES

**1979** September 5 - DAVID - Passed through central Virginia but spawned 2 severe tornadoes here - one in Newport News and one in Hampton.

**1985** September 27 - GLORIA - Passed 45 miles east of Cape Henry. Highest 1 minute wind WNW 46 mph. Tide 5.2 feet above Mean Low Water, rainfall 5.65 inches. Total VA damage \$5.5 million dollars.

**1986** August 17 - CHARLEY - Highest 1 minute wind NNE 40 mph, gusts E 63 mph at the Airport; Cape Henry NE 54 mph, gusts to 82 mph. Tide 5.4 feet above Mean Low Water. One death in Northampton Co.

**1991** August 19 - BOB -

**1992** September 25 - DANIELLE -

**1993** August 31 - EMILY -

**\*1994** November - GORDON -

\* = The effects of the hurricane were felt in coastal Virginia, although the storm did not hit us directly.

