



Hurricanes in Corpus Christi



Photograph of several people clearing the rubble caused by the 1919 storm around the Corpus Christi Railway and Light Company.

Photograph of several people clearing the rubble caused by the 1919 storm around the C.C. Railway and Light Company. (Unidentified Photographer, "Photograph of several people clearing the rubble caused by the 1919 storm around the Corpus Christi Railway and Light Company.," South Texas Stories, accessed April 26, 2018, <http://omeka.tamucc.edu/SouthTexasStories/items/show/8>. TAMUCC Special Collections & Archives.)

By Joshua William Featherstone

In the past 125 years, 3 major hurricanes have impacted the city of the Corpus Christi in such a way that leaders in the city had to redesign precautions for safeguarding the lives and beauties of a city tied to the water.

1919

On September 14th, 1919 only after a day's warning, a category 3 storm thrashed South Texas, with heavy rains and high storm surge. Tides washed away nearly 23 blocks of homes. In the aftermath, 284 bodies were pulled from the city.^[1] Because of the destruction, calls for an engineering project regained steam. The project spent many years in hiatus as it required funding until the late 1930's when the sitting mayor sought to protect port of Corpus Christi and the surrounding residencies with a Seawall. Building began in 1939 composing of a set of concrete steps, providing the wall more strength to bear the force of waves. By 1940, 21 years after the storm of 1919, the seawall was completed.^[2]

Celia

On August 1st, 1970 a tropical depression entered the Gulf of Mexico and rapidly gained strength and intensified into a major hurricane. According to a *National Hurricane Center* meteorologist *Robert Simpson's* preliminary report, "...Celia swirled on a steady west north-west course aimed at the Corpus Christi area like a wild beast stalking its prey."^[3] Winds up to 130 miles per hour ripped through Nueces County from the category 3 storm, causing devastation that left hundreds injured from flying glass along with 15 dead.^[4]

The storm's destruction was so rampant, the name "Celia" was retired by the World Meteorological Organization as a future name for storms. As the city rebuilt, numerous facets of societies modified the way that storms were handled along the coast. Most homeowners' insurance policies in the 1970's refused to write insurance for areas considered "high-risk", which included the Texas coast. After Celia, the state government formed *The Texas Catastrophe Property Insurance Association*, known today as *The Texas Windstorm Insurance Association*.^[5] Although the city of Corpus Christi had been

spared of severe damage since the dawn of the 21st century. A multitude of near misses battered the seawalls, nothing would compare to Harvey.

Harvey

Hurricane Harvey originated as a westward tropical wave that emerging from the eastern Atlantic. The storm slowly developed and became a tropical storm on August 17th, 2017, moving westward. Though Harvey was weakened, the system continued to traverse the Yucatán Peninsula. Late on August 23rd, the remnants of Harvey regenerated into a tropical cyclone and retained tropical storm-level intensity. After becoming a hurricane on August 24th, Harvey continued to quickly strengthen over the next day, ultimately reaching peak intensity as a Category 4 hurricane.^[6] On the morning of August 26th, Harvey made landfall east of Rockport, with winds of 130 mph. After going back out to sea, it made a second landfall on the Texas mainland three hours later in a weaker state. For about two days the storm stalled inland, dropping heavy rainfall and causing widespread flash-flooding. Once offshore, Harvey struggled against strong wind, before making its third and final landfall in Louisiana. The Storm and the following days of evacuation and rescue throughout Texas resulted in the loss of 68 lives, the highest number in the state since 1919.^[7]

Through all the energy of hurricane Harvey, Corpus Christi was left standing. As daylight broke, residents reported seeing downed trees, buildings with siding ripped off, mangled street signs and broken windows. The continued succession of city planners and leaders not only allowed citizens to weather even the most extreme of storms, but to also rebuild and regrow indefinitely, as a pearl of the Gulf of Mexico.

[1] Gray, W. Richard. 1919. "Monthly Weather Review September 1919." National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Web site. September. Accessed March 21, 2018. <http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/general/lib/lib1/nhclib/mwreviews/1919.pdf>.

[2] O' Rear, Mary Jo. 2017. *Bulwark Against the Bay: The People of Corpus Christi and Their Seawall* (Gulf Coast Books. Austin: Texas A&M University Press.

[3] Robert H, Simpson. 1970. " Preliminary Report Celia. National Hurricane Center." The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. March 14. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/storm_wallets/cdmp/dvd0033-jpg/1970/atlantic/celia/prenhc/2.01.jpg.

[4] National Weather Service. n.d. "National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration." Hurricane Celia - August 3, 1970. Accessed March 29, 2018. <https://www.weather.gov/crp/hurricanecelia>.

[5] Cunningham, Atlee M. 1973. "Hurricane Procedures in Corpus Christi, Tex." *Journal (American Water Works Association)* 474-477.

[6] Zelinsky, David A, and Eric S. Blake. 2018. "Hurricane Harvey." National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report. January 23. Accessed April 3, 2018. https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL092017_Harvey.pdf.

[7] South Texas Economic Development Center Publications. 2018. "Harvey's Impact on Corpus Christi." South Texas Economic Development Center Publications. Accessed April 3, 2018. <https://stedc.atavist.com/harveys-impact-on-corpus-christi>.

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