



Great Gale of 1848 Pounds Tampa Bay

Fact Sheet

Event date: September 23 - 28, 1848
Estimated Maximum Winds: 135 mph

Minimum Pressure: 28.18 in (954 mb)
Population of Tampa Bay: ~1,000

Summary of Event:

At 11:00 a.m. [the barometric pressure] stood at 30.12. Three hours later it bottomed out at 28.18. By then water, which, "at one time rose five feet in fifteen minutes," stood fifteen feet above the mean low watermark.

Likely, Egmont Key lighthouse keeper Sherrod Edwards, his son and apprentice lighthouse keeper Marvel Edwards and his family knew first the dangers in store for Tampa Bay residents. The tide rose so quickly at the key that two feet of water surrounded Edwards' home before he realized the need to take action. Having few options in his isolated location, Edwards did what he could to protect his loved ones. "He placed his family in his boat and waded with it to the middle of the island," recalled pioneer John A. Bethell, "and secured it to the palmettos until the gale was over."

Mr. Allen, "remained in his house till the lower story gave way, sliding the upper one down to a level with the water in which he was obliged to wade up to his arm pits some distance in order to reach dry land."

Nancy Jackson, "snatched her babe [in her] arms [and a] man steadied her down the steps, lest she be blown off her feet, she entreated him to return and save if possible, a trunk which contained money and valuables. But before he could re-enter the house it was struck by the heavy timbers of the 'ways' and knocked off its foundation and sent whirling into the raging waves like a spinning top and in an incredibly short time was out of sight down the bay."

Juliet Axtell, a survivor of the storm, recalled, "Our house was blown down in part, and the waters from the bay swept around it in fearful violence. We escaped from it in the midst of the fearful tempests," she continued, "the roofs of buildings flying round us and the tempest raging at such a rate that we were unable to keep our feet or wear any extra clothing, such as a shawl, to protect us from the piercing rain."

Links for more information:

http://www.lib.usf.edu/lds/digitalcollections/S57/journal/v24n1_98/v24n1_98_039.pdf

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