

The Great Colonial Hurricane

Pemaquid, Maine, August 15, 1635 — The winds whipped up to 130 mph, snapping trees like pick-up sticks and blowing houses into oblivion. A surge of water 21 feet high at its crest, engulfing victims as they desperately scurried for higher ground.

A merciless storm, pounding the coast for hours with torrential sheets of rain, was like nothing ever seen before. One observer predicted the damage would linger for decades.

This was the hurricane that welcomed the Angel Gabriel ship with our patriarch **Ralph Blaisdell** and family on board after a 10 week ocean crossing from Bristol, England. So strong were the winds that it took all day to tack from Monhegan Island to Pemaquid Point August 14.

Damage reports

The full force of the hurricane hit the next morning. The Angel Gabriel “was burst in pieces and cast away in the storm, and most of the cattle and other goods with one seaman and three or four passengers did also perish therein,” wrote **Richard Mather** in his diary.

Down the coast in Massachusetts Bay on Marvil Head 23 colonists and seamen had been swept into the sea and perished, except one man and his wife, who survived to report the news.

Reports at the time said 17 American Indians were drowned, while others scaled trees to find refuge. **John Winthrop** wrote that eight American Indians were sucked under the rising water while “flying from their wigwams.” Hurricanes were a foreign phenomenon to these Europeans. Their fears of death were reinforced when a lunar eclipse followed.

Recent Research Conclusions

Nicholas Coch, professor of geology, Queens College, and a hurricane expert, said, “It nearly knocked out British culture in America.” Last year he gathered data from colonial journals to reconstruct “The Great Colonial Hurricane.”

The data was brought to **Brian Jarvinen** at the National Hurricane Center, where it was interpreted by SLOSH (Sea, Lake, and Overland Surges from Hurricanes) computer model. The conclusion: it was a Category 3 hurricane, moving at 30+ mph on this path: the tip of Long Island-Providence-Boston-Pemaquid.

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