

# Storms Unleashed

## Death, Destruction

Talk about unforgettable girls!

We'll never forget Connie and Diane. Especially Diane.

They're not memorable because of their good looks or dynamite personalities.

Quite the contrary.

These were two hurricanes which moved inland in August of 1955 and crept up the East Coast. First Connie, then Diane unleashed deluge after deluge until the saturated earth could take no more.

Suddenly, those pretty, lazy streams in the Poconos — the ones with the picturesque names like Brodhead, Bushkill, McMichaels, Lackawaxen — and those in New Jersey — the Paulinskill, Pequest and Equinunk — roaring rivers plundering everything in their paths.

This surge of water was transferred to the parent stream — the Delaware, which rose to a historic high, spilling over its banks.

Night turned to day and on Aug. 19 the full impact of what had happened began to be understood.

Eighty persons died in The Express area — almost all of them in the Poconos.

The most tragic incident was at Camp Davis, a Baptist Bible camp built along the floodplain of the Brodhead Creek some five miles north of Stroudsburg.

Nearly 40 adults and children perished when the Brodhead slammed into and carried away the camp almost without warning. Only nine campers survived that ordeal.

In the "flats" section of East Stroudsburg, people were trapped in their homes and drowned. Four women drowned at the Day Street fire hall where they had been playing bingo.

The most heavily concentrated loss of property was at the Forks of the Delaware — where the Delaware and the Lehigh meet in Easton and Phillipsburg and where more than 80,000 persons were crowded in the narrow valleys right to the rivers' edge.

In Easton alone, property damage topped \$20 million. The 60-year-old Northampton Street free bridge which connected Easton and Phillipsburg withstood for nearly a day the battering of debris which had piled around its underpinnings — some of it crashing into the bridge at speeds of up to 60 miles an hour.

Then the steel girders gave way and the past interstate link within 25 miles was broken. The Bushkill Street toll bridge had been closed earlier by water on the approaches.

Bridges all along the Delaware gave up the ghost. A slice of history floated into the raging Delaware when the covered foot bridge at Portland, built in 1869, broke into splintered fragments.

Up and down the Delaware Valley came reports of valor and heroism. Perhaps the great and unquenchable spirit of the people was best characterized by residents in the village of Carpentersville in Pohatcong Township, which almost was destroyed by the flood.

After viewing the wreckage in their community they vowed to build a better community. They did.

The great lesson to come from the chaos of the flood of '55 was the need for adequate flood control. Today, 20 years later, some flood control measures have been taken — several dams have been built on the tributaries of the Delaware, the Francis E. Walter flood control dam has been built near White Haven on the Lehigh River and floodplain zoning measures are being enacted in both states.

The proposed Tocks Island Dam, envisioned as the answer to flood control along the Delaware, and steeped in controversy for 13 years apparently will not be built.

Alternatives will be sought. The need for flood control exists just as much today as it did 20 years ago when Connie and Diane came to town.