

BLACK FRIDAY

August 19th, 1955

Over the course of four days in August of 1955, tropical storms Connie and Diane dumped 14 inches of torrential rain on CT and other states along the eastern seaboard. In Winsted, streams and riverbeds became overwhelmed from years of accumulated debris and caused the Mad and Still rivers to overflow. Highland Lake water raged over the spillways and heavily damaged everything in its path. The force washed away streets, sidewalks, buildings, bridges, electrical lines, sewer pipes, and water mains. Floodwater reached as high as 16 feet along Main Street, 7 people lost their lives, and many businesses and homes were damaged or destroyed.

When the Mad River finally receded, it left behind silt, mud, and massive destruction. All buildings on the river side of Main Street were eventually demolished - from Division to Oak Streets. State and federal agencies, as well as a score of volunteers, pulled together to bring Winsted back from disaster, but the massive cleanup effort took nearly 5 years to complete.

The G&LH Room has many resources on the Flood of 1955. Please contact the genealogy assistant for a complete list of materials.

In Memoriam

Winsted Victims of the 1955 Flood

John M. Gould - Age 28

Drowned while alerting others to evacuate.

William A. Samele - Age 56

His building washed away while he watched a rescue.

Mary C. Machrone - Age 46

Drowned when her rescue boat hit a bridge.

Maney Leshay - Age 67

Drove his car into the Still River where a bridge had washed out.

Sinclair Meggison - Age 52

Was found in the Hotel Clifton, which had been torn from its foundation and carried down Main Street.

Concettena Zappula - Age 58

Refused to leave her home near the Still River.

Josephine Cornelio - Age 49

The boat in which she was being rescued capsized.



Black Friday, August 19th, 1955

By Verna Gilson, Genealogy Assistant

Over the course of four days in August of 1955, tropical storms Connie and Diane dumped 14-inches of torrential rain on CT. In Winsted, streams and riverbeds were overwhelmed from accumulated debris, and water from Highland Lake raged over the spillways and flowed down towards Main Street. When the water converged, a tidal wave tore up blacktop, concrete, electrical lines, sewer pipes, and water mains – virtually everything in its path.

Floodwater reportedly reached as high as 16-feet along Main Street, destroying or damaging factories, businesses, municipal structures, tenements, and houses. Bridges over the Mad and Still Rivers were damaged beyond repair and many people were left homeless and without work as a result of the disaster. Tragically, seven lives were lost.

When the flood water eventually receded, it left silt, mud, and destruction in its wake. The municipal losses in Winsted alone totaled \$30,123,190. The threat of weakened foundations prompted the Board of Selectmen to order that all flood damaged structures along the Mad River, from Division to Oak Streets, be condemned. Today's four-lane highway is evidence of their decision.

One hundred seventy out of two hundred businesses located parallel to the Mad and Still Rivers were destroyed by the flood. Though some resumed operations, the majority suffered such tremendous losses that opening was out of the question. The Genealogy & Local History Room has a listing of the businesses and organizations that existed along Main Street, prior to the flood. This list reveals what a tremendous impact the flood had on Winsted's economy and everyday life.

State and federal agencies, as well as a score of volunteers, pulled together to bring Winsted back from disaster after the flood. The massive cleanup effort took nearly 5 years to complete.