



*A Herald Exclusive*

## **It's Been Fifty Years: Remembering the Deadly Flood of 1955**

August 18 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of one of the Delaware Valley's most destructive weather events ever: the Delaware River flood of 1955. Starting this week and ending with our August 18 issue, the Herald is recognizing this anniversary with an exclusive, five-part series about how this disaster happened and the lasting effects it had on our area.

The series is written by Herald columnist and freelance writer Mary Shafer. She has written a book about the event, *Devastation on the Delaware: Stories and Images of the Deadly Flood of 1955*. The book is due to be published on October 1, but can be pre-ordered now at the book's website, <http://www.55flood.com>.

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### **Devastation on the Delaware: Part II**

#### **August 18, 1955 The Poconos – From Paradise to Purgatory**

by Mary Shafer

Diane was a more compact hurricane than her sister, Connie, had been. At one time a Category 3 storm, she had dwindled by the time she reached the Delaware Valley

to a mere tropical depression. She was still capable of producing gusts into the 60 m.p.h. range, but for the most part, wind wasn't the issue. The danger from Diane was the immense amount of moisture she had absorbed while over an abnormally warm ocean for several weeks before making landfall.



Several meteorological and geographic features combined to set up the remnants of this hurricane as a kind of inland “perfect storm.” First, Diane traveled, unexpectedly, not in the track Connie had taken just five days earlier, but forged her own path directly over the top of the Delaware Valley. This ensured that all her rain would concentrate in the river’s watershed.

Second, a low-pressure system had moved down overnight from the northwest, which had the effect of stalling the center of the storm almost directly over Mt. Pocono. The mountain’s steep sides would shed all the runoff into valleys below. Third, the storm stalled on the eastern side of the Pocono mountain range, creating a situation called “orographic enhancement.” This happens when such a vertical landscape feature causes repetitive cold updrafts of air that intensify the cycle of moisture condensation into rain.

All these things, on top of the ground already saturated by Connie’s rain, set the stage for record flooding in the region.

It rained all day on Thursday, August 18, the entire length of the Delaware Valley. People in the Pocono region would later describe the precipitation not in terms of raindrops, but more as plump pellets that exploded on surfaces as they fell. Later in the day, this form would intensify into solid sheets of water like those from a bucket being dumped. This went on for hours, dumping almost eleven inches on Mt. Pocono, and similar amounts nearby.

One of the largest of the Delaware's tributaries, the Brodhead Creek, runs through small resort towns like Henryville, Canadensis and the Stroudsburgs before emptying into the river at the Water Gap near Shawnee. These were the locations that saw the most horrific destruction and loss of life in the flood.



From about eight o'clock through nearly midnight, the Brodhead tore through homes and vacation cottages along its banks in an unprecedented rampage. Many unsuspecting Pocono visitors and residents were washed from their beds in the middle of the night. One particular church camp, Davis Cabins, was completely wiped from the face of the earth. Of forty-six people in the camp at eleven o'clock, when the Brodhead rose thirty feet in fifteen minutes, only nine survived.

Many bodies were recovered far downstream, one as far as Manunka Chunk Island near Belvidere, New Jersey. Some have never been found. Monroe County would suffer the greatest single loss of life—74 people and countless animals—of the whole flood event.

But Diane wasn't finished with her destruction. The Brodhead and all the other tributaries were feeding their volume into the Delaware. All that water was heading south, and those living along its banks would soon learn that the beauty of river living comes with a price.

*Next week: River on the Rampage*