

Windsor Locks Catastrophes

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1. Introduction

While it is interesting and informative to read the happy portions of history, it is also useful, on occasion, to review the bad things that have happened - the catastrophes. This article reviews four categories of such events that have occurred in the last Century in Windsor Locks:

- Natural Disasters (tornados, floods, hurricanes)
- Airplane accidents
- Railroad accidents
- Fires

2. Natural Disasters

2.1 - 1979 Tornado

On October 3, 1979, a tornado struck the area around Turnpike Road, near Bradley Field. It caused three deaths and 500 injuries. It was the ninth most destructive tornado in American history. There were no tornado watches or warnings issued before it struck. An American Airlines flight with 114 passengers was about to land as the tornado was passing the airport but the pilot was able to abort the landing in time. The tornado then hit the section of the airport where the New England Air Museum is located. More than 20 vintage aircraft were completely destroyed and many others were seriously damaged. Damage totals from the tornado were around \$200M in 1979 dollars. 65 homes were destroyed and more than 75 more were damaged. The winds reached 87 mph. (Wikipedia - "Windsor Locks Tornado"). Below you will find the front page of the Oct. 4, 1979 Morning Union newspaper from Springfield, Mass. While the words on the front page article are not readable, the photos and headlines indicate how bad the tornado was. That is followed by a photo of mangled aircraft at the Air Museum and a photo of badly damaged homes.

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By PHILIP M. MORTIMER, JR.

1999



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84. www.irs.gov

1999

[illegible]

A tornado touched its way through northern Connecticut Wednesday killing one person and injuring 600. Driven by 60 mph-per-hour winds, the twister leveled portions of Bradley International Airport, collapsed houses and ripped down trees.

Nature's fury

My farm	
Black on sight	PAGE 12
Following path	
from the air	PAGE 12
Tornado took	
everyone by surprise	PAGE 12
air masses	
formed in clouds	PAGE 12
Twister wreaked	
Western Mass.	PAGE 12

Converted Health Commissioners Dr. Douglas Lloyd said 88 people were treated and released from hospital and emergency rooms in the area and another 10 were hospitalized, including 1 in critical condition.

In northern Connecticut the storm dropped two inches of rain within an hour, driven by the high winds.

The case shows brightly colored stains on the Western Massachusetts where heavy storm damage was concentrated in West Springfield and Agawam. There were no official reports the water touched there in West Springfield. Much of Western Massachusetts was hit by severe flooding of streets and roads, materials strewn in water-damaged areas and damage to houses in West Springfield and Agawam. About 4.5 million Western Massachusetts homes were hit.

The odd wine having whatever that there is at the (Shady) field as before in the second lot," and the

See 400-751000
Page 30

DOI: 10.1002/for

Paul D. drawing the largest share of the U.S. tax, spoke so strongly Wednesday against an extension of marriage and defended private pensions as a business that would be "more

John Ford collected an entire War of 1812 story from a militia captain. He frequently evoked Philadelphia's feelings in the aftermath of American War's ending. "I'm truly among friends" in the title of *Washington* (1915).

The crowd that gathered in front of the streets closed it to downtown Philadelphia gave John Paul a rousing welcome on the third day of his tour. Paul and his band performed for hours and interrupted the beauty of the

The pope said freedom for the individual is a state that exists only when "he is the master of his own actions, when he is capable of choosing that good which is in conformity with reason and therefore

One view is morally and all have one thing in common: recourse to the use of violence to justify any behavior that is no longer consistent with the moral order and the teaching of the church."

The pope said his remarks applied to the whole matter of conjugal morality — not outside of marriage, as is the case in the eyes of the Catholic Church — and to the primary obligation of celibacy.

where school children presented the
with the prize and a 70-cent discount
with the city's "Big Apple" brand, and
the good things in America's most
great within a year of the Statue of
Liberty.

A crowd of 30,000 greeted the pope as he arrived in Philadelphia, including 1,000 Catholic school children who cheered him as he walked to his house.



Bradley Air Museum aircraft after 1979 Tornado



1979 Tornado destroyed houses

2.2 - 2013 Tornado

On July 1, 2013, Windsor Locks was hit by a second tornado that came in from Windsor, where it picked up a lot of tobacco netting and dropped it in Windsor Locks. An EF1-category twister tore through the area of Windsor Locks and East Windsor between 1:30 and 1:45 p.m. Monday. According to the National Weather Service, the tornado reached wind speeds of up to 86 mph, was up to 200 yards wide and traveled 2.5 miles. The EF1 tornado knocked down trees and power lines, scattering tobacco cloth, and removing siding from houses. Damage was concentrated in the areas of East Windsor, Windsor Locks and Fairfield County. Information from: <http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/Tornado-Warning-in-Effect-for-Fairfield-County-213843351.html>



Damage from July 1, 2013 Windsor Locks Tornado.

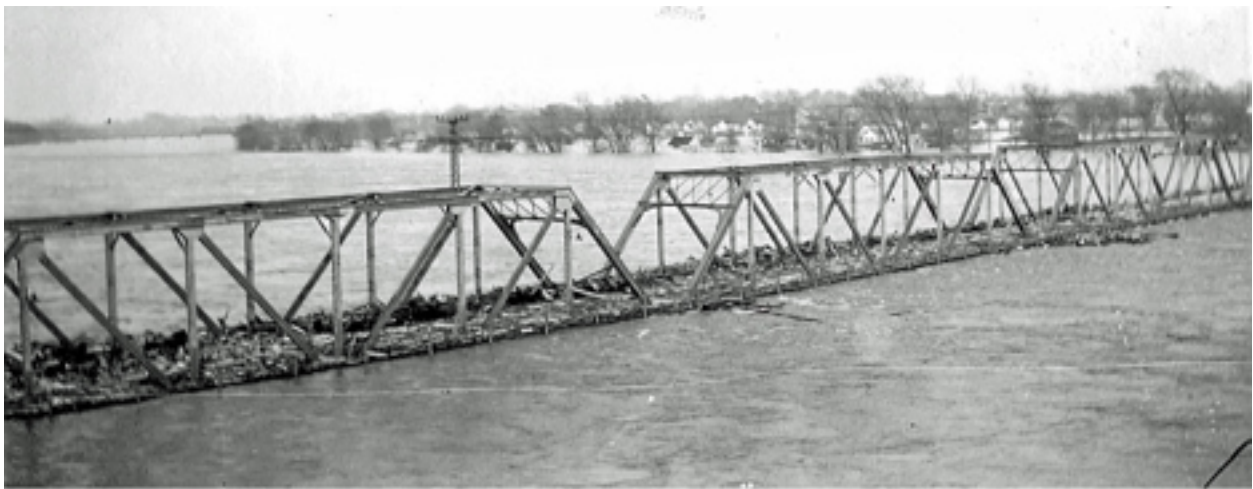
2.2 - Flood of March 1936

The 1936 flood was devastating to communities along its banks. Spring came early and caused the frozen Connecticut River to break up in to huge chunks of ice which dammed the river. When the massive dam burst, the banks of the river flooded towns and farms. Businesses, bridges, homes and roads were destroyed. Thousands were left homeless. Windsor Locks was hit hard, as the following photos show. In the next photo, notice the height of the flood water on the Montgomery building and its outbuildings.



Montgomery building during 1936 flood

In the following photo, the water has gone over the roadway on the bridge. The photo after the flooded bridge shows the Windsor Locks fire truck on a flooded street.



Windsor Locks Bridge during 1936 flood



Windsor Locks Fire Truck during 1936 Flood

2.3 - 1938 Hurricane

The 1938 hurricane was a strong Category 3 with peak wind gusts of 186 mph. Over 600 people in New England were killed was the worst hurricane to strike New England in the last 200 years. The damage in Windsor Locks was enormous, as the following article from the Springfield Republican newspaper shows.

Windsor Locks Hard Hit
Windsor Locks, Ct., provided a vivid story of the struggle against floodwaters. There the canal overflowed its east bank, pouring into the basements of the Medlicott company, C. H. Dexter & Sons and others. As waters rose, the east bank of the canal was finally dynamited north of the American Writing Paper company to allow the water to flow into the river, saving dynamos and machinery at other plants. The south end of the town was flooded and residents forced to leave as waters rose within two feet of the 1936 record. Damage from hurricane was estimated at \$250,000, with tremendous and unestimated losses from the flood. Electricity was restored to the business section yesterday and the Hartford-Springfield road was cleared. Phone service was almost nonexistent.

Springfield Republican
 Sept. 24, 1938 on Flooding

Please note in this article that it was the canal that overflowed its East bank, pouring water into the Montgomery building. Thus, any future attempts to keep the river from overflowing will have to be augmented by methods of keeping the canal from overflowing its banks. In the following photograph, you can see the flooding up against the Montgomery building. The photograph after that clearly shows the flood waters above the roadway on the bridge to Warehouse Point.



Windsor Locks, Connecticut, after 1938 hurricane.



Bridge after 1938 hurricane. Windsor Locks, CT

The following photos show the damages caused by wind during the hurricane.



Freight Station after 1938 hurricane

2.4 - Windsor Locks Flood of 1955

Hurricane Connie dropped 5-10" of rain in portions of northwest Connecticut on Aug 12, 1955. Connie barely produced any wind in Connecticut as it moved to the West but it dropped enough rain to saturate the soil and raise river levels above flood stage. Five days after Connie, Hurricane Diane dropped 10"- 20" of rain in Connecticut. When preceded by Connie's 5-10" of rain, Diane's record 24 hour rainfall was enough to push rivers to levels that hadn't been seen in hundreds of years. In Windsor Locks, Hurricane Connie dropped 7.74" of rain, and then Hurricane Diane dropped 10.86" for a total of 18.42" in five days.

Information from: <http://www.ryanhanrahan.com/flood-of-august-1955/>

The greatest damage from these two hurricanes was greatest in Connecticut, where floods affected about two-thirds of the state. **It was the largest flood on record in the state's history.** All major streams and valleys were flooded during the storm. The Connecticut River at Hartford reached the third-highest level on record at the time, cresting at 30.6 ft. above flood stage. Although there was rural damage, **the city of Hartford was spared from flooding due to previously constructed dykes.**

Information from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Diane

Please note that the bold print in previous paragraph was added here for emphasis.

2.5 - Windsor Locks Flood of 1984

The New York Times, on May 31, 1984, said: “The hardest-hit area was Connecticut, where forecasters said the flooding could turn out to be the worst in 30 years. The Connecticut River was expected to hit 28 feet at Hartford, 12 feet above flood stage, and officials said it would probably keep rising. In 1955, in one of the worst floods on record, the Connecticut crested at 30.5 feet.”

At the end of River Rd. in Windsor Locks, there is a pole on which the heights of previous flood levels are posted. It can be seen in the next photo that the four highest levels ever recorded were floods of 1936, 1938, 1984 and 1955. Those were in order of descending height. The 1984 and 1955 floods were just about the same height. The following photo of the pole showing the heights of past floods in Windsor Locks shows that what the New York Times predicted, actually came to be. The height of the flood of 1984 was about the same height as the flood of 1955, which was the third highest on record in Windsor Locks. There is another shorter pole, closer to the river which also lists notable high water marks of: April 2005, April 1996, April 1993, June 1989, May 2001, and July 1973. It is worth noting that these tend to occur in Spring or in the beginning of Summer.



Flood height levels, River Rd. Windsor Locks

3. Airplane Accidents

There have been three airplane accidents in Windsor Locks since 1950. The following list was developed by Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradley_International_Airport#Accidents_and_incidents

3.1 - 1953 Crash into Terrain

On March 4, 1953, a [Slick Airways Curtiss-Wright C-46 Commando](#) N4717N on a cargo flight from [New York-Idlewild Field](#) crashed. Bradley was experiencing light rain and a low ceiling at the time of the incident. After being cleared to land on Runway 06, the pilot reported problems intercepting the [localizer](#), and continued to circle down to get under the weather. The plane struck trees approximately 1.6 miles (2.6 km) southwest of the airport, killing the crew of two.

3.2 - 1971 Crash on Approach

On July 16, 1971, a [Douglas C-47B](#) N74844 of New England Propeller Service crashed on approach. The aircraft was on a ferry flight to [Beverly Municipal Airport, Massachusetts](#) when an engine lost power shortly after take-off due to water in the fuel. At the time of the accident, the aircraft was attempting to return to Bradley Airport.

3.4 - 1991 Fire on Take-off

On May 3, 1991, a [Ryan International](#) (wet-leased by Emery Worldwide) [Boeing 727-100QC](#), N425EX, caught fire during take-off. The take-off was aborted and the three crew members escaped, but the aircraft was destroyed by the fire. The fire was determined to have started in the number 3 engine.

For anyone who wants to learn more about the early years of Bradley Field, Tom Palshaw wrote a book called: "Bradley Field: The First 25 Years". Bradley Field began in 1941 as a military air base. Given its nature as a flight training base, there were accidents. Palshaw describes them.

4. Train Crashes

4.1 - 1852 Train derailment

The following is from the New York Times (Nov. 1, 1852)

Springfield, Saturday, Oct. 30.

When the express train from New York was passing over the Canal bridge at Windsor Locks, one of the rails broke and the last car, containing about eighteen

passengers, fell into the canal. The last three cars ran off the track when the rail gave way, breaking up their trucks and tearing up the track. The last car ran into the canal, in about twelve feet of water, and was broken all to pieces.

Two persons were known to have been drowned. They were brothers, who had unexpectedly returned from California, and were going to surprise their wives. Their bodies have been recovered.

4.2 - Windsor Locks Man Hit/Killed by Amtrak Train - July 2011

The Windsor Locks - East Windsor Patch described it as follows:

A Windsor Locks man riding a bicycle on Route 140 was struck and killed by an Amtrak train early Saturday afternoon, according to an Amtrak spokesperson. Amtrak identified the man as 44-year-old David Balazs.

Several witnesses have told police that the gates and bells were fully functioning at the time of the accident, said Amtrak spokesperson Christina Leeds. Leeds confirmed that the train involved in the 11:48 a.m. incident was train No. 460, a connecting service off of Amtrak's Northeast regional train service from New Haven to Springfield. According to Leeds, the train terminated its route just north of the Windsor Locks station at the intersection of Main Street and Bridge Street.

There were no reported injuries to any of the 35 passengers onboard the train, Leeds said. All passengers were evacuated from the train and bussed to their final destination in Springfield.

<http://patch.com/connecticut/windsorlocks/windsor-locks-man-hit-killed-by-amtrack-train>

5. Fires.

5.1 ABC Market - fire in 1925

When the ABC market burned down, it was replaced by the Brown Derby. See the following photograph of the ABC Market, which was taken before the fire.



ABC Market

The market on Main Street was a partnership of 'Red' Ambrosetti, Frank Barberi, and John B. Colli. Mr. Ambrosetti was the grocer and Mr. Barberi and Mr. Colli were the butchers. This photo was taken in 1923. The business was a total loss after a 1925 fire. The site was rebuilt as the Brown Derby, which stood until redevelopment.

Photo courtesy of Jenny Colli, J. B. Colli's daughter.

Joe (Red) Ambrosetti's Market, Main St., Windsor Locks, CT 1923

5.2 - Blanche's Bowling Alley and the Princess Theater

The Princess Movie Theater was on the upper floor of the Bowling Alley. Here is an early photo of the building, followed by one of the fire.



Ferrari family in front of Blanche's Bowling Alley, Grove St. 1926



*Blanche's Bowling Alley Burns. Grove St.
Princess Theater was on top floor.*



Blanche's Bowling Alley after the fire.

5.3 - Bidwell's Lumber Yard fire 1958

Here are two photos of the fire at Bidwell Lumber Yard. The first was taken during the fire, and the second was taken after it.



Bidwell Lumber Fire - 1958



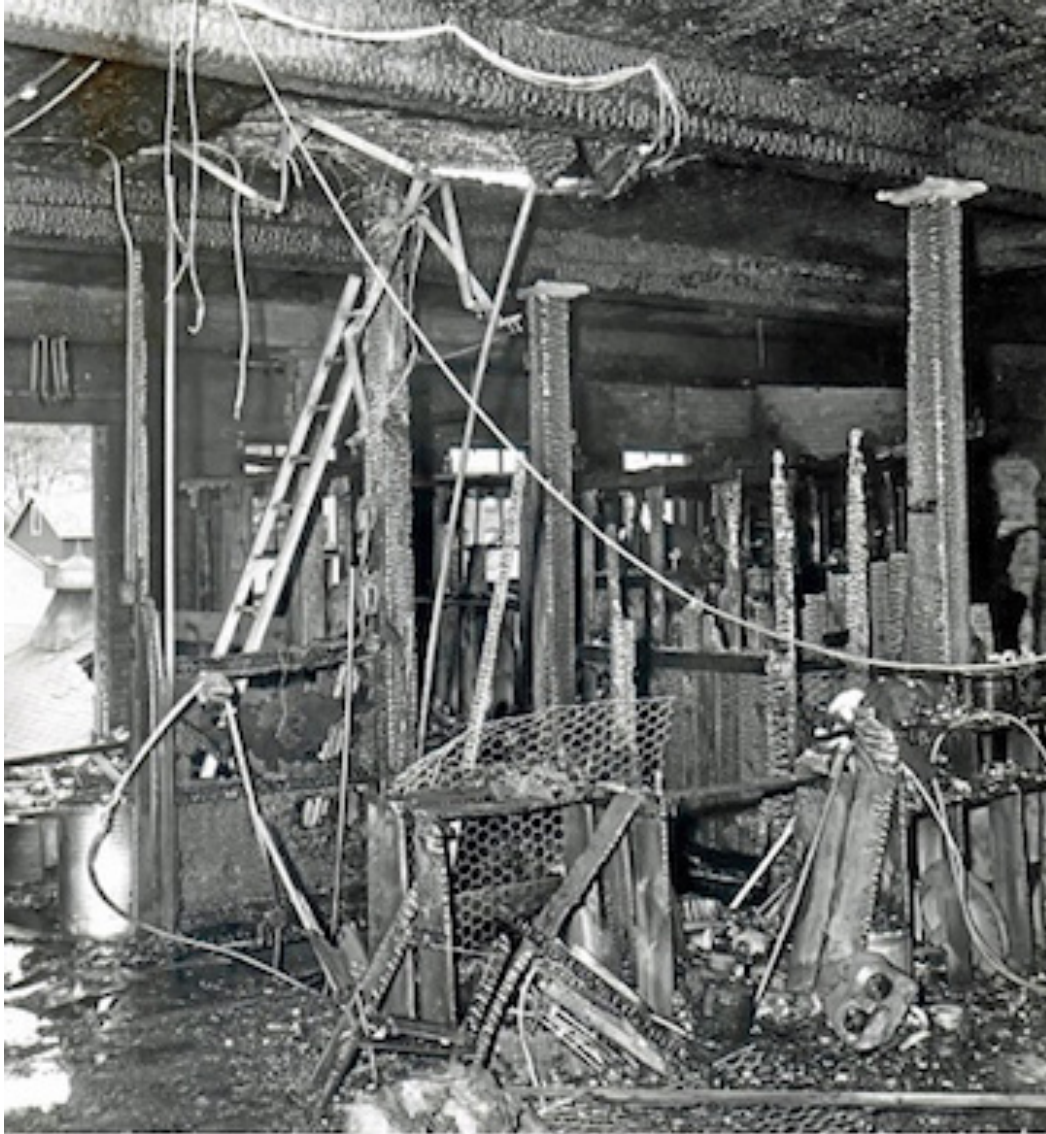
Bidwell Lumber Co. fire, 1958

5.4 - Bidwell's Block Fire 1960

This fire was reported by a telephone operator in the Telephone Company building on Spring St. at about 3AM. She said that she saw the building hit by a bolt of lightning. Two firemen were hurt while battling the blaze. The newspaper clipping describes the fire. The photo shows the aftermath of the fire in one of the upper rooms of the building.



Hartford Times, Sept. 20, 1960,



Bidwell Block fire, 1960

5.5 - Shonty's 1967 Fire

The paragraph under the second photo tells the story. Following are three photos. They are of Shonty's before the fire, during the fire and after the fire. The entire block of buildings from Grove St to the driveway going up to Coly's Hotel was destroyed, both the lower and upper floors, including Sy's News Stand.



From right to left: Shonty's Restaurant, Bianchi's Restaurant, Coly's Hotel.
At right is corner of Grove St. and Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn



WINDSOR LOCKS—A two-story building at Main Street housing Shorty's Restaurant, Sy's Newsstand and 10 individuals living in apartments was ruined yesterday in a fire that broke out at 7 a.m. Although firefighters felt they had the blaze contained within 30 minutes after the alarm, Chief William G. Reilly said the fire was not under control until noon. Loss was estimated at \$25,000. Owner of the building is Benjamin Chmura. Cause of the fire has not been determined.



Shonty's, after 1967 Fire

5.6 - The Mather Block Fire in 1924

Here is a postcard of the Mather Block. It was at the South corner of the corner of Main and Spring Streets. According to a story in a 1924 Windsor Locks Journal, the Mather Block burned, but not completely. That included the bank, and the Windsor Locks Macaroni Manufacturing Co., which was owned by Leo Colapietro. No photos of the fire were available.



Mather Block (see arrow), burned in 1924

5.7 - Montgomery Co. Building Fire in July 2006

Below is a photo of the Montgomery building during the fire in July 2006. The important thing to notice is that the closest that the fire truck could get to the building was to stay on Main St.. It had to shoot water over to the fire from Main St. Between the fire truck and the fire was: the railroad tracks, the canal and a small road.



J.R. Montgomery factory fire, July 2006

5.8 - Coly's Hotel Fire in 1926

Vito Colapietro bought a hotel from Mr. Byrnes in 1917. The hotel burned down as it was being refurbished in 1927. Below is a newspaper clipping about the fire. It contains an error. It says "Hotel Brusi", but it was the "Hotel Byrnes". Vito Colapietro bought it from Mr. Byrnes in 1913. Notice in the next two photos how Coly Hotel went from a wooden exterior with a Mansard roof to a stucco building after the fire.

<p>Hotel Brusi Guttled With Estimated Loss of \$15,000—Help Summoned From Warehouse Point</p> <p>Windsor Locks, Ct., Nov. 24—The three upper floors of the Hotel Brusi, a wooden building, were badly gutted by fire here last night, with a loss estimated at \$15,000. The hotel was unoccupied at the time, as it was undergoing extensive repairs by the owner, Cino Colapietro. The former proprietor, Fred C. Brusi, terminated his lease some time ago. The fire is thought to have originated around a stove used to heat the building while the repairs were under way.</p>	<p>One fireman was overcome by smoke and three others were slightly injured when a ladder broke.</p> <p>The fire department fought the blaze for over four hours, but finally had it under control at 1.30 this morning. Assistance was given by the Warehouse Point fire department. Many thousands of gallons of water were poured into the building from six streams.</p> <p>The ground floor of the hotel contained a shoe store conducted by the owner of the building, and also a men's furnishing store known as the Boston store, conducted by Paul Aronson. A third store on the ground floor had been conducted as a restaurant in connection with the hotel, but has not been in operation since the hotel was closed.</p>
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Springfield Republican, November 24, 1926



Coly's Hotel (see arrow) prior to 1927 Fire, about 1922



Coly's Hotel (on left) after 1927 fire and reconstruction

5.9 - Syd's Modern Drug Fire in May 1965

The first photo shows Syd's Modern Drug store before the fire. Next there is a Hartford Courant article about the fire, followed by a photo of firemen fighting the blaze.



Modern Drug (on right) prior to 1965 fire



DRUG STORE DAMAGED: Fire Sunday morning caused extensive damage to the interior of Modern Drugs, 158 Main St., Windsor Locks, and tied up church traffic for two hours. The alarm was turned in at 6:20 a.m. by Policeman Ted Fisher, who saw smoke coming from the store. The store's owner, Sidney Portnoy, estimates damage

to the store and the second floor stockroom at \$60,000. The fire was put out by the Windsor Locks Fire Department within an hour, but the clean-up job kept equipment on Main Street over four hours. Church traffic was re-routed by the Police Department (Ruggiero Photo).

Modern Drug Fire, Hartford Courant, May 31, 1965



Modern Drug fire, May 31, 1965

Conclusion

This article has reviewed the major catastrophes that have occurred in Windsor Locks over the past century: Tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, railroad accidents, aviation accidents and fires. Thirty photographs and newspaper clippings were presented. One can only conclude that Windsor Locks has had good fortune over that past century. There were only two tornadoes. The first, which was a bad one, was handled as well as possible by all of the groups and agencies that were involved. There were few aviation accidents and even fewer railroad accidents.

All of the fires we looked at were in buildings built from about 1900 to 1940, which were built before the existence of strong building codes. One of the goals of the redevelopment of Main was to eliminate those old buildings which were considered to be "fire traps". The fire-traps are now all gone.

As for floods, Windsor Locks had four major floods in the last century. The portion of Windsor Locks near the river is on a "100 year flood plain", which means that one flood per century can be expected. Windsor Locks got four in that time frame. There will be more. Windsor Locks has always survived those floods. Only a very small portion of the town gets flooded. As was pointed out in a newspaper article which was shown in

the article, in one of the floods, it was the canal that overflowed its East bank which spilled into the Montgomery building.

Very few lives have been lost in Windsor Locks through these catastrophes. The tornado did destroy a number of businesses and houses. We had no warning before it hit. Now weather prediction is much better and much more precise. Windsor Locks is fortunate to be located in a place where tornados are very rare events.

Windsor Locks enjoys good weather, good transportation systems and a good fire department. The citizens of Windsor Locks have a lot to be thankful for. Catastrophes have been few and far between, and their numbers are decreasing. Windsor Locks is a good place to live.

I thank Jerry Dougherty for his vast library of historical photographs, from which I have again borrowed heavily. I thank Bill Fournier, Mickey Danyluk and John Donahue for providing information on the topic of catastrophes, and for their knowledge of Windsor Locks history. Any errors or other problems in this article are my responsibility, not theirs.

Finally, I thank the reader for reading the article, and ask him/her to please pass this article on to anyone you know who might be interested in the history of Windsor Locks.

Mel Montemerlo