

## **Historic Flooding in Windsor Locks** by Mel Montemerlo

Parts of Windsor Locks near the river and the canal are in a “100 year flood zone”. These flood zones are derived from the National Flood Insurance Program’s flood insurance data maps. If we look at the last 100 years, we see that there have been more significant floods in that area than these maps predict. The three most significant floods in that area of Windsor Locks were in 1936, 1938 and 1955.

The March 1936 flood was devastating to communities along the banks of the Connecticut River. 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 river flooded towns and farms. Windsor Locks was hit hard. The first photo shows how high the water level got on the Montgomery building.



*Montgomery building during 1936 flood*

During the second week of September 1938, nine inches of rain fell on the river valley, followed by The Great Hurricane of 1938, which was a Category 5 storm that hit Windsor Locks on September 21. It dropped an additional eight inches of rain in a single day. Two days later, the river crested at an elevation of 34.9 feet above mean sea level. Extensive damage in Hartford caused the city to erect an extensive dike system in Hartford and East Hartford.

The 1938 hurricane was a strong Category 3 with peak wind gusts of 186 mph. Over 600 people in New England were killed. It was the worst hurricane to strike New England in the last 200 years. Windsor Locks was hit hard in the flood that followed. See the photo of the bridge between Windsor Locks and Warehouse Point. Notice that the Connecticut River level went above the roadway on the Bridge.



*Bridge after 1938 hurricane. Windsor Locks, CT*

On August 12, 1955, Hurricane Connie dropped 5-10" of rain in portions of northwest Connecticut. 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. The Connecticut River at Hartford reached the third-highest level on record at the time, cresting at 30.6 feet above flood stage. Although there was rural damage, the city of Hartford was spared from flooding due to previously constructed dikes.

Another flood hit Windsor Locks in 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."

Information on these floods was gotten from the website "Geocaching - Connecticut River - Flood Plain"

At the end of River Road in Windsor Locks, there is a metal post which shows the heights of major floods in Windsor Locks. The 1984 flood was a bit higher than the 1955 flood. If you haven't seen this sign, you should drive over, and see it.

As the great philosopher and historian, George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." History is a great teacher.

If you would like to read any of my other articles on the history of Windsor Locks, you can download them from my website at:

[windsorlockshistory.com](http://windsorlockshistory.com)