

# Hurricane Wedding

*Marjorie Moore*

When I first heard that Hurricane Edna was forecast to pass through Woods Hole on my wedding day, September 11, 1954, I felt that somehow I had provoked it.

As a child I felt that the most exciting things that happened in Woods Hole were hurricanes—and I was destined to miss them all since I had to leave the Cape when school opened.

I heard by phone how my grandmother, Harriet Veeder, opened her West Street (now Albatross Street) home to the families who were flooded out of their Gosnold Road homes in 1938, and cooked up everything in her pantry to feed them. I heard about my grandfather's skiff washed into the Bell Tower garden by the tidal wave, and John and Myra Veeder rescued from the roof of their Millfield Street home. In the summer of 1939 I played on the old drawbridge, which had been towed back to a Woods Hole beach after floating all the way across Buzzards Bay.

In the summer of 1945 I spent hours on one end of a crosscut saw helping my father, Sam Hill, clear up the downed pines on his new Whitman Road lot. His comment on the results of the '44 blow: "I would not have worked so hard last summer to pull out all the poison ivy and catbriar if I had realized that the vines were all that was holding up the trees."

When Hurricane Carol blew through in August, 1954, my reaction was: "Finally a hurricane before Labor Day and I am not there!" The Fisheries pier was battered, boats were driven ashore inside Penzance, and my Aunt Alice Veeder scalded herself carrying hot water from next door because the power was out—and

I was in Troy, New York, making plans for my wedding September 11 in the Church of the Messiah. Yes, it was childish of me.

So you will understand why I felt somehow guilty and responsible when I learned that the Powers That Be had arranged a hurricane especially for me eleven days later—to coincide with my wedding.

We were in Woods Hole by the time the forecasts began arriving, and the wedding party was assembling. The groom, Steve Moore, had already arrived. My brother, Bob, the best man, and an usher drove down from Cambridge—a solitary car in the southbound lane of a highway crowded in the other direction by tourists pouring off the Cape.

The groom's cousin, Bill Graham, drove up from Washington earlier than planned to arrive before the storm—and found himself arguing through her door



Robert and Harriet Veeder's house on Albatross Street, September 1962. Courtesy Marjorie Moore.



The bride and groom the summer before the wedding. Courtesy Marjorie Moore.

with my cousin Marion Swift, who was to house him, but was reluctant to admit a strange young man at 10:00 p.m.

The morning of the storm—wedding planned for 4:00 p.m.—the wedding party assembled at the Veeder house on West Street to sit out the hurricane watch. Power went out, but phone lines held throughout. One bridesmaid was altering her dress—turning the sewing machine flywheel by hand. Small groups walked across the street to see the storm waves—until

Church of the Messiah where the wedding took place. Founded in 1852, this church is the oldest Episcopal Church on Cape Cod. The stone church, built in 1888 by Joseph Story Fay on land given by him in 1852, when the original wooden church was erected, is a favorite place for Woods Hole weddings. Photo by Baldwin Coolidge, 1895. Courtesy WHHC.

older heads insisted all stay inside away from the danger of falling wires.

A call came from the organist: she had cut her hand while evacuating her home on Millfield Street. My mother talked with the Falmouth Methodist minister's wife, Mrs. Albert W. Jackson, who agreed to play for us if we promised the wedding would be over in time for her to help with a church chicken pie supper.

Meanwhile Bill Graham, who was to sing, learned from the rector, Mason Wilson, that the Episcopal Church permitted the use of nothing outside of the Bible, Hymnal, or Book of Common Prayer—"Oh, Promise Me," together with most of Bill's repertory was out. The Lord's Prayer was acceptable.

The storm should have blown through by then, but it seemed to be stalled south of the Cape. We were all on tenterhooks. A phone call came from Providence. Police had stopped Steve's uncle, aunt, and grandmother from driving any further until the hurricane was over. They were watching the storm from a hotel.





78 Main Street, on the Falmouth Village Green, the house where the bride's cousin, Marion Swift, was preparing for wedding guests and the wedding reception. Built by Erasmus Gould in 1844 this charming house, with its square shape, roofline brackets, square pilasters, brown shingles and white trim, is an example of very early Victorian architecture in Falmouth. Courtesy WHHC.

Fortunately, Steve's parents, also coming from Washington, and his sister and family from Virginia, were already with us.

A college roommate phoned from New York: would we cancel her reservation at the Mariner Motel, as her husband felt it was foolish to drive up into the hurricane. Instead we changed the reservation to the new name of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen A. Moore. The Island boats had stopped running: we would be unable to take our room in Oak Bluffs that night.

Then a man in a slicker and sou'wester came pounding at the door: a seventy-foot tidal wave \*had engulfed the

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\*The report of a tidal wave was a false alarm—the result of someone misinterpreting the radar.

Nantucket Lightship: all frame buildings on the waterfront were to be evacuated. We piled into cars and drove through the storm to Falmouth—through what we later learned was the very height of the storm. We evacuated to the Swift house at 78 Main Street, on the Green. Marion was already housing some of the party and had agreed to let us use her rose garden for the reception. She had gone to considerable work for our sakes to clear up the damage from Hurricane Carol. Now she took us all in. Planning continued by phone as the storm finally blew past.

Word came that the eye of the storm split over Nantucket. After all its advance publicity Edna, compared to Carol, proved to be a dud as far as storm damage to the Cape was concerned. But—4:00 p.m. was past. We learned later that some guests

showed up on time at the closed church in the middle of the storm.

It was decided to go ahead with the wedding at 7:30, while moving the reception inside to the Veeder house.

The lobsters to feed the wedding party had been left at West Street when we evacuated, and, because of the power loss affecting refrigeration, later had to be discarded. My mother again phoned Mrs. Jackson, and she agreed, since their supper had been canceled, both to play at 7:30 and to sell us and deliver to the Swift house Methodist chicken pies for the wedding party's dinner.

I was grateful that the Swift house had hot water not dependent on electricity. Before we all returned to



The bride in all her finery. The bridal portrait was taken in Troy, N.Y., before the wedding. Photo by Berthold Studios, 1954. Courtesy Marjorie Moore.

Woods Hole to prepare for the wedding I was able to bathe.

An attempt was made to contact guests by phone. Still, of the hundred expected only twenty-five made it to the church at 7:30. We had no photographs, as the designated photographer had no flash for his camera, and by then dusk was coming on.

Ronald and Alice Veeder, my uncle and aunt, meanwhile, were very busy preparing for the reception and moving the pump organ from the Sunday School over to the sanctuary, as the church organ would not work without power. When they finally slipped into a pew they realized their eleven-year-old son Rob was missing. Missing the Wedding! When Mason Wilson came out with his prayer book Rob was with him in red acolyte robes holding a large candle so Mr. Wilson could see to read.

What a beautiful service! Flower girl Roberta Moore led up the aisle scattering petals, heading the bridal procession with junior bridesmaid Sue Veeder. Bill's singing was beautiful. Mrs. Jackson's music was beautiful. Later we learned that one pedal on the organ broke during the service, and as we were recessing, she was pumping frantically with one foot.

We came out of the church to a sunset distinguished by the largest rainbow we had ever seen, crossing the sky from horizon to horizon. In the next forty years I have seen such a rainbow only once again: following Hurricane Bob in 1991.

The hurricane lantern-lit reception was disorganized but distinguished by the largest wedding cake slices

ever served—as the paucity of guests was reflected in the overabundance of refreshments. Finally I moved up the stairs—which my mother, Bertha Hill, had descended for her wedding in that house twenty-five years earlier. I threw my bouquet from the landing, continued up and flipped the light switch in the dark hall. Of course nothing happened. I was too embarrassed to spoil my big exit by going back down for a lantern, so I changed into my going-away suit by moonlight.

Steve and I were driven off to Falmouth—and then the group which had been stopped in Providence finally arrived in Woods Hole.

We carried a candle to our room at the motel. At 3:00 a.m. we were startled when all the lights suddenly came on. Next day we had a private hotel on the Vineyard: all the other guests had left before Edna.

Forty years later I look back still with regret for guests who never made it to the delayed wedding, not only Steve's relatives, but ninety-year-old Myra Veeder, who had even gone to the special effort of a new hairdo. I have greater appreciation than I did at the time for all the effort put forth on my behalf by my parents and other relatives. And Steve and I have retold the story again—and again—and again.

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A graduate of Radcliffe College, she lived before then mostly in New York and afterward mostly in greater Boston.

Ms. Moore is a member of the Woods Hole Historical Collection, Cantata Consort, and Woods Hole Yacht Club and wife of the Yacht Club Rear Commodore, Steve Moore.