

Readers' Forum

WE USE THE READERS' FORUM TO PRESENT FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS OF HOUSTON-AREA HISTORY FROM OUR READERS. THIS ISSUE WE INCLUDE A LETTER FROM AMIEE ERMINE DOUGLAS OF GALVESTON TO HER MOTHER IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA. THIS PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED LETTER IS DATED "SEPT. 1900 MONDAY NIGHT" AND APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN TWO DAYS AFTER

THE GREAT STORM OF 1900 SWEEPED THROUGH GALVESTON ON SEPTEMBER 8, 1900. THE LETTER IS PRESENTED HERE LARGELY UNEDITED SO THAT OUR READERS CAN HEAR THE VOICE OF ONE OF THE FORTUNATE PEOPLE WHO SURVIVED ONE OF THE DEADLIEST HURRICANES IN AMERICAN HISTORY. IT IS PRINTED WITH THE PERMISSION OF JACK DOUGLAS.

Sept 1900 Monday Night

My dearest Mother-

I will write this & also telegraph you to let you know we are still living, thanks to God's great kindness, we have passed through a night which surpasses The Earthquake. Guess you have heard that "Galveston is washed away." I think it is nearly so and until I find how much of the Island remains will not know if we will be sure of our lives here or not-

I wrote you a letter which was to be mailed on Sat the day the hurricane started but the [wind] blew out the window in which the letter was & the Lord's only knows where it is-

The storm began Sat' morn when we arose we found the water about a block from us but no one was alarmed for the oldest person around here had never seen the water on our block-

About 2 p.m. it just had come up to our door but-not much. I telephoned M [her husband, Marion] to come home at once but-everybody said, "oh it is nothing to be afraid of." The wind began then I became alarmed really-

Boat after boat load of people were brought-up from the block between us & the Gulf... About 4 p.m. — the water was up to our Gallery which is as high as yours, just then the [neighbor's] called over for some help, 9 in their house & no man-so Marion went to see what they wanted & over across the street to a family (an old crippled lady & two daughters) to tell them to come to us as they were in a little cottage. They thought it would end in a little while, only begged him to return later, in the meanwhile my chimneys crashed in, so I decided to leave, I picked up Yvonne & some man helped me & I went to my neighbors the Cooley's on my other side, I walked through water up to my waist- When M returned he said the old lady would not come so he put on a table in a chair in her front room then the water was coming up so fast & the wind so high we had to remain where we were-

You could see broken houses & cattle swimming by all the time, it was terrible- By 7 p.m.— the water was on our Gallery so the carpets were all taken up & everything heavy piled on tables to steady them- We went upstairs- 11 of us & Marion went across the street again swam right over the fence he-could not persuade the old lady to come & was nearly drowned while on his way back- he was swept down the street, caught on lumber & managed to get in exhausted-

Then the water came in faster & faster & the wind rose higher. The last report before the machine broke was "wind 96 miles an hour" it got worse afterwards, it was a night beyond any description, house were blown down and floated by us... and every imaginable thing broke- THE slates were blowing right & left, a plank was dashed through the upper part of homes floor— You can just imagine us all kneeling & praying each moment expecting we would [end up] in the water drowned it was a living death, how my mind is not gone I do not know— The three children behaved beautifully.

About 12 Midnight the water began to go down so we came down although the water was ankle deep still in house which has 6 ft of foundation-

Then came a cry for Marion one of the girls came over for him to get their mother they had clung for over an hour to the frame of their window in getting her here with Dr. C. assistance, I think he has sprained his back-

When light came B___ got over her, Their house is the first over beyond ours & the water & pretty badly wrecked — the upper gallery & roof nearly all gone, the water had been up to our dinning room table, windows were broken open & things swept out or thrown down mud was nearly a foot deep on the floor, when I got upstairs found the rain had poured in & ruined everything except our trunk of Winter clothes-Bureau drawers had water even in them, things swept out & gone, Marion had one suit- Which was soaking left

no shoes & had all of under clothes nearly gone. You can not imagine the damage- My kitchen strange to say is all right – so we [cleaned up] mud over there & with a good scrubbing will be all right – our board ceiling is left- so I hung wet things all around & when they were partly dry down came rain again & wet all up- If it does not rain we can manage somehow- All cisterns have salt in them, dead bodies of animals & people are being dug up & carted off, we have to pile as high as our house nearly in front-of-us We are sleeping at Cooley's tonight- but will have to leave tomorrow & the B_____ & us will manage as we best can, eat anything we can manage to get. Soldiers are all over the town shooting down any one who touches the dead etc. for even the dead are robbed- No mail no telegraphs so I know your all crazy for I hear (?) is as bad & Julius is there, let me know as soon as you hear from him-

Howard & Mitchell are all right- At least 20 around here I know are dead.

All churches are gone. I can write no more for I am tired worn out & nervous. The children are all upset-

Typhoid fever seems to be next thing dreaded as every part of the city is mucked- It is worse then Earthquake, the record of dead so far is 1400, but the debris have not been touched 5000 are supposed to be lost-

God certainly was good to us we are living even if things are gone or ruined

The Texas S_ an Co will very likely smash up so Marion will be in a fix again... What agony you can not imagine even death by drowning

The roof coming down on us, was in front of us. I can write no more for want of paper

Thank God fro us for he has been good-

[Who] would have dreamed such a thing as the oldest inhabitant never witnessed before –

With all our love I am always

Aimee

I ought to believe in prayer. ★

Houston HISTORY

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