

File Disaster

STATE OF DELAWARE
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
DOVER

ELBERT N. CARVEL
GOVERNOR

*Transcript of Governor's Radio
Address of 3/7/62*

We arrived at the Georgetown Police Station, Troop No. 4, yesterday morning at seven o'clock, a.m., having previously arranged to bring State officials to this rendezvous who might be helpful in solving the problems of our serious emergency caused by the terrible Northeast storm. (The date of this transcription is March 7, 1962). Captain Downes of the Civil Defense, Colonel Ferguson, Superintendent of the Highway Police and Major Ellis, his operations Assistant; ~~one~~ members of the Highway Commission, Lemuel H. Hickman of Ocean View, Dagsboro-Selbyville area, and Harry Bonk of the Milton-Rehoboth area, William J. Miller, Director of the State Highway Department; Captain Herbert of the Delaware State Police, Lt. Rogers of the Delaware State Police and General Herbert Wardell of the Delaware National Guard all converged upon Troop No. 4 for the purpose of making a survey and inventory of the destruction created by the storm and to determine ways and means of handling the emergency. Senator Curtis W. Steen was picked up at Dagsboro on the tour which generally consisted of two to three cars with 12 to 15 people participating.

We toured from the Bethany Beach, Ocean View, Oak Orchard, Rehoboth, Dewey Beach, Lewes, Milton, and Milford areas. All along the coastline was practically total destruction of homes, apartment houses, motels, and business buildings. Further inland there was tremendous damage caused by rising water, thousands of houses caused by the destructive force of the wind and by sand being washed up in the streets and highways. Except for the drowning of five people at Bowers Beach and the missing of two others, there was no loss of life and this was caused by the close

close cooperation between the local citizens, the Volunteer Fire Departments, the Delaware National Guard, the Delaware State Police and the Red Cross. Round the clock efforts were being made all over the coastline to evacuate people who had not wished to leave their homes because of the lack of previous warning because of the fact that the Weather Bureau did not lay sufficient stress on the destructiveness of the storm, apparently did not know the storm was going to be this destructive because the Weather Bureau did not warn sufficiently against the threat of rising water. One of the lessons we should again learn from this terrible holocaust the fact that our Weather Bureau has not yet perfected sufficient warning to prepare the people to accept this type of storm and I think we should investigate our methods of forecasting in this direction. Apparently, with a storm coming from the ocean where we have no weather stations, we are handicapped in our forecasting. Unquestionably, this storm is the worse disaster which has ever struck our State, and certainly better forecasting would have helped us to have prepared better than we did. The business of preparing people to accept a disaster, in my opinion, is most helpful in obtaining successful evacuation. Many of our people refused to leave their homes because they were not sufficiently pressed with the seriousness of the storm.

Although total destruction was caused along the shore front and the coastline of Delaware from Fenwick Island to Delaware City, much damage was also caused by rising water in areas from 5 to 10 miles inland from the coast. The low areas in the Fenwick Island, Ocean View, Bethany Beach part of the State had water as high as 4 and 5 feet during long lengths of time. This was destructive to homes as well as the effect of the salt water on productive land and also killed hundred of thousands of

Before I made my estimates that there was a Fifty Million Dollar loss, I talked to a number of people in the areas involved and also to people who were journeying with us such as William J. Miller of the Highway Department, Captain Downes and Colonel Ferguson.

The way the people of Delaware reacted to this tragedy was tremendous. Those people who had suffered severe losses in property, in their businesses, in their life savings, were bravely going about trying to help do whatever they could to relieve the emergency. The Volunteer Firemen had been hard at work day and night in practically every community helping to evacuate marooned people. The National Guard with its trucks and personnel to work in every place where they could be effective and showed splendid understanding and intelligence in handling the difficult problems with which they were constantly faced. The Delaware State Police, especially by way of the Georgetown Station, made a monumental effort to handle the constant flow of demands being made upon their communication facilities. The Red Cross was hard at work at all the disaster areas helping the evacuees to be as comfortable as possible and working with the citizens of the various areas in providing them with the benefit of their experience in these types of emergencies. The spirit of the people all over the devastated areas was splendid and it appears that everybody was putting their shoulders to the wheel to try to make the best of a most difficult situation, the fact that so many people were saved from what could have been a terrible death is a testimony to the teamwork of all these Delawareans working together to help to ease the emergency. The utility people in all areas were likewise hard at work in making efforts to continue to maintain service. All in all it was a terrible day in Delaware history, but the splendid character of Delawareans rose to heroic heights and we can be proud of the many sacrifices and efforts made in every direction by these brave people.