2

Title of Document:

‘Photographs showing the damage and destruction caused by the Hurricane of the 1st September, 1930.’

Date published: 1930

Contained Within:
File: Hurricane in Dominica (with photographs and newspaper cuttings).
Includes 14 photographs depicting: Dominica: hurricane damage to radio masts, buildings and trees. Sloop 'Octavia C' driven ashore two miles from Roseau where she was anchored before the storm. Dated 1930.

Length of document pages: 8

Number of photographed pages: 8

Link to catalogue page: http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2733157

National Archive Number: **CO 152/417/11** 12352163

File Name: [1930_Photographic_Damage_Report_Photos_ CO 152/417/11]

Summary:

These sepia film photographs lie pressed between despatch letters regarding the Hurricane on September 1st, 1930. Their contribution, I assume from their curation, is to bear evidence of the need for construction loans and will most likely have been sent to the colonial governor in conjunction with more formal damage reports. Printed text below each image explains its content. Most of the photographs show damage to buildings and telephone wires, including the Cinema Theatre, *“completely unroofed”,* the Soap Factory, top floor demolished, the post office, *“partially unroofed*”, a *“native hut damaged by fallen coconut tree*”, and three telephone masts, broken off. A death is mentioned in the frame, “large mango tree uprooted and in falling killed a woman”. Gigantic tree roots are pictured above ground, illustrating the ferocity of the winds that swept Dominica that September. The waters must have swelled violently, as a boat, “Octavia C” was driven ashore and disintegrated against the beach.

Intern reflections:

The photos have an innate stillness to them, dull tones and matter-of-fact framing seeming incongruent to the intense demolition of the night before; they illude to what I have imagined it must be like to open one’s door one morning to a landscape as quiet as it always was, but in ruin. It is a bizarre experience trying to gain a rounded sense of hurricane impact from such a geographically and temporally removed position. Much like the letters and despatches I have encountered, these photographs are colonial in their coldness; a dead woman is left unnamed, and a sense of *who* has lost is lacking. Non-the-less, photographs add an incredibly valuable qualitive element to the research, and I will endeavour to find more.

This document bares clues to the scale of the storm: a severed wireless mast, *“supposed to withstand a wind pressure of 120 miles per hour”*, suggests at least a category 3 hurricane (129mph+ winds), which promises *‘devastating’* damage (NHC.gov). It is hard to imagine watching a 300-year-old tree be unrooted by invisible force. The destruction pictured certainly pales in comparison to that of Maria or David, but the images are

unsettling non-the-less. Particularly striking is the *'view of portion of new Tubercular ward shewing erosion of bank by Roseau River'*, capturing a sea of white masses on the beach front underneath a hauntingly hollow building. An array of people dressed in white line the sand. As it is difficult to decipher, I am left wondering whether perhaps the beach is acting as a place for patient treatment. Alternatively, the figures may be clearing debris swept from the building onto the sand. I hope to find the document referenced below, "Vide Admr's Desp. No. 551/1229/30", as it may hold answers to these questions. This picture has triggered a desire to research the disruption of hurricanes on vital services such as hospitals. *What might bad weather catalyse in terms of other structural issues? How do hurricanes affect general population health and emergency response in other areas?*

Furthermore, viewing buildings with whole stories ripped from them, I wish to find out more about architectural storm-destruction mitigation. Dr. Lennox Honeychurch, in an OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) lecture, describes how the indigenous Amerindians and Kalinago built their houses with storm-resistant features such as an oval shape, wooden props, easily replaceable palm thatch, clay safe-rooms, and a wide variety of wood species based upon suitability for each part of the structure. The Kalinago "*village by the sea*" *Barana Autê,* was one of the few structures that survived category 5 Hurricane Maria in 2017 (Honeychurch, 2018). It seems possible, looking at the square, concrete, corrugated-iron roofed buildings pictured, that some vital knowledge has been discarded since the colonial encounter. Moreover, informed by Honeychurch's eloquent historical account of construction post-emancipation, I wonder about the pictured hospital ward's location next to the Roseau riverbank increasing its vulnerability to water surges.

"Post emancipation settlements which have been inherited are usually in the most disaster-prone areas due to their location on marginal land unwanted by plantations. Narrow strips of shoreline vulnerable to storm surges […] houses built at the mouths and on the banks of rivers that become raging turrets during storms […] or in settlements laid down haphazardly some 180 years ago"
– Honeychurch, 2018, OECStv, Youtubehttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lY5wkynIjh8

I hope moving forward to uncover more images and sources detailing land practises in Dominica, in order to piece together a broader picture of how dispossession by colonisers has had lasting impacts on storm mitigation today.

Hurricane category information: *https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutsshws.php*