

# THE GALVESTON GALE

*Bringing Galveston All That's Current Since 1899*

*Special Update One Week After the Hurricane*

*September 15, 1900*

## CITY FILLED WITH FLOATING CORPSES AND WALKING DEAD

According to Isaac's Storm, the book by Erik Larsen, Galveston residents are traumatized by unimaginable damage and lives lost. It was only one week ago, on Saturday, September 8, 1900, that the greatest natural disaster ever to strike the United States occurred on this Texas island community. The early evening hours brought winds exceeding 140 miles per hour as an unexpected hurricane came ashore with such great force that most of the area was destroyed. It is believed that in just a few hours time at least 6,000 people were killed by drowning or being impaled by flying objects. Those that survive remain in shock.

Weather Bureau employee, Isaac Cline, is a scientist who believes he knows all there is to know about the behavior of storms. He never believed that such damage could take place anywhere. Just recently, Cline was quoted as saying that the potential for a storm as deadly as the one Galveston just experienced last week was "an absurd delusion." Even if a storm were to approach, Cline felt confident that his weather bureau would be the first to know. However, questions remain as to whether Cline's hubris and reluctance to call the approaching winds "a disaster in the making" could have contributed to the immense damage and the unimaginable death toll. If he had admitted that there are just some things about nature we can't predict, would Cline's wife and some of the 6,000 others who perished be alive today?

History will show that the people of Galveston's felt reassured by Cline's beliefs. Hundreds gathered at the beach on the days prior to the storm to marvel at the tall waves and pink sky and children played in the rising water even on the morning of the storm itself.

Interestingly, few are blaming Cline. In fact, most are praising him for issuing warnings to merchants in the area to move their products to higher ground on the morning of September 8 and posting storm warning flags at around noon. When he sent a special report to the Washington, DC, Bureau at 3:30, he warned that the worst was yet to come. As a result, thousands of people who lived near the beach or in small houses moved their families into the center of the city and, thus, were saved. Cline himself believes his actions ultimately saved 12,000 lives though this is impossible to confirm. However, the storm was at its deadliest only a few hours later, between 7:30 and 8:30 in the evening; one must wonder if Cline had admitted earlier that he wasn't sure what to make of all the foreboding developments, would lives and property have been saved? In his official report, he claims that "storm warnings were timely and received a wide distribution." Yet many questions remain.

Thankfully the survivors are now turning their thoughts to the future rather than the past. There is much gratitude for Clara Barton's arrival. As the founder of the Red Cross, she is an efficient and helpful presence as our island turns toward recovery. Residents are doing their best to ignore the shabby condition of the clothes donated by those from all over the country. The case of fancy shoes that recently arrived, for instance, included 144 shoes. Too bad they were samples and all made for the left foot. The Galveston Gale agrees with Barton that it is "an unfortunate trait in the human character to assail others in the performance of humanitarian acts." We hope the people of our great city can rise above their terrible loss and move toward genuine healing.

## ISAAC CLINE IN MOURNING; WIFE CORA CANNOT BE FOUND

*This interview was conducted six days after the storm. It has been edited for clarity and brevity.*

GG: Mr. Cline, we are so sorry for your loss. Are you certain your wife is dead?

IC: Ever since the morning after the storm, what I will always refer to as "a most beautiful day," I have been searching for my dear wife Cora. During the storm, our house slid loose from its foundation and capsized in the high waters. My brother grabbed the hands of two of my children and slid out a window, but Cora, our six year old Esther and myself were trapped. I was sure I was drowning. Somehow I was able to swim away from the house, as did "my baby." The two of us moved toward floating wreckage. There we met up with my brother and my two other children. The force of the winds and the current knocked us off the "raft" many times and I was struck almost unconscious by flying timber. Unbelievably, my brother's dog swam to us. He looked at each of us, went to the edge of the raft and then entered the sea. He was looking for Cora, I'm sure. He too was gone.

GG: Is it possible that Cora is alive?

IC: I had hope at first. I turned over hundreds of the dead corpses to look in their faces. The force of the winds and the speed of the currents left many unclothed, many more were battered by debris. It was hard to tell at first whether I had come upon a man or a woman. I checked the hospitals and then being the scientist that I am, I submitted her name to the paper as one of the dead by day's end. I am not one to be given to false hope. I've had a premonition that in two weeks, the demolition crew will come across a dead woman wearing a wedding ring and diamond engagement ring and I will recognize them both. When that happens, I will have the