

## August 12, 1955

Connie weakened while slowing and turning to the north, and struck North Carolina on August 12 as a Category 2 hurricane. Connie produced strong winds, high tides, and heavy rainfall as it moved ashore, causing heavy crop damage and 27 deaths in the state of North Carolina. Connie made a second landfall in Virginia, and it progressed inland until dissipating on August 15 near Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Four people were killed in Washington, D.C. due to a traffic accident. In the Chesapeake Bay, Connie capsized a boat, killing 14 people and prompting a change in Coast Guard regulation. There were six deaths each in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and eleven deaths in New York, where record rainfall flooded homes and subways. At least 225,000 people lost power during the storm. Damage in the United States totaled around \$86 million, although the rains from Connie was a prelude to flooding by Hurricane Diane.

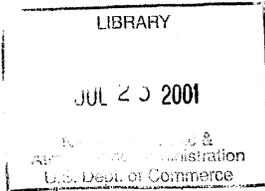
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U.S. Weather Bureau.

Preliminary report of Hurricane Diane and  
Floods.. August 1955.





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
WEATHER BUREAU  
Washington 25, D. C.

August 25, 1955

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PRELIMINARY REPORT  
OF  
HURRICANE DIANE AND FLOODS IN NORTHEAST - AUGUST 1955

Torrential rains associated with hurricane "Diane" produced devastating floods in southern New England, eastern Pennsylvania, southeastern New York, and northern New Jersey on August 18-19. Both rains and floods were of record proportions, and the resultant disaster is of such magnitude that no overall estimates of damage can yet be made. There was tragedy also in the lives lost. The actual number is not known. At present the count is over 175, and many are yet to be accounted for.

The sections worst hit by the floods were: in Massachusetts, the Connecticut River Valley from Holyoke south and Worcester County; in Connecticut, the Naugatuck, Housatonic, Connecticut, and upper Thames River Valleys; in Rhode Island, the Woonsocket area; the Catskills area in southeastern New York; the Delaware River and tributaries in northern New Jersey; in Pennsylvania, the Pocono Mountain area from Scranton to Stroudsburg, the Lehigh and upper Schuylkill Valleys, and the Delaware River area north of Philadelphia.

Principal streams affected in these areas include the Lackawanna, Lehigh, Schuylkill, and Delaware Rivers and tributaries; the lower Connecticut and its tributaries, the Farmington, and Chicopee; the Naugatuck, Housatonic, upper Thames, Blackstone, and other small streams in the areas. Most of these streams exceeded all past floods of history. In western Connecticut, some of the streams are believed to have reached stages more than 10 feet higher than the record floods associated with the New England hurricane of September 1938.

All except the Delaware and Connecticut Rivers are relatively small river basins and rose rapidly, in a matter of hours, from the beginning of the rain. Many are fed by mountain streams with steep slopes, the waters quickly overwhelming the valleys. Small creeks and streams rose as the rain was falling. All added to the destruction. The floods occurred in heavily populated and industrialized areas. Many homes and buildings of all kinds were wrecked and industrial plants damaged or closed down. Highways, bridges, streets, railroads, communication and electric power lines were severely damaged. Summer camps and resorts were hard hit. One camp in the Broadhead Creek area in the Poconos of Pennsylvania was almost completely wiped out. In the Broadhead Creek-Stroudsburg, Pa., area the death toll was listed at 75 persons.

Hurricane "Diane": Hurricane "Diane" originated over the Atlantic, about 400 miles northeast of San Juan, Puerto Rico, on August 11. Strongest winds when first observed were about 50 to 60 mph over a small area near the center. During the first 24 hours, "Diane" moved generally northwesterly to northerly at about 10mph.

On August 12, it became a full-fledged hurricane, with maximum winds of 115 mph near the center. The movement was slow and erratic most of the 12th, but on the following day the center took a definite swing to a west-northwesterly direction at a speed of about 10 to 15 mph, and continued on the same course for over 72 hours. During this period, the hurricane showed some increase in size, but little change in the strength of the maximum winds near the center.

On August 16 the center began to move in a more northwesterly direction, moving inland in the vicinity of Wilmington, N.C., on the morning of the 17th. By this time, however, the winds had diminished considerably. The greatest velocity recorded at Wilmington was a peak gust of 74 mph from the northeast at 2:49 a.m., EST. The center continued in a north-northwesterly direction after moving inland, and passed near Raleigh-Durham Airport during the middle of the afternoon, and on into Virginia to a position near Lynchburg, Va., shortly before midnight. From this point, it moved northerly to north-northeasterly during the night, and then turned to an almost easterly course on August 18, passing very near Philadelphia, Pa., Atlantic City, N.J., and Nantucket, ~~Mass.~~ on the 18th and 19th. Winds decreased rapidly as the storm moved across North Carolina, and by the time the center reached Lynchburg, Va., the strongest winds were about 30 to 35 mph, with occasional gusts to 40.

The coastal areas of the Carolinas were placed on a hurricane alert during the evening of August 14, and this was later extended to include the Georgia coast. Hurricane warnings were hoisted from north of Brunswick, Ga., to Wilmington, N.C., and northeast storm warnings elsewhere along the coast from St. Augustine, Fla., to the Virginia Capes early in the afternoon of August 15. Later advisories extended hurricane warnings southward to Fernandina, Fla., and northward to Cape Hatteras, N.C., and storm warnings as far north as Atlantic City, N.J., including Chesapeake and Delaware Bays. Small craft from the north coast of Florida to New Jersey were cautioned to remain close to port. Warnings were lowered south of Cape Hatteras as the storm moved across North Carolina and the winds subsided, but southeast storm warnings were displayed until 2:00 a.m. EST, August 18, from Cape Hatteras to Atlantic City, N.J., including Chesapeake and Delaware Bays.

Dangerously high winds were confined largely to the North Carolina coast. Tides were from 2 to 4 feet above normal on the Carolina coast and in the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River areas. As the storm moved inland, heavy rains spread northward ahead of the storm.

Precipitation: Less than a week before the onset of rains from Hurricane "Diane", its predecessor "Connie" had produced rains ranging from 4 to 6 inches or more along the Atlantic Coast slope from North Carolina to southern New England. Because of the previous long dry spell, the ground absorbed these rains and only a few local overflows resulted. However, these rains left the ground well soaked and streams were at relatively high levels when the rains from "Diane" began to overspread the area on the 17th.

By the morning of the 17th, as "Diane" crossed the coast line, rains of 1 to 3 inches had spread across eastern North Carolina into southeastern Virginia. As the center of the storm moved across North Carolina into central Virginia in a north to north-northwest direction, the rains reached out to the north and northeast to a distance of about 250 miles ahead of the storm. Rains became heavy in central Virginia in the evening of the 17th.

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Amounts up to 10 inches or more occurred in a 24-hour period along the southern and eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The storm continued moving in a northerly direction until it reached the Mason-Dixon line during the afternoon of the 18th, where it turned sharply to an easterly direction. This brought the heavy rain area directly in focus over the eastern Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and southern New England area.

The pattern of the heavy rainfall area in its relation to the path of the storm is shown in the accompanying map. Rainfall rates were intensified by orographic effects, as the moist air currents were forced upward over mountain slopes.

The rains in southern New England were prolonged as the storm center which was moving eastward directly along the 40° parallel for about 12 hours from 5 p.m. of the 18th to about 5 a.m. of the 19th, recurved to an east-northeast direction paralleling the southern New England coast. The hourly precipitation rates recorded at the Weather Bureau office at Bradley Field, Windsor Locks, Conn., are shown on the map. Until about 9 p.m. on the 18th, the intensities fluctuated considerably, but from then to 10 a.m. on the 19th the rate was quite constant, averaging nearly .6 inch per hour for 15 hours. The greatest amount from this record in a 24-hour period, 12.05 inches, is from 10 a.m. August 18 to 9 a.m. August 19. This compares with the previous maximum 24-hour rainfall of record at Hartford, Conn., of 6.82 inches occurring on July 13, 1897. The precipitation record at Hartford extends back 90 years.

**Flood Stages and Related Data:** Rains began in eastern Pennsylvania during the night of the 17th and by morning many of the streams were in flood. The floods spread quickly to the New York and New England areas. All of the streams severely affected, except the Delaware and Connecticut Rivers, are relatively small river basins and the floods literally rose with the rains.

Flood advisories were issued with the progress of the rains. For the Delaware River and lower Connecticut River, stage forecasts were issued 12 to 24 hours in advance. The lower Connecticut River flood was the third highest of record at Hartford. The Delaware River at Easton, Pa., exceeded the previous record flood of 1903 by more than 4 feet. In streams such as the Lehigh, Schuylkill, and Farmington, forecasts were made every few hours, keeping ahead of the flood stages as the rains continued. In other areas, communications were disrupted by the rains before reports could be sent out or in.

The accompanying table shows provisional flood crests for a few representative rivers. Comparisons are made with previous floods of record. The floods in Virginia and portions of North Carolina and West Virginia were damaging in some localities, but less severe than those in the Northeast.

The Lehigh River exceeded the record May 1942 flood at Allentown and Bethlehem, Pa. The upper Schuylkill was in record flood, approaching record stages downstream from Reading to Pottstown, Pa. The Lackawanna River exceeded the May 1942 flood at Old Forge, Pa., by nearly 5 feet. Most of the tributary and coastal streams in western Connecticut exceeded all previous floods of record.

REPRESENTATIVE CREST STAGES OF AUGUST 1955 FLOOD

River and Station	Flood Stage	Present Flood		Maximum Previous Flood	
		*Stage	Date	Stage	Date
	Feet	Feet		Feet	
Lackawanna: Hawley, Pa.	9	14.0	18	20.1	5/23/42
Lehigh:					
Lehigh, Pa.	9	20.0	18	20.7	5/23/42
Allentown, Pa.	14	23.4	19	21.7	5/23/42
Bethlehem, Pa.	16	25.9	19	25.6	5/23/42
Schuylkill:					
Reading, Pa.	13	18.1	19	22.7	8/24/33
Pottstown, Pa.	14	18.0	19	21.0	2/28/02
Philadelphia, Pa.	11.5	14.4	19	17.0	10/4/1869
Delaware:					
Port Jervis, N.Y.	18	23.9	19	25.5	3/8/04
Easton, Pa.	22	40*	19	35.9	10/10/03
Trenton, N.J.	12	20.5	20	22.8	3/8/04
Lackawanna: Old Forge, Pa.		20.0		15.3	5/23/42
Connecticut:					
Holyoke, Mass.	9	7.7	19	16.8	3/19/36
Springfield, Mass.	20	21.1	19	28.6	3/20/36
Hartford, Conn.	16	30.6	20	37.6	3/21/36
North Branch: Cumberland, Md.	17	22.6	18	29.1	3/18/36
Shenandoah: Riverton, Va.	22	29.0	19	46.05	10/16/42
Potomac:					
Hancock, Md.	30	32.4	19	47.6	3/18/36
Harpers Ferry, W. Va.	18	23.9	20	36.5	3/19/36
Washington (nr), D.C.	10	17.6	20	28.1	3/19/36
Rapidan: Rapidan, Va.	14	22.6	18	27.6	10/-/42
Rappahannock: (VEPCO Fredericksburg, Va. gage)	18	26.8	19	42.5	10/16/42
James:					
Columbia, Va.	18	30.4	19	37.4	9/19-20/44
Richmond, Va.	8	16.9	20	26.5	3/20/36

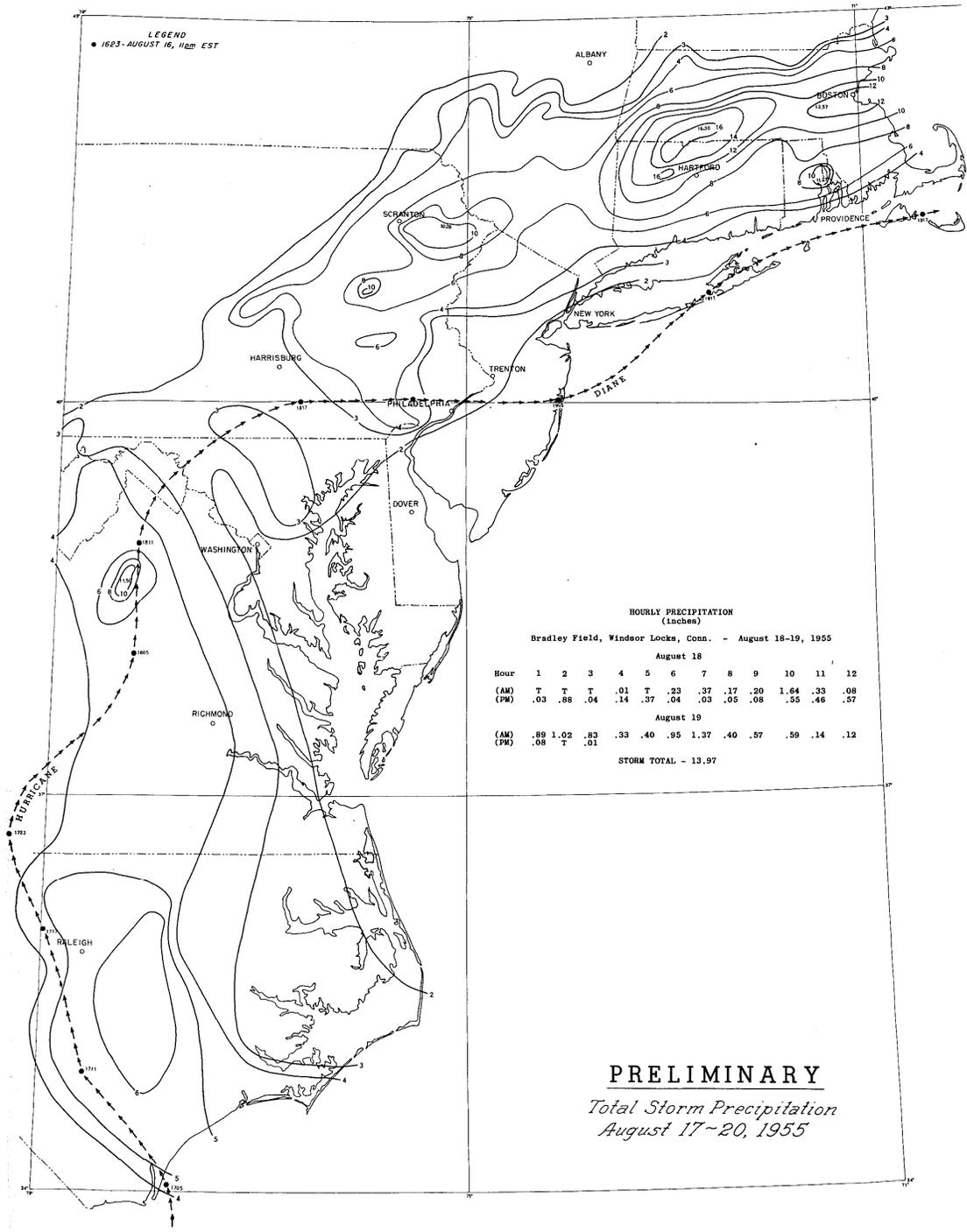
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This is a preliminary report on the rains and floods resulting from hurricane "Diane", based on the incomplete data available at this date. A comprehensive report will follow when more complete information is available.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cooperation of the U. S. Geological Survey and others during and after the flood in securing much-needed information and data on river flows and precipitation is greatly appreciated. Special thanks are also extended to the many other Federal and public agencies and others who helped in relaying information and advisories to the public and provided valuable information to the Bureau during the storm and flood.

For Official Distribution and Correspondence Aids.



**HOURLY PRECIPITATION**  
(Inches)

Bradley Field, Windsor Locks, Conn. - August 18-19, 1955

		August 18											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
(AM)	T				.01	.23	.37	.17	.20	1.64	.33	.08	
(PM)	T	.03	.88	.04	.14	.37	.04	.03	.05	.08	.55	.46	.57
		August 19											
(AM)	T	.89	1.02	.83	.33	.40	.95	1.37	.40	.57	.50	.14	.12
(PM)	T	.08		.01									
		STORM TOTAL - 13.97											

**PRELIMINARY**  
*Total Storm Precipitation*  
*August 17-20, 1955*

## Hurricane Diane

A tropical wave spawned a tropical depression between the Lesser Antilles and Cape Verde on August 7. It slowly strengthened and became Tropical Storm Diane on August 9. After a Fujiwhara interaction defined as when two nearby cyclonic vortices orbit each other and close the distance between the circulations of their corresponding low-pressure areas. Hurricane Connie, Diane had such an interaction curved northward or north-northeastward and quickly deepened. By early on August 8, the storm was upgraded to a hurricane. Only several hours later, Diane peaked as a Category 2 hurricane with winds of 105 mph (165 km/h). The storm resumed its west-northwestward motion on August 13. Colder air in the region caused Diane to weaken while approaching the East Coast of the United States. A recently installed radar in North Carolina noted an eye feature, was poorly defined. Early on August 17, Diane made landfall near Wilmington, North Carolina as a strong tropical storm. The storm then moved in a parabolic motion across North Carolina and the Mid-Atlantic before re-emerging into the Atlantic Ocean on August 19. Diane headed east-northeastward until becoming extratropical on August 20.

Despite landfall in North Carolina, impact in the state was minor, limited to moderate rainfall, abnormally high tides, and relatively strong winds. Further north, catastrophic flooding occurred in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and New England. Of the 287 stream gauges in the region, 129 reported record levels after the flooding from Tropical Storm Diane. Many streams reported discharge rates that were more than twice of the previous record. Most of the flooding occurred along small river basins that rapidly rose within hours to flood stage, largely occurring in populated areas; the region in which the floods occurred had about 30 million people, and 813 houses overall were destroyed. The floods severely damaged homes, highways, power lines, and railroads, and affected several summer camps. Overall utility damage was estimated at \$79 million. Flooding in mountainous areas caused landslides and destroyed crop fields; agriculture losses was estimated at \$7 million. Hundreds of miles of roads and bridges were also destroyed, accounting for \$82 million in damage. Overall, Diane caused \$754.7 million in damage, of which \$600 million was in New England. Overall, there were at least 184 deaths.

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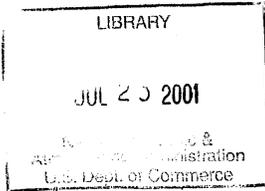
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Hurricane Connie was also a flood maker in the Richmond area dumping 8.71 inches of rain on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Connie deposited 5-10 inches of rain within 100 miles of its track but gave Richmond little in the way of wind.

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Precipitation: Less than a week before the onset of rains from Hurricane "Diane", its predecessor "Connie" had produced rains ranging from 4 to 6 inches or more along the Atlantic Coast slope from North Carolina to southern New England. Because of the previous long dry spell, the ground absorbed these rains and only a few local overflows resulted. However, these rains left the ground well soaked and streams were at relatively high levels when the rains from "Diane" began to overspread the area on the 17th.

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Rapidan: Rapidan, Va.	14	22.6	18	27.6	10/-/42
Rappahannock: (VEPCO Fredericksburg, Va. gage)	18	26.8	19	42.5	10/16/42
James:					
Columbia, Va.	18	30.4	19	37.4	9/19-20/44
Richmond, Va.	8	16.9	20	26.5	3/20/36

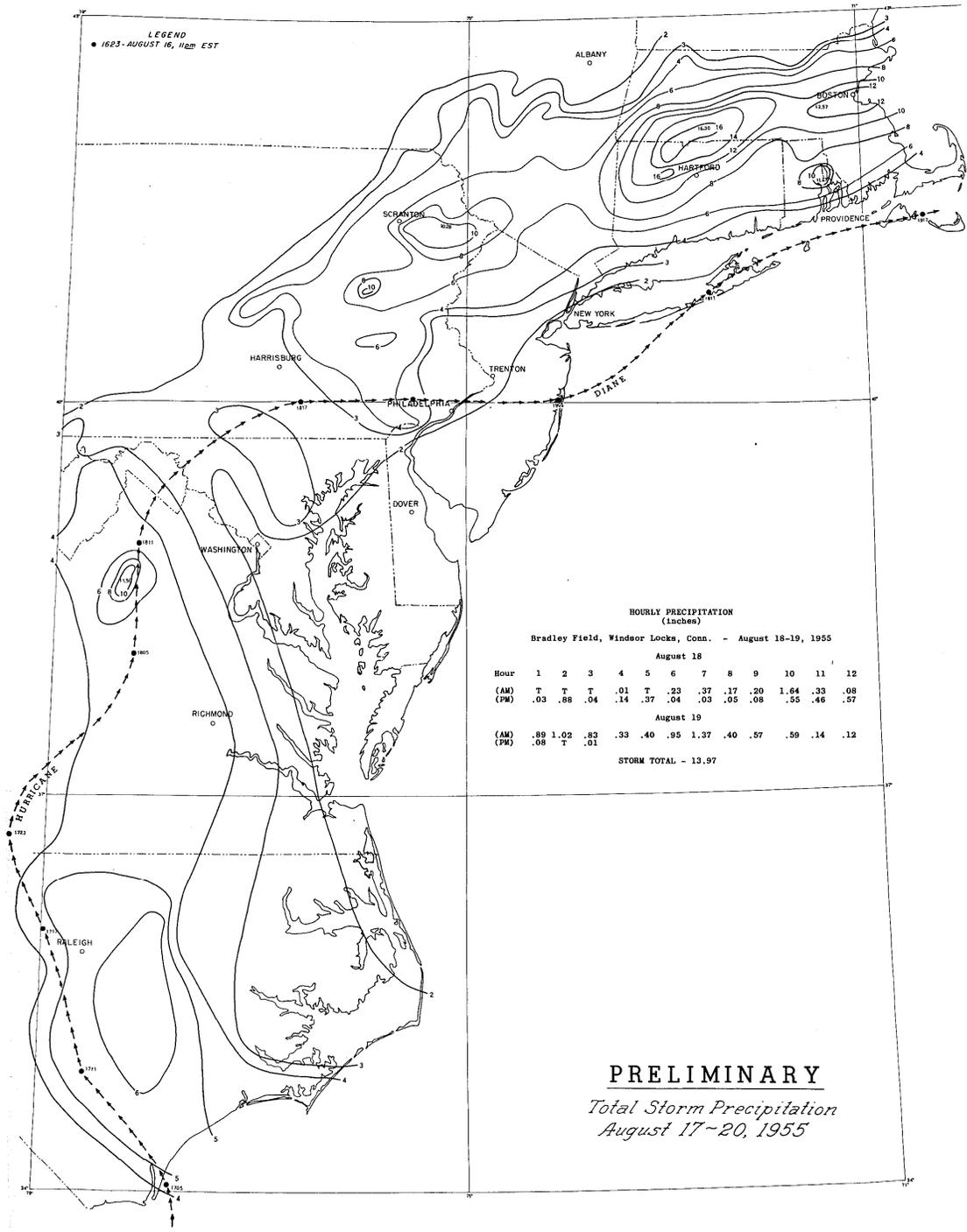
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(Inches)

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		August 18												
		Hour	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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(PM)		.03	.88	.04	.14	.37	.04	.03	.05	.08	.55	.46	.57	
		August 19												
(AM)		.89	1.02	.83	.33	.40	.95	1.37	.40	.57	.50	.14	.12	
(PM)	T	.08	.01											
		STORM TOTAL - 13.97												

**PRELIMINARY**  
*Total Storm Precipitation*  
*August 17-20, 1955*