

E. B. Parker
Sept. 7, 1935
by Worley

E. B. PARKER, NATIVE OF KEYS AND SANITATION MAN AT THE VETERANS CAMPS

ON THE KEYS, being first duly sworn, and under subpoena, gave the following testimony before the State Attorney in his office in the Dade County Court House, September 7th, 1935, CONCERNING THE RECENT HURRICANE:

BY MR. WORLEY:

Q. What is your name, please sir?

A. E. B. PARKER .

Q. You've been connected with the Veterans Camps down there?

A. Yes sir. Sanitation man.

Q. How long have you lived on Matecumbe?

A. Twenty-six years.

Q. How long on the Florida Keys?

A. Well, I'm 48 years old, and I reckon I've been absent about a year in my life.

Q. You have seen a few of these hurricanes?

A. Every one since 1894.

Q. Ever seen a worse one?

A. Never saw one half as bad, Mr. Worley.

Q. At which camp were you when this blow came up?

A. I wasn't at either veterans camp, I was at headquarters, about fifty feet south.

Q. Were you present when the call was made to the weather bureau?

A. Yes sir.

Q. Hear the conversation?

A. Well, yes sir. I heard a conversation between Mr. Cutler and someone at the Weather Bureau.

Q. Just what do you remember about the conversation?

A. Well, I know the questions he asked. He asked the weather bureau

did they think there was any danger approaching, and he said no, evidently.

I didn't hear the answer. He says the reason why I ask, my name is Cutler and I am works director for the veterans on the Keys, and I want to know if they should be moved - for their safety; and he evidently told Mr. Cutler again no, and Mr. Cutler said, well, if you think not, you should know, being the weather man. He hung up and immediately called the East Coast Railroad and asked them if they needed a train right away could they get it; in other words, would they have it ready - would they have to wait?

Q. Mr. Cutler did that?

A. Yes sir.

Q. Do you know who he called?

A. Called the office in Miami.

Q. Where is Mr. Cutler, do you know where I can get him?

A. I couldn't tell you. That is the man, Mr. Worley, who can tell you word for word, and I should say that you will find him in the McAllister

Hotel. Sam Cutler, and a very sensible, nice man; and I am positive the man in the East Coast told him yes, any time you think it necessary, call and we will have you a train there in an hour or an hour and a half; and Mr. Cutler said, "Very good, I am going to leave it in your and the Weather Bureau's hands." Who got the message I do not know. No names called, they were just talking over the phone. I didn't hear any of Mr. Sheldon's messages, the Assistant Director, but he got on the telephone and went to work too.

Q. What time?

A. He called the Weather Bureau - as to the answer I could not say, but Mr. Pinder, who is in Jackson Memorial, his radio is where I got the message right after noon, and that said gale forces South of Key Largo, and that is all.

Q. Never got any messages to the contrary until after four o'clock?

A. No sir. If any contrary messages came in I never heard it.

Q. Did you have a barometer there?

A. Yes sir, with me.

Q. Carry it around with you?

A. Yes sir. Carried it on my person until the house blew to pieces.

Q. How many in your family?

A. Eight children, my wife and myself.

Q. Saved them all?

A. Yes sir.

Q. You did a remarkable job - I don't see how you did it.

A. I am so sore I can hardly sit up. I would not say, but I must have had some supernatural strength.

Q. Where did you stay during the night?

A. I moved my family from my home - my home is right on the Beach,

Mr. Worley, and the barometer started down so fast I took the family to a

little new building in the woods, owned by J. B. Pinder, my brother-in-law, a brand new frame building. About eight, or five minutes after, when that tidal

wave hit, that building left where we was at and I do not know - we do not

know where we were at after that building blew all to pieces. We sat - or

rather stood on a bed in a corner of a little piece that was left, to keep

our chins out of water. I stood the children on my shoulder and held them up

in my arms, and told them to hang on. I have a girl 15 years old who is strong

and could help me. My oldest boy was so cut to pieces by the glass, he

couldn't help, but he hung on. About two o'clock, I judge, the house hit

something. Something hit me - it was a coconut. Within five minutes the house

stopped, and I said to the wife, "We are on land". We thought we had floated

out to sea - we didn't know. I did not know where we were then. It never

has been darker - I have never seen such darkness. We just sat there, I

suppose it was two o'clock, until day came. Then it was not very light, but we knew it was day. I crawled out and located a road that ran from the ocean to the bay, and being so familiar with the place, I knew where I was at. I had gone about three-quarters of a mile on that road -- the house had. I went back and told the wife we were still on Matecumbe. We were South of the Hotel about three-quarters of a mile, and I didn't know who was left I didn't see a sign of a house anywhere, and no trees. We sat there probably another hour, and the wind had abated to normal force, but it was raining hard. I took the family and walked to the highway -- I realized it was the highway because it was a tar and asphalt road. There was a little piece of Mr. King's filling station left, and Mr. King was in it. We went there and got under shelter, standing in water to our ankles all day. It finally subsided about night.

Q. The afternoon of Monday, what was your barometer reading around noon?

A. 20-04.

Q. How fast did it drop between then and four o'clock?

A. At four o'clock that afternoon she was just about 29.

Q. When did it start dropping fast?

A. Well, I would say from 5:30 -- not later than six. She went faster than you have ever seen a clock go.

Q. How low did it drop?

A. Last reading I got was 26-05. I threw it down to save my family. I always keep it with me in a storm.

Q. Did you have any conversation with any of the officials of the F.E.R.A. with regard to the action of your barometer?

A. After it started to go so fast -- no, I never saw any one.

Q. Before it started?

A. I told Mr. Cutler and Mr. Sheldon - I said, "My barometer is falling, Mr. Cutler, and I know there is worse weather near us - I do not know how near it is to us, but there is one thing sure, Mr. Cutler, it is approaching fast". For this reason - the barometer moves up in the morning or in the afternoon, and it had not come up a bit, and immediately after twelve o'clock it started losing. I knew a storm was coming.

Q. What was the wind direction there at nine o'clock in the morning.

A. Alternating Northeast to East, shifting back and forth.

Q. What direction at noon?

A. Just about North or North by East, but the wind never blew any time during the day three minutes steady from one point.

Q. What time of day did you notice a perceptible increase in the wind velocity?

A. I wouldn't say I noticed until about three o'clock, when I was at the veterans hospital.

Q. What was the direction then?

A. Northeast, just about, and I noticed a distinct increase in the

wind. Dr. Main says, "What do you think of that wind." I says that is what the natives call "scud", those are things we have in hurricanes. I pointed at the clouds, and says, "See how much lower and heavier they are". He said that was what he had noticed. I told him we called those scuds.

Q. Constant increase in wind?

A. Increased considerably.

Q. Wind steady in Northeast?

A. Yes sir, I don't think it varied any more until about eight o'clock that night, and then it went East.

Q. Did you get a calm?

A. Almost, for a minute. And lightening! Terrible, it was. If you ask me something definite after the hurricane hit me, I do not know, but I knew definitely the last reading of the barometer. My wife asked me and I said, "You don't want to know", and I didn't tell her.

*Barometer
... 1000
... 1000
... 1000*

Q. How many trucks did they have in the camp, do you know?

A. I really don't. I should say we had about six trucks and at least two or three stake bottoms - that is, in all the camps. And we had, if I remember right, five of these Chevrolet pick-ups.

Q. Any chances of getting out of there with trucks?

A. I think they could have any time between four and six. After six no truck in the world could have made it.

Q. How many people would these trucks have taken?

A. The law issued out of the office was that only 18 men could ride on a truck - for working purposes - might have been 20. But I know they never would allow these veterans to over-load or stand up.

Q. How many trucks would you say they had in all the camps?

A. Well, roughly, I would say twenty trucks between the three camps, #1, #5 and #3. Now here is another thing that maybe I ought to state: Friday was pay day and I think that as many as three or four trucks were out of commission. Some of the veterans drove them out while drunk and wrecked them.

I know several were broke down. As to how many, I would not be able to state. Mr. O. D. King has charge of them, and I know he was cussing about them breaking up trucks.

Q. What was the general condition of the men there on Monday. Many of them drunk?

A. Yes sir. I venture to say - it is safe to say fifty percent. And

*50% of
vets drunk*

I tell you those men fought hard with those veterans - as hard as a man will fight with his children - trying to make men out of them, talking to them about liquor. There was a lot of wild ones in that bunch.

Q. What, in your opinion as a man having experienced all those hurricanes on the Keys - what time of the day did you realize there would be a hurricane - become alarmed?

A. Just about noon on Monday; but in regard to what we had, I never did become alarmed, because I didn't know anything about it - anything as bad as that. About four O'clock I moved my family. If I was asked who was to blame, I would say this: nobody expected what we had. Nobody seemed to have any expectation of what we were going to have. We prepared only for gales. The water is what did the damage - not the wind. I didn't want in a statement to say any one person was to blame. I cannot say any one person was to blame. The weather man must have lost the storm and could not give out the dope, and these people were hanging on what dope they could give out. The water rose over 15 feet in not over 16 minutes. It was not just a flow of water - it was swirling. I think it blew as hard in '29.

Q. You were down there in 1906 hurricane?

A. I was on the dredge. The force of that came further up. Water came over Ellis Key then. Those fills being stopped up is what causes the trouble.

Q. What would you say the damage would have been if it had been just wind and no water?

A. I would not believe the entire damage of the Islands would have been over six or seven thousand dollars. Would have lost porch roofs or something like that. I don't believe we would have lost two natives in the wind.

Q. How about veterans?

A. Well if they had gotten frantic and run out - hit by debris, and

the like. The natives would have known how to handle themselves in the wind. They are good sensible and level-headed people. There was nothing to hold on to when the water came up so high. I had a brother-in-law and his wife who had a storm house built out of natural stone with poured concrete floors and walls inside. It was a good size house, and it crumpled like it had been shot with big guns. He and his wife and little boy drowned. I saw cisterns washed out of the ground.

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Reported by Schaefer.