http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/110112/bountySM.png

Tall ship that visited Port Maritime Festivals sinks during superstorm

Sandy, the superstorm that battered the East Coast earlier this week, failed to deliver the brutal Lake Michigan conditions predicted off Port Washington Tuesday, but it did claim a well-known and fondly remembered visitor to the city.

The HMS Bounty, a 180-foot tall ship that was the star attraction at Port Washington Maritime Heritage Festivals in 2003 and 2010, sank Monday about 90 miles southeast of Hatteras, N.C., as the storm closed in on the eastern seaboard.

Fourteen crew members were rescued from a life raft by helicopters, but a 42-year-old female crew member died and the 63-year-old captain remained missing Tuesday.

Survivors reported that the Bounty, a replica of a British warship built for the 1962 film "Mutiny on the Bounty" starring Marlon Brando, lost power and was taking on water when the crew abandoned ship. It sank a short time later in 40-mph winds and 18-foot seas.

In Port Washington, the Bounty was a majestic sight in the harbor and a popular attraction. The city has hosted other noteworthy tall ships, but none with the Hollywood resume of the Bounty. In addition to her featured role in the Brando film, the ship appeared in "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest," as well as other films.

Sara Grover, executive director of Port Washington Main Street, which organizes Maritime Heritage Festival, recalled that the Bounty was the mystery ship announced at the last-minute at the 2010 festival, which drew record crowds.

"The Bounty is one of the biggest ships we've had here, if not the biggest, and it's certainly one of the most notable we've had," she said. "It was a treasure. We're lucky to have been able to have her in Port and to enjoy her."

Jackie Oleson, president of the Port Washington Historical Society, said the Bounty was a perfect addition to a festival meant to commemorate maritime history.

"When we have those kinds of ships in Port, it's such a neat peek into our past," she said, noting that the Historical Society booked an evening sail on the ship in 2010. "We're going to feel special that we were able to have the ship in Port Washington.

"It's a sad thought that the ship isn't here any more. A storm like that spreads so much sadness and destruction, and the fact this was a ship we know brings it home to us."

Sandy was so large that it was predicted to make its presence felt in more tangible ways in Port Washington and other Lake Michigan coastal cities Tuesday. Predictions of almost unheard of conditions on the lake — 55-mph winds and 33-foot waves — led to warnings about a wild and potentially dangerous lake.

By Tuesday morning, even before sunrise, parking lots along Port's lakefront were filled with people eager for a glimpse of the towering waves that never arrived.

What was supposed to be a north gale turned into a strong northwest wind that made much of the west coast of Lake Michigan, particularly the Port Washington coastline, a protected lee shore. There were waves, but off Port they paled in comparison to those produced by a typical, strong northeaster.

It was a different story in the middle of the lake, where by late morning winds were blowing at 43 mph, gusting to 56 mph, and waves were 20 feet high, according to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration buoy east of Racine.

Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON'S Rotary Park made a pretty setting for the Bounty when it was in town for the 2003 Maritime Heritage Festival. The tall ship, which caught the attention of onlookers as it maneuvered in the harbor, sank Monday off the coast of North Carolina. Ozaukee Press file photos