

Shipwrecks Along Cape Cod's "Forearm"

AT THE ATWOOD

By Lynn Van Dine

At two of our upcoming events – Chris Macort telling “Untold Stories of the Pirate Ship Whydah” on Aug. 1 and Pirates Day on Aug. 4 – there will be a lot of talk about shipwrecks.

And that's as it should be. With its strong currents, deep fogs and constantly moving shoals, Cape Cod's easterly coastline is famously treacherous for ships, especially during storms. The 50-mile stretch between Chatham and Provincetown is often called the “Graveyard of the Atlantic,” with more than 3,000 shipwrecks off its shore.

In our Pendleton Room at the Atwood House & Museum, we have exhibits offering details about ships that went down near Chatham and the U.S. Life Saving service here. For instance, the most luxurious yacht of its day was the *Alva*, built for William K. Vanderbilt in 1886 and named for his wife at a cost of \$500,000 (almost \$13 million in today's dollars). A steel-hulled, barque-rigged steamship, she was 285 feet long and 32 feet wide.

On the afternoon of July 23, 1892, with Mr. Vanderbilt and five friends aboard, the *Alva* departed Bar Harbor, Maine, headed for Newport, R.I. The next morning, the *Alva* ran into heavy fog off Monomoy Point, and the captain decided to drop anchor in Pollack Rip, about four miles off Chatham, to wait for clear weather. Unfortunately, she was anchored broadside in the steamer lanes. A 300-foot-long freighter named the *H. F. Dinock* (remember that name), headed from Manhattan to Boston, struck the *Alva*, sinking her. The crew and Mr. Vanderbilt and his guests were able to board lifeboats and were rescued by the crew of the *Dinock*.

The Joy Line steamer *Aransas* was built in 1877 to carry both freight and passengers. At 241 feet, her iron hull had four bulkheads. Just after midnight on May 7, 1905, she was steaming along her regular route between Boston and New York City when she encountered heavy fog halfway across Massachusetts Bay. With slowed engines, she approached Pollack Rip. There, the vessel was struck by the freighter *Glendower*, which was in tow of the tug *Patience*. The *Glendower* was not damaged, but the *Aransas* was struck nearly amidships on the starboard side and went down in a matter of 15 minutes. The 29 crewmen and 37 passengers were rescued, but one 25-year-old waitress, Miss Anna Field, perished. The wreck of the *Aransas* is now a popular diving site.

The *SS Horatio Hall* was a passenger and cargo ship, built in 1898 at 297 feet long. On March 10, 1909, the vessel was en route from Portland, Maine, to New York. Steaming in dense fog in the Pollack Rip Slue, she was rammed by the freighter *H. F. Dimock* (remember her?) The bow of the *Dimock* cut deep into the *Hall's* port side. The doomed vessel drifted onto Pollock Rip Shoals, where the Orleans Life Saving crew rescued her crew and passengers. Storms eventually pushed the steamer into deep water. The *Horatio Hall* was later demolished so as not to cause a hazard to navigation. What little wreckage that's left can be found in 35-40 feet of water.

The tanker *SS Pendleton* was built in 1944 for the War Shipping Administration and was sold to a commercial shipping company after the war. She was she was 504 feet long, with a beam of 68 feet 2 inches and a depth of 39 feet 2 inches. On February 18, 1952, while en route from New Orleans to Boston, *Pendleton* broke in two in a gale just south of Chatham. The ship's sinking and crew rescue (along with the break-up and rescue of its sister ship the *SS Fort Mercer*) in 1952 is told in the 2009 book *The Finest Hours: The True Story Behind the US Coast Guard's Most Daring Rescue*, by Michael J. Tougias, which inspired the 2016 Disney-produced film *The Finest Hours* with Chris Pine.

The most tragic shipwreck off Chatham was that of the barge *Wadena*, which ran aground in a storm on Shovelful Shoal off Monomoy Point on March 17, 1902, not far from another grounded barge, the *Fitzpatrick*. The *Wadena's* crew of five raised a distress signal, which was spotted by the crew at the Monomoy Life Saving Station. Eight Life Savers went out on a surf boat as the *Wadena's* crew, including its owner, William H. Mack, tried to salvage their belongings. After the Life Savers had picked up the stranded sailors, as they turned about, the surf boat was struck by a huge wave, capsizing the vessel. The captain of the other stranded barge, Elmer Mayo, went out on his own to try to save those lost to the sea, but found only one clinging to the craft, Lemuel Ellis. The Mack family had a memorial erected for all those lost near the Chatham Light to be within sight of the wreck.

Be sure to stop by the Atwood House & Museum to hear Chris Macort of the Whydah Pirate Museum tell "Untold Stories of the Pirate Ship Whydah," (back by popular demand) on Wednesday, Aug. 1, from 5 – 6:30 p.m. Admission is \$10; free for current members.

Pirates Day will be a fun-filled day for the whole family! The Free Men of the Sea will be at to the Atwood to perform demonstrations, show artifacts, and sing shanties. There will be face-painting and pirate merchandise for sale. Come learn about who pirates really were, what a pirate's life was like, and much more!

The Atwood House & Museum is located at 347 Stage Harbor Rd, Chatham. Visit our website at www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org.