

Mary Booth

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White Lake Area Historical Society



The Mary Booth was built in 1857 at Buffalo, New York by Bidwell & Banta, for John Booth of that city. The Schooner had a wooden hull, two masts, and was 100 feet in length with a 24 foot beam. She was classified as a Schooner.

The following is an account of the events that happened to the Mary Booth on a November day in 1877 and which appeared in the local newspaper on November 9, 1877.

The Scow Mary Booth, commanded by Capt. T. Baker, of Chicago, sunk about the middle of Lake Michigan, off from Milwaukee, on Monday evening, November 5, 1877, about half past nine. The vessel was loaded with maple lumber at Frankfort, on Monday, belonging to Messrs. Evans & Crane, consigned to George W. March of Chicago, consisting of about 100,000 feet.

They left Frankfort about 8 a.m., wind south-east steering southwest, making for the western shore. At 12:00 p.m. the wind was blowing a heavy gale, and the pumps working all right. At six p.m. the crew went to supper and the weather had moderated somewhat, but on trying the pumps again found that water was making considerable headway. A search was immediately instigated, and it was found that a heavy stream of water was rushing in on the starboard quarter. All hands immediately flew to the pumps, but they found that they were useless, and that water was steadily increasing.

They then chopped out the ceiling and found that a large plank had burst out and that no help remained for her as the vessel was rapidly filling with water.

The captain then ordered the yawl boat manned and put in readiness for any emergency but had scarce got her righted and the men in, when the vessel gave a lurch forward and turned bottom up, sinking before they were out of sight. The captain, who was the last to leave, barely escaped with his life.

It was about half past nine in the evening, and they drifted at random until morning amid a heavy sea in a small open boat, drenched to the skin, and without comparatively anything to eat, and with scanty clothing, the men only saving what they had on.

They rowed by turns in this manner until about 8 p.m. on Tuesday evening. After 24 hours of suffering, nearer dead than alive, they sighted White Lake.

The crew was composed of seven men, all living in Chicago, and when they arrived at this port they were in a deplorable condition. They were so weak from privations and over exertion that they were barely able to stand. One man had his feet frozen to the knees, and the others were more or less chilled and frozen. There was no insurance on either the vessel or lumber, the whole being a total loss.

All of this happened before the White Lake Life Saving Station was built in 1887. Fortunately, the existing channel was completed in 1871.