

Muskegon lumber schooner's 120-year-old sinking honored during Saturday event

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Eric Gaertner | Muskegon Chronicle

By

MUSKEGON — The schooner named after one of Muskegon's best-known lumber barons will be remembered with a commemorative event on the 120th anniversary of the ship's tragic demise.

The Hackley & Hume lumber schooner Thomas Hume is set to have her lumber-shipping career and sinking in southern Lake Michigan honored Saturday with a special program at a recently created museum exhibit, premiere of a documentary film, a concert by Great Lakes folksinger Lee Murdock and the release of a new nonfiction book about the topic.

The exhibit, based on research dives conducted on the shipwreck **originally discovered in 2005**, is touted for its ability to solve a long-running mystery on how the schooner sank. The dive team's evidence-supported theory is that a storm caused the tragedy, ending more than a century of rumors and other theories concerning the May 21, 1891, disappearance of the three-masted, 132-foot schooner.

The Lakeshore Museum Center in Muskegon and Holland-based Michigan Shipwreck Research Associates partnered on the exhibit, "Unsolved Mysteries: The Shipwreck Thomas Hume," **which opened earlier this month in the City Barn** at the Hackley & Hume Historic Site, 484 W. Webster.

The commemorative events begin at 3 p.m. Saturday at the exhibit. Those attending the event then move over to the Muskegon Museum of Art,



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A tour group walks through the exhibit "Unsolved Mysteries: The Shipwreck Thomas Hume" at the Hackley and Hume City Barn.



296 W. Webster, for the concert at 4:30 p.m., followed by the showing of the documentary film.

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Oil lamps are part of the display in the "Unsolved Mysteries: The Shipwreck Thomas Hume" exhibit at the Hackley and Hume City Barn.

Valerie van Heest, a diver and author, was project director for the exhibit. She also co-authored the book with maritime historian William Lafferty and narrated the film with diver Craig Rich.

In addition to solving a Great Lakes mystery concerning the loss of the Thomas Hume, the exhibit and other items help draw attention to the role the schooners played in Muskegon's lumbering era and the seven-member crew who died in the tragedy, Van Heest said.

In examining the wreck site, the dive team located shoes, some intact clothing, coins, a locket, a cigar holder and other items.

"What rings clear with me is even though we're dealing with a crew where we really only know their names, the shipwreck kind of brings them to life," van Heest said. "Finding all those personal things gives us a connection to the people that we normally wouldn't have."

Dani LaFleur, collections and technology manager at the Lakeshore Museum Center, said it was fun to work on an exhibit that shines a light on the local lumbering era's often-forgotten part in shipping lumber on the Great Lakes.

"It fits our maritime history and how important ships and schooners were to Muskegon's history," LaFleur said.

The exhibit features a large photo display of the schooner's wreck site and a map of Lake Michigan with an "X" marking the spot, about 24 miles northeast of Chicago. Based on the wreck's location, the dive team concluded that the schooner must have changed course to head for St. Joseph in the storm.




SHIPWRECK EVENT

Activities planned for the commemorative event Saturday honoring the career and sinking of the Muskegon lumber schooner Thomas Hume:

- Exhibit — 3-4:30 p.m. Saturday in the City Barn at the Hackley & Hume Historic Site, 484 W. Webster.
- Concert — 4:30 p.m. Saturday at the Muskegon Museum of Art, 296 W. Webster; Great Lakes folksinger and historian Lee Murdock; admission is free, but reservations are requested by calling 722-0278.
- Documentary film — Following the concert at the Muskegon Museum of Art; Focused on the career of the lumber schooner Thomas Hume, including a re-enactment of the sinking; admission is free, but reservations are requested by calling 722-0278.
- Book — Throughout the event, a nonfiction book will be released for purchase; Valerie van Heest, who co-authored the book with William Lafferty, will be on hand to sign it.

In

addition to recognizing the rumors that circulated following the schooner's disappearance, the exhibit explains the dive team's theory based on its exploration of the shipwreck and its contents.



Robert Underhill|Contributed

A member of the dive team examines the bow section of the Thomas Hume shipwreck in southern Lake Michigan.

The lumber company had claimed in 1891 that the schooner was too well maintained to have succumbed to a storm.

The project is sponsored by the Michigan Humanities Council.

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