

# The Martha's Vineyard Times

## Northeaster claims schooner, snarls Island traffic

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Hammered ashore in an easterly gale, Valora, a 36-foot wooden schooner that operated in the charter business out of Vineyard, parted from her mooring in outer Vineyard Haven Harbor and went ashore on the harbor breakwater Monday afternoon, despite efforts to save her. No one was aboard at the time. The schooner took a fearsome beating against the breakwater rocks, and observers expected she would be declared a total loss.



The Valora's masts are visible on the east side of the Vineyard Haven breakwater, as she breaks up on the rocks. Photo by Ron Callahan

The captain of an arriving Steamship Authority ferry alerted the harbormaster to the wreck.

Elsewhere on the stormy weather front, ferry cancellations and the inability to use the Oak Bluffs terminal because of relentless bad weather and the normally heavy traffic associated with the end of the Ag Fair and the approaching end of summer led to long lines of traffic Monday snaking in both directions back from Five Corners.

### Eerie destruction

Ron Callahan, aboard his 33-ft Bertram powerboat Scout on a mooring about 100-feet away, but in the lee of the breakwater, said he heard a radio report about the drifting sailboat, from the captain of the Steamship Authority's Island Home to the Tisbury harbormaster, as the ferry approached the Vineyard Haven dock about 3:45 pm.



A photo of the Valora at sail.

"I could hear it [Valora] smashing up against the rocks," Mr. Callahan said. "It was eerie and quite upsetting."

The pounding waves blew debris from the disintegrating vessel into the inner harbor. "It was a slow, powerful death," Mr. Callahan said.

The Valora was launched in 2006 at Boothbay Harbor Shipyard. She is used for daysails and private charters. According to her website, she is "the result of a passionate collaboration between her owner, Karl Frey, and her designer and builder, David Stimson."

Phil Hale, owner of the Martha's Vineyard Shipyard, said he was unable to reach the Valora in time to save her and later called all his employees off the water due to the hazardous conditions. "I told all my guys to come ashore," Mr. Hale said. "Waves were short of six feet out there."

In a phone conversation Tuesday, Ben Eriksen, captain of the vessel, said it was a hard day for everyone associated with the schooner. He said the weather came from the worst possible direction for the outer harbor, where Valora was on a mooring. "The forecast was 25 to 30 knots, with an easterly component," Mr. Eriksen said. "That turned out to be 35 to 45 knots northeasterly. We're just going to move forward and get the clean up organized for tomorrow."

The easterly blast, spawned by a stationary, intense low pressure center southeast of Nantucket, drove heavy rain ashore and kept emergency crews scrambling across the Island Monday.

The police scanner crackled all day with reports of broken branches endangering power lines and fallen in roads, medical emergencies, jammed traffic, and motor vehicle accidents.

A view of Vineyard Haven Harbor is available on The Times webcam.

### **Steamship Authority challenges**

The SSA stopped running the Governor and the Sankaty by early evening, and canceled the last scheduled round trips of the Martha's Vineyard and Island Home.

The Town of Tisbury and the American Red Cross Cape and Islands Chapter came to the rescue of some stranded SSA passengers by opening an emergency shelter at Tisbury School, according to SSA general manager Wayne Lamson.

"A few people took advantage of that and stayed there for the night, and we appreciated that help — it was great," Mr. Lamson said in a phone call Tuesday.

The SSA pulled its freight boat Katama from Fairhaven to alleviate the backlog of vehicles trying to get off Martha's Vineyard Tuesday morning.

"It's good we have the spare vessel and we were able to get an extra crew to come in on their days off and run that service for us today," Mr. Lamson said. "We try to do whatever we can, and hopefully by the end of the day we'll be in pretty good shape."

Although Steamship Authority ferries continued to operate in and out of Vineyard Haven only, Mr. Lamson said everything was up and running Tuesday.

"With the wind out of the east, we're still getting a lot of rollers coming across the dock there in Oak Bluffs," Mr. Lamson said. "We're operating five vessels. The two large vessels and the three freight vessels, the Sankaty, the Governor, and the Katama, are all operating, and we're doing the best we can to get people off today who got stranded yesterday."

Mr. Lamson said operating all ferry service from Vineyard Haven allowed the SSA to take advantage of the Island Home's lift decks by moving trucks to freight boats, since boats were coming and going from the same terminal all day.

### **Tisbury School shelters stranded passengers**

With news that the last ferry trip might be canceled Monday night and that 300 people wanted to take it, SSA agent Robert Townes called his dad, Richard, who is Tisbury's emergency management director.

Mr. Townes has a signed agreement with Tisbury school from principal Richard Smith, allowing him to open an emergency shelter there at his discretion.

"With the hotels and the situation the way it is with the President here, there aren't many rooms available," said the senior Mr. Townes. "So after talking to my son, I called the Red Cross and talked to Jim Thomas, who runs the Martha's Vineyard operation. I found out he actually was in Virginia, and he called from there and got his team in place."

Red Cross staffing leader Shelley Christiansen called upon Bill Howell, Maribel Umpierrez Adams, and Ed Pierce to join her in setting up and manning the shelter for the night.

"When I got the call we needed to open the shelter, at that time the Steamship Authority was saying 'we don't know how many people there will be; it could be as many as 300 or as few as 20,' depending on how many had places to go back to or other solutions," Ms.

Christiansen said on Tuesday. "We just stood ready for whatever." She put out an alert to all Island Red Cross volunteers, asking them to be on standby in case they were needed.

In the meantime, two of the crew rounded up supplies from storage units, while the other two set up things at the shelter and held down the fort.

Mr. Townes gave the Red Cross team high marks. "They have a trailer that has cots and blankets on it, and they went and got it out at the airport and found out it had a flat," he said. "So they changed the flat in the dark about 8:30, and managed to get back down and meet all of us at the school. We had it up and running as a shelter by 9:30."

Mr. Gosselin's son Karl and Mr. Townes' sons Shawn and Robert joined them at the shelter and pitched in and helped set up 30 cots.

"We figured people would be in need of snacks and refreshments and called upon Cumberland Farms, who stepped up to the plate and donated some things, as they have in the past in other situations," Ms. Christiansen.

Mr. Townes said he was grateful to the Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA) for sending a bus to take people from the SSA terminal up to the school.

Nineteen signed in to use the shelter, Ms. Christiansen confirmed. "It turned out to be relatively light — they were coming from as close as Chatham and as far as California," she said.

Their reasons for seeking shelter were as varied as their hometowns. A few had checked out of hotels and couldn't go back because there were no rooms available. Others could check back in but couldn't afford to do so.

In addition to a few stranded day-trippers, Ms. Christiansen said, "One woman in particular was kind of embarrassed, because she had come over as late as 4:30 or something, just for dinner, and had caught the last boat running. It had never occurred to her that she might not be able to get back."

The Tisbury School served nicely as a shelter, with showers available in locker rooms off the gym. Mr. Townes even set up a television in one corner of the room.

Although some people were initially upset about being stranded, Mr. Townes said they calmed down and everyone seemed to make the best of it. A few people salvaged the evening with a walk into Vineyard Haven to catch a movie at the Capawock Theatre.

Mr. Towne's son Robert stuck around to answer questions about the SSA and getting off the Island the next day. Dukes Country emergency management director Chuck Cotnoir stopped by to see how everyone fared.

At 5:45 am on Tuesday morning, the VTA helped out again and sent another bus to the school to take people to Vineyard Haven SSA terminal in time to catch the 6 am ferry.

"Actually, for the amount of lead-time we had, it worked out very well," Mr. Townes said.

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