Diving into the Wreck

“As we passed over the wreck we felt excitement mixed with a twinge of sadness... it was bittersweet,” says Anne Smrcina, among a handful of researchers on the R/V Connecticut to see the first ghostly images of the Steamship Portland in over a century (see sonar sidescan, below). The legend now lies on the ocean floor, covered in barnacles, sea anemones, and “tangled in fishing nets,” says Smrcina.

On November 26, 1898, with 192 aboard including at least 17 African American Portlanders (see “S.S. Portland,” by Herb Adams, Winterguide 1999), the Portland sailed from Boston, Portland-bound, despite severe storm warnings. Perhaps the passengers were eager for home after the Thanksgiving holiday, or maybe Captain Blanchard was overconfident in the 281-foot, shallow-hulled vessel’s ability to ride out a storm. The Portland never made it home. Instead she sank off Cape Cod; her final resting place has now been confirmed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

“We were hopeful that this was the wreck – one of more than 50 anomalies we’d scanned in the sanctuary – but once we were above the Portland, it’s not a gleeful thing... there is a finality to it,” says Smrcina. Though time and tides have swept away the superstructure, remains of the smokestacks, paddle wheel walking beams, rudder, and bollards provided fingerprints needed for identification. Future expeditions will study the largely intact hull. “We considered it too dangerous to send anyone into the wreck,” because a diver might be caught in the nets, another victim of a century-old disaster.

Lobsters, Etc.

Isle au Haut’s Linda Greenlaw celebrates the release of The Lobster Chronicles at Books Etc. in Falmouth. The Chronicles have bobbed from 2nd, to 3rd, to 14th on the New York Times non-fiction bestseller list, and are bringing Maine’s close-knit fishing communities into the spotlight. Left to right: Allan & Nancy Schmidt, co-owners of Books Etc., Greenlaw, and Falmouth residents Annie & Jack Sutton.

Scrutiny on the Bounty

Fresh from a $1.5 million reconditioning in Sample’s Shipyard in Boothbay Harbor, where she received “new engines, new galley, new crew’s quarters – new everything from the waterline down,” the H.M.S. Bounty II, star of 1962’s Mutiny on the Bounty, starring Marlon Brando, visits Portland Harbor on the way to Greenport, New York, her new home. The repairs took “almost a year to the day,” says Margaret Ramsey, director of seaside operations. Next phase? “A fresh coat of paint three to five years from now, which could cost another $1.5 million.”

Congrats to the 5 Vietnamese physicians who’ve completed the first year of a 6-year program at Maine Medical Center designed to establish a curriculum to integrate family medicine into Vietnamese schools. Back row: Dr. Lieu, Hanoi Medical School; Dr. Son, Thai Nguyen Medical School; Dr. Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City Medical School; and Dr. Vinh, Thai Nguyen Medical School. Front, Dr. An, Hanoi Medical School. – Compiled by Sarah Hammond