

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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HILARIA



1675 ton American ship Hilaria : On fire at Town Pier Port Melbourne. 1895. , 1895. (TROVE)



View along Hilariau0027s deck after the fire. Looking from the aft. Malcom Brodie Collection 1895



1/2 THE HILARIA BURNING AT THE PORT MELBOURNE TOWN PIER. David Syme & Co, Melbourne, 1895. 3 prints: wood engravings published in the Australian news



2/2 THE HILARIA BURNING AT THE PORT MELBOURNE TOWN PIER. David Syme & Co, Melbourne, 1895. 3 prints: wood engravings published in the Australian news

Location

Town Pier, Port Phillip Bay

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S331

Date lost

09/07/1895

Official number

92355

Construction material

Wood

Hull

Sheathed with yellow metal 1889. Felt and yellow metal 1892 Classed 'Veritas' 13 years, by Bureau Veritas

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

3

Length/Breadth/Depth

225.00 Feet / 41.50 Feet / 24.30 Feet

Builder

John K. Dunlop

Year of construction

1886

Built port

St Johns, New Brunswick

Built country

Canada

Registration Port

St Johns, New Brunswick

Date lost

09/07/1895

Departure

Lying at wharf; after voyage from New York to Melbourne

Cargo

General, keronse, rosin, and 1 box detonators consigned to Messrs Couche, Calder & Co. (UID 9). Cotton, grass seed, paint (UID 152)

Owner

William Thompson & Co

Master

Captain C.O.Allen (from 1891)

Cause of loss

Fire in the hold completely burnt the ship. Was too dangerous to attempt to tow, but this was delayed when a man fell into the hold. It was then too dangerous to tow, so after several unsuccessful attempts sink it by boring auger holes, shooting with a 12lb breech-loading field piece, and detonating guncotton, it was finally scuttled using dynamite (UID 152)

Number of crew

6

Crew comments

Mark Lyndsey (2nd mate), Benson (watchman), Stein (chief officer), Edward Gibson (watchman)

Statement of significance

<p>The Hilaria is socially significant for its association with the death of a District Superintendent during its sinking, and the act of bravery associated with his attempted rescue. It also had a significant social role after it was adapted for re-use as swimming baths.</p>

VHR history

The Hilaria was burnt at moorings in the early hours of July 9th 1895. An earlier fire had occurred while Hilaria lay at Town Pier on 7 July 1895. It was successfully extinguished by fire brigade. Captain, wife and child and the others on board escaped. Another fire, found to be unrelated to the first, broke out two nights later. Detective Superintendent Christopher Gee lost his life after falling 26 feet into the hold, despite the heroic effort of Deputy Chief Officer O'Brien to retrieve him from the hold. This blaze ultimately destroyed the ship before it could be towed away from the pier. Attempts made from HMCV Nelson to scuttle the burning ship met with no success until explosives were used. Coronial inquiry found the fires had been deliberately lit and were not the result of spontaneous combustion as was suggested in some quarters. Captain Allen was totally exonerated but the boatswain, acting as second mate, and an able seaman, acting as watchman, were committed for trial. On 15 August they were remanded until next sitting of Supreme Court but no record of any trial during subsequent sittings was located, although the Criminal Records Book was inspected to 15 April 1896. Ship valued at 8,000 pounds, although one expert considered it would be difficult to find a buyer for a wooden sailing ship. It was only lightly insured. It had traded chiefly in the China Seas. Contrary to some reports, it was not a sister ship to Habitant (burnt the previous year) but was built on the same pattern. The fire brought forth a plea for floating fire engines at the port. Footscray City Council documents note that the Hilaria was towed on to the banks of the Maribyrnong River to be used as swimming baths (Cited in Duncan, Maritime Infrastructure Project, notes on file)