



Gotham

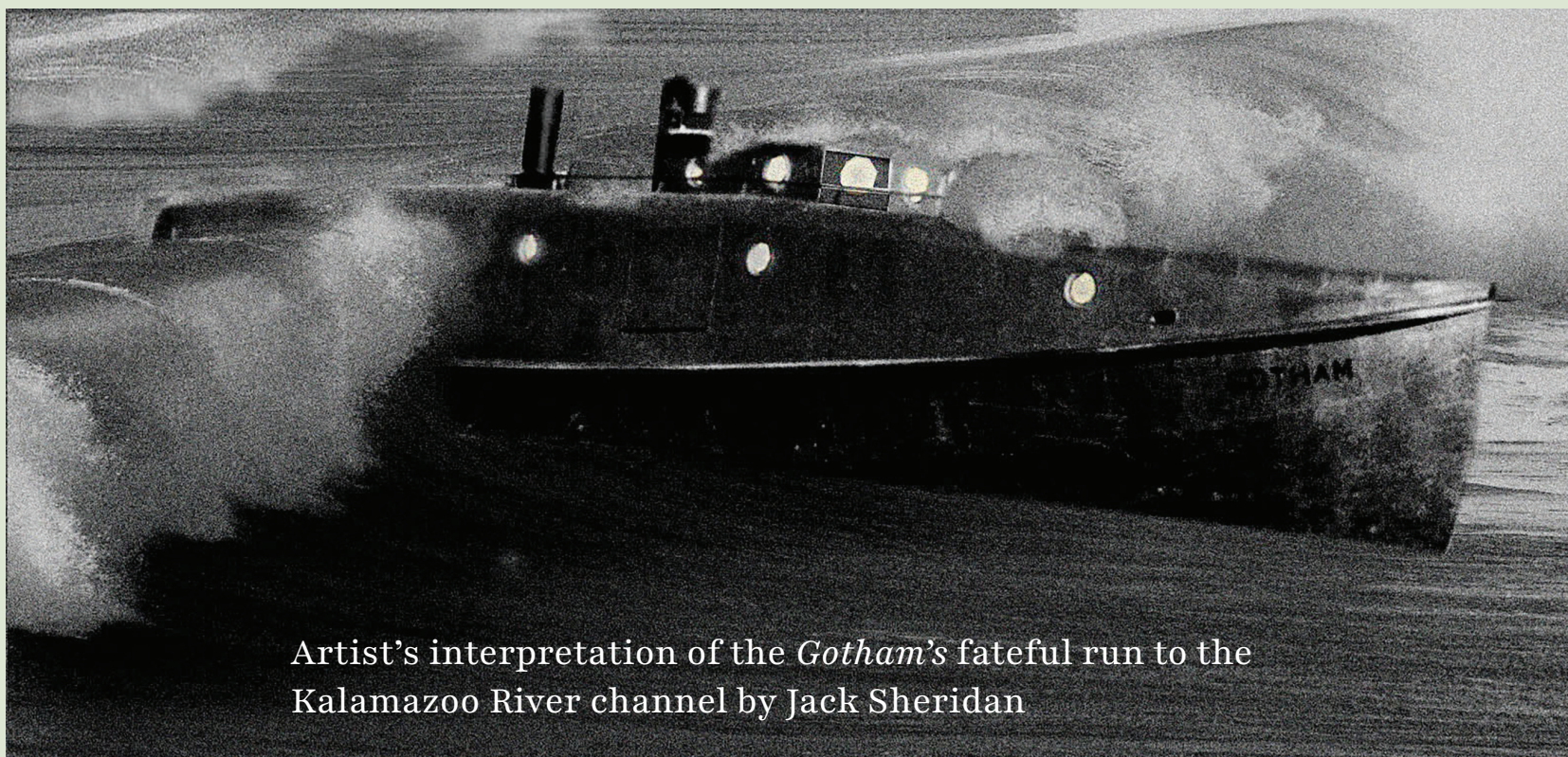
“The Greatest Tragedy in Saugatuck’s Maritime History”

— December 17, 1943 *Commercial Record*

The *Gotham* (1941) was an all-steel fishing tug designed and built by local fisherman Lewis Gotham and his sons Fred and Sam. With sleek lines like a submarine, the *Gotham* knifed through the waves rather than rode over them. It looked invincible. Justifiably proud of their accomplishment, Lewis reportedly said of the *Gotham*, “You can never sink her.”



The Gothams proudly display their model hull. Gotham is pronounced “GO-tham” rather than “goth-ham.”



Artist's interpretation of the *Gotham's* fateful run to the Kalamazoo River channel by Jack Sheridan



Townpeople gather as the *Gotham* was raised from Saugatuck channel, May 1944.

On December 11, 1943, the *Gotham* was caught by a sudden storm. Lewis Gotham was a experienced captain so initially he chose to ride out the storm in the middle of the ice-free lake. His crew would be in for a wild ride, but the *Gotham* was no danger of striking

anything. But that night — for reasons unknown — the *Gotham* tried to make it to shore in 50-mile-per-hour northwest winds. When waves are high, entering the narrow river mouth risked slamming into the cement channel walls or grounding on a sand bar.

Three days later the *Gotham* wreck was located in 20 feet of water, 100 yards north of the channel. The bodies of Lewis Gotham, Sam Gotham and crewman F. Harley Jones washed ashore in the spring of 1944. The vessel was dragged inside the channel in May, revealing the bodies of Fred Gotham and 15-year-old Billy Jones buried in sand inside. The rear doors of the *Gotham* had been pushed in but there was little damage to the hull.

Today, the *Gotham* life preserver is on display here in memory of the tragedy. Every year on the evening of December 11, the *Gotham* descendants carry the bell recovered from the wreck to the water and ring it five times — once for each life lost.