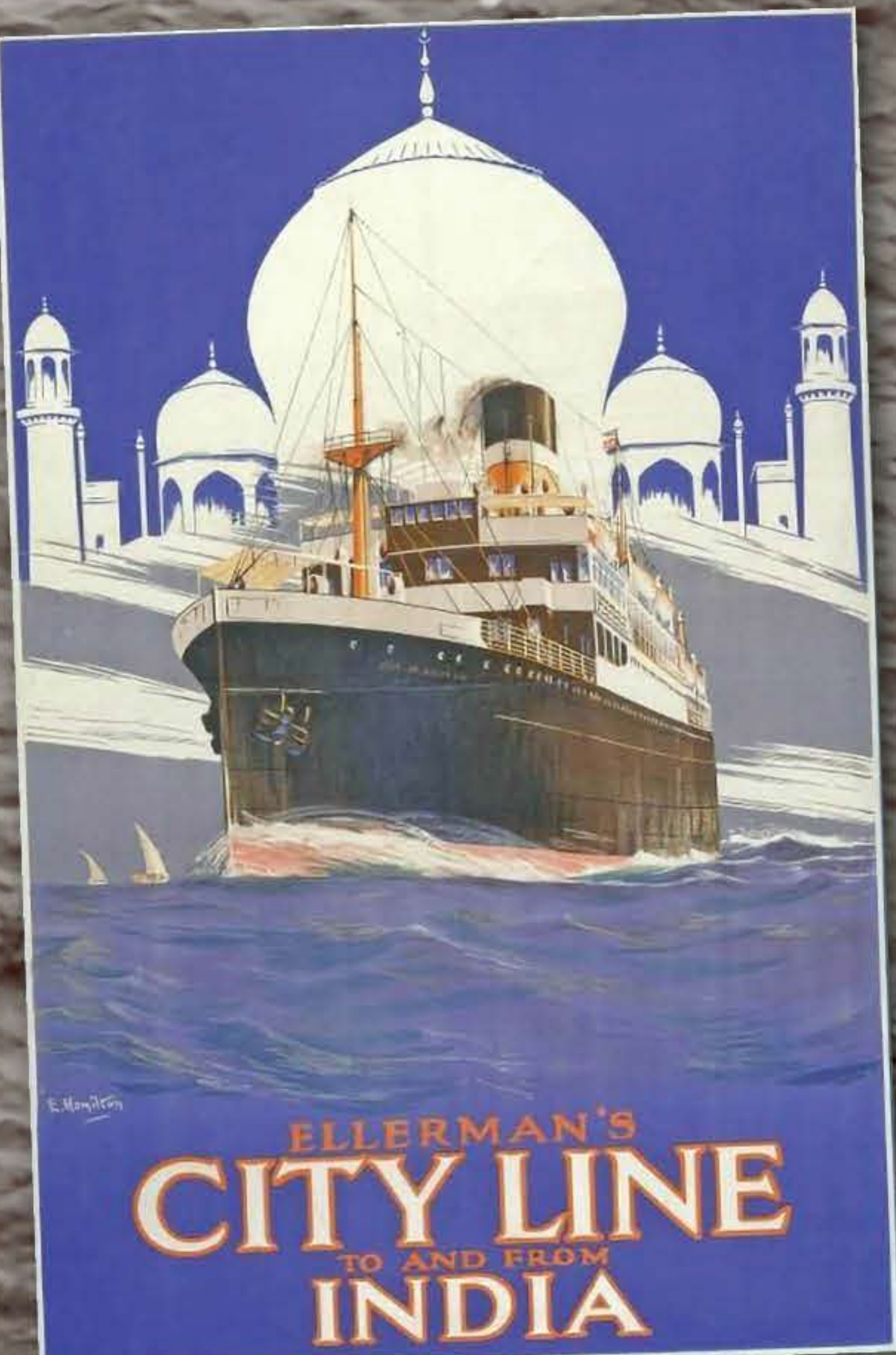


FATE OF THE “ZOO SHIP”

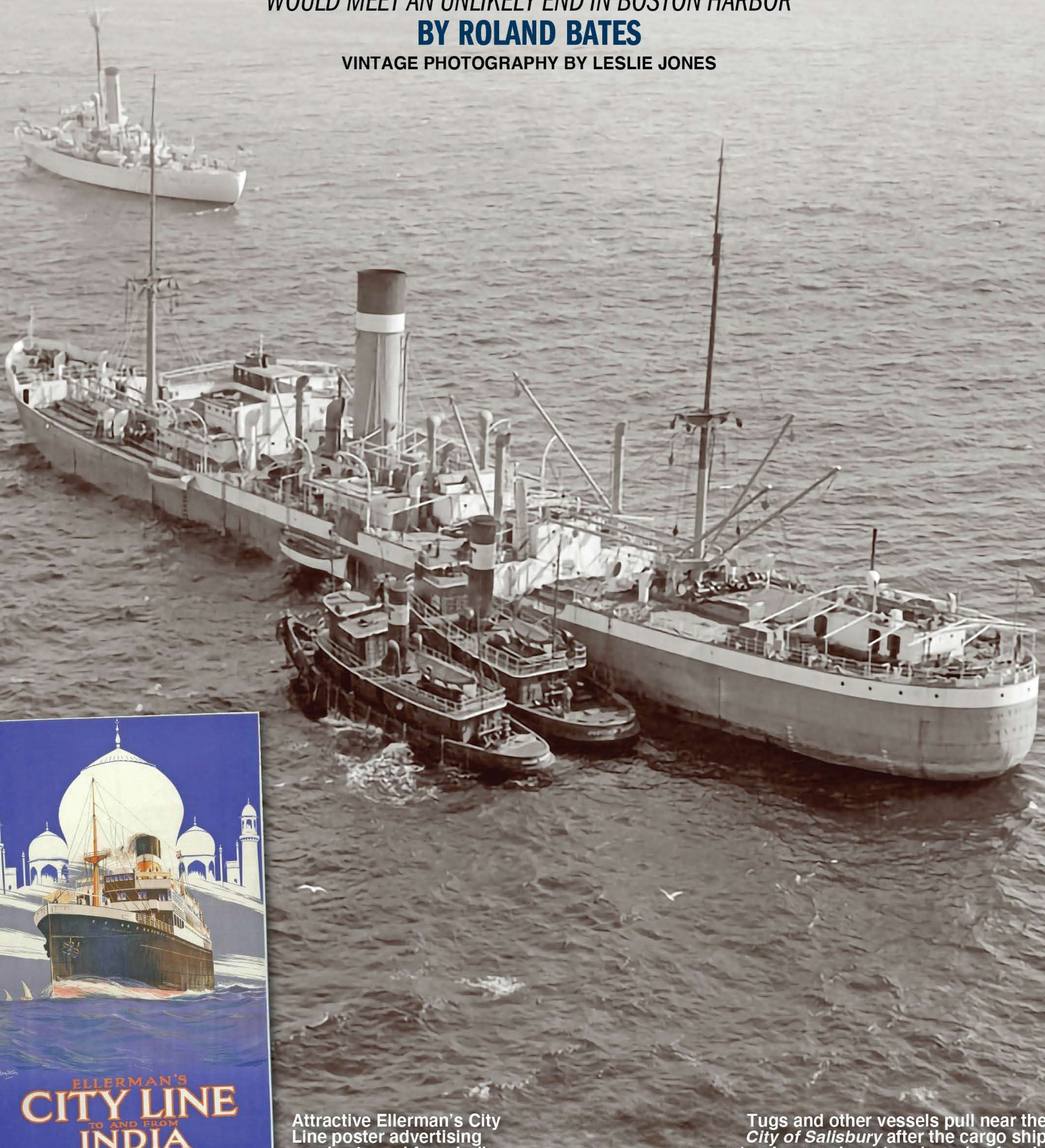
LOADED WITH EXOTIC ANIMALS, SS CITY OF SALISBURY
WOULD MEET AN UNLIKELY END IN BOSTON HARBOR

BY ROLAND BATES

VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY BY LESLIE JONES



Attractive Ellerman's City Line poster advertising service to and from India.



Tugs and other vessels pull near the City of Salisbury after the cargo ship struck an underwater pinnacle of rock.

It had not been the most pleasant of voyages but SS *City of Salisbury* was now on the home stretch of a long voyage that included stops in Calcutta, India; Ceylon; the Malay States; Halifax, Nova Scotia, and now the last stop in Boston Harbor on 21 April 1938 before heading to the final destination of New York City. The 10,000-mile journey had seen the ship, flying the flag of British-Ellerman City Line, take on a variety of cargo that included iron, rice, sugar, tea, jute, rubber, and other products of the Orient. That portion of the cargo was valued at \$1,500,000 in 1938 dollars. However, as we shall see, the steamer had some of its space devoted to a much more unusual cargo.

Built in 1925 by William Gray Co. Ltd. in Sunderland, England, *City of Salisbury* had a length of 415 feet, a beam of 54 feet, and a draft of 30 feet with a total tonnage of 5924 tons. Ellerman Lines was a British cargo and passenger shipping company that was founded in the late 19th Century and continued to expand by acquiring smaller shipping lines until becoming one of the largest shipping firms in the world.

That morning of 22 April, and prior to departing Boston Harbor, the *City of Salisbury* had taken on Boston Pilot Capt. William H. Lewis to guide the ship toward the outer harbor. The weather was clear as they departed its dock but a thick fog bank soon covered the ship. Navigating in very limited visibility was no simple matter but Lewis was confident of their position. Northeast of Graves Ledge Light, his Government Chart #246 showed that *City of Salisbury* had 33 feet of water under her.

Lewis had the ship proceed slowly through the fog as the First Mate regaled the pilot with tales of the rest of the cargo while Capt. Oscar Harris looked on. Besides the usual items from the Orient, the ship was carrying a wide variety of exotic animals and had earned the nickname of the “Zoo Ship.” The First Mate said they had a massive Himalayan bear in the hold but it had somehow got out of its cage, jumped on the deck where it scattered the crew, and then went



Boston Police rescue boat heads out to the site of the sinking.



Boston Harbor was extremely busy and rescue vessels were soon on hand to remove most of the crew.



At this point, the hull was still intact and all the live animals had been rescued.

overboard and onto the Calcutta pier where it headed for the warehouses lining the harbor. Terrified Indians ran in every direction. Then, while at sea, an extremely long King Cobra apparently got a bit hungry and devoured its mate, much to the horror of those that watched. At Halifax, about 25 monkeys managed to get loose and took off in every direction — some jumping on the heads of fleeing crewmen and ripping at their

faces with claws and teeth. As the First Mate noted, they would be happy to get rid of the hundreds of animals, snakes, and birds that formed a valuable part of the cargo.

Lewis took particular note of the Graves Ledge Light on the map as he navigated the ship through the fog, which seemed to be thickening even more. The Graves is the outermost island of the Boston Harbor Islands and is nine miles offshore