



Postcard courtesy of Jeanne C. Sedler Appel

The Slocum

June 15, 1904

A tragedy

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German Genealogy Group
members with a story to
tell . . .
their recollections.

Bobbe Horton

**Member #1462
Grand Rapids, Michigan**

Cataclysm in Kleindeutschland

After they arrived in America, Katti's parents, Lorenz Ulrich and Sophie Kröll joined St. Marks Lutheran Church, (Illustration 7), Sixth & First Avenue, in Kleindeutschland, or "Little Germany," in New York City. The area is now known as the East Village and then as the Weiss Garten neighborhood.¹ As Kleindeutschland's spiritual center, St. Marks was "almost mystically revered in the old country, as the first place any voyager would seek out upon arrival in the New World."² Throughout the neighborhood, German immigrants could find German fraternal societies, athletic clubs (turnvereins), theaters, restaurants and beer gardens in abundance. Anne Harms-Yeomans remembered hearing how fond Lorenz and Sophie were of St. Marks' minister, Reverend George C.F. Haas. He performed the marriage of their daughter Katti and Henry John Harms.³ Katti's sister Lizzie was her Maid of Honor (Illustration 8).

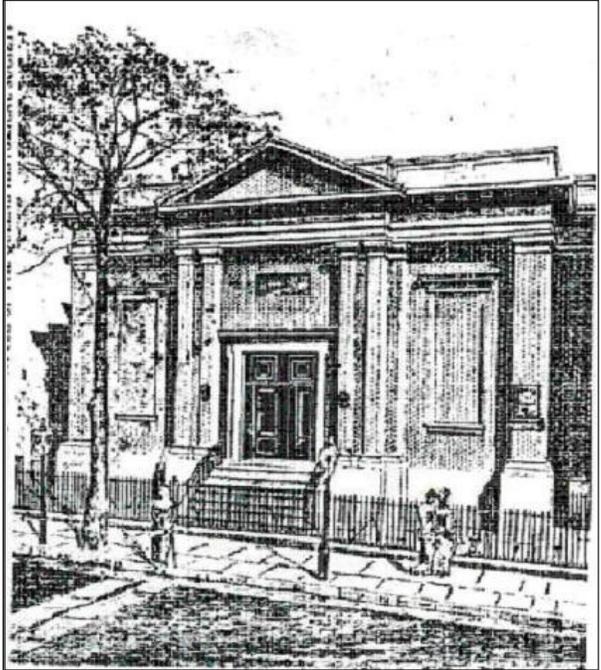


Illustration 7: St. Marks Lutheran Church, a haven for German immigrants



Illustration 8: Elizabeth "Lizzie" Ulrich, Katti's sister and Maid of Honor

Every year, to celebrate the end of the Sunday school session, Reverend Haas and his parishioners organized an excursion and picnic to Locust Point, Long Island. Since 15 Jun 1904 was a Wednesday, mostly women and children attended.⁴ School children were even excused from classes to be part of this seventeenth annual outing. Lizzie, a Sunday-school teacher at St. Marks⁵, arranged for the day off from her \$10 per week salary (equivalent to \$249 in 2008) as a bookkeeper. Anne Harms-Yeomans remembered Lizzie as a hat model and seamstress, who made ties, before she became a bookkeeper. Lizzie wore the most fashionable millinery of the time in her modeling job. Her hats were the talk of the neighborhood. Lizzie was well loved in the Ulrich family, but at age 32, she was not married and was still living at home.

Sophie asked Katti if she could take her grandson Lorenz Henry Harms (29 Nov 1889-25 Apr 1952), a teenager at the time, on the picnic, but Katti said no because Lorenz was feverish the night before. Sophie and her daughter Lizzie went alone. They were disappointed for Lorenz, but excited about the picnic with so many friends and Lizzie's Sunday school children.

(Continued on page 5)

Bound for the beaches of Long Island, the excursion steamer The General Slocum left New York's Third Street Pier at 9:30am with more than 1300 passengers from St. Marks Church on board.⁶ Less than an hour later, she was a burning inferno (Illustration 9). Everything was working against the parishioners' survival: the crew, hired off the streets, was never adequately trained in emergency procedures; the lifeboats were painted or wired in place; rotten fire hoses couldn't sustain pressure from the pumps and the life jackets were available, but rotten, as well as having been filled with scrap iron to bring them up to the weight required by law, rendering them useless, even for children. In addition, highly flammable hay was illegally stored on board, acting as an accelerant. All of these factors contributed to a maritime disaster of such magnitude that history recorded The General Slocum as "the most deadly peacetime maritime disaster and New York's deadliest day, before the terrorist strikes on the World Trade Center twin towers on 11 Sep 2001."⁷

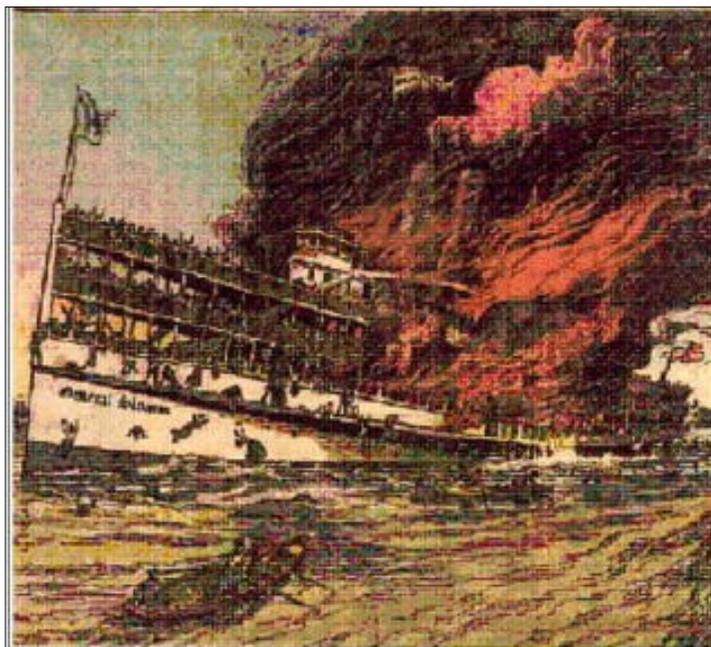


Illustration 9: The General Slocum ablaze

When the fire broke out, panic ensued. Hundreds died in the first fifteen minutes and hundreds more in the next fifteen minutes before the ship was beached.

Sophie and her daughter Lizzie remained on the Slocum as long as they could, but passengers were pushing and shoving as the flames leapt at their backs. Finally, hand-in-hand, they jumped into the waters of the East River to escape the choking smoke and flames. Reverend Haas did the same with his wife, Anna, holding one of his hands and his thirteen-year old daughter, Gertrude, the other. In the pursuit of safety, more and more parishioners jumped overboard, landing on Lizzie⁸ (**Exhibit J**), Anna and Gertrude. They never resurfaced, perishing with over 1000 other picnickers.⁹ Of those who jumped into the River, very few of them were picked up alive. Even good swimmers—and there weren't many in those days—had little chance, with the waves whipped up by the wind and the long dresses and layers of petticoats that dragged them down, not to mention the "lifejackets" that drowned, instead of saved them.



Illustration 10: A house in mourning

On the day following the tragedy, flags were at half-mast throughout New York City. As was the German custom in those days, the front door of the Ulrich home was hung with one black mourning sash to signify Lizzie's death (Illustration 10). A black sash indicated the loss of an adult, while a white sash represented a child. Lizzie was buried in the Ulrich family plot (Lot 1660, Map 3A) at the Lutheran Cemetery, now called All Faiths Cemetery in Middle Village, Queens, as are most of the other victims.

(Continued on page 6)

Although it is probably Elizabeth Ulrich who was buried in the Ulrich plot on 22 June 1904, the cemetery records identify her as Edith Ulrich. This misidentification was probably due to the sheer number of burials taking place in one cemetery during a week's time. With the vast number of funerals, it was decided that none would be held at St. Marks. All services were conducted in funeral parlors or in private homes. The horrific loss of lives and the burial of 61 unidentified victims in a mass grave are memorialized by the Slocum Monument in The Lutheran Cemetery (Illustration 11) and a second monument in Tompkins Square in Kleindeutschland.

The Mayor of New York appointed a Citizens Relief Committee to collect money and to offer aid to the victim's families. What the members of the Committee quickly learned, and what those of us of German descent already know, is that the people in "Little Germany" were hard-working, self-respecting and especially proud. They shied away from charity. Most grieving families would accept only the cost of burial, and about a fourth of them even declined that.¹⁰ The committee disbanded at the end of August, leaving an unspent balance of \$17,000 (equivalent to \$424,119 in 2008), after setting up trust funds for children orphaned by the disaster.¹¹ From the 437 families accepting aid, 784 individuals had died, and the breakdown is sobering: 9 fathers, 191 mothers, 73 other adults, 155 children over fourteen, and 356 younger.¹²



Illustration 11: Slocum Memorial at All Faiths Cemetery

Kleindeutschland never recovered from the Slocum tragedy. Most of the surviving German immigrants and their families attempted to erase their memories of the Slocum by moving from the lower East Side to resettle in the Upper East Side. St Marks, whose membership had been decimated, merged with Zion Church, 339 E. 84th Street, New York, to become Zion-St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Today, on the wall of the meeting room in the basement of the church, is a plaque listing all of the members of St. Marks who lost their lives in the Slocum disaster. Elizabeth "Lizzie" Ulrich's name appears there, although the inscription reads "Lena Ulrich."

Roberta Harms-Horton and her daughter Alison felt privileged to attend a German-language service at Zion-St. Mark's in 2000, and to be recognized during the service as descendants of church members who survived the Slocum. The minister pointed out the pulpit which came from St. Marks at the time of the merger with Zion, as well as some of the stained windows that were given in memory of specific parishioners who died on that day. Every five years, since the disaster, the parishioners of Zion St. Mark's have organized an exhibit, in June, at the church. The purpose of the display of memorabilia is to commemorate the dead and to remind and educate posterity about the cataclysm in Kleindeutschland.

At the coffee after the service, Roberta and Alison were told of a church member, Adella Wotherspoon who was the only living survivor of the Slocum, but was not in attendance that Sunday. On 5 Feb 2004, there was an article in the Grand Rapids Press about her death, at age 100¹³ (Exhibit K). Adella was just six month's old when The General Slocum caught fire. She and her parents were rescued, but they lost other family members.

Ferry disaster survivor

NEW YORK — Adella Wotherspoon, believed to be the last survivor of the deadly 1904 fire and sinking of the excursion ferry General Slocum, died Jan. 26. She was 100.

Wotherspoon was just 6 months old when the excursion ferry caught fire on the East River as it took a group of German-American church members on an outing on June 15, 1904.

The disaster killed 1,021 of the 1,300 people aboard. Wotherspoon's parents survived, but she lost other family members.

Exhibit K: Obituary of the last Slocum survivor

(continued on page 7)

The lives of so many German immigrants living in New York City on that fateful day in 1904 were changed forever! Not even the conviction of the Captain of The General Slocum, William Van Schaick, could assuage their deep depression. In fact, it was exacerbated when he served only three years of his ten-year sentence for negligence. The following year, President William H. Taft poured salt on the survivors' wounds when he pardoned Van Schaick. How could a man who sacrificed hundreds of lives by not beaching his ship at the first opportunity be pardoned? Why did he proceed to North Brother Island with his ship ablaze, instead of steering it into shallow water immediately? The Ulrichs and other families of Kleindeutschland were distraught about the Captain's short incarceration in Sing Sing and his Presidential pardon. For exhibiting such poor judgment and causing so many unnecessary deaths, the punishment did not fit the crime. There were so many broken hearts and so little closure for the survivors and the families of the victims.

It was a particularly long healing process for Sophie. Every day memories of that tragic excursion flooded her mind. She had vivid visions of the frenzied mob begging for relief and safety from the blazing inferno. She recalled how parishioners let out screams as the crowd pushed them against the searing deck railing, and how families were easily separated by the shifting and swaying of the mob. The air resonated with terrified cries for lost loved ones. Dense smoke and the lack of space at the bow made breathing almost impossible. Friends and neighbors were coughing, choking and flinging themselves overboard. These were just a few of the images Sophie relived night after night after night.

Most of all, Sophie mourned Lizzie's drowning. That was the hellish vision that she saw most often. What irony that Lizzie escaped the flames and had a fighting chance of being rescued, only to be knocked unconscious by a fellow passenger, also seeking self-preservation. Sophie questioned her decision to jump into the river. Maybe she and Lizzie should have taken their chances in the bow of the ship. Maybe they should have jumped further out from the side of the Slocum. Maybe Sophie wasn't holding Lizzie's hand tight enough, so she drifted away, instead of resurfacing. Self recrimination is so natural and so severe!

Although family and friends offered comforting words and support for the decisions that Sophie made, she found little consolation and continued to blame herself. A daughter shouldn't die before her mother, especially a beautiful beloved one who brought her mother such great joy! The last time that Sophie saw Lizzie's face she had lost some of her ghostly fear and even tried to smile. That is how Sophie tried to remember her every time she was forced to relive the saddest day of her life. The fact that she survived and Lizzie perished haunted Sophie until her death, almost twelve years later, on 24 May 1916, at age 82.¹⁴

The spelling of the name of the original St. Marks (without an apostrophe) comes from the program for the picnic. The spelling of the name Zion-St. Mark's, the merged church comes from the website of the church and correspondence with the church secretary.

Please contact Bobbe if any of your ancestors were associated with the Slocum disaster.

Bobbe is researching the following families: Anderson, Burchill, Ewing, Harms, Hoff, Horton, Kemp, Kröll, Lanning, McCrath, Menard, Meyer, Osinga, Probasco, Riggs, Roege, Romeijn, Schaap, Schepers, Smith, Schutter, Tenckinck, Ulrich, Winke, and Wolff in New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Ontario, Germany, Scotland, and The Netherlands. You may email her at **bobbehort@aol.com**.

¹Kirschman, Rebecca and Samuels, Dr. Nils, "General Slocum Disaster, June 15, 1904," www.maggieblanck.com/Goehle/GeneralSlocum.html

²Ibid.

³Certificate of Marriage #14333, State of New York, December 20, 1888.

⁴American Heritage Magazine, "The Flames of Hell Gate," October/November 1979, Vol. 30, Issue 6.

⁵Brooklyn Daily Eagle, "The Slocum Disaster," June 15, 1904, www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/Newspaper/Slocum/Slocum.html

⁶American Heritage Magazine.

⁷O'Donnell, Edward T., "The Dreadful End of Little Germany," April 7, 2006, Spiegel Online, www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,410321,00.html

⁸Certificate and Record of Death #3444, State of New York, June 15, 1904.

⁹American Heritage Magazine.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Grand Rapids Press, "Ferry Disaster Survivor," February 5, 2004, p B-12.

¹⁴Certificate and Record of Death #16258, State of New York, May 24, 1916.

Exhibit J

STATE OF NEW YORK
CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF DEATH

No. of Certificate

864

Elizabeth Ulrich

32

Place of Death *East River - St. Ann's Mission*

Character of Disease, whether
 contagious, venereal,
 or of other infectious
 nature, state full title
General Slocum

*Book before
 U.S.*

Father's Name *Lorenzo Ulrich*

Father's Birthplace *Germany*

Mother's Name *Sophia Kroll*

Mother's Birthplace *Germany*

I hereby certify that I, *Joseph S. Berry* Coroner in and for
 the City of *Brooklyn* City of New York, have this *30th* day
June, 1904, taken charge of the body of *Elizabeth Ulrich*
Morgan in the *10th* Ward of said
 City and that no inquest thereon is pending.

Joseph S. Berry Coroner

I hereby certify that I have viewed said body, and upon examination
 thereof, that she died on the *15th* day of *June*, 1904,
 at *A.*, and that the cause of her death was
Asphyxia Pulmonarum

REGISTRATION required in certain hospitals and institutions

at Residence, *433 W 41st St*

Place of Death, _____

[Signature] M. D.
 Coroner's Physician

Judith Ann Speckmann Garlow

Member #2019 Syracuse, New York

When I was a girl during the 40's and 50's, I spent much of my time with my grandmother and grandfather Beckmann in the Bronx, NY, Pine Bush, NY and Yonkers, NY. They were a very devoted couple, always together, and truly loved being with family.

Grandma Martha Beckmann used to tell me this story about a boat excursion and how she survived by floating on the East River. I am not clear about her rescue, because my Aunt Martha, her daughter, told a slightly different version, but she was rescued by boaters, perhaps longshoreman. I never understood that this was a ship and its magnitude until much later.

My Grandpa William Beckmann was born in Yorkville, NYC in 1876. His father, Marcus came to America several times from Wanna, Germany before deciding to bring his family to live permanently. I don't know how Grandpa Beckmann met his wife Anna Wierck, but by June, 1904 they were married and had a baby, Anna.

My family were Lutherans and belonged to St Mark's. I think that they had taken this trip before this day. My Grandmother, Martha Wierck joined her sister, Anna Beckmann, and baby Anna for the trip. When the fire started they all tried to get to safety and lost each other. Later it was reported in the paper, that Anna and the baby died. There were pictures of the ladies together, which I have saved and treasure.

My grandfather was devastated, and as others did, eventually made his way to the Bronx. He married my grandmother, Martha Wierck, sister of Anna, and they became a wonderful couple. They borned 3 children, the oldest being Ann, my mom, and Martha and Bill. Of course, I now understand the impact that this tragedy had on my life.

My grand father and grandmother lived very happily on Walton Ave. in the Bronx. They also lived on City Island and in Pine Bush, at the family homes. I, with my brothers and cousins, enjoyed the best times with them. They were wonderful grandparents.

I am not sure when the Slocum memorial organization was formed, but I do remember going to the meetings with the Beckmanns. I also was told by my Uncle John Winters that Grandpa William Beckmann was the president throughout the 40s until he died in his sleep in March, 1950.

My grandmother lived until 1962. Sadly, my mother Ann Speckmann (she married Charles Speckmann), died in my grandmother's arms in a taxi. Mom was ill and on her way to the hospital the day before her 49th birthday. My grandmother was very brave and thankful for her life. She accepted whatever came her way, losing her sister, her husband, her daughter, but never losing her faith and continuing to love her family.

I think about this wonderful couple each day and remember all the fun things we did, the great places we lived and the delicious German food we ate. I am so grateful for them. Sometimes really good things do come from the worst tragedies.

Jeanne C. Sedler Appel

Member #2235
Maryland Heights, Missouri

Jeanne Appel's grandmother was a passenger on the ill-fated journey.

*M*y grandmother, Mary Michel Sedler and her uncle, Henry Wilhelm Michel, who was born in Mauswinkel, Germany, lost his wife Magdalena (Maggie) Welder Michel, age 42 years old, and his son William Michel, age 14 years, that day. Henry Wilhelm Michel was not with them. His younger son, George William Michel, age nearly 10 years old, accompanied the others on the trip.

It seems that William swam to shore but died of either shock or exhaustion. George, who couldn't swim, was lucky to have someone pull him out of the water and he survived. Their sister, Magdalena age 11 years, was not able to go that day. She was told to stay and help her grandmother who took in wash for a living.

Magdalena said she would rather have died on the General Slocum just to be with her mother.

Magdalena ran away from home at the age of 15 years. She married Paul Heine on June 16, 1915 so she would always remember the day her mother and brother passed away."



Maggie Michel Death Certificate - front

STATE OF NEW YORK. No. of Certificate **4301**

CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF DEATH

Maggie Michel

Sex <u>Female</u>	Color <u>NBS</u>	Place of Birth <u>CB Post New</u>	
Age <u>42</u> yrs	Sex <u>—</u>	Days <u>—</u>	Character of Residence, whether domestic, private, if hotel, hospital or other institution, state full name <u>R.</u>
Place, buried, buried or interred <u>maund.</u>	Character of residence, whether domestic, private, if hotel, hospital or other institution, state full name		
Signature <u>M. Michel</u>	Father's Name <u>—</u>		
Signature <u>M. B.</u>	Father's Surname <u>—</u>		
Was born in U.S. or foreign <u>—</u>	Mother's Name <u>—</u>		
Was born within City of New York <u>—</u>	Mother's Surname <u>—</u>		

This is to certify that I, — Coroner in and for the Borough of — City of New York, have this — day of — 190—, taken charge of the body of — and at — in the — Ward of said borough, and that an inquest thereon is pending.

Joseph D. Barry Coroner.

I hereby certify that I have viewed said body, and from — evidence, that he died on the 15 day of Jan 1904 A. D., and that the cause of death was —

D. Delmas

Should be filled out only in hospitals and institutions.
Signature of Health Officer — 1904

Signature of long Resident of Place of Death — M. D. —

Maggie Michel Death Certificate - back

3301

Place of Burial, Silver Lake Cem. S. C.

Date of Burial, June 19, 1902

Undertaker, A. Stohendinger

Residence, 87 Stanton St

TO CORONERS AND CORONERS' PHYSICIANS.

The Department of Health may, from time to time, fix and define the time of holding, and the form of returns and reports to be made to said department by the coroners of The City of New York, in all cases of post-mortem inquests, or viewing of dead bodies held by them or any of them; and the said coroners are hereby required to conform to the directions of said department in the premises, and it shall be the duty of every coroner at once, and before holding any inquest, upon being called upon in hold an inquest as aforesaid or notified thereof, to immediately transmit and cause to be delivered to the secretary of said department of health, written notice of the fact of such call, in which shall be stated every particular then known to said coroner as to said call, the body, the place where it is and the reported cause of death. If at any time said department, or the sanitary superintendent, shall deem the protection of the public health to demand, it may, as soon as the coroner's jury or physician may have viewed the dead body, and an autopsy thereof shall have been made, provided the coroner deems the same necessary, order the immediate burial of any dead body, or he or it deems that the public health demands an immediate removal of said body from the place of death to another place for inquest, may likewise, at any time, order said removal, and shall have power to cause said orders to be obeyed and executed. — See 1901, Chap. 665, Laws 1901.

TO UNDERTAKERS.

1. No burial permit can be obtained without a proper certificate.
2. Certificates must be written throughout in black ink.
3. No certificate will be accepted which is mutilated, illegible, inaccurate, or any portion of which has been erased, interlined, corrected or altered, as all such changes impair its value as a public record.

4012-70-4.016 (7)

Ann Thibadeau

**Member #316
Levittown, New York**

Ann Thibadeau is a charter member of the GGG. Her family's story does involve the Slocum Steamboat and planned church picnic.

Ann's father, Otto Jommersbach, a small child at the time, wanted to go on the picnic. His family lived in Kleindeutschland, very close to St. Marks Lutheran Church. His mother, Susan Jommersbach, (Ann's grandmother) had planned to take young Otto on the picnic and boat ride, since most of the children in the neighborhood would be going to this fun filled day at the seaside. Otto was not feeling well on June 15, 1904, and so his mother had to change plans. Because of this, both Ann's father and grandmother were not on the doomed boat that morning.

Susan Jommersbach was affected, however, as were all the families in Kleindeutschland. She joined a group of women who wanted to provide a memorial to those lost in the disaster. Susan became a member of the *Society of Sympathetic German Ladies*. This was the group that raised money to have the memorial fountain erected in Tompkins Square Park. On the side of the memorial credit is given to this society.



Ann Thibadeau holding picture of herself and friend at the memorial monument.

Robert A. Schlesier

**Member #615
El Cajon, California**

**Slocum Organization Trip Oct 12, 1904 - Washington, DC
to see President Theodore Roosevelt**

This trip was to see the President to change maritime laws and also to get some relief for the victim's families.

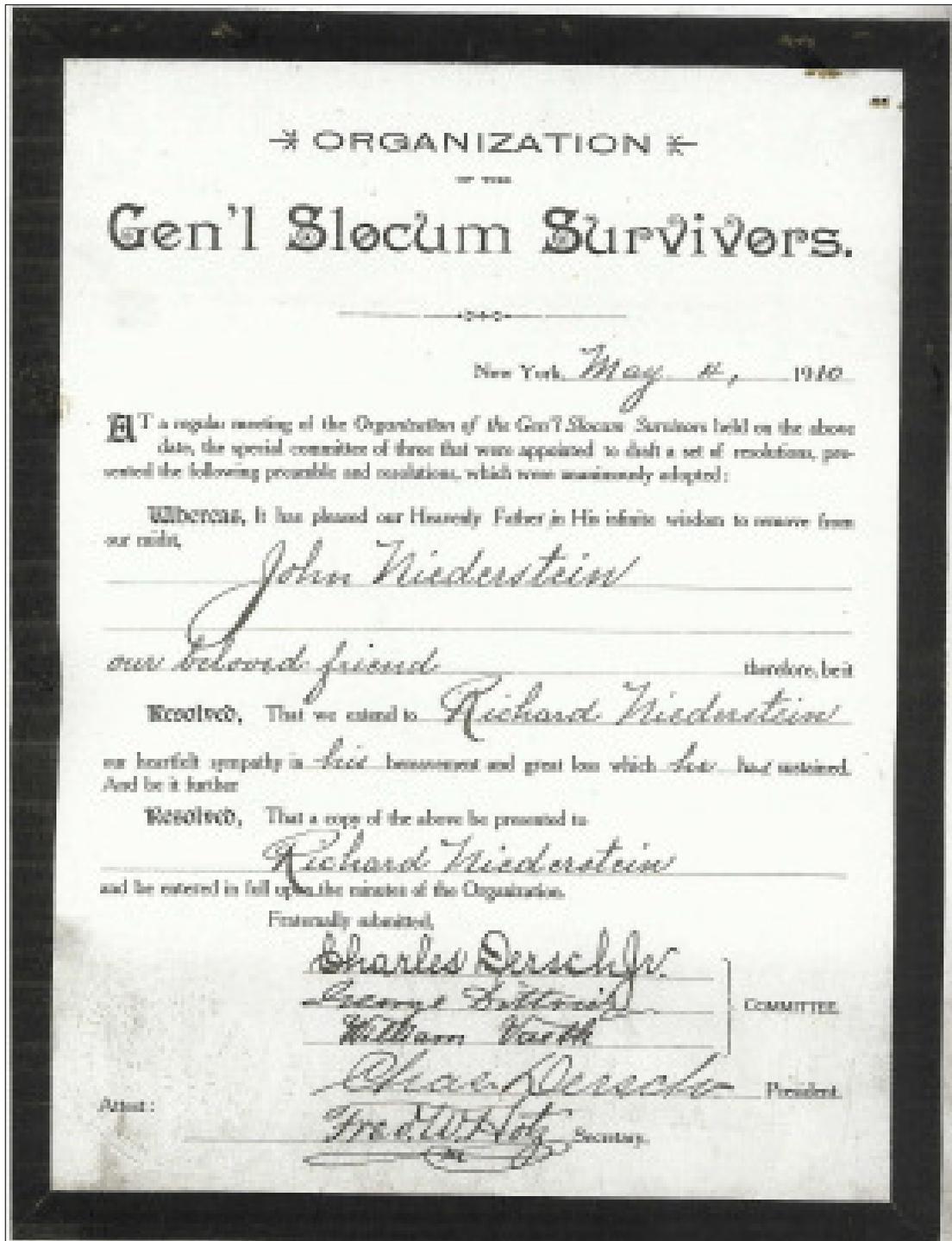
This picture has George Salzer & wife, County Clerk John Niederstein and wife Louisa Reimers, Richard Niederstein and Wife Crescentia (Grace) Reimers. Richard and Grace Niederstein are my wife's, Grace Niederstein Schlesier's, Grandparents.

Can you identify anyone sitting on the sight-seeing bus?



May 4 1910 General Slocum Survivors Org Document
Condolences to Richard Niederstein on his brother's, County Clerk John Niederstein, untimely death at the age 39 in May of 1910.

Committee Charles Dersch Jr
 George Dittrich
 William Vaeth
 President Charles Dersch
 Secretary Fred W Hotz





Plaque of General Slocum Burning

This photo was glued on a cardboard with an 8 x 8 inch black mat overlay. The glue dried up and the black mat came off. The notes now seen after the black mat came off are the framers notes which read:

8 x 8 (Final size of Mat)

3/8 black oak (type of frame to use)

black Mat

Niederstein (who ordered the work at the framer, probably Richard Niederstein)

These photos were probably given out to the Slocum Survivor organization members and Survivor families after the Monument was completed and unveiled on the one year anniversary of the disaster on June 15, 1905. The disaster occurred on June 15, 1904.

Ruth Becker Cipko

**Member #520
Whitestone, New York**

*T*his is a story that began in Germany in the town of Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein.

In 1867 the Dobert family welcomed a new baby, whom they named Heinrich Harwig August Dobert.

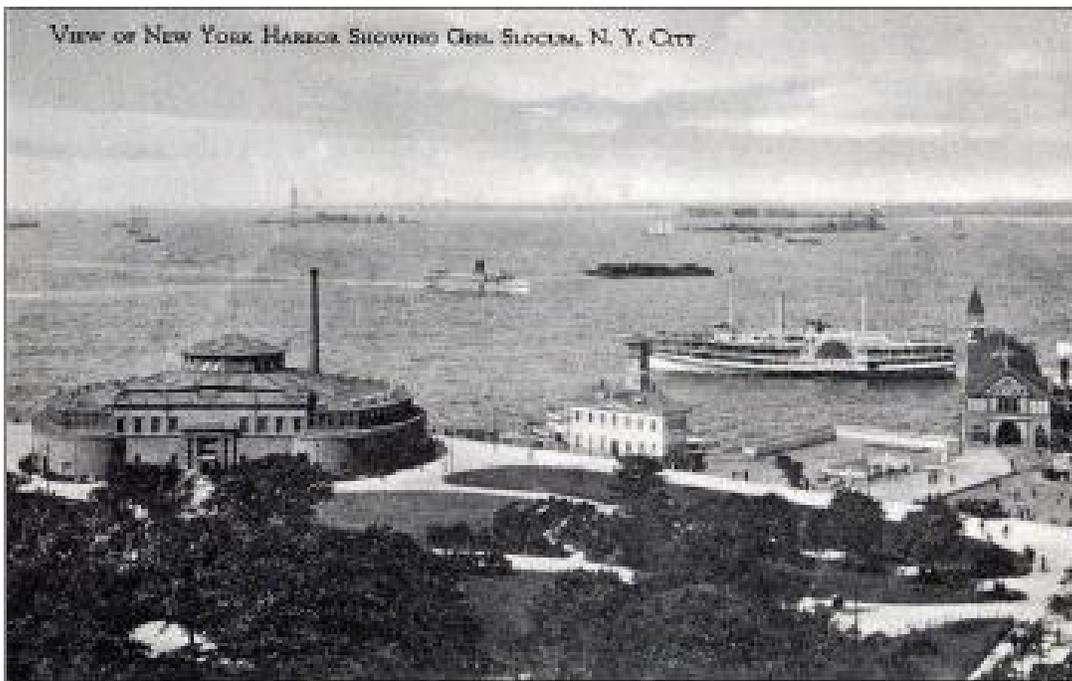
As a young man, Heinrich had a great love of the sea and took on that life, leaving his homeland. At some point in time, Heinrich, or Harry as he was commonly known, jumped ship and was living in the Carolinas in the US. He made his way to New York City, and at the age of 28, in 1895, joined the New York City Police Department.

After working in the police department for a few years, Harry got the transfer he was looking for, back to the water, his first love. He was placed in the Marine Division, where he remained for the rest of his time “on the job.” It was June 15, 1904 when Harry’s skills earned him a commendation for his rescue work during the tragedy.

After retiring from the NYPD in 1921, he returned to the sea. He became a Master of Arms on German ships. In 1924 through 1929 he was a police and fire chief in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

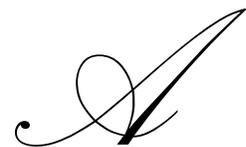
Harry Becker was GGG member Ruth Becker Cipko’s uncle. She has memories of him as a soft-spoken gentleman. Ruth recalls that when Harry passed in 1948, she and her father, Hubert Becker Jr., returned Harry’s ashes to his beloved sea in New York Harbor.

Others
with a story to tell . . .



Postcard courtesy of Jeanne C. Sedler Appel

Sue Greenhagen
Morrisville, NY



post on a Rootsweb page was made to find people with stories of the Slocum Disaster. One was received from Sue Greenhagen, a librarian in Morrisville College in New York. She stated that her grandmother was scheduled to be on the General Slocum trip in June 1904. She was pregnant at the time and she did not feel up to making a trip such as this, and did not go. She was pregnant with Sue's father, so her decision proved very beneficial for the family! In addition, Sue's then nine year old aunt, who was late for everything in her life, was late for the trip, and she missed the boat!! Sue's family lineage was therefore not interrupted by the disaster.

Sue says: **“The Slocum disaster was a horrible tragedy overshadowed in 1912 by the sinking of the Titanic. My grandparents, who lived in Little Germany, soon left NYC for Orange County. As I understand it, Little Germany was decimated by those who simply packed up and left.**

“It's a hard story to talk about, even for me, who wasn't even there, but knows that our family was impacted by the event.

“My grandmother's name was Emma Greenhagen and her bouncing baby boy, born on July 8, 1904, was named Carl.”

Placum

Monuments

~ ~

Lest we forget

Tompkins Square Park

Manhattan

In 1906, two years after the Slocum Tragedy, a group of German women commissioned a memorial to the lives lost on June 15, 1904. The women called themselves The Sympathy Society of German Ladies. The fountain that they erected was placed in Tompkins Square Park, off the East 9th Avenue traverse. This park is located in the East Village of Manhattan not far from the East River, the location of the Slocum disaster. The park was also close to the location of the Lutheran Church that sponsored the day trip on the Slocum.

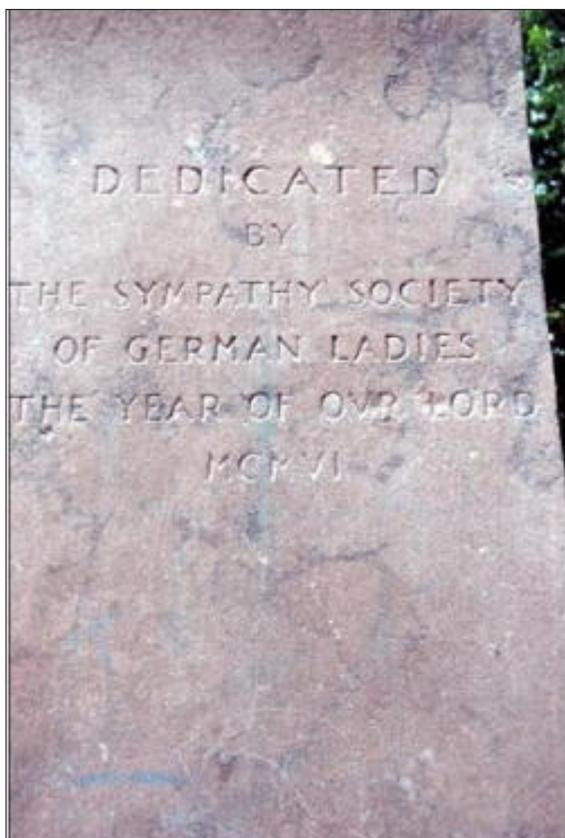
The nine-foot marble fountain was created by Bruno Louis Zimm. Zimm was a famous classic style sculpture at the time. His work includes “Sakakawea” at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, a bust of Robert E. Lee at Baylor College, Texas. This fountain, commissioned by the German Ladies Group, was to be a permanent reminder of the tragedy, so the lives lost would not be forgotten. They chose a well known artist for the task. He created this monument from pink Tennessee marble.



While the front of the marble above the fountain has weathered with time, the two children in the right corner looking at the sea are still visible. The inscription at the top reads “They were Earth’s Purest Children Young and Fair.” (The inscription is actually taken from a poem by Percy B. Shelly written in 1818 originally entitled ‘Laon and Cythna’ and then changed to “The Revolt of Islam”).

(continued on page 15)

The monument predominately shows the two children looking out to the water. Vaguely visible in the sea is a faint shadow of a ship, presumably the Slocum. Below this vista there is a lion head fountain with a metal fleur-de-lis ornament on either side. One side of the monument indicates it was dedicated by the Sympathetic Society of German Woman in 1906 and the other side memorializes those who lost their life on the steamer the General Slocum.



The monument sits near a playground, and the sound of children playing perhaps echoes those joyful sounds as anticipation of a day that was tragic in June of 1904.

*All Faiths Lutheran Cemetery
Middle Village, NY*



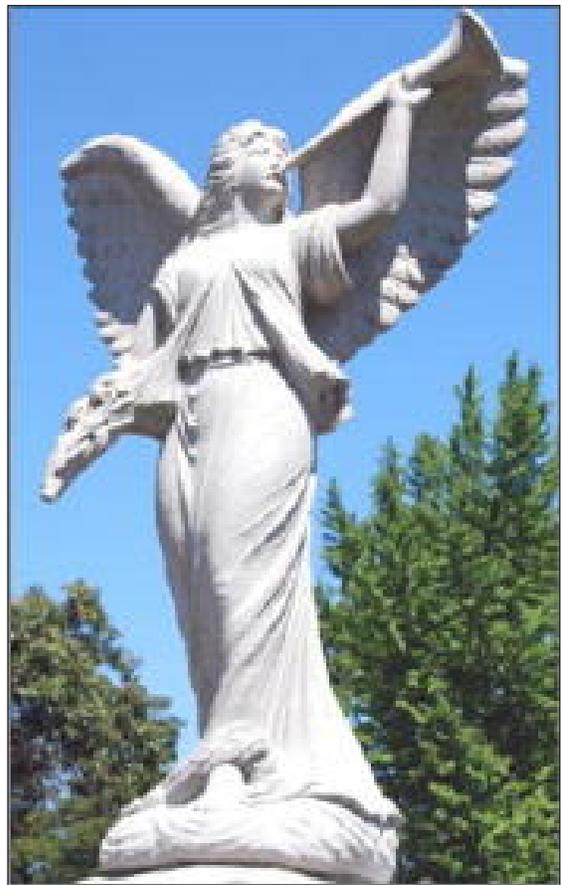
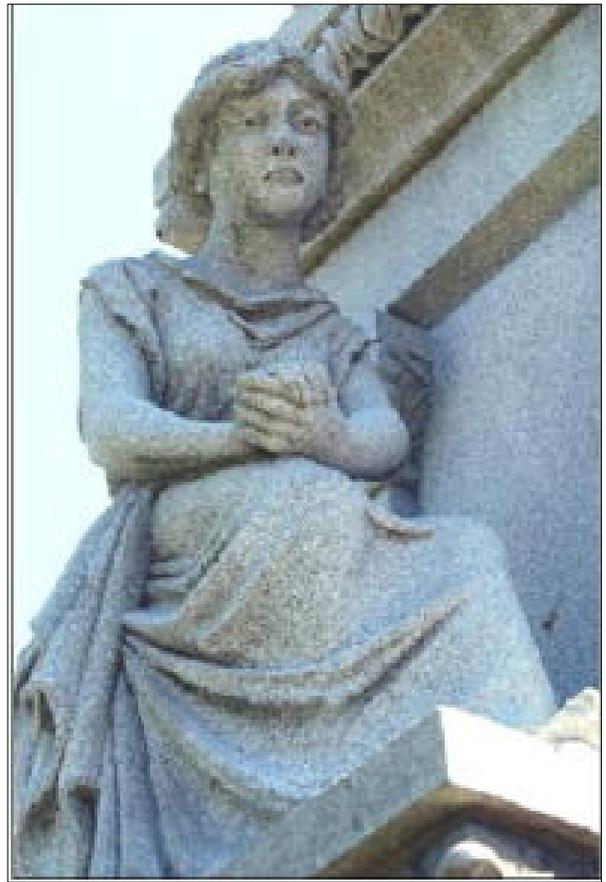
Postcard courtesy of Jeanne C. Sedler Appel



7
 "LET US
 NOT HAVE
 DIED
 IN VAIN"
 7

Postcard courtesy of Jeanne C. Sedler Appel



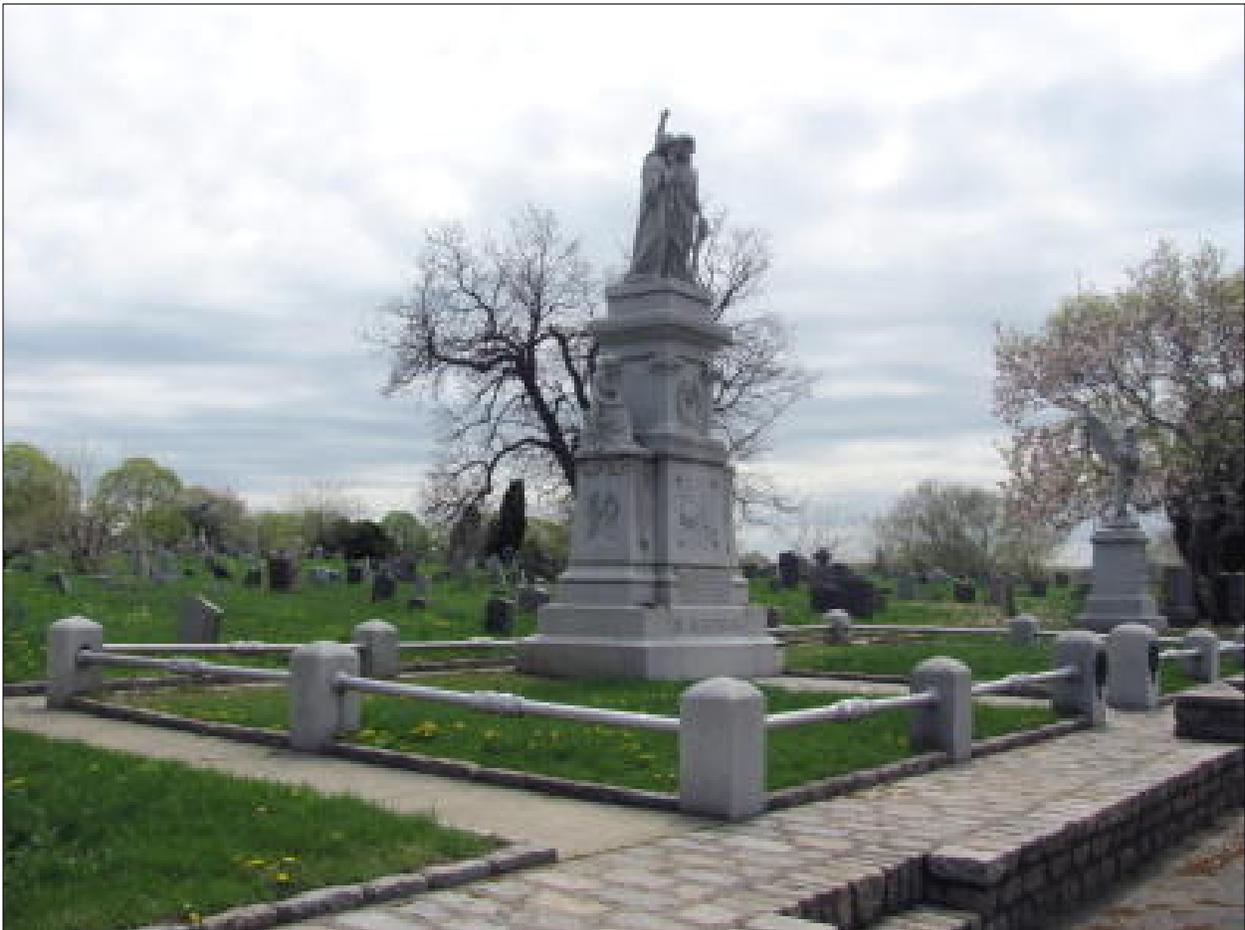


Extracted from article in Newtown Register

This thought spread and finally crystallized into action, and an association was formed known as the "Organization of the General Slocum Survivors" of which Charles Dersch of 76 First avenue, Manhattan was made president and Frederick W. Hotz of 319 Fifth street, secretary.

It was decided by this organization that a monument should be erected over the unknown dead that would cost about \$6,000, and that the funds should be raised by popular subscription. The successful design for the monument was made by Joseph Bermel of Middle Village and he will erect the same as stated above. The monument of which a picture is herewith given, will be entirely of granite, with a large bronze plate upon the front, on which will be a picture in bas-relief of the burning steamer. The statue on the right side of the monument represents memory and that on the left grief, while the two statues on the top represent faith and hope. All the figures are life size and the entire monument will be twenty feet in height and eight feet and a half broad at the base. The inscription at the foot of the monument reads as follows:

[Erected By The Organization Of The General Slocum Survivors And The Public In The Memory of the Sixty-One Unidentified Dead Who Lost Their Lives On The Steamboat Gen. Slocum June 15, 1904.]



Ploum Exhibits



Postcard courtesy of Jeanne C. Sedler Appel

Maritime Industry Museum

Bronx

Just on the Bronx side of the Throggs Neck Bridge on Pennyfield Avenue is the SUNY Maritime College. It is on a piece of land which is the home of the historic Fort Schuyler. This fort is located where the East River meets Long Island Sound. It is actually located near the spot that the General Slocum burned on that fateful day in 1904.

The campus houses a rather large Maritime Industry Museum, which is actually contained within the structure of the historic fort. The museum was established in 1986, and is open to free to the public, on Monday through Saturday 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

Contained within this museum is a display dedicated to the Slocum Disaster. A display case is devoted to the incident, and much is related to changes that were made as a result of the unsafe practices that contributed to such a massive loss of lives.

The exhibit speaks to the investigation ordered by President Teddy Roosevelt. The findings of this commission's research resulted in re-inspection of many vessels, dismissal of inspectors involved in the Slocum's safety inspection, and changes in the construction of ships for the future.



Pictures

Some of the survivors of the disaster

The matron of the hospital at North Brother Island, who directed the work of the nurses among the injured and dead, said that after the rescued had been revived they were given dry clothes and the entire hospital stock available was brought out for their use. All night the kitchens were kept busy preparing hot soup for the survivors. She stated it was fortunate that the boat was beached as it was.



SOME OF THE SURVIVORS OF THE DISASTER

The General Slocum was one of the most popular excursion boats in the New York area. "It was built chiefly of white oak, locust and yellow pine."



Slocum Monument side statues being sculpted

Adam Bock, center, was the designer and sculptor. Paul Bock, rear top, assisted his father. The other two men are unidentified helpers. This picture was taken in 1911-12 in a rented space at Benisch Bros. in Cypress Hills. The statues are in Lutheran Cemetery, Middle Village, NY.



Anxious Crowd on the New York shore

The news of the burning of the General Slocum flashed like wildfire over the city of New York. This picture shows a throng of people watching the burning steamer and awaiting news of imperiled friends. Tens of thousands of people on the Island of Manhattan forgot their business, their pleasures and their troubles in the shadow of the awful disaster.



Crowd in front of St. Mark's German Lutheran Church, which lost so many of its members in the great calamity.



Aftermath...

Disaster Casualties

There is much written over the last hundred plus years of the story of the Slocum disaster in New York City. In 1904, newspapers, magazines, and books were written describing the incident and its impact on the population of Manhattan, and New York City in general. As time went by, memorial services were held on June 15, as folks remembered the disaster and the great loss that ripped into the soul of New York. In terms of German-American history, the profound effects of this tragedy to a neighborhood would forever change its face. People had a difficult time walking the streets where their family members had lived, played, and worked. It was too painful of an experience on a daily basis. To this end, the German population migrated, many of them moving uptown to Yorkville, but the horror of their great loss would remain with them for their life time. This migration is also well documented in the historic records of New York City. From a maritime perspective, there is a great deal of documentation on how this disaster impacted on safety changes aboard ships.

This event was a Sunday school trip. It was the annual trip for the Lutheran Congregation at St Marks' Church. Tickets for the fun-filled picnic via paddleboat to the north shore of Long Island were sold to the congregation and the general public as well. People purchased tickets for themselves as well as relatives and friends from other areas, who would plan to make a trip to NYC to enjoy this outing. Of course, no one ever considered that accurate records of the people on board that Wednesday morning would be essential. If a person had a ticket, they boarded the boat and prepared for an enjoyable day. There was no check off list, no head count, just anxious families who paid their way to join in the festivities. It is estimated that 1,342 people were on board that morning, the majority women and children, since Wednesday was a work day for the husbands and fathers.

The ship got underway on that beautiful day at about 9:30 in the morning from the pier on the East River at Third Street. In a very short period of time, as the ship was passing 90th Street, a fire was discovered in the Lamp Room, which quickly spread. The end result of this was that 1,021 of the people on board that morning were dead. A morgue was set up on North Brother's Island, and bodies were left to be identified, when possible. The flames on the ship had done damage to many of the victims, who were never able to be identified.

Because there were no records of the passengers on board that day, it was not possible to obtain accurate statistics of those who perished on the Slocum the 15th of June 1904. Newspapers published lists. The NYC Health Department published its findings. Thus, based on the numbers of people deemed missing, the number of casualties identified, and the numbers of survivors that day, statistics were created.

In 2010, Don Eckerle, Vice President of the GGG began a project to create a data base to be made available on the GGG website related to the Slocum's victims. He compiled victim's names from various sources, and then obtained their death certificate numbers. This information was placed on the website. And is available in a data base.

In a continued effort to create a unique and meaningful data base, Don then search all of the death certificates to determine where the victims were buried. This information was never available in any written work on the tragedy. This information was placed on the website, and is available in a data base.

There are victims who are buried in various locations, some as far away as Pennsylvania. Since it was a Lutheran church outing, it is no surprise that the greatest numbers of victims are buried in Lutheran Cemetery (now All-Faiths Cemetery) on Metropolitan Avenue in Queens. Lutheran Cemetery had 660 burials from the disaster. Nearby Evergreen Cemetery had 59 interments. Greenwood was the third most popular site with 47 victims laid to rest in Brooklyn. Linden Hill Cemetery is the final resting place of 25; Calvary Cemetery has 17 victims; Woodlawn Cemetery has 12 burials from the Slocum and Holy Trinity has 11. Other burial arrangements are documented on the website, but these seven cemeteries have the largest number of victims from the disaster.

The General Slocum Steamboat

The General Slocum was named for a Civil War general and Brooklyn congressman Henry Warner Slocum and was launched in 1891. It was 264 feet long. It was constructed of locust, white oak and yellow pine. Similar to many paddleboats of the time, the Slocum had mahogany interiors, ornate carvings and wicker furniture with red velvet.

The Slocum began its fourteenth season in 1904, having passed inspection by the U.S. Steamboat inspection service. Reverent George F. Haas, the pastor of St. Marks' Evangelical Lutheran Church, chartered the Slocum for \$350. The journey was to begin in lower Manhattan, travel up the East River, and end in Locust Grove, a picnic area on Long Island's north shore.

The ship was freshly painted, and was adorned with American flags and buntings as it waited for the passengers to board that day in June 1904. Food was prepared and an oompah band played joyfully. All that glitters is not gold, and the scene was far from golden at the pier on that beautiful June morning.

The ship was freshly painted, but the paint just added another layer of restraint to the lifeboats, which were on board. The lifeboats were wired in place, and the paint and wires made them very difficult, if not impossible, to remove.

The life preservers were crumbling. They were rotten and filled with disintegrated cork, thereby losing their buoyancy. Some of them were weighted down with metal rods, so that they would weigh enough to meet legal requirements. At the inquest, one man testified that he put a "Kahnweiler Neversink Preserver" on his seven-year-old daughter, Elsie Kircher, and threw her in the water. He watched his little daughter sink and drown.

The fire hoses were the poorest quality and cheapest available. They were made of linen, which had dried out, and they burst apart when the water was turned on.

There had never been a fire drill on board the Slocum. The inexperienced crew responded in a haphazard fashion, many of who abandoned the ship.

No one looked at the captain of this ship closely. Captain Van Schaick, who was 67 years of age, has been with the ship since its launch. He certainly boasted of the safety record of this vessel, and that it had been on hundreds of journeys carrying millions of passengers. But, on closer inspection, there were many mishaps. The ship had run into mud banks and sand bars, hit tug boats, and collided with piers. Since the actions were never too serious, the officials from the company tended to ignore them. There were reports that the "elderly" captain was nervous and insecure, and since he was nearing retirement age would soon be relieved of his duties. So, he remained in command.

The Knickerbocker Steamboat Company was in some financial distress. Van Schaick hired inexperienced crew members because he knew this was a way to keep costs low. The inexperienced crew, many of whom were unemployed from other types of jobs, was happy to get the work. As it turned out, this crew, with no training, was of little help at the time of the fire. There were no fatalities of the crew or the captain.

The fire broke out at the Slocum was heading north in the East River. Van Schaick claimed that he decided to avoid docking at the piers he was passing along the East River because he feared the piers would be set on fire. The ship passed the wharves between 125 and 135 streets. He ran the boat up the river, and the wind helped to increase the flames. Van Schaick decided to beach the boat on North Brother Island off of 149th Street. They continued to this destination directly into the wind, which served to send flames in great walls throughout the ship.

One week after the fire, President Teddy Roosevelt named a commission to investigate the tragedy. The records of these hearings are available at NARA. The commission placed most of the blame on the USSIS (Steamboat Inspection Service). People were fired and re-inspections of boats were carried out. It is not a surprise that there were widespread safety problems found. New rules were instituted, which had a result in making many safe changes in the maritime industry.

There were criminal indictments of the owners, the crew, federal steamboat inspectors, and the only person to be convicted was Captain Van Schaick. He was convicted of negligence in that he did not have fire drills, did not train the crew properly, and did not maintain the fire apparatus. Van Schaick was sentenced to ten years in Sing Sing prison in New York State. President Taft pardoned him on Christmas 1912. He left Sing Sing and lived the rest of his life in upstate New York.

Salvage crews raised the Slocum hull on June 22, 1904. The hull was sold to Peter Hagen. It was converted to a barge and named "Maryland." The ship finally sank in a gale in 1911, just off the shore of Atlantic City, New Jersey. In October 2000 Clive Cussler, a marine explorer and fiction writer, located the hull of the barge The Maryland on the New Jersey Shore near Atlantic City, where it is resting after a disastrous career.



Captain William van Schaick

President Theodore Roosevelt ordered an investigation into the Slocum tragedy. The captain of the General Slocum was tried and convicted for his responsibility in dealing with the fire on that fateful voyage. He was charged with manslaughter and criminal negligence and sentenced to ten years in Sing Sing prison. After serving several years of his term, his sentence was commuted.

It seems that even after his vindication, William van Schaick lived his life in disgrace. His name was negatively associated with the worse disaster in New York City. He died on the 8 December, 1927. Van Schaick was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Troy, New York. The grave remained unmarked until very recently. Captain van Schaick's great niece has placed a marker on his grave through which he will be perpetually remembered as "Vindicated."



Bits & Pieces

There are a vast number of books, articles, and web sites devoted to this NYC disaster, which, until 2001, was the worst disaster in NYC history. GGG member **Doris Spehar** suggested a site www.forgotten-ny.com Doris advises that if you click on the section, "You'd never believe you're in NYC," you will find information on the tragedy as well as current photos of North Brother Island and some Slocum memorials.

GGG member **Maggie Banck** invites all those who are interested to visit her web site. Maggie has posted many images related to this disaster on her website, and happily she does not have a history of any losses of family members on that fateful day in June, 15, 1904.

Another GGG member, **Karen T. Lamberton**, has written a book on this subject entitled Angels in the Gate. Her book was published in 2006 by Heritage Books, Maryland. Karen's work has a different approach to the story, in that she gives a family approach, telling the stories of over 55 surviving families, complete with photos and genealogical charts. Karen wanted to create a living memorial and to create a documented reference to this tragedy.

Premonition of the Slocum Disaster

It is well documented in the stories related to the disaster of the premonition a perspective picnicker had on that fateful day. Mrs. Philip Straub had a feeling that something terrible was about to happen on the trip. Although she had boarded the boat, just before the gangplank was removed, Mrs. Straub rushed to the shore. She had told a man of her fears, and he joined her in the escape from the ship, along with his wife and children.

The youngest survivor of the Slocum was Adella Wotherspoon. At about 6 months of age, she was the youngest person to escape. When the monument was erected in Lutheran Cemetery on June 15, 1905, the eighteen-month-old child was once again held in her mother's arms as she unveiled the monument. Her recollections are those of what she was told by her parents. She had gone on the ship with her mother and father, two sisters, two cousins and an aunt and uncle.

Adella's mother was badly burned. She hung on the railing until she couldn't hold on any longer, holding baby Adella in her arm. Eventually she dropped into the water. The disaster claimed the life of her two sisters.

Adella died January 26, 2004.

Ein Fest Burg Ist Unser Gott

The Slocum sailed away from the pier on East Third Street on the morning of June 15, 1904. Picture the scene as the three decked side paddleboat began its journey to the north shore of Long Island. A church group, and neighboring friends, headed for a wonderful day, singing a hymn that is beloved by Protestants, and was a favorite of Martin Luther. This Lutheran church group raised their voices in song, voices that were predominantly women and children. They sang:

**Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott,
Ein gute Wehr und Waffen;
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,
Die uns jetzt hat betroffen.
Der alt' böse Feind,
Mit Ernst er's jetzt meint,
Gross' Macht und viel List
Sein' grausam' Ruestung ist,
Auf Erd' ist nicht seingleichen.
Mit unsrer Macht is nichts getan,
Wir sind gar bald verloren;
Es steit't für uns der rechte Mann,
Den Gott hat selbst erkoren.
Fragst du, wer der ist?
Er heisst Jesu Christ,
Der Herr Zebaoth,
Und ist kein andrer Gott,
Das Feld muss er behalten.
Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär'
Und wollt' uns gar verschlingen,
So fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr,
Es soll uns doch gelingen.
Der Fürst dieser Welt,
Wie sau'r er sich stellt,
Tut er uns doch nicht,
Das macht, er ist gericht't,
Ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen.
Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn
Und kein'n Dank dazu haben;
Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan
Mit seinem Geist und Gaben.
Nehmen sie den Leib,
Gut, Ehr', Kind und Weib:
Lass fahren dahin,
Sie haben's kein'n Gewinn,
Das Reich muss uns doch bleiben.**

Kleindeutschland

The German community of Kleindeutschland was established in the 1840's. A large portion of the population of New York was of German descent. Many of these immigrants settled in Kleindeutschland. One area of this settlement, near Tompkins Square between Houston Street and East 14th was known as Weiss Garten, or the White Garden. It was named this because of the frequency of clean white fences, which enclosed the community. This small area was the heart of the community, the spiritual center. On Sixth Street between First and Second Avenues stood the red brick building of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church. By 1904, there were approximately 750,000 Germans living in New York.

Written accounts of Kleindeutschland describe it much as the old country. The businesses were operated by Germans. The innkeepers, physicians, tailors, barbers, grocers, shoemakers were all German. There was a German lending library, and the residents there did not need to know English to make a living, which attracted more immigrants from Germany to the area.

The businesses of the area supported the Church outing by taking an advertisement in the *Journal* for the Seventeenth Annual Excursion of St. Marks Evangelical Lutheran Church. By looking at some of the businesses and proprietors of those businesses, one can get a feel for the area at the turn of the last century. The names and owners of some of the advertisements follow:

The American Tea and Coffee Company - Joseph Fuss, Proprietor (successor to Charles Lutz)

Schneider's Cider – Peter Schneider (successor to Andrew Baldauf)

Worsted and Saxony Hosiery – A. Deppert and Son

Undertaker – Philip Wagner

Live Poultry – C. Bishop

Fleischmann's Grocers

Spanish Cedar, Mahogany, Rosewood Importer – J. Rayner

Liquors - H. Dahnke and Brothers

Balsler's Pharmacy

Coal and Wood – John Rheinfrank

Confectionery and Ice Cream – E. A. G. Intemann's

Tompkins Market Coffee Company – H.H. Pottebaum

Kohler's Real Estate and Insurance - H.A. Kohler and G.L. Kohler

High Class Bakers – George Mundorff and sons

Artistic Signs- Joseph Roth

Specialty of Cloaks and Suits – L. Heymann

Louis Cappel Dealer in Bolognas and Provisions – Fresh Salt and Smoked Pork

The Reliable Laundry – Paul C. Port

George Ehrets Beer, Ales, Wines, Liquors, Segars, Lunch Room – John Oed

Sheboygan Natural Mineral Water – Peter Fettig

Funeral Director and Embalmer – F. Odendahl

The Shoe Man – Jantzen

Dress and Fancy Plaiting – E. Heineck

The Ships & Boats

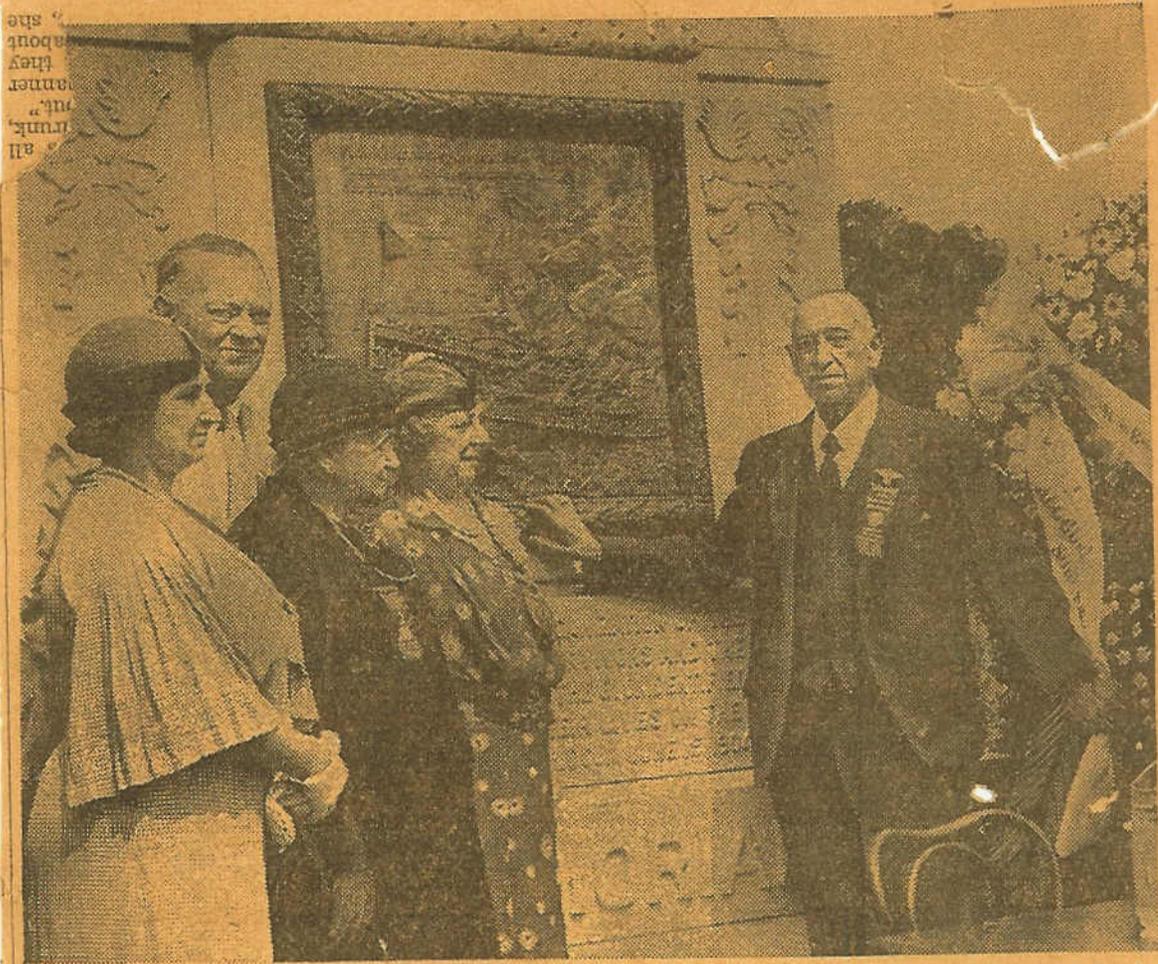
*M*any water vessels of many kinds were participants in the *Gen. Slocum* tragedy. Some of these were the first to race toward and warn the *Gen. Slocum's* Captain of impending disaster, some participated magnificently in the rescue during the disaster, some performed valuable service in the aftermath period and some were connected in circuitous loops.

Many of the heroes were on the spot because of these vessels; many of the heroes were the hands aboard the vessels. In any case, the very nature of the tragedy required that the water vessels play a major role in it.

There were so many types of small craft involved in some way from small rowed boats and skiffs to larger steamers. There were yachts, launches, tugboats, ferries, sloops, patrol boats, dredges and wreckers. Each had a captain and each had some crew albeit, sometimes the crew and the captain were one! It is fairly certain that not every boat had an identifiable name and this gave rise to hiding its role behind the anonymity. In some cases the "crews" were leeches and predators so perhaps full identification of all vessels is not desirable.

NEW YORK CITY, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 1931

Group at Service in Memory of Slocum Dead



Memorial services for the victims of the General Slocum disaster were held in Lutheran Cemetery, Middle Village. Shown above are, left to right—Mr. and Mrs. William Beckman, both survivors; Anna Brown, who lost a sister when the steamer burned and sank; Mrs. M. Hatzfeld, a survivor, and Charles Dersch, president of the Organization of General Slocum Survivors, who conducted the services. (Eagle Staff photo.)

Mr John Gardner

STATE ISLAND	VA ONE	VA TWO	VA THREE	VA FOUR	VA FIVE	VA SIX	VA SEVEN	VA EIGHT	VA NINE	VA TEN	VA ELEVEN	VA TWELVE	VA THIRTEEN	VA FOURTEEN	VA FIFTEEN	VA SIXTEEN	VA SEVENTEEN	VA EIGHTEEN	VA NINETEEN	VA TWENTY
ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND
ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND	ROCKLAND

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DAILY NEWS, FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 1974

Slocum Holocaust Still Burns in Her Mind

By ARTHUR MULLIGAN

"It was 70 years ago but, believe me, it has never left my mind. I can close my eyes and still see the boat, the fire and smoke, the people screaming and scrambling to get away from the roaring flames which came at us in waves."

The scene still is vivid to Mrs. Catherine Connelly, 81, of 211 E. 53d St., who was 11 years old when she lost her mother, her 9-year-old brother and 9-month-old sister in the General Slocum disaster of June 15, 1904.



Associated Press Wirephotos
Mrs. Catherine Connelly: "... flames came at us in waves."

More than 1,000 of the 1,400 people aboard the excursion boat perished when it caught fire and eventually ran aground in the East River. Mrs. Connelly, who has raised nine children, is one of 18 known survivors still alive today.

Mrs. Connelly, whose maiden name was Gallagher, said she last saw her 31-year-old mother standing on the top deck of the three-decker paddle-wheeler.

'Don't Go Back There!'

Mrs. Connelly said that she doesn't know how she was separated from her mother but that she vaguely remembers being pushed over the rail of the boat



Some victims of disaster when the General Slocum ran aground in East River in 1904.

ing, 'Don't go back there, don't go back there. I don't want to go back,' she said.

The tugboat put her ashore, along with other injured survivors, apparently at the foot of a Bronx street. She and three or four other youngsters were placed in an iceman's pushcart and taken to Lebanon Hospital by two or three men.

Later that day, she was taken home on the el by two young women survivors who also had been treated at the hospital and lived near her. She got off the el at 14th St. and ran to her home at 424 E. 15th St. She ran screaming up four flights of stairs and collapsed at the door of her apartment at 9 p.m.

Her father, her grandfather and her grandmother were in the apartment, anxiously waiting for word of her. Later that night, an uncle identified the body of Mrs. Connelly's baby sister.

said she couldn't use them because she had to work in the store that day. "We were delighted to get the tickets," Mrs. Connelly recalled.

Best estimates are that the fire broke out in the forward part of the vessel as it was opposite Gracie Mansion, then a museum, at E. 88th St. For some never adequately explained reason, the captain ordered full steam ahead instead of trying to dock.

He finally ran the boat aground on North Brother Island, where it turned on its side and burned to the water's edge. One explanation was that he wished to keep the vessel out of the hands of salvagers and thought the crew could contain the flames. But the fire hose aboard was rotted and so were the

*Final
Thoughts*

*They Were Earth's Purest Children,
Young and Fair*

Reflections of Jo Ann Schmidt

**Member #2026
Melville, New York**

*W*e can only imagine how the people living in New York City in 1904 felt in the aftermath of this horrific tragedy so close to the shores of Manhattan. As with any catastrophic event, there is always a desire to keep the memory of those involved alive. Often monuments, such as the ones in Tompkins Square Park and Lutheran All-Faiths Cemetery, carry this out. Every year, on the anniversary of the disaster, people gather to remember. As the years go by, the numbers that gather may get smaller, but there are still those that chose to attend a memorial.

There are also events which may renew the interest in a tragedy. When the Titanic sunk, there was a renewed interest in the Slocum disaster of just a few years before. As the stories of any horrifying incident are told from one generation to the next they may lose their glow and impact over time. In 1934, thirty years after the disaster, the Slocum story was immortalized on the silver screen in the movie "Manhattan Melodrama" which begins with a re-enactment of the fire. These images were brought into the memory of the public, who, left to their own devices, may not have recalled the tragedy from the past.

And so there are the memorials. Details of the Memorial services are found each June in the newspapers, but the story of the disaster retreated slowly from the spotlight. Most recently, the "worst disaster in New York City history" was eclipsed by the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11. The profound shock and horror that resulted from this act of willful destruction and murder is not really analogous to the Slocum disaster. The Slocum tragedy occurred because of negligence, poor decision-making, and the lack of safety standards. But, these two events are very closely enmeshed. They both stole the lives of many who lived in and near the city. There was a tremendous outreach of sympathy and sorrow for both of these groups, survivors and victims alike. Both tragedies contained stories of amazing efforts by uniformed heroes and bystanders as well.

Memorials are created to commemorate events, in this instance the Slocum Disaster and 9/11, both horrific events. A grand public memorial is planned for the site of the World Trade Center Towers. Two memorials are in place to honor for the Slocum Victims. What is the purpose of these types of memorials? They are erected to honor those who died and suffered through the tragedy. They exist to give the living a place to go to remember. They are built to remind future generations of the incident, so that it will never be forgotten. But what effect does time have?

Have you ever visited Gettysburg battlefield? Monuments were erected, big and small, honoring the troops who fought in the Civil War. Many of these granite memorials are overgrown and barely visible to the visitor. And yet, in their time, they were pristinely cared for and visited by those who remembered the fight, the war. How could this happen? Do people really forget the battle, or the souls who lost their lives during the fight? The memorials stand in the shadows of the battlefield, and the memories hide in the shadows of the memorials.

The disasters that befell the United States on 9/11 will never be forgotten. We will build a memorial; we will have ceremonies, and read names. We will build monuments like those erected by the Society of Sympathetic German Women, so that the disaster in the East River will never be forgotten. We have 9/11 memorials to help those left behind cope with the loss in their lives, the loss in our country. There have been Slocum memorials in Lutheran Cemetery, each June, for over one hundred years. The Slocum was the greatest disaster in New York history until 9/11. The most effective way to remember is the story, the telling and sharing of the story, so that the images live in the minds of future generations.

Much was written about the Slocum Disaster, about the picnic plans, the church, the ship, the women and children who perished. What is strangely absent from these writings is details of the emotional reactions of the people effected by such a tragedy. After 9/11, survivors gave DNA samples to identify their loved ones and walked around with flyers pinned to their tee shirts looking for relatives that were missing. What were the relatives doing on 6/15? There was no DNA testing, many of the victims were burned beyond recognition. Some were recognized by jewelry they may have worn, if it was not stolen from them by “rescuers” on that fateful day. Did families walk aimlessly around the city, trying to figure out what to do next? It would seem so. It was the worst disaster in the City of New York, as described on the sign on the memorial in Tompkins Square Park. On 9/11, people watched from the streets, and many watched from their living room televisions. On 6/15 people watched what was happening just hundreds of yards away from the shore of Manhattan.

The emotional aftermath is felt today from the tragedy of 9/11. Is the Slocum’s affect still in the forefront of our minds? I do not believe it is. As time passes, the harshness of the event softens. On a website dedicated to Slocum memories, a woman writes that her father’s family lived in Kleindeutschland on East 5th Street. She states that according to her Dad, there was not a single tenement that did not have at least one crepe at the doorway. Some people affected directly by the tragedy said there came a time when the topic was never discussed. What emotional devastation existed in 1904? How does one begin to articulate the ongoing sadness of *after*. One way is to leave the area that harbored disaster, sorrow, and death. The German community uprooted itself. The survivors were scattered as a result of despair, not of economics, since the victims were women, children, grandparents, but not *the breadwinners*.

The Slocum disaster marked the end of Kleindeutschland. The neighborhood was devastated and stripped of its gaiety. The community fell apart as the mourning residents turned their backs and fled. It is reported that approximately one hundred family members committed suicide. Many moved to Yorkville, others to Astoria, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and some returned to Germany. There would never again be such a vibrant, close knit German community in New York.

And so, the monument stands in Tomkins Square Park in a playground. The once pink stone is white with age. The faces of the two children are still visible, as they look at what a hundred years ago, was a ship in the distance. They were the earth’s purist children, so young and fair. Who will remember them?



*Visit our General Slocum list of
Dead & Missing at:*

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