

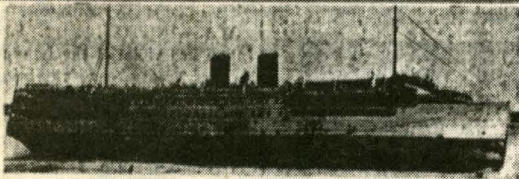


KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Excursionists Periled:

212 SAVED AS SHIP SINKS IN COLLISION



S. S. NEW YORK, OF EASTERN STEAMSHIP LINE Crew Saved All on Board After Sinking Excursion Liner Romance

BOSTON, Sept. 9.—The 38-year-old Bay State excursion liner Romance sank off Graves Light, at the entrance to Boston Harbor, after a collision with the New York of the Eastern Steamship Line in a dense fog tonight.

The New York's crew, passengers and crew were rescued in a vessel, seen in a rescue in a

Passengers on Boston Ship Praise Crews for Life Saving

Brings In 308 Transferred New York, Which Rammed Excursion Craft With 212 Aboard.

Liner Sinks Boston Boat, Rescues 212

New York, of Eastern Steamship Line, Saves All Aboard Excursion Craft in Crash in Fog

who arrived at Grand Central Terminal at 7:20 in a twelve-car special train from Boston were for the crews of the coastwise steamship and the rammed excursion boat Romance, which in a thick fog last evening ten miles off Boston Prompt rescue work by the crews saved the lives of 212 persons aboard the excursion craft, the New York's passengers said.

The Boston Boat plies back and forth to our tip of the world day after day, year after year without incident. If weather conditions seem threatening, the ferry stays in port. There have been times when the weather changed abruptly making docking dangerous, so within sight of Provincetown, the Boston Boat has had to sail back. Such safety at sea comes from a well-kept code of wisely made decisions through which many lives have been saved. Most of these decisions are known only to the steamship line and to the passengers on a given day of cancellation. Both sides are often left disgruntled due to loss of income and loss of holiday, barely reflecting that they have avoided a disaster. But a disaster does remind people of their "luck" and helps everyone to be more knowing and cautious when a risk of danger to safety arises.

One such quasi-catastrophe occurred in our waters when the New York, a ship of the Eastern Steamship Line travelling its routine run between Boston and New York collided with the Romance, an excursion liner of the Provincetown-Boston run. The Romance—1240 tons and 38-years old—was carrying 212 people (159 passengers, 53 crew members). The New York—4:1 tonnage at 4989 tons—was carrying 425 (300 passengers and a crew of 125). The evening held a dense fog on September 10, 1936 when at around 7:30 PM in the area of Graves Light, 10 miles out of Boston Harbor, these two vessels were far too close to each other at an angle waiting for disaster.

The Romance carried day-trippers waiting out the last few minutes in the saloon and on the decks. One woman, interviewed later, said that she had asked a deck hand if they were on time. He answered "Yes." Within moments the woman felt a jolt and noticed the crewman running aft. "I knew something was wrong," she said.

A woman waiting in the saloon with her small child was looking out the

NEW YORK SINKS ROMANCE

BOSTON, Sept. 9.—Donald Leveridge, captain of the New York, one of the largest steamships in the world, said tonight when the 38-year-old Bay State excursion liner Romance sank in collision with the New York in a thick fog last evening ten miles off Boston. The New York's crew, passengers and crew were rescued in a vessel, seen in a rescue in a

dow and through the fog saw something "large and white" coming swiftly toward them. She grabbed the window casement for support; her little girl fell and bumped herself but "was not afraid. It was the bump she cried about."

What had happened was that, although sounding loudly through the fog, the Romance and the New York did not see each other until near impact. The New York, the larger and more commodious liner had people dining, sleeping and others enjoying a concert of the "Poet & Peasant Overture". Just as the overture ended, the sleepers, the diners and the music lovers felt an almost imperceptible nudge.

The New York rammed the hull of the Romance and had it hanging on its bow. The reverse of the engine had caused the bump. So many passengers! Captain Roland Litchfield has been credited with the heroic quick thinking which averted a major maritime disaster. The New York had a twin screw engine and Litchfield kept them

churning so that the *New York* would stay wedged into the *Romance* allowing precious time to rescue the 212 people aboard the *Romance*. The precise importance of the life-jacket, life-boat rescue drill were about to be proven. Lifeboats dropped from both vessels immediately. Life jackets were distributed with swift and quiet buckling assistance. Ladders were quickly slapped against the *New York* and passengers calmly shinned up the ten feet to the decks of the *New York* with the assistance of crew members.

One elderly woman fell between the boats and was quickly rescued. Twenty-two year old Sally Brandeis fell three decks from the ladder as she was stepping to safety. Her fall was broken by the open arms of two crew members, Edward Nugent and Maurice Gallagher. Nugent suffered a fractured arm.

A crewman and a waiter from the *Romance* tumbled overboard while assisting passengers and were just as quickly fished out themselves. Dripping and shivering, the waiter was asked by a *New York* passenger, "Were you in a lifeboat?" "No, I had only the Atlantic under me," he replied in comic relief.

Black smoke was billowing out of the *Romance*, adding to the visibility problem from the fog. The saloon was lit and resting eerily at the water line. With all this drama, there was no panic. Captain Litchfield stayed at the wheel, plugging the hole in the *Romance* from the intrusion of the Atlantic until all the passengers and three dogs were rescued. Captain Adelbert Wickens and two crew members sat in a lifeboat on the top deck of the *Romance*. Captain Litchfield reversed his engines and let the engulfing waters claim the wounded vessel.

The *Romance* succumbed quickly in black smoke, fog and an empty lighted saloon. The Captain and two men perched in a tiny lifeboat waited for the upcoming water to buoy them, while the Atlantic squeezed the most mournful last call from the doomed craft. Those watching from the *New York* would not soon, if ever, forget the sight. From the moment of collision to the sinking, only 18 minutes had passed—no lives lost, no panic, twelve injuries (a bump on the head, a fractured arm, a bruised back from a fall on the deck, five in shock and scattered bruises).

During those 18 minutes Captain Litchfield had notified the Coast Guard and the Boston Marine Police. The *Vulcania*, the *Harriet Lane*, The *Faunce* and many smaller Coast Guard craft rushed to the scene. Though it was thought that all were rescued, these craft spent the night surveying the area around Graves Light for any possible survivors. The *New York* slowly pulled into Boston harbor around 11:00 PM with a 12-foot hole in her bow at the waterline. Ambulances, doctors and nurses were on the scene, but there was

little to do. Most passengers were eager to get on the specially arranged train that would take them to New York City. They were merely relieved, making light of the night's adventure except for the sincere and high praises of the crew.

The *New York* had been three hours behind schedule at the outset because of dense fog. All international liners were docked for the day because of dense fog. Captain Wickens was queried that very morning by Captain Lyons, United States Hull Inspector about venturing out in such thick fog. "Captain Wickens, you are not going out in weather like this, are you?" "Oh, yes," Wickens replied.

The implied warning was ignored and Captain Wickens was asked to appear before the

United States Steamboat Inspectors on charges of negligence brought by the Cape Cod Steamship Company, operator of a rival line which was also operating between Boston and Provincetown. He was charged with crowding another excursion boat, the *S.S. Steel Pier*, and ignoring their distress signal and a violation of pilot rules. The *Romance* had had its history. Built in 1898 as the *Tennessee*, she had suffered accidents and aided in the rescue of other distressed vessels. She was the *Romance* for only one year on her Provincetown to Boston run.

This saga of the harbor seas was told to me by Sheldon Caldwell, a teaching pro at Bissell's Tennis Courts. He was giving a lesson to an 85 year old woman in St Petersburg, Florida. Half way through the lesson, the "pupil"

asked for a time out—lest fatigue interrupt learning.

While resting courtside, small talk ensued.

"Where are you from?" she asked.

"Provincetown, a small town at the tip of Cape Cod," Sheldon replied.

"You do?"

"Do you remember the collision of the *Romance* and the *New York*? Probably not—too young."

"Oh yes, I do," replied Sheldon. "I was the trip with my parents the day before the collision. We were celebrating their wedding anniversary—September 9, 1936."

"And do you remember the young lady who fell three decks into the arms of two crew members fracturing the arm of one of them?"

"Yes."

"Well I am/was that young lady."

Surprise and pause.

"But that's not the name in the newspaper account."

"No, that's not the real name of my traveling companion either."

With that the grand dame leaned closer to Sheldon and added with a wink, "We were on a sneak."

