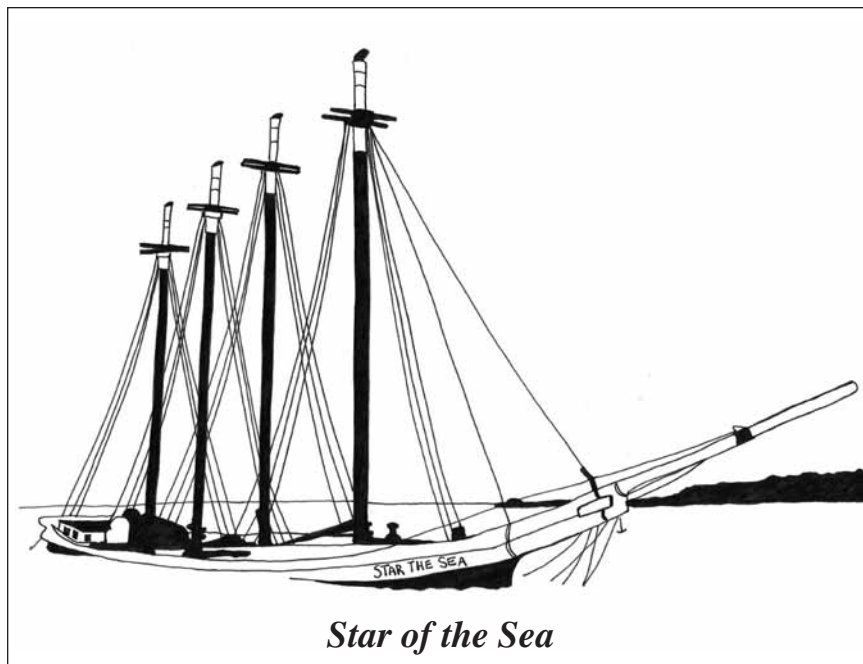


Star of the Sea – A Long Island Sound Wreck

by Adam M. Grohman

At the top of the mast, the United States flag flew upside down. Flapping in the soft September breeze, boaters and sailors cruised past and shouted for the crew to fix the ensign. All were unaware, except a five-year-old who pointed out the flag to his father that the flag's orientation was not a mistake, but a call for help. Three young boys, the oldest only 16, were on a sinking schooner attempting in vain to summon assistance as their training ship slowly sank into the waters of Long Island Sound.

The last of her kind, the *Star of the Sea*, a wood-hulled four-masted schooner was slowly succumbing to the ravaging effects of her 38 years of seagoing service. The 600-ton, 171-foot fore and aft-rigged vessel had been slowly taking on water through its leaky timbers for three days. She was losing her battle versus the saltwater elements. Her keel, most likely a victim of hogging, had seen its last days, and the three young boys were on board alone as she fought in vain to stay afloat. Despite the efforts of the boys of the Cadet Midshipman Training Corps, Nassau County New York Police Boats, and several Coast Guard assets, she finally sank north of the Hempstead Harbor breakwater on September 4, 1955.



Star of the Sea

The *Star of the Sea*, built in 1917 and launched in Bath, Maine, had originally plied the waters of the Northeast as a coastal trader. Originally named the *Annie C. Ross*, she had been retired to Newtown Creek in Queens in 1941. She lay moored at the dock and later in the waters off 26th street in Manhattan as ownership traded hands on multiple occasions, first to a coal merchant, who planned on utilizing her for trade with Africa, but

passed away before he could realize his plans. The *Star of the Sea* then transferred to New York State, which decided to sell the aging vessel at auction. Actor Scott Moore, who had eyed the schooner for many years, purchased the vessel in 1952. Along with the sails and rigging came a huge headache. He and his family began the backbreaking work of refitting the craft, which had endured a small fire and a set of vandals who stole minor equipment and a long-boat. The dream of turning the vessel into a floating television studio, however, was dashed. Less than two years later, the *Star of the Sea* was up for sale once again. Finally, the aging and dormant vessel was sold to the Cadet Midshipman Training Corps for \$2000 for use as a training ship for its young cadets. Purchased by the group in 1954, the *Star of the Sea* eventually found its way to an anchorage off Glen Cove's Morgan Park, where she was to undergo a complete refurbishing so that she could teach young men the art of seamanship.

Lying in about 21 feet of water, the main deck was less than two feet above the surface of the

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Star of the Sea – A Long Island Sound Wreck

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water, her four masts rising high into the sky. After her first night on the bottom, as Captain Richard K. Lukeman went ashore, a band of harbor thieves sneaked aboard the ship and stole the ship's wheel, a lantern being used to signal passing vessels of the danger, and various other minor items. Though he stated that the *Star of the Sea* would retain a manned watch from that moment on, it is unclear how long that vigil continued. What is certain is that the *Star of the Sea* remained undisturbed on the bottom and at the mouth of the harbor for quite some time.

Though the owners of the semi-submerged schooner believed that she could be floated and repaired, various Coast Guard officials explained that the ship's timbers were too rotten to be worth repairing. The United States Army Engineers also were quick to offer their opinion of the hulk to Capt. Lukeman in the form of an order: raise the ship or remove the hulk. Local residents also were vocal and the local board of trustees quickly drafted a letter to the U.S. Army requesting that it remove the danger to navigation. Less than a month after she had landed on the bottom, the Merritt, Chapman, and Scott Company planned to salvage her, but the efforts fell through. By November, another letter, written by an advocate for the hundreds of yachtsmen of Hempstead Harbor, with the support of a

councilman and senator, again asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to act. Finally, the U.S. Army issued a response stating that the owner had only a short time to acquire funds to remove or salvage the wreck; otherwise, federal funds as allowed by law, would be used to remove her once and for all.

In early December 1955, the owners remained confident that *Star of the Sea* would rise from the murky depths to sail again. They believed that the saltwater immersion of the timbers would cause them to swell, therefore relieving some of the gaps that had leaked and sent her to the bottom. While the Coast Guard placed blinking navigational signal lights on the wreck to warn other mariners, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contacted the Chief of Army Engineers in Washington for his permission to dispose of the wreck.

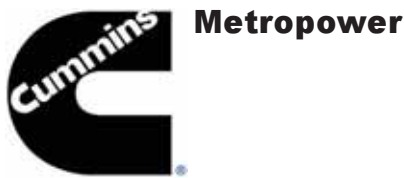
The paperwork loomed on and so *Star of the Sea* remained. In February of 1956, bids were opened for companies interested in salvaging or removing the ship. The Glen Cove City Council issued permission for the Woodcrest Construction Company to raise the hulk, tow the timbers to shore, and burn the remains on Garvies Point, but that plan never materialized. In early April of the same year, the fate of *Star of the Sea* was finally determined. Edward O. Sanchez of New Bedford, Massachusetts was granted a contract for \$11,900 to raise the vessel and tow it from Hempstead Harbor. According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, it would

be placed in a "deep hole in the Long Island Sound."

Though she sank, ironically, on Labor Day weekend, a time for most to sit back and relax, *Star of the Sea* was still a labor of love for those who saw her potential. Those who believed she could be raised from the bottom to bring joy and education to young cadets once again worked diligently to protect her from an untimely demise. But like an aging and beat-up old project car purchased by a dreamy teenager with visions of grandeur, *Star of the Sea* still retained a gleam about her lines that said to those who believed in her that she could be beautiful again. Realistically and financially, though, it was an ill-fated pursuit. The twinkle of *Star of the Sea* was surely in the eyes of those who worked to save her. Unfortunately, she was not able to shine as brightly as they had wished. She finally ended her days, heavily weighted down and scuttled to the dark bottom of our waters.

About the Author

Adam M. Grohman is a researcher, author, and chief diver of the Underwater Historical Research Society based on Long Island, New York. He is the author of *Non Liquef, The Bayville Submarine Mystery; Runner Aground, A History of the Schooner William T. Bell; Dive Gtmo* and two novels. For more information about this vessel or other projects of the UHRS, visit www.uhrs.org



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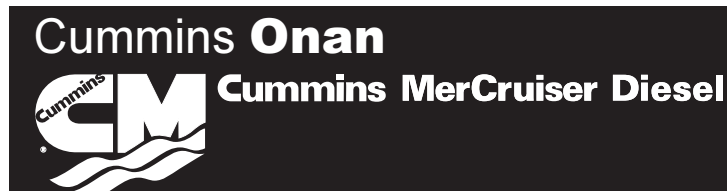
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