



## OCTOBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING “DEATH BY FIRE & ICE, THE STEAMBOAT LEXINGTON CALAMITY”

By Brian E. O'Connor, JD, Author

*Books signed by the author will be available for cash purchase.*

**Friday, October 27, 6:30pm (Doors Open at 6 PM)**

**In-Person and Live Streamed Via ZOOM from the National Opera Center Rehearsal Hall  
330 7th Avenue at 29th Street, 7th Floor, Manhattan**



*Death by Fire and Ice* tells the little-known story of the sinking of the steamboat *Lexington* on Long Island Sound in January 1840. Built in 1835 by Cornelius Vanderbilt, the *Lexington* left Manhattan bound for Stonington, Connecticut, on a bitterly cold day carrying an estimated one hundred forty-seven passengers and crew and a cargo of, among other things, baled cotton. She tragically caught fire on Long Island's north shore.

As the night wore on, the temperature plummeted well below zero. With no hope of rescue on the dark horizon, the forlorn passengers and crew faced a dreadful decision: remain onboard and perish in the searing flames or jump overboard and succumb within minutes to the Sound's icy waters. By early morning all but one passenger and three members of the crew perished. The tragedy remains the worst maritime disaster in the history of Long Island Sound.

Within days, the New York City Coroner convened an inquest to determine the cause of the disaster. The public's reaction to the verdict was scathing. Improved passenger safety legislation followed.

Join us and learn more about this fascinating story!

### ADDITIONAL UPCOMING MEMBER EVENTS

---

**NEW:** Saturday, October 14, 10 AM - 11 AM, **ENCORE** presentation via ZOOM  
“The Quarantine Islands” by Staten Island historian Pat Salmon

**SAVE THE DATE:** Sunday, January 7, 2024, 2 PM - 5 PM, **WSS-PONY BRANCH HOLIDAY  
2023 PARTY** (Location to be announced.)

**SAVE THE DATE:** November 11-15, 2024, **CARNIVAL RADIANCE 4-Night Cruise**  
Long Beach, CA, plus Queen Mary Pre-Cruise Special Rates and Activities

**UPCOMING NOVEMBER/DECEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING**  
**“EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION”**

By Ted Scull, Author, and WSS-PONY branch member

**Friday, December 1, 6:30pm (Doors Open at 6 PM)**  
**In-Person and Live Streamed Via ZOOM from the National Opera Center Rehearsal Hall**  
330 7th Avenue at 29th Street, 7th Floor, Manhattan

With increasingly large numbers of Europeans desiring passage to Canada and the United States in the 19th century, many shipping lines built larger and faster ships to meet the demands right up to WWI. It was these souls who sailed steerage that filled these ships and created the profits rather than those in first class. We will monitor how the trade fluctuated, and new ships were built right into the 1960s.



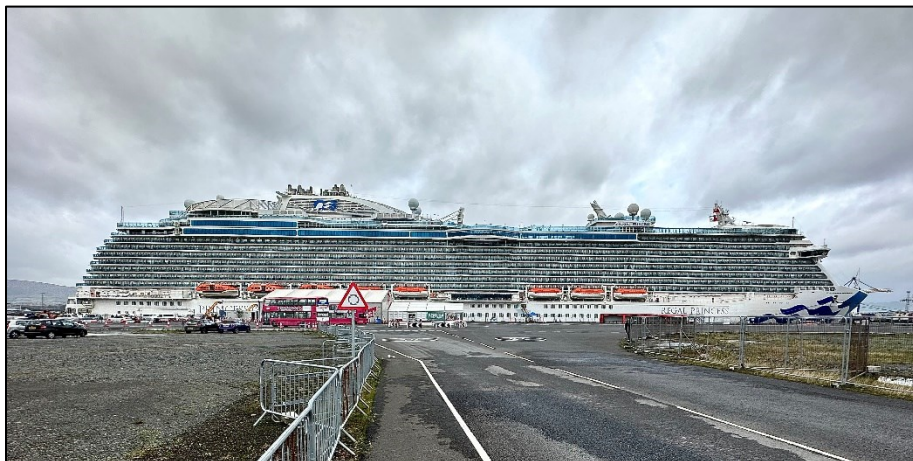
BERLIN seen on her last sailing from sailing from New York.  
She regularly carried immigrants from Europe to America. *(Ted Scull Photo)*



STEFAN BATORY at London's Tilbury Landing Stage. In this photo, Ted Scull is crossing  
the Thames to join the ship for a westbound transit to Montreal. *(Ted Scull Photo)*

## MEMBER NEWS

### ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES



David Hume and Marjorieann Matuszek cruised on REGAL PRINCESS  
Round-trip Ireland and Scotland, September 29 - October 9. *(David Hume Photo, Belfast, Ireland)*



Tim and Lisa Dacey cruised on ZUIDERDAM, New England and Canada Cruise  
September 23-30, 2023. *(Tim Dacey Photo, Bar Harbor, ME)*

## MEMBER PHOTO OF THE MONTH



*In memory of Jimmy Buffet*  
MARGARITAVILLE at Grand Bahama Island. *(Justin Zizes Photo)*



## SHIP'S LOG: SEPTEMBER 2023 MEMBERSHIP MEETING A REVIEW OF "THE QUARANTINE ISLANDS OF NEW YORK"

by Pat Dacey

On Sunday September 24<sup>th</sup>, the WSS-PONY branch welcomed historian Pat Salmon to the National Lighthouse Museum on Staten Island for a live presentation, "The Quarantine Islands of New York". Despite the effects of Tropical Storm Ophelia, a group of hearty members, friends and guests ventured to the National Lighthouse Museum, who generously allowed the WSS-PONY branch exclusive access to the museum for our program prior to opening the museum to general visitors. This provided a unique opportunity to view the museum's collection and enjoy some fall bakery treats and warm beverages before the program started.



Pat Salmon presenting to WSS-PONY branch at the National Lighthouse Museum (*Pat Dacey Photo*)

Pat retired as Curator of History at the Staten Island Museum in 2012. She has been a Staten Island resident for almost fifty years and was a Naturalist/Historian at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve in that borough for eight years. Ms. Salmon has authored the books *Realms of History: The Cemeteries of Staten Island*, *The Staten Island Ferry: A History, Murder & Mayhem on Staten Island* and *Staten Island Slayings: Murderers and Mysteries of the Forgotten Borough*. She is a board member of the Tottenville Historical Society, a consultant to the Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries of Staten Island and an adjunct professor at Wagner College in Staten Island.

As an authority on Staten Island history, Pat was well suited to take our group on a detailed journey of the quarantine stations of Staten Island which first opened in 1799 in the area then known as Tompkinsville which is now Saint George and the current site of the National Lighthouse Museum. The purpose of the first Quarantine Marine Hospital and subsequent ones was to hold immigrants who arrived in New York Harbor with contagious diseases and others who were identified as being infected. With almost one quarter of arriving immigrants dying during passage, it was decided that quarantine physicians would first be brought out to the ships as they arrived to check on the conditions of the passengers, mostly steerage, for illnesses such as tuberculosis, yellow fever, cholera, and typhus to name a few.

Since the medical knowledge of the day was primitive compared to today's standards, little was known about contagion and the spread of disease. As a result, the death rate in the original Marine Hospital was high while also creating significant outbreaks in the local community and high demand for cemetery space on Staten Island for the unfortunate victims.

With death rates and the numbers of sick immigrants rising, the local community protested to have the quarantine hospital moved away from populated areas. The first attempt, in 1857, was to Seguin's Point in Prince's Bay which during construction was set on fire by residents who were opposed to the plan. With residents of Tompkinsville seeing the success that the fire had on the closing of the Prince's Bay site, another fire was set on September 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1858 at the Quarantine Marine Hospital and ultimately closing the hospital forever.



The burning of the Quarantine Marine Hospital  
(Courtesy of The Noble Maritime Collection)

Still needing a location for a quarantine hospital and acknowledging the opposition by Staten Island residents, two sand bars off the South Beach shore were acquired and expanded to accommodate the new quarantine station. The two were ultimately named Swinburne and Hoffman Islands and first opened in 1873. This new facility also provided a solution to the increased need for cemetery space by including a crematorium on Swinburne Island as well as a small cemetery.



Swinburne Island

(Courtesy of The Noble Maritime Collection)

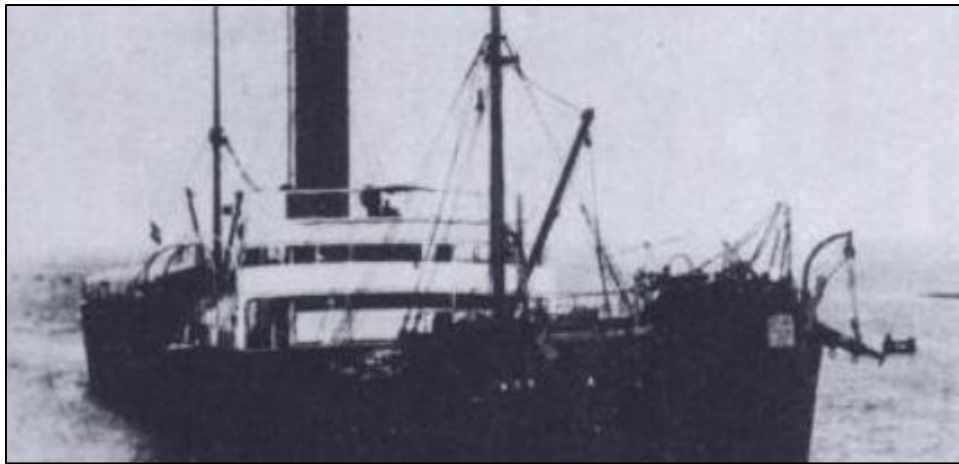
With the new Quarantine Islands functioning and supported by the Quarantine Boarding Station location on the Clifton shoreline, Pat explained the protocols and procedures that the Health Office for the Port of New York used in determining quarantine status and how they were implemented especially with the outbreak of cholera.

One notable incident Pat shared was the Hamburg American Liner, *Moravia*, which sailed into port in 1892 with 833 steerage passengers and 24 crew all inflicted with cholera. Of these, 23 individuals then perished.

Sadly, diseases continued to plague immigrants as newer strains and outbreaks such as smallpox, bubonic plague and measles found their way to the United States.

Later, by the early 1930's, immigrants were no longer held at the islands, replaced by imported wildlife that came into the United States that were thought to be carrying communicable disease and held in quarantine until determined healthy.

After the official closing of the islands for quarantine use, New York City envisioned many plans for the islands to include turning them into a place where inner-city youth could go to enjoy the outdoors until vetoed by NYC Parks Commissioner Robert Moses. Ultimately, in 1940, the islands were turned into an annex for the United States Maritime Commission to train merchant seaman throughout the period of the Second World War.



S.S. MORAVIA, 1883 Hamburg-American Line  
*(Courtesy Steamship Historical Society Collection, Univ. of Baltimore Library)*



Hoffman Island *(Courtesy of The Noble Maritime Collection)*

By 1948, the islands were deserted, and they became unofficial bird refuges until they were officially claimed by the National Park Service as part of Gateway National Recreation Area and are off-limits to individuals without permission.

An excellent question-and-answer session followed Pat's presentation with additional discussion on this little-known history in the immigration process and the historical significance that it played on the evolution of medical care and passenger shipping. WSS-PONY branch thanks Pat ([patsalmonhistory.com](http://patsalmonhistory.com)) for her insightful presentation and looks forward to her next program.

### **WORLD SHIP SOCIETY**

**Regular meetings with speakers on maritime topics, local outings, group cruises, friends, and more. Join us!**



<https://worldshipny.com/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/people/World-Ship-Society-Port-of-New-York-Branch/100064589415891/>



## SHIPS IN PORT: MIKHAIL GORBACHEV & THE “MAXIM GORKY” by Bill Miller

Onetime Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev died in August 2022. He represented a new, friendlier era in East-West politics and is probably best remembered for the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The liner MAXIM GORKY, assuredly the most luxurious passenger ship owned by the Soviets, played a part in political events of that time. In December 1989 and while at Malta, the ship was used for an important summit meeting between Gorbachev and President George H. W. Bush. Quickly, the MAXIM GORKY was in worldwide headlines. Along with their political entourages and amidst huge security, reporters were invited onboard and at least one described the ship's spacious interiors as “Soviet Deco”.

In fact, the ship had been built as recently as the late 1960s and was first known, and to New Yorkers, as the HAMBURG. A group of WSS-PONY branch members visited the 24,900-ton ship on a Saturday evening in August 1969. With a keen penchant for deck plans, the late Vincent Messina served as our tour guide, deck by deck and lounge by lounge. Aglow in lights, the ship later sailed off on a cruise to Canada. We watched from adjacent Pier 42 and the ship looked radiant.



The HAMBURG seen at the North Cape.

*(Des Kirkpatrick Photo)*

When the popular liner HANSEATIC of the Hamburg-Atlantic Line burned at Pier 84, New York, in September 1966, she was found to be beyond economic repair and so was soon scrapped. West German investors wanted to continue and so re-grouped as the renamed German-Atlantic Line. With post-Second World War restrictions finally lifted, they could actually build a brand new ship and in a German shipyard. They opted for a very luxurious liner, named HAMBURG, to be constructed by the Deutsche Werft shipyard in Hamburg harbor itself. Launched in February 1968, it was intended to use the new ship on summer season crossings between Cuxhaven (Hamburg), Southampton and New York, and with the remainder of the year on mostly long cruises. However, such ideas soon changed – she would cruise fulltime. After entering service in March 1969, she headed for New York that June and arrived at Holland-America Line's Pier 40 to a gala midday welcome. Holland-America would be in fact agents for German-Atlantic and found the new ship, with only 600 berths, to be exceptionally spacious. The late Cees Tensen, a former Holland-America vice president, once told me: “For sales and marketing purposes, we decided to dub the HAMBURG as the ‘Space Ship’. This would give the ship something of a separate identity. The ship even looked like something linked to space travel with its unusual hour glass-like funnel.”

The twin-screw ship had added publicity when, on a summer's night months later, in August, the HAMBURG was decorated with hundreds of light bulbs provided by the Sylvania Company. Off Lower Manhattan, the ship was suddenly to light (for several minutes) and even sparkle. It was a unique publicity event. A dozen or so WSS-PONY branch members lined the Battery seawall, excited and with cameras in hand. Unfortunately, an unhappy crewmember decided to sabotage the event and disconnected almost half the bulbs. Regardless, the ship looked quite special.



The MAXIM GORKY seen cruising in Norwegian water.

*(Des Kirkpatrick Collection)*

The HAMBURG was not an especially successful ship, however. She could not seem to find her place in the cruise business. In February 1972, she was moved out to the West Coast, for itineraries from San Francisco and Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the devastating fuel oil price increases of 1973 caused big problems. German Atlantic promptly sold their other ship, the “new” HANSEATIC, the former SHALOM, and, in September 1973, hurriedly changed the HAMBURG to HANSEATIC. Then, in less than three months, even the former HAMBURG was sold and German-Atlantic itself shut down. Reportedly sold for as much as \$30 million to Japanese buyers, she was in fact bought by the Odessa-based Black Sea Steamship Company. In a flash, she hoisted the Soviet flag and became the MAXIM GORKY.



The MAXIM GORKY while seen under German charter. *(Bill Miller Collection)*



Initially, in 1974-75, life for the 629-ft long ship varied. In February 1974, she departed Southampton on a charter for United Artists Films for use as a floating prop in the film *Juggernaut*. Interestingly, she was even temporarily renamed BRITANNIC. Later that year, under the watchful eye of Lower Manhattan-based March Shipping Company, she ran mostly short cruises from New York. When we returned from a Canada cruise on the MIKHAIL LERMONTOV in August 1975, we were unusually berthed stern-to-stern along the south side of Pier 88 with the MAXIM GORKY. Months later, in November, the ship was damaged by a bomb explosion while in San Juan. Finally, by December 1975, she was transferred to charter cruising, mostly for West German companies including Neckermann Reisen and Phoenix Reisen.

Although Soviet owned and manned, the MAXIM GORKY became very popular with the Germans. Her annual world cruises had passengers, again mostly Germans, that booked year after year. Notably, there were the occasional mishaps. On June 19<sup>th</sup> 1989, the ship nearly sank after colliding with drifting ice in Spitzbergen. Quickly evacuated, she was later patched and then towed all the way to Bremerhaven for full repairs. Then, in July 1991, there was a fire in the crew quarters. That same year, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ship was transferred to Cyprus-based owners that used Bahamian registry.

At nearly thirty, in late 2008, her time had run out – and she was laid-up in a Greek backwater. There had been rumors months before, including some advance scheduling, that she would be sold to US-based investors for a revival of the Orient Line and sail as the MARCO POLO II. Then there was talk of it becoming a museum and hotel ship in Hamburg harbor. Neither plan materialized. In January 2009, the ex-HAMBURG was sold to Liberian-flag intermediary buyers on behalf of Indian scrap merchants. Weeks later, on February 24<sup>th</sup>, the ship arrived at Alang as the renamed MAXIM M. to be beached and then scrapped.



The ship's funnel was certainly unique and distinctive.

(Bill Miller Collection)

---

Members may submit the following for consideration for publication in The Porthole: member photos, member arrival and departure details, and articles that may be of interest to your fellow members. Please direct submissions to [wsspony@gmail.com](mailto:wsspony@gmail.com). Please note published materials are subject to editing and are not necessarily the opinion of the PONY branch.

**WSS-PONY BRANCH ADDRESS:** PO Box 384, New York, NY 10185-0384

**E-MAIL:** [wsspony@gmail.com](mailto:wsspony@gmail.com) **WEBSITE:** [www.worldshipny.com](http://www.worldshipny.com)

## SHIP NEWS

By Pat Dacey

**Empire State VII Arrives in New York:** On September 18th, SUNY Maritime College in the Bronx, New York welcomed the arrival of its new state-of-the-art training ship, the *Empire State VII*. Empire State VII is the first of five new government-owned National Security Multi-Missions Vessels (NSMV's).

Empire State VII was constructed by Philly Shipyard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and is the first new vessel ever constructed for a state maritime academy. In total, five vessels will be built to serve a dual purpose as floating classrooms for the nation's five state maritime academies and as a humanitarian and disaster relief platform during times of national emergency.

Empire State VII can accommodate 600 cadets while at sea, in addition to providing modern hospital facilities, a helicopter pad, and the ability to accommodate up to 1,000 people during humanitarian missions. Empire State VII also has roll-on/roll-off and container storage capacity for disaster relief missions. (Source gcaptain.com)



The EMPIRE STATE VII passing under the Throgs Neck Bridge.  
(Photo Courtesy SUNY Maritime College)

---

### THANK YOU, GUEST EDITOR!

Special thanks to WSS-PONY Branch Chairperson Denise Dacey for guest editing the October 2023 issue of The Porthole. – Bob Allen

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS		COMMITTEE HEADS		BOARD OF DIRECTORS	
<b>Chairman:</b>	Denise Dacey	<b>Finance:</b>	Marjorieann Matuszek*	Bob Allen	David Hume*
<b>Vice-Chairman:</b>	Pat Dacey*	<b>Membership:</b>	Stuart Gewirtzman	Denise Dacey	Marjorieann Matuszek*
<b>Branch Secretary:</b>	CAPT James Zatwarnicki	<b>Newsletter:</b>	Bob Allen	Pat Dacey*	Carol Miles*
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Stuart Gewirtzman	<b>Programs:</b>	Pat Dacey*	Mario De Stefano	Ted Scull*
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Marjorieann Matuszek*	<b>Special Events:</b>	Pat Dacey*	Stuart Gewirtzman	CAPT James Zatwarnicki
*Past Chairperson		<b>Website:</b>	Stuart Gewirtzman		