

Sunken Shipwrecks
Of
Chatham
&
the Outer Cape

Donald L. Ferris

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“Not a mariner but dreads the shoals and bars of Cape Cod, and woe to that captain who finds himself on a lee shore with a rising wind. Not a harbor is offered along its entire front, while out to sea are shifting shoals, which mean certain ruin to the vessel that attempts to cross them.”

Boston Globe 10-18-1903

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INTRODUCTION

Chatham, and especially Monomoy Island, was one of the busiest, most treacherous maritime crossroads along the entire northeastern coastline. All north and southbound shipping traffic—whether heading to or from bustling ports like Portland, ME, Boston, and New York, or the smaller towns in between—crowded into these perilous waters. Wooden schooners, tugboats towing long strings of barges, steamships, fishing vessels, and pleasure craft all vied for space in a maze of narrow, twisting channels, where numerous buoys, lightships, and wreck markers, lined the way to navigate the sharp, nearly 90-degree turn around the Cape's elbow.

Barring poor weather, the passage to your destination was usually direct, and expedient, but in poor weather, it could cost you your life.

Just as accidents are commonplace on our modern highways, so too were mishaps inevitable for the ships of yesteryear. They fell victim to navigational errors, human mistakes, brutal weather, and, all too often, sheer bad luck. Fires, collisions, groundings, and structural failures were frequent causes of loss. In fact, maritime disasters were so common in the waters off Chatham, Orleans, and Provincetown, that much like today's brief newspaper reports of fender benders, the media typically noted only the most significant incidents—those involving loss of life, valuable cargo, or the vessels of prominent owners. For most other mishaps, a simple paragraph in the local newspaper would suffice. Sailors who lost their lives or their livelihoods were, in many ways, just another part of the daily toll exacted by the sea.

I've been lucky for four decades, I literally get to swim through history. Every time I strap on my tanks and fins on Cape Cod, I get to touch old shipwrecks, some dating back hundreds of years. Sometimes, I swim over their kelp-covered bones looking for clues to their identity. Often I know their background like old friends. I can tell you the facts regarding their construction, and their loss. I can tell you stories about their careers, the places they've been, and the men who trod their decks. For almost forty years now, I've explored the ships in this book. I've seen them magically appear in fine condition, unsanded and exposed after violent winter storms, and I've seen them disappear - sometimes for many years. I've watched them rust away, but far worse, I've seen them disappear from people's memory.

It was only two generations ago that one could not gaze across



Chatham's waters without spying the tall masts of a dozen schooners, and perhaps a steamship or two. The phrase "*Iron Men and Wooden Ships*" was coined to describe the incredibly heavy workload of moving crops, heating products and freight by enormous wooden schooners and their crews of harden sailors. Today, there is neither the romance, nor the mystique, that existed in the days of old. Now, similar tasks are performed by graceless, nameless nondescript trains, semi-trucks, container ships and airplanes.

Virtually all of the nautical characters written about in this book are now deceased. Thus, not all the details can ever be known about any given chronicle described. I have tried diligently to state the facts, but where there were gaps, I have taken the liberty to fill in the story and tell it as I discern it. It is my hope that these ships and the iron men who sailed upon them come alive for you, as they have for me.

It might be easy to imagine that I uncovered all of the shipwrecks described in this book, but that couldn't be further from the truth. While I did discover a number of them myself, many others were located by experts such as Arnold Carr and John Fish of A.U.S.S., who used sidescan sonar to pinpoint many wrecks hidden beneath these waters. Some were found by my good friends Captain Peter LaRoche, Captain Jeff Steele, Don McNichol, and Chuck Carey. Others came to light, or were documented by the government's charting service, NOAA. The search for all these wrecks has truly been a collaborative effort, with many hands, both local and scientific, contributing to the rich history beneath the waves.

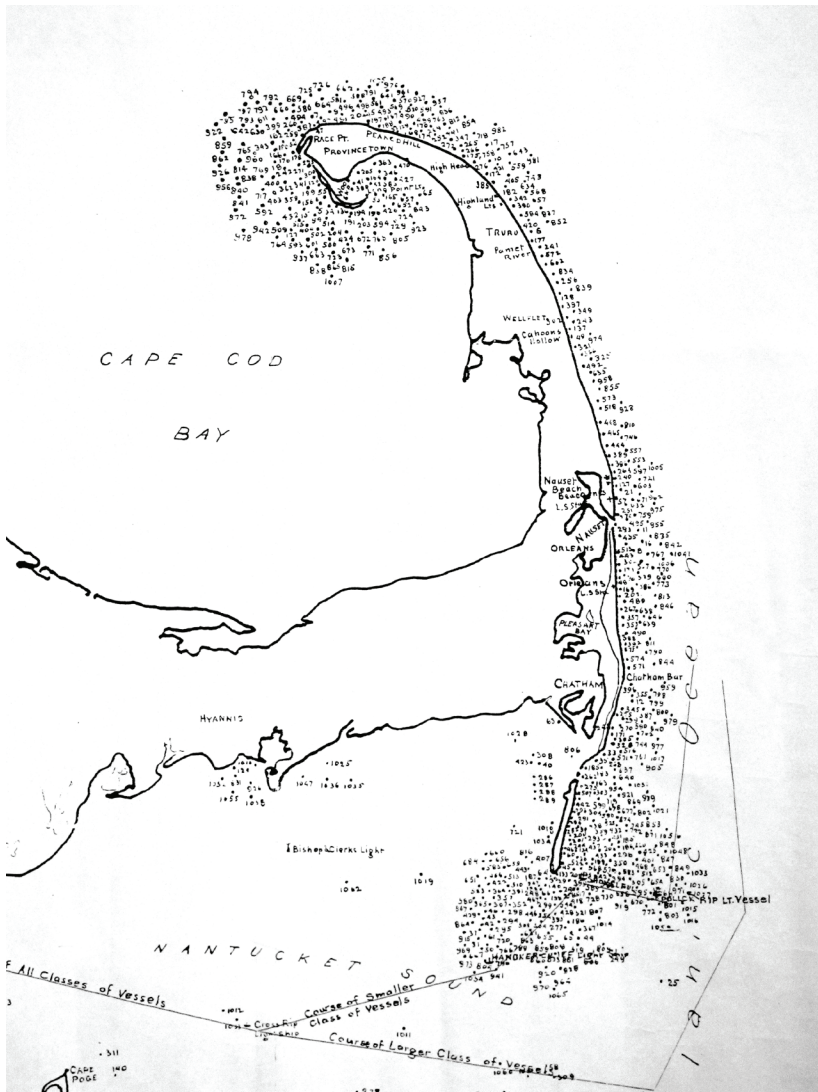
However, sometimes I think what we really do, is to "relocate" old wrecks. After all, the *ALVA*, *Wyoming* and the *Horatio Hall*, were actually buoyed with lit beacons, so other ships wouldn't strike them.

You may notice I don't focus much on the ships that broke on the shore in this book—there are plenty of excellent resources already published about those shipwrecks. Instead, I've dedicated my time to writing about the ships I've located and scuba dived.

Over the years, I've explored and documented the ships in this book extensively, using pen, paper, and underwater cameras. For wrecks such as the *Alva*, *Perkiomen*, *Pendleton*, *Aransas*, and *Horatio Hall*, I've logged more than 100 dives on each. I know these ships like long time friends; we've grown old together.

I sincerely hope you enjoy my stories.

Donald L. Ferris



This map shows just a portion of the wrecks having occurred around Cape Cod. Note the vast amount of wrecks at the elbow of the Cape. Over 10,000 ships a year would pass through that zone. The water is shallow, with strong currents, and many days *very* foggy.



1

The Joyous Season in Newport

The Sinking of the Luxury Yacht ALVA

"We called them mansions, a dead giveaway that we were outsiders. Real Newporters knew the proper term was "cottage"

The headline of the society page of the New York Times July 24, 1892, paper read:

"Newport's Joyous Season"

An increase in the number of social incidents.
Many dinner parties with long lists of guests.
Other notable events.
Getting Ready for Polo - Prominent Arrivals

The "Joyous Season" in Newport, Rhode Island, had nothing to do with Christmas. Instead, it referred to the summer return of the social and economic elite of the country who summered in their cottages by the sea. Nightly parties, lawn tennis, horseback riding, social outings and lavish dinner parties were only a few of the ways that the cream of America's society found to entertain themselves.

Now, try and imagine - if you can, the following four things:

1) You are one of the richest people in the world; 2) There are no income or estate taxes...What you earn is what you keep; 3) You are heir to one of the greatest industrial fortunes in the world - shipping, trains, real estate... You own it all; 4) You live in a period when flaunting one's money is not only accepted, but celebrated by the masses.

The Vanderbilt's lived in just such a day. For a shining instant frozen in time, this family could claim the title of the richest in the world. It was the accumulation period of the era known as the Gilded Age. This fabled period lasted for but a brief moment, 1870 -1910.



The Vanderbilt wealth began with the birth of Cornelius Vanderbilt, a farmer's son, on Long Island. The Commodore, as he was known, built his fortune shipping goods into and out of New York City. He was known as a crass, hard-talking water man who knew how to make and save a dollar. He quickly branched into transportation interests and solidified his fortune as the founder of the New York Central Railroad, the only railway serving the city of New York. At the time of his death in 1877, he had accumulated in excess of \$95,000,000! This was more money than was held in the United States Treasury at the time.

Following his own advice to never split up the money, he passed the bulk of his holdings to his eldest son, William H. Vanderbilt. William was a different kind of man than his father, but every bit as much the businessman. In less than a decade he managed to double the wealth of the family and for several years held the title of the world's richest man. Only upon his own death at the age of 75, did he dare disobey the father he had feared. He split the family fortune amongst his wife and daughters, with the majority of his estate divided equally between his two eldest sons, William and Cornelius. They each received in excess of \$65,000,000 and equal control of the railroads and shipping concerns. The Gilded Age was now in full swing.

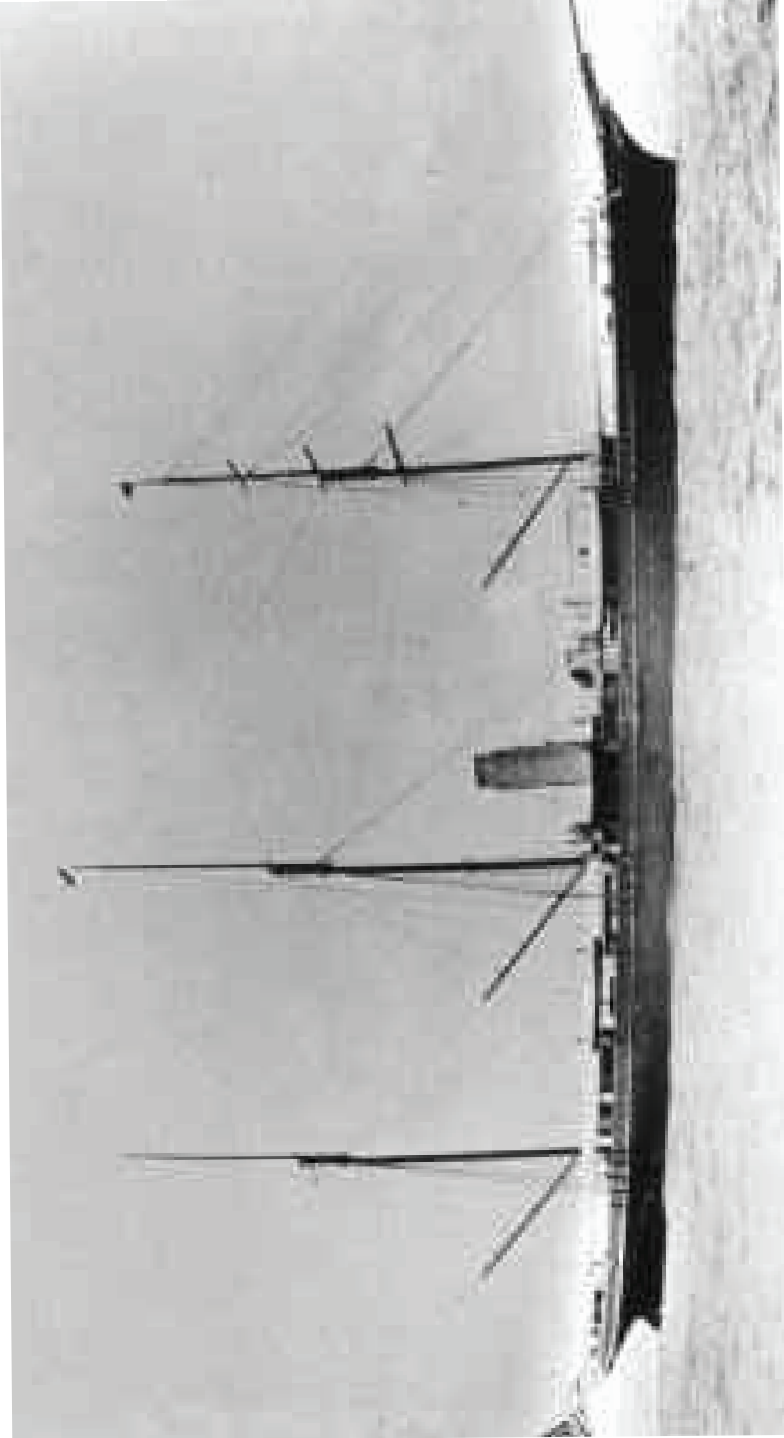
William Kissam Vanderbilt, was 26yrs when he married the 22 year old Alva Smith, on April 20, 1875. With no way of imagining the consequences of this union, neither Willie nor the family would ever be the same again.

Alva was the daughter of Murray Forbes Smith, a successful cotton merchant in Mobile, Alabama. A headstrong child from a very young age, she seemed to enjoy exerting her will over others. This tendency to be in charge, to oversee others, to be at the top of the pecking order, was the hallmark of her personality.

Although Alva was not a raving beauty, she nonetheless exuded considerable sex appeal. She was by all accounts an intelligent woman with great conversational powers. Alva's best friend was the wealthy Consuelo Yznaga. Consuelo's brother had married one of Alva's sisters, and she in turn introduced Alva to one of the city's most eligible bachelors, Willie Vanderbilt. Alva had always been enchanted by royalty and appeared to feel that if there was no American nobility, she at least could live like English nobility. With that thought in mind, the spending of the Vanderbilt wealth began.

Alva demanded and received much from her husband including





The 285 foot Vanderbilt yacht, *ALVA* is one of Cape Cod's most historical shipwrecks. She was sunk July 24, 1892 several miles off Chatham, MA.



lavish homes in Long Island, a summer cottage retreat she named "Marble House" in Newport, Rhode Island, and a private railroad car described as a veritable mansion on rails. Alva herself stated that there was nothing she liked more than to be up to her armpits in mortar.

On February 25, 1886, as a present to his wife, Willie commissioned the Delaware shipyard of Harlan & Hollingsworth to build a three-masted schooner to be named *ALVA*. Launched and christened on October 14, 1886, she was fully commissioned in February 5, 1887.

The 285-foot yacht drew 17 feet of water and was guaranteed to produce a speed of 15 knots on its trial run. The builder's plans called for "all workmanship and materials to be of the very best description and quality." The shipyard did not disappoint the Vanderbilt's.

Spars were made of the finest Oregon pine, while standing rigging and ironwork were American iron. Her blocks were of American white wood, brass-sheaved and finished. *Alva's* interior was paneled in mahogany. The forward cabin held the chart room, galley and reception room. From the reception room, passengers descended a mahogany stairway to a large hall which opened into the main dining room and the owners' quarters.

These quarters consisted of nine rooms and a nursery built of ash wood. The builder's plans state "owner's room and wife's staterooms to have large marble topped lavatories with tiled edging and large looking glasses with beveled edges." Each room was furnished in varied period pieces.

The dining saloon ran the width of the ship. This room, as well as all the woodwork, was finished in white enamel with gold trim. Across the entrance to the dining room was a wood-burning fireplace. The room was lit by two chandeliers of brass and gilt with half a dozen wall fixtures. Additionally, there was an overhead skylight covered with clouded glass, which also slid open for ventilation.

In the dining room, there was a piano across from the rounded mahogany table that comfortably seated a dozen. On the starboard side, running the entire length of the dining room was a cushioned settee. The ship's library was on the starboard side and measured 16 by 18 feet, paneled in French walnut with its own fireplace and skylight. Along the walls stood well-anchored bookcases, fitted with brass rods in front of the books to keep them steady in foul weather.

On the port side, behind the library, were 7 staterooms, 7' by



10' feet in size. Each held a narrow canopied bed, seat, drawers, lockers, a private lavatory, wash basins, jug and receiver, a stand for decanters and tumblers, writing table, chamber stand, a good-sized looking glass with beveled edges and a ledge for combs and brush. The ship's officers had smaller staterooms paneled in yellow pine, private baths and a mess room. The bulk of the crew lived forward in the bow in light and airy bunk rooms.

ALVA carried a crew of 53, including Captain Henry Morrison. A Brit, Morrison was an experienced captain whom Willie hired away from a steamship line. In addition, there was a chief officer, second officer, four quartermasters, two boatswains, a ship's carpenter, eighteen seaman, a chief engineer, first and second assistant engineers, six fireman, three coal passers, three oilers, a donkey engine man, an electrician, an ice machine engineer, a chief steward, three cooks, two mess boys and a physician. By the time she began her final trip, *ALVA* had already steamed to Europe and around the Mediterranean, Turkey, Egypt and the West Indies.

On July 23, 1892, *ALVA* left Bar Harbor, Maine, bound for Newport, Rhode Island. On board were Mr. Vanderbilt, his younger brother Frederick and several friends and associates. Willie and Frederick waved farewell to their mother who had come to see them off, and the stifling heat of Bar Harbor was quickly left behind as the sea breezes flowed over the decks.

After a comfortable steam south, Highland Light off the backside of Cape Cod was passed at around midnight Saturday. The men had just finished their dinners after which they all went on deck to smoke. Soon after, they retired for the evening.

While approaching Monomoy Shoals, the ship encountered light fog that progressively grew heavier and thicker. The ship's whistle was sounded as prescribed by maritime code, but by 6:15 a.m. the fog proved such a hindrance that the ship was finally brought to anchor at around 7 a.m. Sunday morning.

A watch was posted and the crew reported spotting the dim outlines of several vessels. They also heard engine noises from several others. At around 8 a.m., the relief watch was called. The old watch went to quarters, breakfasted, and in most cases turned in for a few hours' rest.

Awakened by the noise of the ship anchoring, one of the guests, Mr. Riggs, went on deck where he found Captain Morrison ringing the ship's bell. Upon entering into conversation with him, he was told by the skipper that three steamers had passed them as well as



several schooners; Captain Morrison stated it was safest to anchor and run no chances of encountering another vessel.

Mr. Riggs then went aft to see if the other gentlemen were up and saw that Frederick Vanderbilt had just closed his door. He then returned to his own room and had just climbed into his berth when he heard Captain Morrison sing out, "Keep cool, keep cool men, keep cool." He glanced out of the porthole and was startled to see what looked like a mountain right on top of them. He jumped to his feet but was knocked to the floor by the shock of the collision.

The Metropolitan Liner *H.F. Dimmock*, a Boston-bound vessel with Captain A.B. Coleman in command, was experiencing the same fog as the *ALVA*. Unlike Captain Morrison, Coleman knew this route like the back of his hand. He was accustomed to making the run from New York to Boston several times a week. The *Dimmock* was a freight steamer, not particularly pretty, with a high prowed bow. A good-sized steamer at 2,625 gross tons, she carried only her officers and crew. The ship had left the dock in New York at 6 p.m., laden with a general freight cargo. The trip usually took 20 hours in good weather. By 4 a.m. Sunday, the *Dimmock* was approaching Monomoy Shoals.

To use Captain Coleman's own words, "It was exceedingly foggy. Lookouts were posted and were straining their eyes in every direction while the whistle was being continuously sounded. We were very careful to keep right in the regular channel and were only going at half speed. Our progress was little more than drifting, as every little while we stopped and made observations before proceeding. For four hours we kept the whistle sounding, and we were feeling our way for Pollock Rip Slue Bell Buoy. When I had begun to think we were pretty near it, we heard the tinkling of a yacht's bell. As soon as the faint ring reached us, the lookout saw the dim outlines of a vessel dead ahead of us."

She struck the yacht on the port side, plumb on the bulkhead separating the two watertight compartments and plowing her way several feet across the deck. The water poured through the aperture in torrents and in a few minutes the ship began to settle noticeably. Dazed, Mr. Riggs picked himself off the floor and rushed on deck. The millionaire and his guests were slow to appear, but the crew was later credited with working like clockwork. Stewards ran below and banged heavily on stateroom doors. William Vanderbilt was one of the first to open his door. He turned to dress. The steward shouted to him to waste no minutes in reaching the deck. In silk pajamas and



night robe, Mr. Vanderbilt joined the crew on the main deck. Pajama-clad Frederick Vanderbilt ran below to retrieve his valuables. He found the water deep on his cabin floor and lost little time securing what he had come for and regaining the deck.

In a very short span of time, all five of the yacht's lifeboats, together with the steam launch she carried on her deck were put safely over the side. The crew stood by and assisted the Vanderbilt party in leaving. Once all the passengers were safely off the *ALVA*, Captain Morrison instructed his crew to don life preservers and abandon ship.

Aboard the *Dimmock*, Captain Coleman was yelling orders to his crew to prepare to render assistance. Damage assessments were made by the ship's officers and quickly reported to the skipper. Four or five of her plates were damaged and twelve of her ribs had fractured. All in all, she escaped relatively undamaged.

One account of the sinking notes that a fireman on board the *ALVA* was ordered into the boiler room to bank the fires. When he returned from the task, he found that every lifeboat had left the vessel's side and was rowing to the steamer *Dimmock*, which had dropped anchor less than 500 yards away. He noted that as he watched the lifeboats leaving, the bow of the *ALVA* was already submerged. The stern was working upward as the water's weight filled the forward compartments. With the decks just awash, the fireman plunged into the sea and swam for his life. He was soon safe on the deck of the anchored steamer.

A separate eye witness account by Mr. Riggs states, "The captain was the last to leave the *ALVA* and almost instantly discovered that one of his fireman was absent. This man had got rattled and later said he had no order to go below. The captain sang out to him to jump, which he did, and he was picked up."

After rowing to the *Dimmock*, the men climbed a ladder to the deck and with the exception of one man who sustained a cut foot when a rung broke, no other injuries were noted. Captain Coleman rounded up coveralls and other assorted clothing for the pajama-clad millionaires, which they donned over their pajamas. Mr. Vanderbilt instructed First Officer Carlton to take the yacht's steam launch and proceed to Newport with a message for his family.

The *Dimmock* remained on the scene until afternoon and then continued on to Boston, where the Vanderbilt party and crew disembarked in the late afternoon. After paying off the ship's crew who received extra pay for lost personal belongings, the men went



shopping for clothes. After a short stop at Parker's Restaurant, they boarded the first train to Newport, finally completing their memorable trip.

A Vanderbilt representative was immediately dispatched to New York to contract the firm of Merritt Wrecking to raise the *ALVA*. The Merritt wrecking tug *Rescue* reached the scene late on July 26, 1892, and began to survey the damage. Their hard hat divers quickly ascertained that the ship lay on her side and that her hull damage was located in a very difficult position. The tidal currents that sweep through Nantucket Sound and the backside of the Cape converge almost directly on top of the wreck site. Except for brief moments of still water called slack tide, the currents run at a speed much too great for a diver to work safely.

The wreck that lay before the divers still lifted with the passing of overhead ground swells. There was only 20 feet of water over the top of the deck houses. Some of the standing rigging was down and the main hatch was off. Very little debris or furniture had floated out of the wreck, and speculation ran that a chair or chairs were blocking the companionways. A captain from a competing wrecking firm stated to the newspapers, "I would not give \$100 for the wreck. The season is not long enough to float her in. If the Merritt people are so fortunate to raise the yacht, it will doubtless cost Mr. Vanderbilt about \$30,000 for the operation."

The mode of raising the wreck consisted of a diver patching the hole in her hull with wood and canvas. The bulkhead would be reinforced and chains passed around the hull. The tug *Rescue* was fitted with powerful derricks fore and aft, with large steam boilers to supply the power for the lifting and pumping. The chains would be attached to the lifting derricks and the ship winched to the surface. Once the ship was partially exposed to the air, powerful pumps capable of displacing hundreds of gallons of water a minute would pump the ship out. Additional patching of the hull would be accomplished as the ship eventually rose higher and higher out of the water. Once stabilized, she would be towed to Boston or New York and placed in dry dock for permanent repairs.

Due to *Alva's* precarious position in the middle of the shipping channel, on July 28, the government placed a gas-lit black buoy about 150 yards southeast of the sunken yacht and filled it with a two-month's supply of gas.

The wreckers feared that if they didn't move fast, a strong southeast blow would demolish the ship before they could raise her. It was



ALVA WAS IN A BAD BERTH
Lay Broadside Across the
Ship Channel.

Only Damage is a Hole and She Can
Probably be Raised.

Capt. Coleman Says the Dimock Was
Going Very Slow.

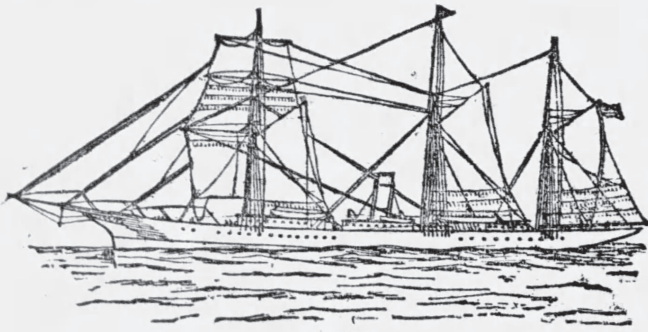
ALVA SUNK.

**W. K. Vanderbilt's Fine
Yacht Cut Down.**

**Crashed Into by the
Steamer Dimock.**

**Millionnaire Escaped
in His Pajamas.**

**He and Party were in
Their Berths.**



THE STEAM YACHT ALVA,

named in honor of Mr. Vanderbilt's wife, was constructed of steel, and was launched from the shipyard of Harlan & Hollingsworth at Wilmington, Del., during the spring of 1886. She measures 256 feet over all, has an extreme breadth of beam of 32.3 feet and has a draught of about 18 feet. Her gross tonnage is 1151.24 and her net tonnage is 600.55. She has a compound three-cylindrical engine and steams 15 knots per hour.



already evident that the hull was quickly filling with sand, and the ship appeared to be cradling herself in the soft sand bottom.

Mr. Vanderbilt, accompanied by Captain Morrison and the ship's steward, arrived in Chatham, Massachusetts on July 28, and checked into the Hotel Chatham. Captain Sharp of the wrecking tug *Rescue* brought his ship into port that evening to confer with the owner. The result of that conversation was that on July 29, Willie Vanderbilt announced that he had decided that the wreck could not with any certainty be lifted, and that the ship would be sold at auction. Several newspapers reported that Mr. Vanderbilt immediately placed an order with a shipyard for a new yacht to be built. A schooner was sent out to the wreck to guard the property and keep a lighted buoy on the site at night.

On August 5, 1892, the *ALVA* was sold at auction. Only three bidders were present, the Merritt Wrecking Company, the Chapman Wrecking Company and Perking & White Contractors of Boston. The bidding (considered to be a very risky speculation) began at \$100 and quickly ran at bids from \$10 to \$200 dollars. The winning bid was finally knocked down to \$3,500.00 to the firm of Perking & White.

The purchase of the wreck was indeed very risky. Captain Fred Sharp of the tug *Rescue* had been at the wreck and performed a thorough evaluation. At the auction he allowed himself to be easily outbid, causing the general gossip to indicate that the chance of raising her must be slim. The representative of the Perking & White firm refused to talk about the company's plans for the yacht. The speculation ran that the firm would dynamite the hull, thus allowing divers to enter the wreck and remove the machinery and finery that adorned *ALVA*. Her wines were said to be valued at over \$10,000 alone.

Everything about the yacht except her small boats and the money and personal property of the gentlemen who were aboard at the time of the collision, was sold absolutely. Perking & White were to receive 50 percent salvage on all the money and personal property of the guests recovered. There was no estimation given of the dollar amount or type of personal property involved. The small boats were to be sold at a later date.

On August 4, 1892, at the local office of the Board of Steamboat Inspectors in Boston, an official inquiry into the sinking of the yacht by the *H.F. Dimmock* was conducted. Captain A.B. Coleman of the *Dimmock* showed the board his log book which substantiated his ship was creeping along in the fog at the time of the accident. The



log showed that the First Officer, Cornelius Baker, was on deck at the time of the collision and was stationed at the bow. Captain Coleman and the quartermaster were in the pilot house.

Upon being questioned, they both replied that they heard no noise before the time of the collision. Just before the collision, they saw a shadow ahead. First Officer Baker testified that he saw the yacht less than 30 seconds before they struck her. The engines were immediately reversed. All witnesses said they had never seen a ship anchored anywhere near that spot. In order for the ship to have had a safe anchorage out of the shipping channel, the yacht should have anchored one mile from where she was. Representatives of the *ALVA* were given an opportunity to question Captain Coleman, but they remained silent.

On October 11, 1892, the board posted their decision that the collision was not caused by misbehavior, negligence or lack of skill on the part of the officers of the *Dimmock*. No further charges were held against Captain Coleman, the *H.F. Dimmock* or her owners. The board did find that the *ALVA* at the time of the accident was being navigated in violation of section 4401, U.S.R.S., she not being under the control of a pilot licensed for that route. The board stated that they were satisfied that a licensed pilot would never have anchored where the *ALVA* was. Therefore, they suspended the license of Captain Henry Morrison as master for six months from that date.

The wreckers went to work and all of that summer remained on scene at the wreck site. A large wooden box was fixed to the *Alva's* deck on September 27. The box was thought to have immense lifting power if pumped out in conjunction with sealing off water-tight compartments and it was hoped she could be raised. The wreckers continued their work, but as autumn quickly approached, they knew their chances of raising the *ALVA* were gone with the change of weather. In October, they announced that they intended to abandon the site. The wreck was thus considered unowned property. On November 1, 1892 the Army Corp. Of Engineers advertised in the *Chatham Monitor* for proposals to remove the wreck of the yacht. There were three bidders for the work. O.J. Kelly and O.S. Fansant of Atlantic City bid \$5016., Charles W. Johnson and R. Townsend of Somers Point N.J. bid \$12,305., while Chapman Derrick Wrecking Company of N.Y. bid \$16,874 dollars. The contract would go to the lowest bidder with work to commence within four months.

While they waited for the wreckers to do their work, the wreck of the *ALVA* damaged or ensnared numerous passing vessels. The



Everett Wheeler, a schooner, was the first of several ships to have mishaps with the submerged yacht. Loaded with 700 tons of coal, she ran directly over the submerged *ALVA*, carrying away her topmast and stack. The steamer *Wilkesboro* then struck the submerged wreck, damaging herself significantly. On November 17th, the barges *Sooloo* and *Storm King* under tow by the tug *Saturn* both hit and struck the *ALVA*, the result being that the *Sooloo* sank in the main channel and the *Storm King* beached on nearby Monomoy. The *Sooloo* sank with 3,000 tons of coal on board. Both vessels were considered to be total losses. On December 8th, the barge *Beechwood*, under tow by the tug *Plymouth*, struck the *ALVA*. Again, that winter in March, 1893, the barkentine *Altamahe*, bound from Georgia to Boston with a cargo of pine lumber, ran up on the submerged wreck. The wreck tore a hole in the ship's bottom and after she floated off, the captain put on all sail and grounded her on nearby Monomoy Island. She was boarded by the lifesaving crew, and all hands were taken safely off.

In March of 1893, a steamboat tied up in Stage Harbor waiting for suitable weather to arrive in Chatham so she could blow-up and remove the wreck. Bad weather kept the steamboat at the dock most of the time until April, when the local residents complained to the town authorities that the dynamite kept aboard the vessel had become loose one night as the ship rocked in rough seas. This incident, combined with reports of more explosives stored on the wharf, prompted officials to have the ship moved off the dock.

By May 1893, the weather moderated and the explosives experts were hard at work blowing up the ship. The Chatham Monitor reported, "*They are giving the ALVA a good blowing up, but for all that she hangs together well.*"

The wreckers continued their work removing the ship's English-designed engines and boilers. Her broken and shattered hull was left to rot. Occasionally, a fisherman would drop a hand line on her and jig for codfish, but for the most part the once proud yacht was all but forgotten.

The rest of the story....

Willie Vanderbilt did indeed build another pleasure ship. In 1893, the two-masted yacht *Valiant* was launched. Measuring 332 feet long, with a beam of 39.2 feet, and a draft of 18.4 feet, the ship was powered by a massive engine designed to provide 17 knots of speed. She was one of the first yachts constructed with twin screws.



Described as one of the most elaborately furnished ships ever built, she was for many years the largest privately-owned yacht afloat.

Consuelo Vanderbilt, (daughter of Alva and Willie) married the Duke of Marlborough in November of 1895 under heavy pressure from her mother who sought nobility in the family tree. Alva's own marriage to Willie dissolved in divorce in 1894 and she quickly married one of his best friends, Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont. She later became well known in the women's suffrage movement. Willie Vanderbilt lived a full life traveling the world, and eventually passed away from heart trouble on July 22, 1920.

What about the family fortune? The seemingly endless fortune of the Vanderbilts was divided again and again among the heirs. The introduction and establishment of income and estate taxes cut the wealth even further and faster. By 1907, no member of the family was listed among the richest people in the United States. Stock wars, mergers, proxy fights and The Great Depression stripped many of the Vanderbilts of any ownership in the railroads and shipping interests.

When 120 of the Commodore's descendants gathered at Vanderbilt University in 1973, for the family's first reunion, there was not a millionaire among them. The money was spent.

Epilogue

In 1983, a team of sidescan sonar experts from American Underwater Search and Survey in Cataumet, Massachusetts, located the wreck. John Fish and Arnold Carr were the first to explore the virgin site. What they saw amazed them.

The wreckers, in their haste to finish the job, had somehow left the entire clipper bow intact. Heeled over onto her starboard side, the massive ship's bow faced into the current so if a diver stood on the deck with his hands on the rail, the water rushing past made him feel as if the ship were still moving.

Directly behind the bow section, the ship was torn and mangled from the dynamiting that had occurred 90 years earlier. A large "navy style" anchor was lodged in the ship. The remains of the ship's starboard railing still stood proudly. The teak rail with its brass fittings still looked good even after close to a century of submergence. The partial remains of the deck cabins were evidenced by the discovery of several rectangular portholes. Rectangular portholes are a rarity and the divers carefully removed several of these brass keepsakes for later preservation.



Traveling aft, Carr and Fish easily made out the ship's lifeboat davits. Lobster antenna appeared from every conceivable crevice, and the explorers placed several five and six-pound bugs in their collection bags. The visibility, at over 40 feet, was excellent for New England. Big striped bass and schools of cunners swarmed around the divers. Passing by copper and brass cooling pipes that protruded from the sand, Carr and Fish knew they were in the general area of the engine room. No signs of the ship's boilers (which had stood 17 feet tall) or other machinery was found. The rounded stern of the ship became evident with a little imagination, telling the divers that they had come to the end of the wreck.

Checking their air supply, the pair began the return swim up the wreck's port side. The hard-packed white sand that comprises Monomoy Shoals dazzled their eyes with its brightness as it reflected the sun's rays off the bottom. Several round portholes, with their storm covers and glass intact, were spotted and the location stored in the divers' minds for a future day.

Large heavy green kelp swayed with the rocking motion of the ocean, and multitudes of tautog, cunners and flounder accompanied the divers. Forty minutes elapsed in what seemed a few minutes, and they were forced to begin their ascent. The slack tide was just beginning to fade and the first pull of strong current could be felt as the two made their way slowly to the surface.

The wreck was kept secret for many years, explored by only a handful of lucky individuals. I began to dive the wreck in 1985. In 1994, with the publishing of my third book, "Exploring the Waters of Cape Cod," the secret location of the *ALVA* became known to others. The wreck instantly became very popular with charter boat captains.

Today, a dive to the *ALVA* still brings the same excitement and challenge as that experienced by the first explorers. The wreck is still in remarkably good shape, surviving severe pounding during nor'easter storms and several hurricanes in recent years.

Prior to their dive on the *ALVA*, many divers like to tour the Vanderbilt mansion, Marble House, located in Newport, Rhode Island, just an hour's drive from Cape Cod. There, you can tour several "summer cottages" and step back in time; the costume balls, lavish gala dinners, servants on hand at every step and Willie and Alva's personal rooms all speak of an era when the Vanderbilt's were the richest family in the world. Once you experience the glitter and glamour of the gilded age, you are ready to dive the wreck.



Forty-five feet down in the ocean, gliding along the wreck, it is easy to imagine the posh elegance of the once breathtaking yacht named *ALVA* - as she sailed toward Newport, for the start of the Joyous Season.



Bottom photo: Dale Dougherty on the *ALVA* wreck site, recovers a porthole. Underwater, Dale is shown removing heavy concretions (rust and sand buildup) from the porthole with his dive knife, before heading back to the surface. Later, Dale is shown back at the dock.



NOT BRIGHT FOR THE ALVA

**CHANCES OF RAISING HER SAID
TO BE LESSENING.**

**SAND PILING UP AGAINST HER HULL—
THE YACHT GETTING HARD KNOCKS
FROM PASSING COASTERS—A BUOY
SET TO MARK THE WRECK.**

**COTTAGE CITY, Mass., July 28.—G. W. Coffin,
Naval Secretary of the Lighthouse Board at
7-29-1892**

MONEY RECOVERED.

**8-1-1892 Wreckers Secure Mr. Vanderbilt's
Treasury in the Alva.**

The Merritt coast wrecking steamer Rescue, returned to Stapleton, S. I., Sunday, from the wreck of the yacht Alva, near Pollock Rip lightship. Capt. Sharp, who was in charge of the expedition, succeeded in recovering from the cabin of the Alva Mr. Vanderbilt's treasury, which contained a large sum of money and several checks. The wreckers also stripped the Alva of her spars, two large brass cannon and other deck fixtures. Capt. Sharp said that when he left the wreck on Saturday there was a rough sea and he was unable to remain by the wreck for more than half an hour.



WRECK OF THE STEAM YACHT ALVA. U. S. Engineer Office, Newport, R. I., 24th October, 1892. To whom it may concern. Whereas navigation is obstructed and endangered by the wreck of the Steam Yacht Alva, lying in Pollock Rip Channel, Mass., near the Light Ship: Notice is hereby given that it will be removed by the United States under authority of law. Sealed proposals in triplicate, for the removal of said wreck, will be received at this office until 12.30 P.M., on the 3d day of December, 1892, and then opened. The attention of bidders is invited to the Acts of Congress approved February 26, 1885, and February 23, 1887, Vol. 23, page 332, and Vol. 24, page 414, Statutes at Large, and the Act of August 1, 1892, Sections 1 and 2 (Public No. 193). The United States reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to waive any informalities. Full information furnished on application. By authority of the Secretary of War: **W. H. BIXBY,** Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army. m4t

Above, the public notice for sealed bids for the disposal/destruction of the yacht, ALVA. Over 1000 lbs of dynamite were used to blow up the wreck.

The bell of the wrecked steam yacht, Alva, was shipped from Hyannis to New York the other day by express.



RAISING THE ALVA.

How Divers and Pumpers Work at It.

Magnitude and Difficulty of the Job Undertaken by Bostonians.

Anchors, Chains, Music Boxes and Silverware Brought Up.

CHATHAM, Sept. 24.—"Can you take me out to the Alva and back between now and midnight?" asked THE GLOBE man of Skipper Cal Hammond of the catboat Lenora, early this morning.

"Well, if this nor'wester holds I can."

So away we sped down through Stage harbor and out into Chatham bay, with the wind over the quarter and the sheets started just enough so that the boat made fast time across the bay down toward Monomoy, when the wind died completely out, leaving us drifting quite rapidly out over the shoals, propelled by the strong current setting to the eastward.

It was in the general direction toward the Alva, however, and as we drifted down past the Showful lightship and saw directly in our track in the distance the Pollock Rip lightship gradually looming up, and also saw coming directly toward us the fast steamer Winthrop, from Bar Harbor for New York, which came so near hitting the Alva on that eventful Sunday morning when the fast 2500-ton steel steamer, H. F. Dimock, for Boston, crashed into the side of the beautiful yacht.

One thing not generally known is that the Dimock's bow-plates were pierced by a solid iron projection on the Alva's side, which held the two vessels together so firmly that the Dimock could not free herself from the yacht, though her engines were backing at full speed in the effort to shake off the Alva's grip.

The sharp shock on the Alva's bow just as it was settling under water, caused the vessels to separate, and down went the Alva to the bottom; had they not separated then she would have dragged the bow of the Dimock down so that the water would have rushed in through the hole in her plates, and she would have followed the yacht.

After Mr. Vanderbilt and all those on the yacht had been taken to Boston he sent divers to examine the wreck with a view of raising her. The New York divers made such an unfavorable report that he decided to abandon the idea of raising the yacht, and advertised to sell her at auction in New York.

Many thought that this was just what was desired, and that some towboat company would surely buy and attempt to raise her.

While the sale was in progress there was present an unknown man who kept raising everybody's bid to the amount of \$50, in a

get something to partly pay the expense of the attempt.

"Here's a sabre from the Alva, which please accept as a memento, with my compliments to THE GLOBE."

"You can go over into the other boat and talk with Mr. Duncan, if you wish, while he is getting into his diving suit."

It was a decidedly novel sight to watch Mr. Duncan prepare himself for the work and still more novel to see him load himself with a leaden belt and lion shoes, and, after taking a crowbar, hand saw and piece of plank, plunge backward into the dark waters.

He has no fears, however, as long as his own son tends the hose and signal line from above and keeps the man at the air-pump actively at work.

After a time he comes up after another plank, a hammer and some knives, bumping up a brass bracket-lamp from one of the staterooms, and showing also a nasty cut on his forefinger, the result of promiscuous round in the dark among some broken glass.

Said he: "I am inclined to think Perkins & White will succeed in this job if the weather holds favorable a while longer."

"It is without doubt one of the most difficult wrecking jobs ever undertaken, but their plans are wholly new, and I believe they will be successful."

"We have over there in Chatham bay the biggest lighter on the coast, on which is being built a large box, 36 feet long, 15 feet wide and 8 feet deep, made of plank six inches thick, caulked water tight, which we propose to put down over the boiler room and fasten secure to the deck, another of nearly the same size will be put down over the engine room."

"When they are pumped out and the air goes in they will each lift over 100 tons."

"At the same time we shall place our powerful steam pumps on the yacht, and after pumping the water out of her compartments which we have now closed tightly, and letting the air go in we believe she will come to the surface."

"The steam pumps will be worked under water by steam forced down into the cylinders from the lighter's boilers above. We think it is entirely practicable, even though the yacht is heeled over so that her decks are at an angle of 30 degrees, which makes it exceedingly difficult to work on her."

"The bow, forward of where the Dimock struck her, is now broken completely off, and we propose to lift that section, though it is 58 feet long, on the deck of our lighter and take it into port."

"If we raise the yacht, we shall beach her at first out of this strong current, and then prepare her to be towed to Boston."

Another diver came up with a bag full of silver knives, forks and the prettiest little individual coffee pots, cream pitchers and syrup pitchers.

He said they had not yet disturbed the \$10,000 worth of wines and liquors in the storerooms of the yacht; that if they succeeded in raising her those cases would come up with her; if not they could be taken up at any time, as Mr. Vanderbilt's lawsuit against the owners of the Dimock, whether successful or not, will not affect the ownership of these stores.

Hanging aloft in the Alva's mizzen rigging is a big ship lantern, placed there by Capt. Coleman of the Dimock; it is lighted every night by the wreckers to mark the stern end of the sunken wreck, while a government gas buoy, which will burn a month, has been placed off the starboard bow to mark her forward end. Nevertheless she was run into by the steamer



SNARED BY THE ALVA.

Vessels Caught and Bitten by
- Sunken Craft.

Trap for the Keels of the Unwary Which
Must Pass the Slue.

Contract to be Made by Uncle Sam to
Blow Her Up.

The sunken steam yacht *Alva*, once the pride of Millionaire Vanderbilt, but for many months past a dismantled wreck off Pollock's Kip, is fast becoming famous for its destructive qualities.

Since the memorable night last July, when she met in collision with the *Dimock* and went to the bottom, while her owner barely escaped with his life, she has lain beneath the waters, a menace to all vessels passing the channel at this point and a source of annoyance and dread to many of the brave and hardy seamen who after dark can only guess her resting-place.

As she herself went down before the prow of a more powerful craft, so has she sent other vessels to their doom, or else left them stranded upon the shoals not over a mile away, the result of a vain attempt to pass her in the night.

Like the deadly torpedoes which in times of strife played havoc with the unwary men-of-war, this remnant of a pleasure yacht lies in the channel awaiting the coming of her prey.

Her latest victim was one of two barges in tow of the tug *Plymouth*, which tried to pass the wreck early yesterday morning.

A few hours before the steamers *Berks* and *Lancaster*, each with a barge in tow and bound north, passed the obstruction successfully, but the *Plymouth* and her charges were less fortunate. One of the barges struck the *Alva* with considerable force, and immediately began to leak.

Both barges were anchored as soon as possible, and remained together until daylight. As the leaking barge was found to be rapidly filling, a run was then made for the beach, and the damaged boat was anchored off the Monomoy life-saving station about 10 o'clock.

The pumps were kept working the rest of the morning until assistance arrived.

Sea-faring men are loud in their denunciation of the law which permits this dangerous obstruction to navigation to remain in the channel.

They argue that had such an obstruction been placed there with malicious intent, it would be deemed a crime, and why not one to leave it there after so many craft have been disabled, either by running into it or grounding on the shoals in trying to avoid it.

Although the fact of the *Alva's* presence in the channel is well known to most of the

Several ships were damaged after striking the sunken remains of the *ALVA*.

POUNDED BY BREAKERS.

Barges Sooloo and Storm
King Breaking Up.

Sea Strewn with Wreckage from Rock-
Impaled Vessels.

Steward Small Tells of the Terrible
Night in the Leaky Dory.

CHATHAM, Nov. 17.—The wreckers at Monomoy report that the barge *Sooloo* is going to pieces, as her deck and one mast were floating down past Shovelful lightship this afternoon, and that wrecking schooner A. B. Lyman was trying to get hold of them; also that other wreckage was picked up near Monomoy lighthouse.

The heavy swell continues outside, so it is predicted that the barge *Storm King* will probably not hold together another day.

Steward Small has arrived home tonight, and reports that he passed the roughest experience of his life last night, in that leaky dory, occupied by Capt. Harding and wife and himself.

He says all were obliged to bail water almost continually all night to keep from sinking, he and the captain taking turns at the oars.

Everybody aboard the *Sooloo* except one sailor belonged in Chatham, so were wrecked very near home.

The Boston Tow Boat Company's agent, H. S. Cook, has arrived in a tug from Vineyard Haven and will probably strip the *Storm King* tomorrow, also try to save some rigging from the *Sooloo*, whose masts are partly out of water.

Underwriters' Agent Isaiah Harding will go out in the morning.

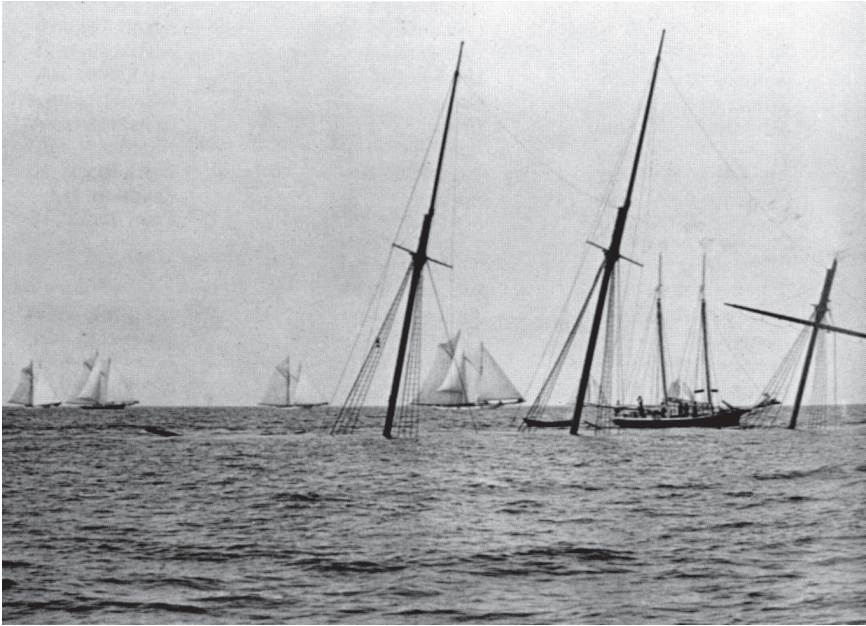
The gas buoy on the sunken *Alva* went out nearly a week ago, and the weather has been so rough since that the lighthouse boat has been unable to put the new one there, so in these dark nights there is nothing to mark her position, which makes it very difficult for passing vessels to dodge such a big obstruction, especially a steamer or tug with a string of heavy barges in tow.

There are now three bad obstructions for the government to remove from the Slue channel, and unless something is done promptly in that direction there will be more piled up around these.

TRIED TO DODGE THE ALVA.

Thus the Captain of the *Saturn* Lost His
Bearings Slightly.





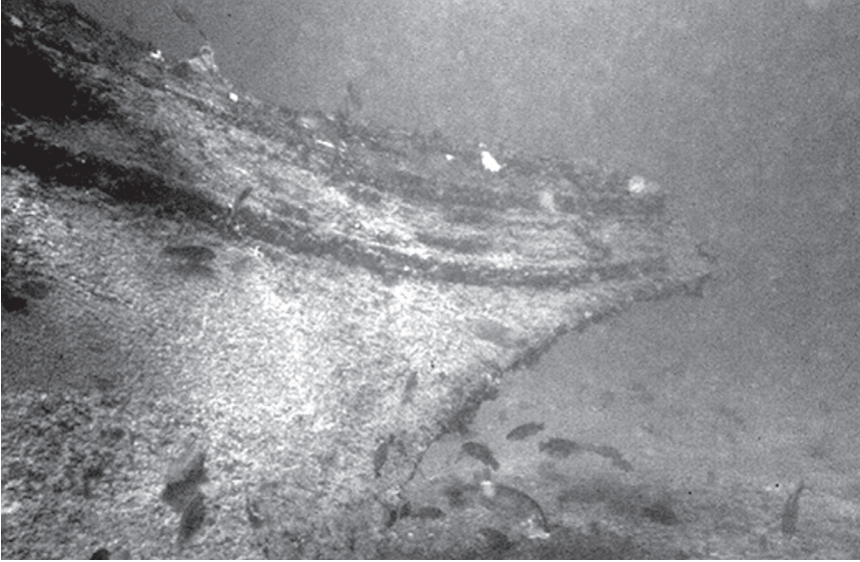
The luxury yacht *ALVA* after being sunk by the *H.F. Dimmock*. She was later dynamited as a hazard to navigation. Several ships hit her and one sank while she was in this condition. She was later dynamited as a hazard. The article below says the salvage crew is having a hard time destroying the wreck, she is so well built.

The Alva Was a Staunch Ship.

From the Providence Journal.

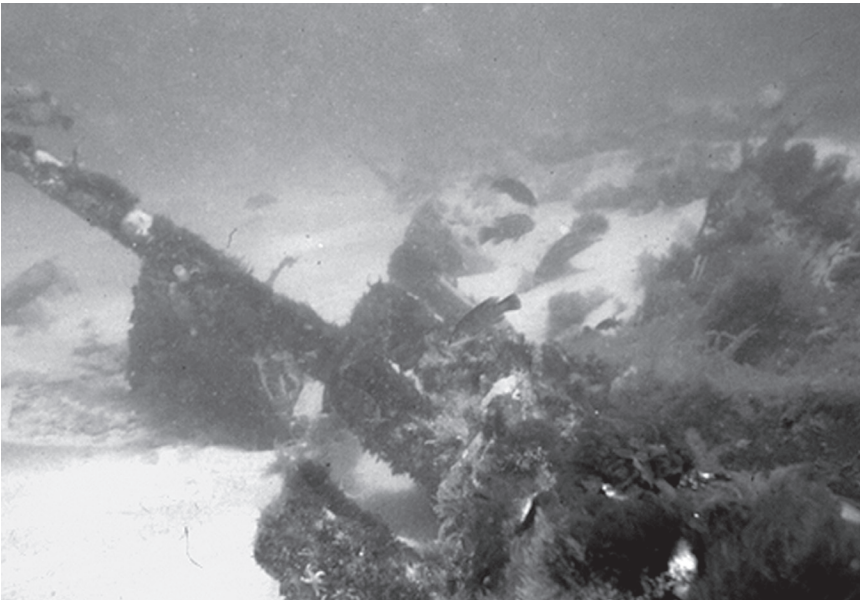
Capt. Bixby, United States Army, has returned from a week's visit to Vineyard Island Sound and vicinity, where he has contractors engaged in removing several wrecks which have been obstructions to navigation. The principal of these is the yacht *Alva*, and the Captain regrets to report this craft yet intact and practically in as good condition as she was when the wreckers left her two or three months ago. The sea appears to have little effect on the hull, and dynamite is little more destructive. The contractors have, in the past month, detonated nearly 1,000 pounds of dynamite, most of it upon the *Alva*. The damage thus far done is to punch a few small holes in her deck and sides. But the two coal barges, *Storm King* and *Zulu*, which collided with the yacht and then sank, are distributed about the bottom of the Sound, so that they form no obstacle to other than crabs and flounders. The work upon the *Alva* will be continued as weather permits.





Just 45 feet below the surface, the mammoth clipper bow of the schooner yacht *ALVA* rises gracefully off the bottom. When viewed by divers in the stiff currents, it appears as though the ship is still sailing.

Below, the starboard side of the *ALVA* as viewed from the bow looking towards the stern. The taller piece of structure on left, is actually one of the ships lifeboat davits.





Master Divers Roup Baker, and Dale Dougherty, on the wreck of the *ALVA*. When we first started diving the wreck, portholes were lying loose on the bottom.

Below, Divemaster Al Koch, holds a restored brass porthole (with intact storm cover) and a picture of the *ALVA*.



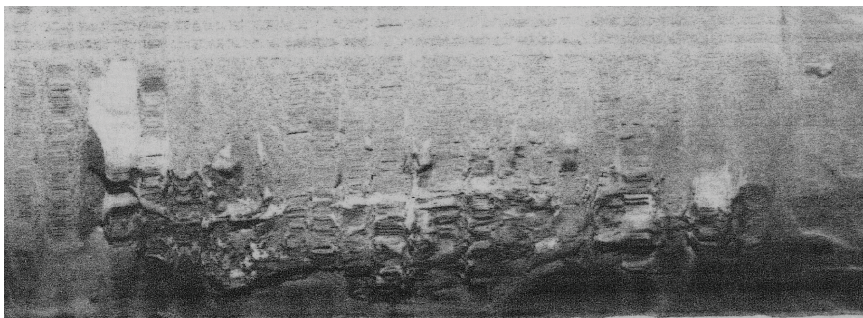


photo by AUSS

The side-scan sonar record above was recorded by John Fish and Arnie Carr of A.U.S.S. in the mid-1980s. When I first started diving the wreck in 1985, ALVA provided me with wonderful visibility for photography—sometimes over 40 feet of clear water over a white sand bottom. I had many amazing adventures on the wreck, including watching a shark attack and devour a large skate. I watched divers recover enormous lobsters, brass portholes, and even 70-pound lead ingots from the ship's keel.

After sinking, ALVA was heavily dynamited, but the bow remained relatively intact, and it was straightforward for us to follow a port, starboard, bow, and stern path of the ship. After numerous dives, it became easy for us to make out where the deckhouses had been, as well as the mechanical areas of the ship. Below is a more recent 2020 side-scan of ALVA by Ben Roberts. It shows the massive sand shoal that has crept in and now covers much of the ship like a blanket. This shoal will continue to alter over the decades and may cover or uncover the wreck for future divers. The bow is to the left, and the stern to the right.

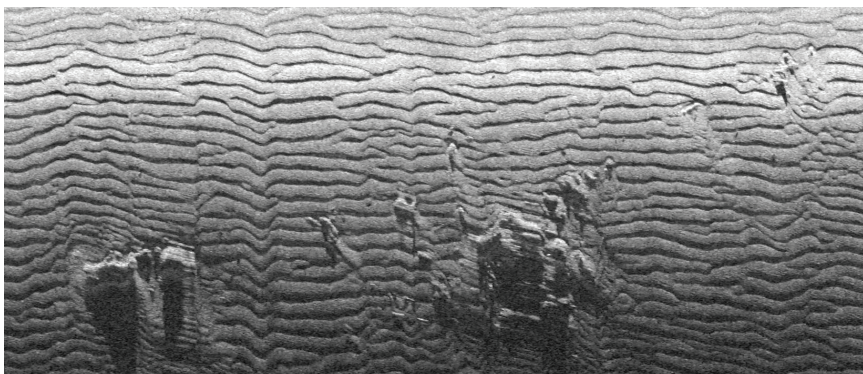
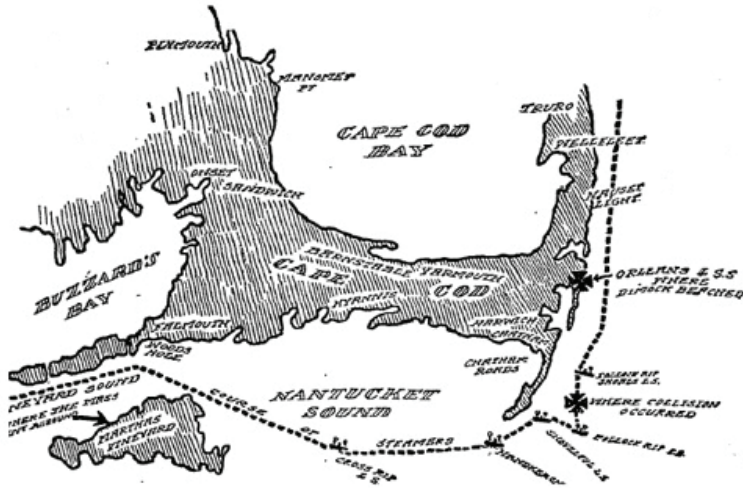


photo by Ben Roberts



WHERE THE DIMOCK AND THE HALL CRASHED TOGETHER.



The location where the *ALVA* was struck by the steamer *H.F. Dimock* was one of the busiest on the east coast. Several ships and barges received thousands of dollars in damages after striking the sunken remains of the *ALVA*.

Below, the starboard teak railing of the bow section of the *ALVA*. One of the lifeboat davits is seen in the background. The wreck lies in 45 feet of clear water.



photo by Dr. David Wood



Above, Jerry Cronin discovered this "keeper lobster" at the bow of the yacht, *ALVA*, exact size unknown (estimated 20lbs), as he set it free.

Below, an article about dynamiting the *ALVA*.

VESUVIUS OUTDONE.

Capt. Van Sant's Attack on
the Yacht *Alva*.

Ton of Dynamite Tears Away the
Greater Part of Her Hull.

Great Carnage Done to Fish and a
Whale Gets a Big Surprise.



Master Diver Dale Dougherty, still wet from diving, proudly displays a "double square porthole" he recovered from the wreck of the *ALVA*. We discovered a small trove of these square portholes, which were from the wooden deckhouses of the ship. These would sometimes come up in pairs of two. Opposite, a single square porthole, recovered & restored from *Alva's* upper deck houses, by Alec McGinley. While *Alva's* hull was steel, her deckhouses were made of wood.



TO REPLACE THE ALVA.

W. K. Vanderbilt Places an Order for an Extremely Large and Palatial New Steam Yacht.

Shortly after the wreck of W. K. Vanderbilt's *Alva*, when he began to sell off his small fleet of launches and steamers, it was given out that he would retire for good from the yachting world. Such is not the case by any means, for he has just placed an order with St. Clair Byrne, of Liverpool, for designs for two new palatial steamers. Mr. Byrne was the designer of the *Alva*, and it is understood this time that Mr. Vanderbilt is looking for speed as well as comfort. With the *Alva* it is said he was often disappointed in the way other boats passed him.

The smaller of his two new steamers will be as large as Commodore Gerry's *Electra*. She will be used for coast cruising wholly. The larger one will far exceed the *Alva*. In fact, it is hinted that she will dispute with the *Sultana* the title of the largest steam yacht in the world. Both boats will be ready by next year. Harlan & Hollingsworth, Wilmington, Del., will build them.

The Yacht *Alva* Blamed for the Dimock Collision!

The decision of the local steamship inspectors, Andrew Burnham and A. I. Savage, on the *Alva*-Dimock collision, July 24, by which the *Alva* was sunk, was given Tuesday to the supervising inspector at New York. It contains the following:

"We are satisfied that the collision was not caused by misbehavior, negligence or unskillfulness on the part of the licensed officers of the H. F. Dimock and they are therefore exonerated from all blame. The only testimony we have from anyone on the *Alva* is that of Capt. Henry Morrison, by which we are forced to the belief that the *Alva* at the time of the collision was being navigated in violation of sec. 4401 U. S. R. S., she not being under the control of a pilot licensed for that route. We are satisfied that a licensed pilot possessing skill and experience on these waters would never have anchored where the *Alva* was.

"We do, therefore, suspend the license of Capt. Henry Morrison as master for the term of six months from this date."

10-11-1892



2

Metal Beams Don't Float

The Wreck of the Tugboat Lackawanna

"The tug Lackawanna was painted bright white to showcase how clean, the coal purchased from the railroad, burned."

Years ago, ship salvage firms would pay "finders fees" for information on any vessel that had wrecked. Numerous individuals up and down the coast could be counted on to "call-in" a wreck. Competing firms would rush to the wreck site and usually, whoever got to the site first, got the job.

Monday August 16, 1915 12:40 p.m.

Transcription of telephone call from James Hughes to the New York salvage firm of T. A. Scott:

Hughes: Hello, this is Hughes talking. Have you heard anything of the tug Lackawanna? She is sunk down in the shoals.

Mix: We heard of a barge, an unknown barge sunk down in the shoals, about two miles from Handkerchief Shoal.

Hughes: Well that is the Lackawanna. I got that straight too. She was under charter to J. B. King and I got this word. I wasn't supposed to get it but I did.

Mix: We got word from steamer "Bunker Hill" last night that an unknown barge had sunk.

Hughes: That is the Lackawanna and I thought I would pass it on to you so you could get busy.

Mix: Thank you.



Hughes: Get hold of Mr.. Emory of the Lackawanna (Railroad). Don't tell him where you got the information but get right after it quick.

Mix: Thank you.

At 4:10 p.m. the same day, noted salvage expert Captain Tom Scott called East Boston, Massachusetts, to speak with one of his staff, Captain Lewis:

Scott: Hello, this is Scott, Captain. The tug Lackawanna she is sunk.

Lewis: Where?

Scott: Two miles west of Handkerchief Lightship. She was run into last night by a barge in tow of the tug Triton. She sank two miles to the westward of Handkerchief Lightship. I think you better go down and look the situation over. The tug is a big thing. She is ten years old - net tonnage is over 400, gross tonnage is over 500.

Lewis: I will look her up.

Scott: See what you think about her. We ought to be willing to take a reasonable chance on that job. They are trying to negotiate with Chapman, but I don't believe they can handle it.

Lewis: I will be there.

So began the story of the well known tugboat *Lackawanna*...

Built for and operated by the Lackawanna Railroad, the steam tug *Lackawanna* was painted bright white to showcase how clean the coal purchased from the railroad burned. As anyone who has burned coal in a stove knows, while some coal does burn cleaner than others, it all leaves a mess. Thus the crew of the *Lackawanna* were perpetually busy scrubbing the ship and touching up her paint. Familiar throughout New England, in 1915 the tug was sold to the Reading Company.

According to the Life Saving Report, on August 15, 1915, the *Lackawanna* was towing three empty barges from New York to Portland, Maine. Approaching in the opposite direction was the tugboat *Triton*, with the barge *Nanticoke*, in tow. The two tugs had already



passed each other when the *Nanticoke* suddenly swerved out of position, and struck the *Lackawanna* a fatal blow amidships. The tug filled so quickly with water, that her mate and ships cook, were drowned in the accident.

Sunk midway, between mainland Cape Cod and the island of Nantucket, Captain Lewis of the Merritt Wrecking Company got to the wreck the next day as promised. The tug was completely submerged and due to the shallow depths in the area, it was surmised that she must be laying on her side. In a position such as that, slings would need to be passed under her belly and heavy salvage cranes used to dead-lift the ship to the surface. Once her upper decks broke the surface, she could be pumped out, patched and refloated.

Preliminary work was hampered by swift currents and heavy ship traffic. Long strings of unwieldy barges would pass within yards of the wreck site, endangering the salvagers and their ships. More than once, the salvage crews were required to quickly back off the wreck to avoid being hit themselves. On other days, wet gray fog hung over the wreck site for the better part of the day, making useful work extremely dangerous.

Hard-hat divers were brought in, and a full survey of the wreck was begun. Working in limited visibility around 15 feet, the divers reported the ship angled to her starboard, with a list of 17 degrees. Already, she had begun to dig herself a grave in the soft sands of Nantucket Sound. The sand on her starboard side actually reached the top of the starboard rail.

With winter just around the corner, a decision was made to leave the wreck and declare her a total loss. Dynamiting would not be necessary as there was plenty of water over the top of her hull. The attention of the salvagers were drawn away to more lucrative prizes, and the tug *Lackawanna* was soon forgotten.

Epilogue

In 1988, I was given the coordinates for the *Lackawanna* from a friend. Although he had not dove the wreck, he believed I would have no trouble locating her. With dive boat Captain Mike Polluck at the helm and one other diver, I set off for the wreck.

After a short run towards the island of Nantucket, Mike informed me we were getting close. I began to prepare the grapnel hook and marker buoys as Captain Mike got his bearings and began to run slow, interlocking uniform passes over the region. The air was gray



with wet, hanging fog. Pass after pass over the area produced nothing on the depth finder but an endless progression of sand ripples.

Confident in the Loran numbers I'd been given, I decided to troll the grapnel hook in the hopes of snagging the wreckage. Mike indulged me as he again transected the area being careful to overlook his runs so we wouldn't miss anything.

After more than two hours of effort I finally felt the hook "grab" something. It was decided that the other diver aboard, (who until now had been quietly patient) would get the opportunity to dive and see what we had hooked. Although I have long ago forgotten this fellow's name, I will never forget what happened next.

After assisting the diver with donning his equipment, I watched as he back rolled from the boat and quickly pulled himself down the anchor line. Within moments he disappeared from view, and I watched the surface of the water as his bubbles pleasantly gurgled their way to the top.

Less than three minutes had passed when I felt the anchor line slacken and then noted the diver resurfacing. I informed the captain that the diver was on his way up, and we were again drifting free - "unanchored" in other words.

"What was it?" I asked the diver as I helped him back into the boat.

"Aw, nothing," he replied. "Just a big metal beam of some kind. I didn't see any wreckage as I looked around, so I just released us."

He must have known by the looks on our faces that he had done something wrong.

"You don't think that was the wreck do you?" the diver stammered.

"Well...I've never known metal beams to float themselves across the ocean," I replied trying to be polite as possible.

Although we tried, we were unable to relocate the wreckage, and my attention that year became diverted to other easier-to-find wrecks. Years have passed, but I keep meaning to return and search for that metal beam. The wreck has to be nearby since metal beams don't really float very far - do they?

Ship's Update

In the summer of 2004, diver Chuck Carey relocated the wreck of the *Lackawanna*, using side scan sonar. Along with Chuck and Divemasters Roupen Baker, Brian Faunce, and Ron Napolitan, I



was one of the first to explore the *Lackawanna*.

Lying in just 40 feet of murky water, the wreck at first appeared jumbled and torn. This came as a surprise as the the original hard hat diver's notes, (which I had located in a museum), indicated the ship had been left intact on the bottom with no major salvage occurring. After viewing the wreckage for only a few moments, I realized this was not the case. Following the trail of wreckage, I soon encountered a large boiler. Just to my left I noted what I thought must be the Port side of the vessel. Peering over the edge of the Port side, four to five feet of solid vertical hull remained, before dropping off into a sandy slope. As I continued forward, I quickly noted a second boiler. Shining my light inside the boiler I was amazed at the diversity of maine life who were using the old rusty boiler as their home. Small lobsters, Tautog, Cunners, Sea Bass and even a couple of crabs were neatly sharing the same darkened space. Continuing to follow the Port side of the ship forward, I finally came to the distinct blunt nose of the ship. Often used for pushing heavy objects, the nose of the tugboat reassured me I was on the *Lackawanna* and not another of the over 1000 ships that have come to rest on the bottom of Cape Cod.

I followed the wreckage down the Starboard side, hoping to make a full circumference swim of the wreckage before my air supply dwindled and I would be forced to return to the surface. The Starboard of the ship was heavily sanded in, just as the old hard hat divers had reported in their 1915 report. Numerous hull plates lay scattered on the bottom in a hap hazard pattern. Careful examination showed many had simply rusted off and fallen. The metal was brittle and in many places so thin you could bend it with your hands.

Not far behind the boilers I located the tug's tow bit. This substantial piece of metal can be seen on all tugboats, even today. It is the main spot used for securing the tow cable from the tugboat to a vessel in tow or a distressed ship.

The stern of the ship was easy to distinguish as the rounded upper lip of a tug is different than most other types of ship. Checking my air supply, I noted plenty of remaining air, and as the water was a balmy 70F, I decided to take another tour of the wreck to aid in my retaining the ship's layout to memory.

The second time around, I made more careful note of the fact that the stern was not in alignment with the Port side of the ship. This indicated to me that the stern of the ship was broken off or pushed to one side. After completing that second circumference swim, I then swam up the mid ship line of the wreckage. Several things struck



me as odd. Not only was the stern 'off kilter' from the rest of the wreck, where was the ship's engine? Poking around the boiler area, I noted several twisted and bent hull plates. This twisting indicated the ship had been dynamited, perhaps to remove the engine, which was missing. But who had salvaged it, and when?

Later, after discussion amongst the dive team, I concluded that not long after the original salvage teams abandoned the site and the insurance company had written the *Lackawanna* off the books, someone had returned to the wreck site and removed her engine and many other vital components. *Perhaps this, I thought, is a good example of old Cape Cod ingenuity.* There were many expert salvage hands in Chatham who could have easily pulled off the job. In fact stripping a wreck was as easy to them, as removing doors from an automobile at a body shop. They had proved this hundreds of times on ships like the *Aransas*, the *Horatio Hall* and the *Perkioman*.

The mystery was later solved when I chanced upon a document from December 6th, 1915. It was from the U.S. Engineers office, Newport, RI., calling for bids for the removal of the tug *Lackawanna*. Contractors were required to commence work within 30 days and complete the work within six months time. It appears they took the job and the money, but only removed items of resell value. Months later, when no one was paying attention, they simply abandoned the wreck site without ever really demolishing the wreck.

Author's Notes:

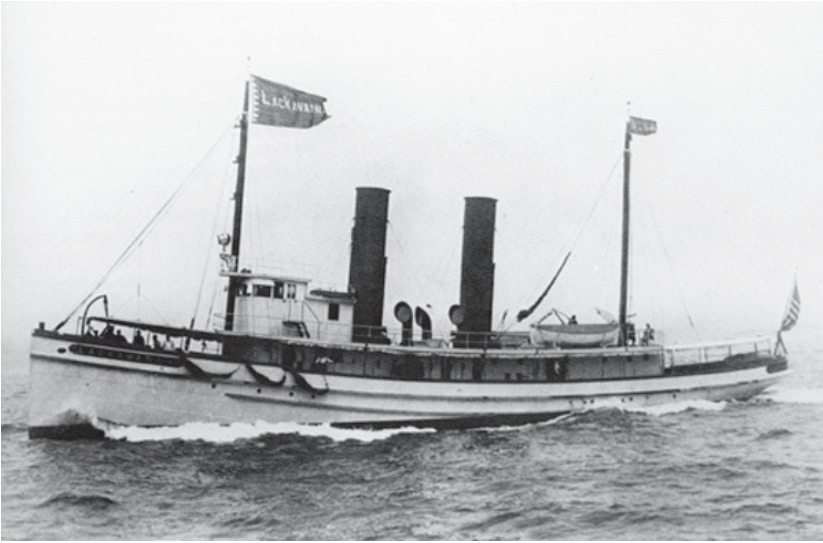
The Lackawanna was iron with one deck. She had a length of 137.1 ft., a width of 25 ft., a depth of 14.7 ft. and a gross tonnage of 340. Her propulsion was steam, propeller and her machinery consisted of (2) Boilers, (1) Triple expansion 3 cylinder engine, cylinder diameters 17", 24", 41" with a stroke of 30", nominal horsepower 92. She was built by J.H. Dialogue & Son in 1900, at Camden, New Jersey. Her home port was, New York, N.Y.

Notice to Mariners

5-22-1916

The bouy marking the site of the sunken tug Lackawanna in Nantucket Sound has been removed, the wreck having been blown up.





Above, the tugboat *Lackawana* and her sister ships with their white hulls were a common sight around New England waters. She was struck by a barge and sunk in Nantucket Sound.

Below, Master Diver Alec McGinley displays a porthole he recovered from the tug *Lackawana* when the sands shifted and exposed the brass treasure.

photo by Alec McGinley



2 DROWN WHEN TUG SINKS.

Eleven Others Were Saved in Collision on Sound.

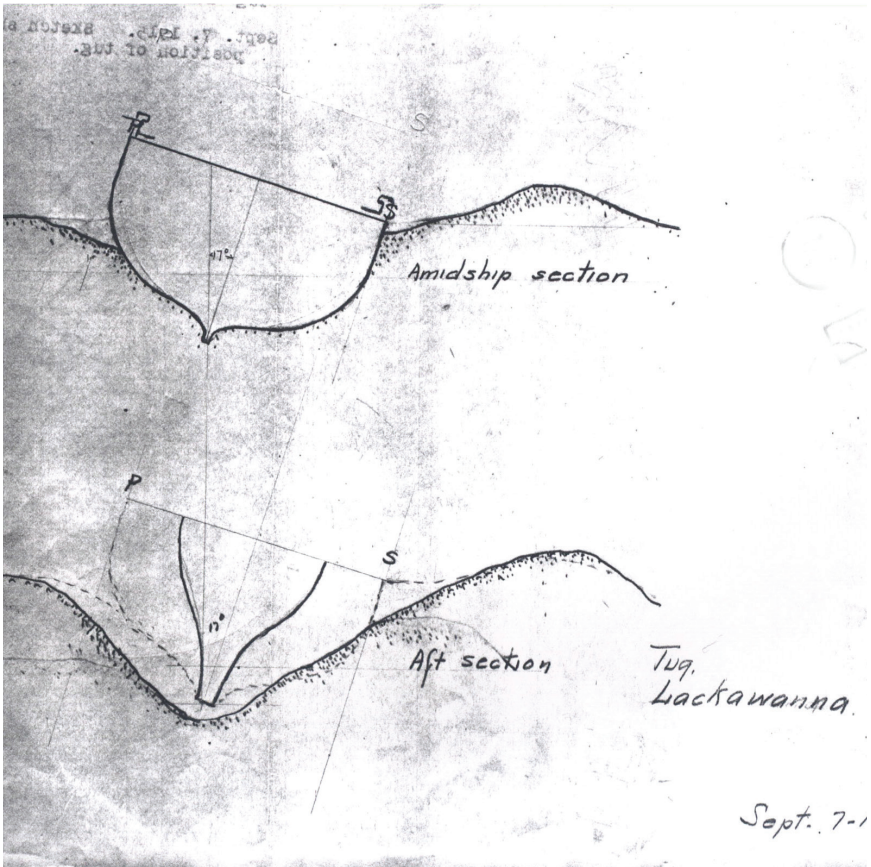
VINEYARD HAVEN, Mass., Aug. 16.—The tug *Lackawanna*, owned by the Reading Railroad, was rammed and sunk south of the Handkerchief Lightship last night by the barge *Nanticoke*, in tow of the tug *Triton*. Clarence Tingle of Bayonne, N. J., the mate, and Nicholas Mikey, a cook on the tug, were drowned.

Eleven survivors, including the chief engineer, who was greatly exhausted after being in the water four hours, were brought here by the tug *Scranton* to-day.

8-16-1915

Below, Divemaster Roup Baker shows several brass ship's letters that he and I, recovered from the tugboat *Lackawanna*. After soaking in fresh water, then using vinegar to remove growth, and finally wire brushing the brass for brightness. Instead of lying lost at the bottom of the sea, these restored artifacts will be cherished and passed onto a Cape museum. That is why we collect artifacts, not to rob the ship, but to *keep* its memory alive.





Above, a hand drawing of the sunken tugboat *Lackawanna*, sketched by the head diver for the T.A. Scott Wrecking Company, dated September 7, 1915. The drawing shows how the sand has already built up against the hull. The wreckers decided it was a difficult job with no certainty of success. The *Lackawanna* was left to lie virtually intact, until I began to dive her in the late 1990's.

