

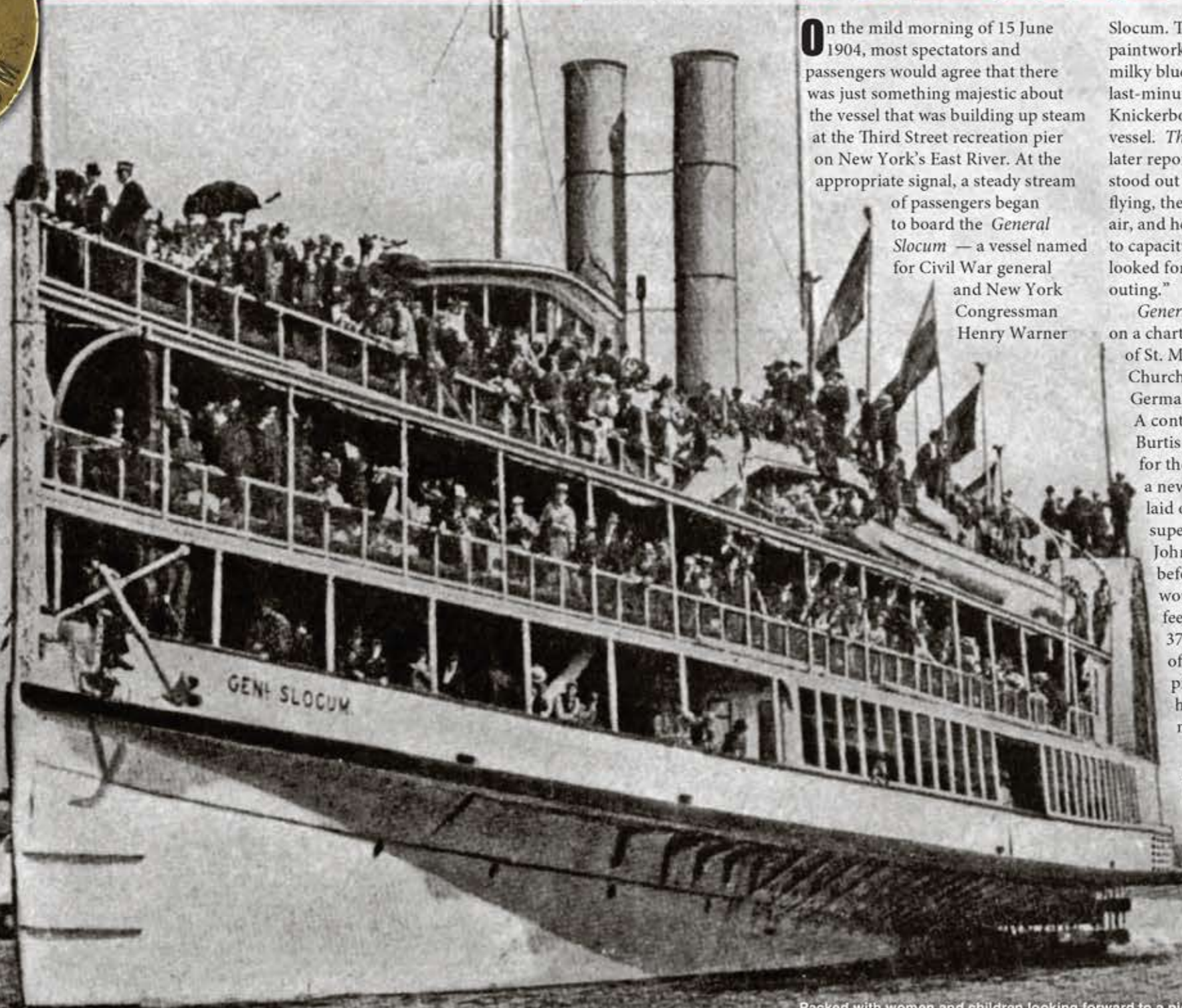
DISASTER AT

NORTH BROTHER ISLAND

THE BURNING OF THE STEAMSHIP GENERAL SLOCUM
WOULD REMAIN AS THE WORST DISASTER TO BEFALL
NEW YORK — UNTIL THE MUSLIM ATTACKS OF 9/11
BY MALCOLM COWLEY



A five cent token
to be spent aboard
General Slocum.



On the mild morning of 15 June 1904, most spectators and passengers would agree that there was just something majestic about the vessel that was building up steam at the Third Street recreation pier on New York's East River. At the appropriate signal, a steady stream of passengers began to board the *General Slocum* — a vessel named for Civil War general and New York Congressman Henry Warner

Slocum. The ship's gleaming paintwork set off nicely against the milky blue sky as the crew made last-minute preparations to the Knickerbocker Steamboat Company's vessel. *The New York Times* would later report, "As she cast off and stood out in the stream her flags were flying, the band was playing a lively air, and her three decks were crowded to capacity with a happy throng that looked forward to a pleasant day's outing."

General Slocum was setting out on a chartered run to carry members of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Manhattan's Little Germany to a large church picnic. A contract was issued to Divine Burtis Jr., a Brooklyn boatbuilder, for the construction of the hull for a new steamship, whose keel was laid on 23 December 1890. The superstructure would be built by John E. Hoffmire & Son. Named before launch, *General Slocum* would have a keel some 235 feet long while the hull was 37.5 feet wide. Constructed of white oak and yellow pine, *General Slocum* had a hull depth of 12.3 feet and measured 1284 tons gross.

The steamship was constructed with three decks (main, promenade, and hurricane), three



The ship was named for Civil War Gen. Henry Warner Slocum.

watertight compartments, and some 250 electric lights. She drew 7.5 feet unladen and was 250 feet long overall. Power came from a single-cylinder, surface-condensing vertical-beam steam engine. Built by W&A Fletcher Company of Hoboken, New Jersey, the engine had a bore of 53 inches and a 12-foot stroke. Steam was supplied by two boilers at a

Packed with women and children looking forward to a picnic, the *General Slocum* set sail from the recreation pier on what would be a deadly voyage.