



Gravestone of H. Wickholm at Old Manahawkin Cemetery.

Despite the discrepancy between Wickholm's date of death engraved on his tombstone and official records noting the date of the wreck as January 8, 1884, his stone is a permanent reminder of the ocean's potential wrath and a symbol of a much larger loss.

It was later determined that the *Elmina's* crew did not properly connect the lifeline that had reached the vessel, and that most of the crew were overtaken with exhaustion and dropped one by one into the sea.

### Attempting to Rescue the *Kraljevica*, February 1886

*"And now came the fatal moment; the boat was half way in from the wreck and the brave little band were doing their best in the wild turmoil of waters when to their utter dismay, and to the horror of their comrades who were watching them from the shore, a towering wave reared its frowning crest close astern and so hollow that the boat could not rise to it."* —1886 Annual Report of the U.S. Life-Saving Service

On the morning of February 11, 1886, the Austrian bark *Kraljevica* wrecked near the Barnegat Life-Saving Station, which was located three-eighths of a mile south of Barnegat Light. The vessel was bound from Marseilles to New York with a crew of fourteen men, including the captain, and a cargo of salt. She was traveling with all sails set into a strong northeast wind and dense fog, which is described in the 1886 Annual Report of the U.S. Life-Saving Service as *"a ghostly cloud of canvas."*

Rescuers onshore heard a sudden crash of breaking wood, and the *Kraljevica* appeared from the fog with the ocean breaking over her

deck. According to the report, the vessel struck on the south side of the Barnegat shoals with *"...the confusion of harsh noises instant and great—the swashing blows of the sea, the violent slatting of the sails, the straining and creaking of the spars, the groaning and grinding of the hull in the gripe of the shoal."* The ocean flooded the cabin, and near 2:30 AM, the captain and crew launched the long-boat and rowed towards shore in calmer seas as the *Kraljevica* began to break up.

Dawn's first light made the shoreline visible through the fog, but as the long-boat neared the sandbar, it endured a second wave of catastrophe as it flipped over and rolled at least six times. Eight men drowned almost immediately as they tried to swim to shore in the winter sea, but the captain and five sailors clung to the capsized boat and, at about 8:30 AM, reached the shore almost dead with exhaustion. They were nearly one mile south of the Ship Bottom Life-Saving Station and nine miles away from where the *Kraljevica* had wrecked.

Unbeknownst to rescuers, who were coordinating efforts with the Barnegat Life-Saving Station to save the crew who they assumed were still clinging to wreckage in the sea, the sailors entered the empty life-saving station where they found food, water, and shelter.

The storm had erased their path of footprints in the sand. Unaware of their survival, a rescue boat from the Barnegat Life-Saving Station with six surfmen aboard entered the shoals and braved the surf. The men had rowed almost halfway to the remains of the *Kraljevica* when their boat was overcome by a massive wave and all crew members were tossed into the sea.

Three of the six surfmen lost their lives in the valiant rescue effort. Their eons of experience were no match for what the surviving surfmen called *"the ugliest surf they had*



Illustration of the rescue attempt of the Austrian bark *Kraljevica*, stranded near the Barnegat Life-Saving Station, which was located three-eighths of a mile south of Barnegat Light.

courtesy of the New Jersey Maritime Museum

continued on page 12