

The **OSWEGO MARITIME FOUNDATION** is a non-profit corporation devoted to public service. The basic purposes of the Foundation are to:



- Foster maritime recreation, research and education.
- Encourage, sponsor and coordinate a variety of maritime-related programs and activities.
- Promote increased knowledge of and respect for skills regarding appropriate utilization of maritime resources.
- Work with other established organizations devoted to meaningful maritime activities

For more information call (315) 342-5753, or write: Oswego Maritime Foundation, 41 Lake St., Oswego, NY 13126.

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Related Points of Interest

H. Lee White Marine Museum (315) 342-0480
 Fort Ontario (315) 343-4711
 Richardson-Bates Museum (315) 343-1342



County of Oswego Department of Promotion and Tourism
 County Office Building • 46 East Bridge Street
 Oswego, New York 13126
 (315) 349-8322
 General Information 1-800-248-4FUN

Explore

New York State's Maritime Heritage



Photo by Philip Church

A Maritime Heritage Guide to the Wreck of the **MARY KAY** Oswego, NY



Tugboats... All Guts, No Glory

Glistening ocean liners, proud warships, and graceful tall ships often catch the eye of the public and the hearts of maritime historians. The common tugboat is usually overlooked and under-appreciated. Yet, the larger, celebrated vessels would seldom even be able to leave dock, if it weren't for this small, powerful workhorse. Few other vessels have had such a large impact on the economic development of the Great Lakes region as the tugboat.

Tugboats are the oldest specialized type of steamship. When the steam engine was first employed in ships, it was thought that its only practical application would be in towing larger vessels in and out of port. On August 28, 1816, the *Majestic* became the first steamship to tow another vessel. She towed the sailing vessel *Hope* from Deptford to Woolrich on the Thames River in England.

The 102-foot *Rufus King* was the first steam vessel built specifically for towing in the United States. Built by Smith & Dimon for the New York Dry Dock Company in 1825, the *Rufus King* towed vessels to and from railway loading areas in New York Harbor.

With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, the usage of inland waterways for commerce and trade increased dramatically. The Great Lakes became a primary route for America's westward expansion.

Unable to accommodate the heavy demand for goods and supplies, many owners of small passenger vessels adapted by converting their ships for towing. Soon tugboats could be found operating in nearly every major port and canal system.

In the 1830s, American sailing packets of up to 600 tons were arriving from Europe and needed tugboat assistance to dock. By 1840, large clipper ships came on the scene, and with them, the large side-wheel tugs.

The largest and the last side-wheel tug was the *William H. Webb*, built by William H. Webb for James Chambers and Henry A. Heiser in 1856. She was 190-feet long with two 44" x 10 stroke, beam engines. Her side-wheels were 30-feet in diameter.

Although tugboats with screw propellers were in service at the same time as the large side-wheelers, they were not as powerful or numerous. The first was the *Sampson*, built by William Cramp in 1850.

The screw prop tug came into its own after the compound engine was developed and adapted for ships. The compound engine had greater fuel economy. As the engine was improved, the power of screw tugs grew rapidly and doomed the side-wheel tugs.

Steam-powered screw prop tugboats dominated the towing industry well into the 20th century until the development of the diesel engine. Tugboats powered by diesel engines, like the *Mary*

Kay, offer many advantages over steam engines. The engines turn at a higher rate, require a smaller engine crew, and have better fuel economy. Most importantly, the diesel tugboats can be ready for instant action: their engines don't have to "work up a head of steam" before the vessel can be moved.

Today, tugboats have a variety of uses, including harbor and canal towing, rescue duty, fire fighting, and commercial salvage. Curiously, tugboats in Europe almost always pull vessels, but in America tugboats push by placing their stem against the vessel they are maneuvering.

Tugboats have evolved a basic design. They are generally high forward and low aft, with the pilot house near midships. The hulls are full in form and have a pronounced line of sheer. Built for powerful work, a tug's machinery takes up an average of 60 percent of the hull space.

Visit an historic tug...

After exploring the wreck of the *Mary Kay*, visit the H. Lee White Marine Museum in Oswego Harbor and see the historic tugboat *Major Elisba K. Henson*. This vessel is designated as a National Historic Landmark. It is the last remaining tug used during the D-Day invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. The *Major Elisba K. Henson* is beautifully restored to its World War II appearance and operating condition and is maintained by volunteers. If you are in town on the right day, you may be lucky enough to see this proud vessel out for a run on the lake. Tours of the tug are available during the museum's operating hours. Located at the foot of West First Street, the museum is open daily, 1 to 5 p.m. during May, June, and September, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during July and August. Other times by appointment.

History of the Mary Kay

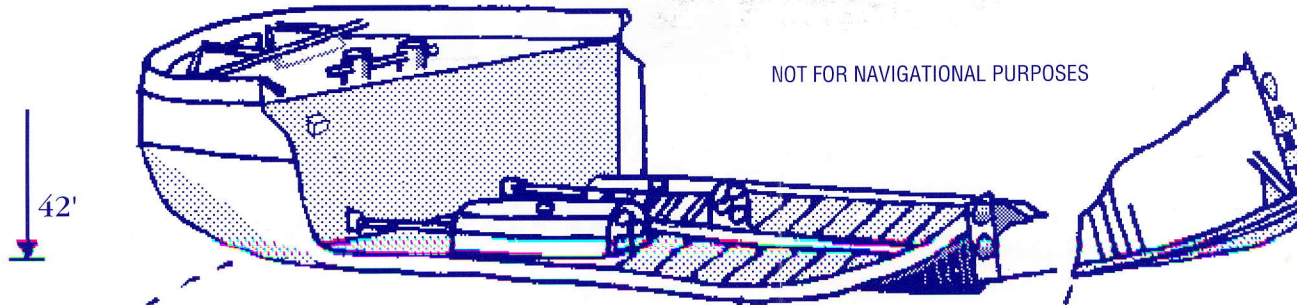
Constructed in 1957, the *Mary Kay* was a 55-foot, 35-ton tugboat powered by twin Murphy diesel engines. In 1988, the *Mary Kay* was purchased and re-fit by Salvage and Demolition Inc. of North Weymouth, Massachusetts. On September 21, 1988, the *Mary Kay* left Rochester, NY to begin her long journey to her new home in Boston.

Just west of Oswego harbor, two 9-foot waves crashed over her stern and filled the engine room. She sank quickly. Aboard were the captain and engineer. Responding to a short radio call for help and phone calls from witnesses on land, the US Coast Guard cutter from Oswego headed out into the storm and rescued the two men. The City of Oswego Police Department awarded the USCG crew certificates of recognition for bravery.



Site of the *Mary Kay*

Site survey and research conducted by trained volunteers.



GPS Coordinates

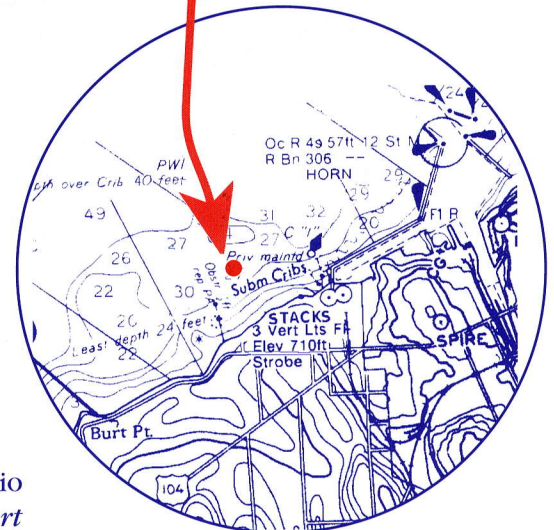
Latitude N 43° 27.705
Longitude W 76° 33.198

Debris Field



Loran "C" TD

16094.77
28669.81



Directions to Boat Launch

The City of Oswego is located on the shores of Lake Ontario at the junction of State Routes 104 and 481. Public launching is available at Wright's Landing Marina on Lake St. on the city's west side. For more information phone (315) 343-8430 or 342-8172.

Lake Ontario
NOAA Chart
14803, 24th Ed.

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**Leave the Past
for the Future**

Dive Site Information

LOCATION: One and one-half miles west of Oswego Harbor Lighthouse.

ACCESS: Boat only.

DEPTH: 42 feet.

VISIBILITY: Average 30-40 feet.

TEMPERATURE: 50 to 70 degrees F.

SKILL LEVEL: Basic open water diver.

BOTTOM: Flat and rocky.

HAZARDS: Lake Ontario weather is unpredictable

and can change very rapidly from good to severe. Weather conditions and unexpected weather changes should be a constant consideration when planning dives. Boats should be anchored so that dives begin into the wind. One person should be left aboard when the boat is anchored. Strong currents may be present if the seas are running 3 feet or higher.

Zebra mussels are very sharp and can cause injury. Protect against injury by wearing gloves and an exposure suit and by carefully controlling buoyancy. Promptly clean and treat all injuries to prevent infection.

Recreational boating traffic can be heavy in this area.

DESCRIPTION: The stern and midships of the *Mary Kay* sit upright on the rocky bottom. The bow section lays on its port side. The superstructure has crumbled and lays in a debris field immediately south of the wreck. A one to two-inch layer of zebra mussels coats the wreck and the surrounding geology. The two propellers, bollard posts, and twin diesel engines are exposed for inspection. Bass often school around the stern and eels can be observed during night dives.

- Shallow depths and the absence of penetration areas make this a popular dive for newly certified divers. Experienced divers find the wreck very relaxing, allowing for detailed observation of vessel construction and site exploration.
- Photographers and videographers appreciate the bright natural light, and the vessel's machinery make good photo props. There are a variety of fish that inhabit the area.
- Diving is possible May through October. May to early June and late summer are the best times to dive.

Can I Take Souvenirs Home?

Abandoned submerged items resting within the jurisdiction of New York State are the property of the State. New York State Education Law Article 5, Section 233, states "...no person shall appropriate, excavate, injure or destroy any object of archaeological and paleontological interest, situated on or under lands owned by the state of New York, without written permission of the commissioner or education. Violation of this provision shall constitute a misdemeanor."

**PLEASE PROTECT THE SPORT OF SCUBA DIVING.
HELP US PRESERVE THIS SITE
FOR FUTURE DIVERS TO ENJOY.**

Dive Flag Laws

Once a boat is anchored and diving is about to begin, the vessel **must fly a red and white "divers down" flag.** By law, the boat **must also fly the blue and white "Alpha" flag.** Divers must stay within 100 feet of the dive flags. Surface vessels must stay a minimum of 100 feet away from the flags. All standard, safe diving procedures relating to towing dive flags must be followed. Reference: Section 35-B, NYS Navigation Law and Rule 27, U.S. Coast Guard Navigation Rules.

Emergency Information

In case of emergency immediately contact **Coast Guard Station Oswego.**

**Marine Band Radio: channel 16
Telephone: (315) 343-1551**

Other emergency telephone numbers:

Oswego Fire Department Ambulance (315) 343-8571
Oswego Hospital (315) 349-5511
Divers Alert Network (DAN) (919) 684-8111

The nearest **recompression chamber** is located at the SUNY Health Science Center in Syracuse. Referrals should be made through Oswego Hospital.