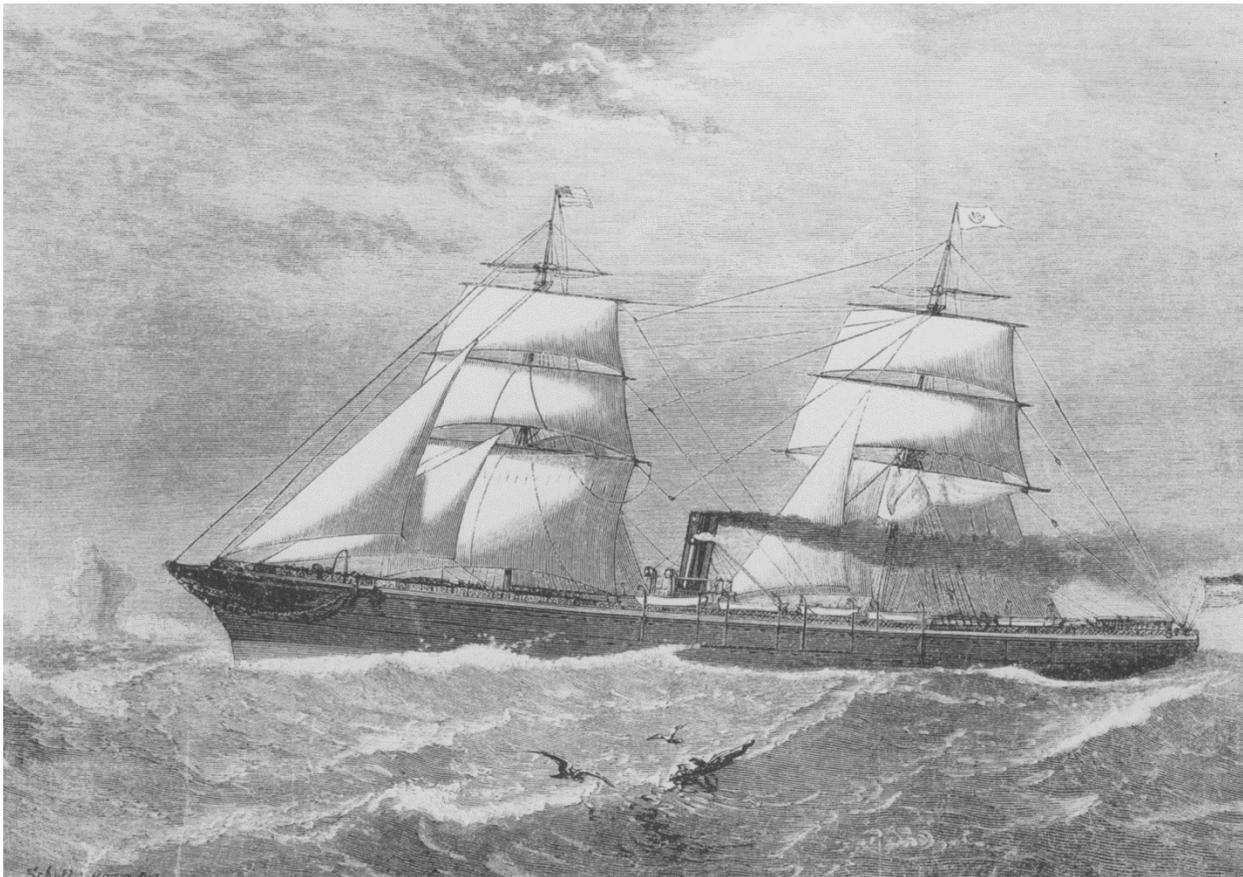


The Deutschland

In December 1875 five Sisters ventured from the motherhouse in Salzkotten, Germany, to St. Louis to lead the new American Province. They were the fifth group of Sisters to make the journey to America since 1872. Early in their voyage, as the ship moved along the coast of England, they were caught in a terrible winter storm. The *Deutschland* went aground on a sandbar off the coast. The ship remained lodged with a broken propeller. Calls for help went unheeded due to the howling winds and low visibility. Huge waves crashed across the deck of the doomed ship.



(Photo: courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum.)



(Plate from the *Illustrated London News*)

Among the 157 people who drowned in the accident were the five Franciscan Sisters. It was reported they had given up their space in limited lifeboats. The bodies of four Sisters were found, but the body of Sr. Henrica Fassbender (the 28-year-old chosen by Mother Clara to lead the American group) was never recovered. Franciscan priests were sent to accompany the remains of the Sisters as they were transported by train to Stratford, England. The Sisters were buried from St. Francis Church in Stratford (picture below) with a Requiem Mass celebrated by Cardinal Henry Manning of London. His Eminence offered the eulogy for the Sisters, who had yet to be individually identified. Newspaper accounts estimated more than 40,000 people lined the streets of the village as the funeral processed to St. Patrick Cemetery in nearby Leytonstone.



Before departing for America, Sr. Henrica left a handwritten note on the desk of Mother Clara Pfaender, her dear friend. It contained a heartfelt poem created by Sr. Henrica, made all the more intense by the tragedy of her death.

Sr. Henrica's poem, "Farewell" is translated here. [poem](#)
At the bottom of the link is a scanned copy of the original letter in Sr. Henrica's hand.

The newspapers were filled with the grim details of the *Deutschland's* loss of life. Many were moved to profound sadness, including Jesuit priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Deeply touched by the tragedy, Hopkins turned to poetry. His resulting masterpiece, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, dedicated to the Sisters, celebrates Hopkin's deep sense of God's presence in the face of disaster and memorializes the Sisters. This sketch by artist Wilhelm Foeckersperger was commissioned by the Gerard Manley Hopkins Festival, Monasterevin, Ireland.

