

MAY, 2010

VOLUME XXVI, # 5

Thursday, May 20, 2010 at 6:00 PM
The South Street Seaport Museum
12 Fulton Street, New York, NY

DECODENCE:

Legendary Interiors & Illustrious Travelers Aboard SS Normandie Guided Tour of the Exhibition Led by William H. Miller

France's NORMANDIE, commissioned in 1935, is widely acknowledged as the most luxurious Atlantic super-liner ever built. She was an Art Deco tour de force, a floating Waldorf Astoria, indeed from the era of Fred & Ginger dancing cheek-to-cheek.

Sadly, the ship sailed for only 4-1/2 years and then burned and capsized at her West 48th St. berth in February 1942. But she lives on. Mario Pulice, one of the greatest NORMANDIE collectors anywhere, has provided almost all of the collection for DECODENCE --- an exhibit of furnishings, memorabilia & objects d'art, not only on the ship itself but of design, decoration & maritime style --- now staged at the South Street Seaport Museum. Bill Miller is curator of the exhibit and will personally guide us this evening. Indeed, the NORMANDIE will be "sailing" once again!

Directions:

Subway: 2, 3, 4, 5, J, Z, or M to Fulton Street; A and C to Broadway-Nassau. Walk east on Fulton Street and cross Water Street. Bus: M9 & 15 along Water Street to Fulton, then cross street. The museum entrance is on the right, halfway along the Fulton Street pedestrian mall.



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NEXT MEETINGS: Thursday, June 24
Cruise to Halifax and Boston on the **QUEEN MARY 2**; July 1-6

WEB SITE:
www.worldshipny.com

THE PORTHOLE, published by the Port of New York Branch, World Ship Society, welcomes original material for publication. Address to the editor, Marjorie Dovman. Opinions expressed are those of the author only and not of the PONY branch or **THE PORTHOLE**.

SHIP'S LOG

Due to schedule conflicts, Ship's Log will return in June.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Bill Miller sailed on a 20-day segment of the SILVER SPIRIT's gala maiden voyage, from Los Angeles to Ft. Lauderdale. Charles and Marjorie Zuckerman crossed the Atlantic on a repositioning cruise on the CONSTELLATION, from Miami to Hamburg, Germany with a stop in Rotterdam. Bob & Phyllis Poda were on a 23-day segment of the AMSTERDAM's world cruise, from Singapore to Kobe. Robert Hatem did the entire world cruise on the QUEEN MAY 2, from January 4 through April 15. Chris & Barbara Skokos were on the SUMMIT for a Caribbean cruise in February.

WELCOME ABOARD

Welcome to our newest member, Joseph McDonough.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We know that many of you have great stories about your cruises, maritime interests, collections and other topics of interest to WSS PONY members. To contribute to the Porthole, just contact Marge Dovman at a meeting or via the P.O. box. Web site contact is David Sykes, who may be contacted the same way or via e-mail.

JOIN WSS AT SEA

Join our July 4 Holiday Weekend Cruise, sailing July 1 on the QUEEN MARY 2, from Brooklyn to Halifax and Boston. For details, contact Brad Hatry at Pisa Brothers Travel, 212-265-8420 ext. 222

BILL MILLER FEATURED IN THE NEW YORKER

In the March 22 issue, WSS PONY member and world-class ocean liner historian Bill Miller was featured in the "Here to There Dept." A brief summary of Bill's career as a maritime lecturer and author was given, along with a paragraph or two about his current activities. The article ended with a description of Bill's remarkable collection of ocean liner models, complete with replicas of New York's West Side liner piers of the 1950's.

THE FLEET IS IN!

What would spring in New York be without the annual Fleet Week? In almost every year since 1984, we've had the opportunity see fascinating navy ships, and the men and women who sail them. This year, the fleet will be in from May 26-31, docked on the West Side of midtown Manhattan. For more information, check your local newspaper or TV station.

YOUR DAILY PROGRAMME

VANCOUVER WSS & VANCOUVER MARITIME MUSEUM

If you're visiting Vancouver, BC the local branch of WSS will have its next meeting on Wednesday, September 8. The program will be announced at a later date. Meetings are held at the Vancouver Maritime Museum at 1905 Ogden Avenue (Kitsilano Point). For additional information if you visit, contact Glenn Smith: 604-684-1240, e-mail glenn.smith@worldshipsocietyvan.ca. In the museum, current exhibits include "We Stand For Thee: An exhibition to commemorate the Canadian Navy Centennial" and "Studies in Sea Ice", by Roberta Holden. For more information, contact the museum at 604-257-8300 or www.vancouvermaritimemuseum.com

AT THE SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM

There will be a series of guided tours of the exciting new exhibit "Decodence: Legendary Interiors and Illustrious Travelers Aboard the s.s. NORMANDIE." Tours are on May 8, 9, 22 and 23 at 1:00 PM, at 12 Fulton Street. Continuing the theme of great French liners, join ocean liner historians Bill Miller, Mario Pulice and Rory McEvoy for an all-day seminar, "France Afloat," celebrating the great French ocean liners NORMANDIE, ILE DE FRANCE, LIBERTE, and FRANCE. This event is on Saturday, May 15 at 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM (lunch not included); tickets are \$15 members / \$25 non-members. Reservations are required for the seminar. Enjoy a spring walking tour of the Seaport Historic District on May 8, 9, 22 and 23 at 3:00 PM; meet at 12 Fulton Street. Also, continuing at the Seaport are "Treasures of a President: FDR and the Sea" and "Monarchs of the Sea: Celebrating the Ocean Liner Era." Free Friday, this month on May 21, will feature a Waterfront and Ships Tour, from 5:00 to 8:00 PM at Pier 16. Finally, on May 29, harbor cruises on the PIONEER resume for the summer season. On that day, PIONEER will also offer a Marine Ecology program from 1:00 to 3:00 PM at Pier 16. For more information, call 212-748-8786, e-mail reservations@southstseaport.org or go online to www.southstreetseaportmuseum.org.

AT THE STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

See the exhibit "The Staten Island Ferry: The First 100 Years of Municipal Service" at the museum, located at 75 Stuyvesant Place, Staten Island NY 10301. For additional information, call 718-727-1135 x 113.

"CRUISE THE BIG APPLE" WITH NY WATERWAY TOURS

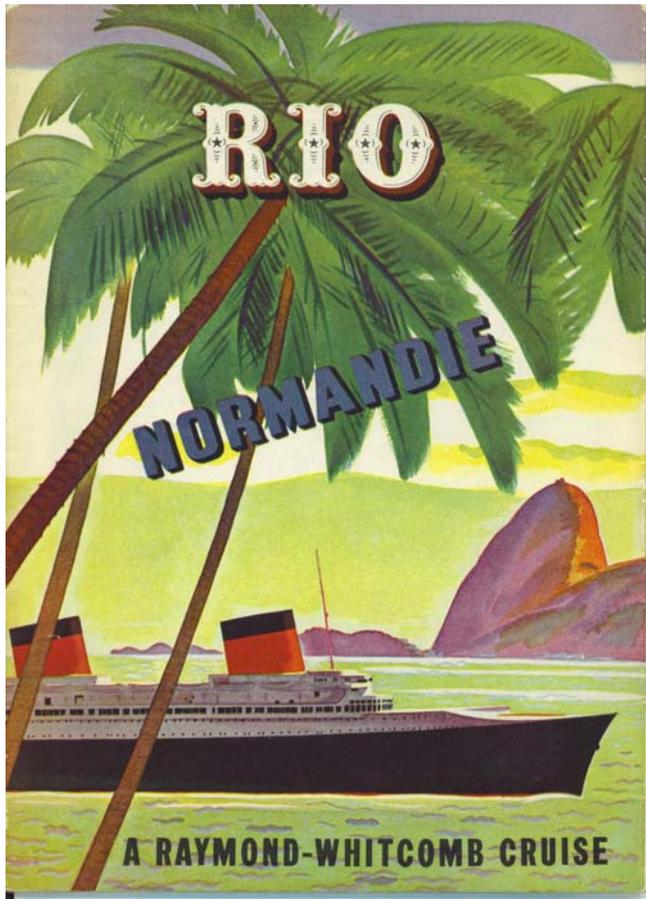
New York Waterway has published a spring and summer cruise schedule that is sure to please those who seek a short, budget-priced voyage. The 90-minute Skyline and Twilight Cruises, as well as the NY History Cruise leave from Pier 78 at 38th Street & 12th Avenue. The Gateway to America Cruise departs from Slip 5 in the Maritime Building near Battery Park. The 4th of July Cruises will depart from numerous points in New York and New Jersey. Yankee Clipper Baseball Cruises sail to every Yankees home game throughout the baseball season. For prices and additional information, contact NY Waterway Tours at 1-800-FERRY or online at www.nywaterway.com

GUEST EDITOR

Marge Dovman continues to enjoy a long; Bob Allen is still manning the Editor's desk in her absence.

SHIP NEWS

- The vast ash cloud caused by the Icelandic volcano brought much European air traffic to a standstill in late April. At the height of the disruption on April 20, the new CELEBRITY ECLIPSE arrived in Southampton and was scheduled for an inaugural cruise for travel agents and members of the press. However, her owners decided to divert the brand new ship to Spain to rescue stranded British citizens and bring them back to England in style.
- The Carnival Corporation announced in early May that they would build two 141,000-gross ton, 3,600-passenger vessels for their Princess Cruises brand. They stated that the new ships would be of a prototype design, yet would be "evolutionary," keeping many public venues and features familiar to Princess passengers. The new cruise ships which are due in 2012 and 2014 have yet to be named, and will be the first added to the fleet since the RUBY PRINCESS of 2008.



Aboard the MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

Robert Strang

On May 28, 1973 the MIKHAIL LERMONTOV departed Leningrad on her maiden voyage, arriving in New York on June 11, which made her the first Russian liner to call there in 25 years. During the summer she offered very reasonably priced cruises to Nassau and Canada, as had her sister ship, the ALEXANDER PUSHKIN, from Montreal since 1967.

On a Saturday afternoon in July 1974, we boarded the MIKHAIL LERMONTOV at Pier 40 in lower Manhattan for a cruise to Canada. The departure was scheduled for the evening. After settling into our cabin, we prepared for dinner and later explored the ship. When we arrived at the dining room with our table number card, there was a bit of confusion. It seems our assigned table was located adjacent to the captain's table, and it was in use by him to entertain a larger group of shore guests than his table alone could handle. However, we were assured that the table we were offered for the evening was only temporary. After dinner we went on deck to watch the sailing. As the ship departed the pier, there was a brass band of crew members on the forward deck playing selections of marching music, something you no longer see. Like passengers on so many ships leaving New York, we remained on deck as the LERMONTOV sailed down the Hudson River, passing the Statue of Liberty. Afterward we went to the Bolshoi Lounge to listen to the Russian dance band attempting to simulate Benny Goodman. During the course of the evening, Betty was approached to dance by a gentleman who was casually dressed, like most of us on this informal evening. He was wearing an open neck shirt, dark pants with a wide belt and shiny black shoes. We thought for sure he must be either a New York City policeman or fireman on vacation. No matter, Betty found Bill to be an excellent dancer.

The next day we arrived in Boston to receive more passengers. As we departed, again the brass band was playing marches on the forward deck. Once at sea, it was time to dress formally for the captain's cocktail party in the Bolshoi Lounge. As we entered the lounge, each was handed a small glass of Russian vodka for a toast. Well, except for our 12-year-old son. He was quickly offered a glass of soda. Following the toast, Russian champagne was served along with never-ending trays of caviar and crackers. The captain introduced his officers, and then turned the program over to the cruise director, who was an American. I will have to say that the Baltic Shipping Company was indeed wise; they had hired not only an American cruise director, but also his entire staff, which he now introduced. There was his assistant, a couple of singers, an eight-piece jazz band, a few other entertainers, a chef from the Waldorf-Astoria to advise in the kitchen and finally, a Catholic priest, Father Bill! Ah, so much for Betty's dance partner for the rest of the cruise. I took this opportunity to speak to the chief engineer about seeing "his" engine room. He agreed and said to meet him tomorrow morning here in the lounge at 10 A.M. At dinner this evening,

we were seated at our originally assigned table adjacent to the captain's table, where we met our table companion, an elderly Canadian lady, who was a travel agent from Montreal and had boarded at Boston.

After dinner we returned to the lounge, where the cruise director acted as the MC for the evening's entertainment of song and dance performed by both his American staff and members of the ship's crew, who did double duty as entertainers. For example, the harpist was the ship's nurse; likewise the dancers were dining room waiters and waitresses and cabin stewards. It made for a very pleasant evening's entertainment.

In the morning, after breakfast, my son and I went to the lounge to meet the chief engineer. At precisely 10 A.M. he entered the room, and after warm greetings guided us aft to a door and stairway leading down to the huge cavern of the engine room. Occupying most of the space was a pair of enormous seven-cylinder Sulzer diesels. Lining the walls was a collection of giant wrenches and spare engine parts. The room, although crowded, was orderly and spotless. He showed us the massive stainless steel propeller shafts, each equipped with a braking device. He took special effort to explain how these devices could be activated to stop the shaft from turning, should they need to repair one of the engines while still under way and powered by the other engine. In addition to the two main engines, there was the bank of smaller engines for generating electricity. I don't recall any of the details of the engineering controls, other than the much larger two-sided engine room telegraph. What impressed me the most about it was that it had more than the usual number of sectors, and the indicators were only at slightly beyond half speed, yet at the time we were very much well under way, cruising toward Canada. Although not of any authority, I have always felt the MIKHAIL LERMONTOV, if ever called upon to do so, was capable of much greater speed than the established maximum of 20 knots. Upon completing the tour, we thanked the chief engineer for his time and he guided us back up to the main deck.

Our first stop in Canada was St. John, New Brunswick, where, while the passengers were on shore excursions, the cruise staff chef was very busy acquiring a large quantity of fresh lobsters for this evening's very special Lobster Newburgh banquet. After dinner we attended the nightly entertainment in the Bolshoi Lounge. But Jonathan had found the three or four slot machines much more fascinating and kept bugging us for more quarters. True, they won't serve vodka to a 12-year-old, but no one ever questioned him about playing the slots. Betty said, "OK, Jonathan, here are the last two quarters for tonight." And off he went, leaving us to watch the rest of the entertainment, but not for long. Shortly he returned with his jacket pockets bulging with quarters. He had

hit the jackpot! So for the rest of the cruise, he used his own quarters and still had cash when we returned home.

One morning we met Father Bill in the hallway and after the usual greetings he asked us to attend, as he put it, "his wedding." Of course, we must have looked shocked, and he went on to explain that a couple had approached him wishing to renew their vows on their anniversary. We said, "Oh, that sounds very nice." To which he replied, "Well, it is a bit more complicated. You see, they are Jewish! But I told them, having been a Navy chaplain, I would study the service and oblige." So that afternoon in this Russian ship's theater, a U.S. Catholic priest performed a wedding service for a Jewish couple in Canadian waters, complete with the "Mazel Tov" and the stomping of the glass. Truly, this had been an international event.

During the course of the cruise, we sailed along the St. Lawrence River and turned into the Saguenay River with its high cliffs. Upon one of the cliffs is located a large religious statue. As we passed it, to honor the occasion, the Russian tenor, Edward Boxer, rendered "Ave Maria" over the ship's public address system. When he had finished, a group of French Canadians on deck, who had boarded at Boston, offered their version in French, not to be outdone by a Russian.

We found the items in the gift shop very interesting. The most popular were the carved wood bears and of course the Russian champagne, wines and vodka. A most attractive fur hat caught Betty's eye. However, when she tried to buy it, the saleslady said "Nyet! Man's hat!" and she absolutely would not sell it to her. So the next day I bought it for her.

At one of the stops, I believe it was Prince Edward Island, they were offering a tour of the bridge. What I found most interesting was a large navigation console that digitally displayed our position and the exact time. Very impressive, considering this was 1974.

One day it was announced that that evening there would be a costume party in the Bolshoi Lounge, and everyone was encouraged to do their best to create something original. On deck the cruise staff was offering assistance and supplies. Jonathan chose to be a slot machine in keeping with his jackpot winnings. From somewhere below, the staff acquired a large cardboard box for him to cover with crepe paper and color with crayons. I opted to be dressed as a dignitary, wearing my black tuxedo with a red sash and a large rhinestone pin borrowed from Betty. She elected to be a modern day Miss Liberty, wearing her bright yellow short shorts, a matching yellow stretch jersey top, yellow stockings and high heels. Her crown was made of yellow construction paper and the book she carried in her left arm consisted of a few magazines covered with yellow crepe paper, as was a flashlight for the torch. That evening, when she paraded across the dance floor of the Bolshoi Lounge, she made a very striking appearance. But it was Jonathan who took the prize, when the MC inserted quarters in a slot in the box and lowered Jonathan's left arm like the lever on a slot machine and Jon, from inside, dispensed winnings through an opening. Indeed it was a fun evening. I am sure the LERMONTOV cocktails helped, which are very much like a Bloody Mary, but served in a special tall tulip glass with a stalk of celery. It was not uncommon to see rows of them lined up on the tables on deck at 10 in the morning.

The swimming pool onboard the LERMONTOV was glass-enclosed with a roof that opened. I believe it was on the last night of the cruise, after leaving Boston; not only had they closed the roof, but the pool water was well heated and Jon and I enjoyed a very delightful late evening swim. However, the next morning we arrived back in New York and like all good things, this cruise came to an end. Like the song rendered one evening by Edward Boxer in the Bolshoi Lounge, "Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end." But of course it did, with us returning home, and Father Bill to his parish.

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