



## “VICTORIA OLD AND NEW”

By Tom Rinaldi

**FRIDAY, April 26, 2024, 6:30 PM**  
**JOIN US VIA ZOOM**

Fearing that the end might be near for one of the most interesting veteran passenger ships on the planet, WSS-PONY Branch member Tom Rinaldi set off in 2023 for Tanzania in East Africa, where the former



(Photo: Tom Rinaldi)

R.M.S. VICTORIA has provided service across her namesake lake for most of the last 70 years. Reaching Lake Victoria after a two-day rail journey across the country, Rinaldi managed to secure passage over-and-back aboard this little-known "liner on the lake" before it was too late. In this presentation, he will share the story of his most recent African adventure, including a look at the history of the old VICTORIA and the future of ferry traffic on the lakes of Africa's Great Rift Valley.



**Thomas Rinaldi** grew up in the Hudson River Valley near Poughkeepsie, New York. He is the author of “Patented: 1,000 Design Patents”, “New York Neon” and the co-author of the book “Hudson Valley Ruins: Forgotten Landmarks of an American Landscape”. His photographs have been published in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Post, the New York Observer, Westchester Magazine, CNN Online, and elsewhere. Tom exhibited at the New York State Museum in Albany and at the Municipal Art Society of New York. He is a regular contributor to the UK-based magazine "Ships Monthly." Rinaldi holds degrees from Georgetown University and Columbia University, and has worked

for the National Park Service, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, and the Central Park Conservancy. Tom currently works as an architectural designer in New York City.

## ADDITIONAL MEMBER EVENTS

**SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2024, 10 AM ENCORE Presentation**  
**“GRACE LINE COMBO SHIPS TO SOUTH AMERICA” by George Gillow**

**MEMBER ACTIVITY**  
**TRAINING SHIP EMPIRE STATE VII SHIP TOUR**  
**SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 9:30 AM – 1 PM**  
**SUNY Maritime College, Fort Schuyler, Bronx, NY**



(Photo: [www.NYmediaBoat.com](http://www.NYmediaBoat.com))

In September 2023, SUNY Maritime College welcomed the arrival of its new state-of-the-art training ship, the EMPIRE STATE VII, the first of five new government-owned National Security Multi-Mission Vessels (NSMV's). Built by Philly Shipyard in Philadelphia, PA, it is the first of five sister ships that will serve as a training ship and offer floating classrooms for 600 cadets while at sea for the nation's five state maritime academies. It will also serve as a humanitarian and disaster relief platform with accommodations for up to 1,000 and features modern hospital facilities and a helicopter pad.

WSS-PONY Branch members will be welcomed aboard for an interesting cadet-guided tour of the EMPIRE STATE VII at SUNY Maritime College at Fort Schuyler in the Bronx. We will also visit the Museum of Maritime Industry located on the campus. This special in-person event, with lunch included, is FREE for all WSS-PONY Branch members. Each member can bring one (1) guest for a \$25 pre-paid guest fee. Attendees must wear flat closed-toe shoes and will be required to climb stairs. Ladder climbing is needed for some optional areas of the tour.

If not traveling by car, SUNY Maritime College is accessible by the MTA Bx40 bus, and a transfer to/from the No. 4 subway train is available at Burnside Avenue ([www.new.mta.info](http://www.new.mta.info)). The buses stop at the College's front gate. Uber and Lyft are locally available. Visit [www.worldshipny.com/events/](http://www.worldshipny.com/events/) to register for the tour. Patron members may register starting Saturday, March 30. Non-patron member registrations will be accepted starting on Tuesday, April 2 (30 max. attendees). The event meeting location, additional event details, and guest payment details will be provided with registration confirmations.

## “SWEDISH TASTE ON THE HIGH SEAS”

By Christian Roden

FRIDAY, May 17, 2024, 6:30 PM

JOIN US VIA ZOOM

Swedes have been sailing to America since 1638, bringing their language, cultural traditions, and handicrafts. By the 1920s, the new frontier of Art Deco set new trends for consumer markets, and American audiences began developing a taste for Swedish design. A major factor in this trend was the Swedish ocean liner KUNGS HOLM, one of the first ships to use the Art Deco style in her passenger quarters. Not only did her interiors prove wildly popular, but they also influenced the development of land-based buildings, particularly the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia. Join maritime historian Christian Roden for a discussion about the forgotten connections between this ship and the development of Swedish-American museums in the United States during the roaring twenties!



(Photos: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))



**Christian Roden** currently works for the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Foundation and has a wide range of professional experience in the museum, cultural heritage, and higher education sectors. He has designed and curated museum exhibits, contributed and appeared on the History Channel’s *Secrets of the Lost Liners*. He also publishes and lectures widely. Alongside scholars and experts from across Europe and North America, he participates in the Ocean Modern Advanced Research Group. He holds an MA in material culture studies from the University of Delaware, and a BA in English, art history, and studio art from Washington & Lee University, with additional studies at St. Anne’s College,

Oxford and École France Langue. After earning his BA, he was selected Fulbright Research Fellow to France based at Association French Lines in Le Havre, where he immersed himself in everything related to the S.S. ÎLE-DE-FRANCE. Christian and his partner, Norman, live in Philadelphia, and spend much of their spare time sailing on the Chesapeake Bay.



## MEMBER PHOTO



MSC MERAVIGLIA outbound from NYC on St. Patrick's Day  
as taken from the Staten Island Ferry, DOROTHY DAY (Photo: Pat Dacey)

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**JOIN THE FUN ON A SSHSA 5-DAY/4-NIGHT CARNIVAL RADIANCE CRUISE**  
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**MEMBER NEWS**  
**SSHSA RELEASES NEW “SHIPS” FILM**  
**FEATURING WSS-PONY BRANCH MEMBERS**



**New York's  
Changing  
Waterfront  
& Harbor**

A presentation by Ted Scull &  
Stuart Gewirtzman

(Image: [www.shiphistory.org](http://www.shiphistory.org))

The latest release of the Steamship Historical Society of Americas' (SSHSA) "SHIPS" (Ships, History, Influence, and Power) Series, "Manhattan's Changing Waterfront and Harbor", highlights Ted Scull, a former WSS-PONY Branch chairman, current board member, author, travel writer, and lecturer specializing in destinations, maritime and railway subjects, and New York City. You will learn about his time working for Holland America Line from 1964 – 1966 in Sales Promotion where he witnessed the major changes to Manhattan's waterfront. You will also hear from current WSS-PONY Branch board member, Stuart Gewirtzman, whose childhood fascination with ships and trains led him to a 33-year career as a transportation planning consultant in New York City with a focus on transit and ferry services. Stuart shares exceptional photographs he took of Manhattan's waterfront and the ships you may see in the harbor today.

SSHSA's "SHIPS" Series uses exclusive oral histories and primary resources straight from their extensive archives, focusing on the vessels, crew, and passengers that revolutionized the way that we traveled, traded, and immigrated. Under the leadership of Aimee Bachari, Education Director for SSHSA, the episodes provide an exceptional opportunity to learn through recorded oral histories and exceptional visuals.

**Visit [www.shiphistory.org](http://www.shiphistory.org) to watch this and other films.**

## **SHIP'S LOG**

### **“MARITIME ROYALTY: BRITAIN'S QUEENS OF THE ATLANTIC” by Bill Miller**

#### **Review By Alan Zamchick**

Our March 22, 2024, WSS-PONY Branch membership meeting was honored once again to have Bill Miller present a captivating, enthusiastic and lavishly illustrated Zoom seminar entitled “Maritime Royalty: Britain’s Queens of the Atlantic.” In this engaging session, Bill began by transporting the audience back to the not-so-distant past when three iconic Queen ships graced the Liverpool waterfront for the occasion of Cunard’s 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in May 2015. In true Bill Miller fashion, Bill painted the scene, “2.5 million people eagerly gathered to witness these three Cunard Queens sailing proudly into Liverpool.” Sharing the humorous meeting of a woman aboard his ship he continued that “she sadly remarked that she could see only two of the three Queens on hand. Noting that she wanted to write Cunard for a refund, Bill could only gently remind her that she herself was sailing aboard the third ship!

Beginning his historical perspective of the Cunard Queens, Bill detailed that despite having three of the grandest vessels in service during the 1920s among their 24 liners, Cunard most desired a two-ship service with simultaneous sailings from New York and Southampton. Targeting Cunard’s Centennial in 1940 they set out to do just that. Contracts were signed with John Brown & Company and construction commenced on the first ship, initially known only as Job Number 534 in 1930. Bill detailed how the Great Depression dealt a severe blow to transatlantic traffic, halving passengers from one million within five years, halting construction on No. 534 and instituting major layoffs. The British Government loans, critical for completing the two vessels were withdrawn and Cunard considered scrapping the shell of No. 534 due to fears the transatlantic trade might never recover. The ship stood-by, rusting, and seemingly forgotten.

By April 1934, after Cunard merged with the White Star line and with the economy improving, funds were again forthcoming. Construction moved ahead. On September 19, 1934 with the King and Queen in attendance and in front of 30,000 rain-soaked spectators Queen Mary named the giant liner QUEEN MARY instead of the originally proposed “VICTORIA”. It took another two years to beautifully outfit her. “By May 1936, escorted by hundreds of boats, tugs, and sightseeing vessels she entered New York’s Upper Bay and ascended to the Cunard Pier.” Very shortly after she became the world’s fastest liner, exchanging that title for a short time with the French NORMANDIE, but eventually securing it as her own.

Bill continued with the superlatives that abounded: “750 chickens could be roasted at one time, her whistles could be heard for ten miles, the rudder had a door large enough to accommodate two men. Onboard she was likened to a great English country mansion and Cunard printed size comparisons with famous buildings of the era. QUEEN MARY achieved an impressive 98% capacity during her first three years. The NORMANDIE, BREMEN, EUROPA, and REX simply could not compare economically with the new liner.

The second Queen, the QUEEN ELIZABETH, was planned to be a bit different. She sported a more modern appearance with two funnels. She had a raked bow and notably lacked a traditional fo’c’sle. The name King George V was given consideration but instead she was named after the new Queen, the Queen Mother. She was launched in time to begin the two-ship service by April 1940. Fate intervened. In September 1939, with the QUEEN MARY at sea and with Britain’s declaration of war against Germany she became the target of German U-boats. Bill recounted the unconfirmed story of a Washington, London, and Berlin agreement that the QUEEN MARY would be allowed to arrive in New York safely if



the United States allowed the BREMEN to depart from the port of New York to return to Germany. Bill went on to outline the many changes befalling the ship to ready her for service and to protect her from Nazi saboteurs.

Meanwhile work on the QUEEN ELIZABETH continued in Scotland. In February 1940, still incomplete, she began to move out of the Clyde. The announced plan had her heading south to Southampton for dry docking. Instead, she headed north of Ireland and raced across the Atlantic to New York safely joining QUEEN MARY across Pier 90."



Both QUEEN MARY and QUEEN ELIZABETH were referred to at various times as "The Gray Ghost" after America entered the war and both ships were refitted to bunk 15,000 troops per sailing. In July 1943, the QUEEN MARY departed New York with 16,683 onboard, still the record for the greatest number on a single ship in history. Bill humorously added that "Carnival Cruise Lines still hasn't exceeded that number but I'll keep you posted!"

"The Gray Ghost" underway.

*(Bill Miller Collection)*

In October 1942, a tragic incident: while the QUEEN MARY was coming over the coast of Northern Ireland on her way to Scotland there was an alert that a U-Boat was lurking. She maintained 29 knots, zigzagged to evade the threat, and was forbidden to stop while trooping. A destroyer escort, the CURACAO, miscalculated and slipped in front of the QUEEN MARY's bow. The liner cut the CURACAO in two and the warship sank within minutes with 338 sailors onboard. In 1945, at the end of the war, QUEEN MARY was officially the first ship to bring GI's, wounded soldiers, and British wives with their young children home to huge welcomes.

Completing her military service the QUEEN ELIZABETH was restored first and she finally sailed on her Maiden Voyage in October 1946. The QUEEN MARY reentered service in July 1947. Cunard at last was able to initiate their two-ship service – seven years late.

During the 1950s, the MAURETANIA was smaller than the QUEENS but very well-liked. At the time, the CARONIA was said to be the most palatial ship in the world. She embarked on long voyages around the globe. Some lived onboard for 2 or 3 years, and one lady, Bill reported, lived onboard for 14 years! The BRITANNIC, the last of the White Star Line ships sailed from Liverpool. These Cunard ships all carried cargos: mail, woolens from the Midlands, whiskeys from Scotland and the occasional racehorse enroute to the Kentucky Derby. Sailings were available on the combination ships MEDIA and PARTHIA with 250 all First-Class passengers. The SAXONIA, IVERNIA, SYLVANIA and CARINTHIA sailed to Canada.



QUEEN ELIZABETH departing NYC (Photo: Bill Miller Collection)

In 1958, the first jets flew across the Atlantic and the number of airline passengers for the first time exceeded those traveling by liner. At first it was considered a fad. Within six months airlines had 66% of the transatlantic business and within five years, 98%! By the 1960's New York piers thinned of their usually crowded sailings. The QUEENS were losing \$4MM per year. In 1966, there was a 6-week maritime strike that cost millions of dollars and prompted ship owners to question the future of increased labor rates and manning rules which further drove companies and ships into oblivion.

By 1967, it was announced the QUEENS would be retired. In September 1967, the QUEEN MARY sailed from New York for the last time and Bill joined the World Ship Society as they chartered a Circle Line boat to be part of the huge flotilla seeing her off. QUEEN MARY's fate was uncertain. The city of Long Beach, California, planning to make her a huge attraction beat out the Japanese scrappers and off she sailed for her final 39-day cruise around the Cape Horn of South America to California. Five hundred vessels greeted the MARY on her Long Beach arrival. The ship needed to undergo heavy duty "surgery" before she could begin her new role as a hotel and museum. She was moved to a dry dock for a complete refurbishment. By 1972, she was moved to her new birth and reopened as a museum hotel with shops and restaurants after a costly \$75MM investment. Even so, she mostly struggled as a museum and hotel; never quite achieving the notoriety as a static monument.

QUEEN ELIZABETH struggled on. She had been refitted with a stern swimming pool and full air conditioning and added cruises to her itineraries, but without success. In October 1968, she left New York for the last time. She was soon auctioned off and sold to CY Tung and renamed SEAWISE UNIVERSITY. During her renovations while in the port of Hong Kong sabotage fires erupted and, in an effort to stem the blaze, she capsized from the volume of water pumped into her, just as the NORMANDIE had done 30 years earlier.

When they were gone, the QUEENS were celebrated as having been the golden age of travel. Related memorabilia became popular and in high demand. Cunard decided there was room for one last big liner.



On the Clyde a new liner of 66,000 tons arose, QUEEN ELIZABETH 2. In May 1969, the WSS-PONY Branch again chartered a boat for its maiden NYC arrival. Despite a lot of criticism that she could not possibly survive in the economic climate she sailed into the '70s, the final era for superliner service with FRANCE, the QE2, the Italian MICHELANGELO and RAFFAELLO. Six months a year she sailed the North Atlantic and six months she spent warm-water cruising. Bill shared that by 1975, she made her first 100-day world cruise yet was criticized as “somewhere between early James Bond and late Twiggy, but she was a comfortable ship.” Bill found that his first trip aboard her in November 1970 was “thrilling”.

By the 1980s Cunard had a rather eclectic fleet. They had the Cunard PRINCESS and COUNTESS; they had bought the SAGAFJORD (renaming her the CARONIA), and VISTAFJORD from the Norwegian America Line. They ran the SEA GODDESS sisters, and for a short time had the CROWN DYNASTY. The QE2 had gone through several refits and redecorations, converting in 1987 from steam to more efficient diesel power. Cunard partnered with Concorde during this time and the partnership was the heaviest contributor to Concorde traffic. One could cross one-way on possibly the last Atlantic Liner and return on the world’s only supersonic jet.

After sailing for 39 years, the QE2 was finally retired in the fall of 2008. Despite being valued only around \$5MM, Dubai paid Cunard/Carnival \$100MM. After being fully refurbished, she has become quite successful as a permanently moored Dubai hotel. At the end of her sailing career, QE2 sailed more miles, carried more passengers, went to more ports, and earned more money than any superliner in history!



QM2 and QE2 sailing outbound from NYC in tandem. (Photo: Bill Miller Collection)

Bill concluded with a summary of recent history including the construction and launch of QUEEN MARY 2 in January 2004 with as much ambiance of the bygone liners and former QUEENS. Bill revealed Cunard 2026 plans that QM2 will make her first full transit of the Panama Canal. The QUEEN VICTORIA was added in 2007 and the new QUEEN ELIZABETH in 2010. In only two months, the QUEEN ANNE will be added to the fleet, for a total of four QUEENS in service, and seven altogether!

Bill’s expertise and storytelling undoubtedly left a lasting impression on all who attended, celebrating the grandeur and legacy of these oceanic monarchs, the great QUEENS of the Cunard Line.

## SHIPS IN PORT: A SHIP NAMED “GRIPSHOLM”

By Bill Miller

*(Photos are from the Author's Collection)*

A friend spent the summer of 1996 traveling around Scandinavia. He saw lots of ships. There were the easily recognizable luxury liners such as the MAASDAM, ROYAL PRINCESS and CRYSTAL SYMPHONY. There were also the ferries, especially the big, bulky ones shuttling back and forth in the Baltic. And then there was, he later told me, the busy little passenger ships of Norway's famed “Hurtigruten,” the “Coastal Express”. But one passenger liner stumped him completely. It was named GRIPSHOLM. He knew that the celebrated cruise ship of that same name hadn't sailed for the bygone Swedish American Line in over twenty years, in fact not since 1975.

Alas, mystery solved, GRIPSHOLM was, in fact, the former SAGAFJORD. Built in 1965, many might recall her from her Norwegian America Line days and then, after 1983, being with Cunard. In February 1996, during a three-month cruise around the world, a serious engine room fire caused the trip to be aborted and the 24,000-ton ship laid-up in the Philippines. Many of her passengers were flown onwards to meet another Cunard world cruise ship, the ROYAL VIKING SUN. (Later, ROYAL VIKING SUN would have problems of her own when she went aground in Egyptian waters.) Since Cunard had planned to retire the 615-foot long SAGAFJORD in about six months in the fall 1996, it was decided to postpone any extensive (and expensive) repairs, cancel her schedule of sailings, and instead make the ship available for sale or charter.



Left: The VISTAFJORD & SAGAFJORD together at Pier 88, NYC, December 1975.

Right: The GRIPSHOLM (ex-SAGAFJORD) at Pier 88, New York.

Meanwhile and at the same time, Germany's Transocean Company, a major cruise operator, had intended to charter Regency Cruises' REGENT SEA, herself the former GRIPSHOLM, dating from 1957. The charter was to run for five years. They also decided to use the ship's original, well remembered name. Soon enough, that ship was caught in legal problems following Regency's sudden bankruptcy in October 1995. However, since Transocean had already begun to market and sell cruises for that ship, they looked for a suitable replacement. The SAGAFJORD was ideal. After some initial repairs at Singapore, it went on to Hamburg where it was fully repaired, overhauled and renamed GRIPSHOLM. It then embarked on a series of cruises that included summers in Scandinavia, autumn to the Mediterranean and US East Coast (including a visit to New York) and then, in winter, out to the Caribbean, South America and the Pacific. There was also a slight snag in early August 1996 when the ship went aground near Copenhagen, had to land all her passengers by tender and then sail all but empty to a shipyard for repairs.

In late October, there were still more changes. It was sold by Cunard (and thereby canceling the charter to the Germans, but who then promptly chartered the ASTOR as a replacement) for just under \$20 million to UK-based Saga Cruises. It was to be delivered in March 1997. After further refitting and now as the SAGA ROSE, it would be based at Dover and sail on cruises marketed purposely to passengers over fifty. Previously, there had been rumors that the ship might continue under the very popular name of SAGAFJORD.



The SAGAFJORD seen passing through the Panama Canal.

French-built, the 618-passenger SAGAFJORD had an impeccable reputation in its earlier days. It was the very first cruise ship, for example, to be accorded not just 5 but 5 ½ stars. Puppeteer John Chisholm did four world cruises aboard her in the Norwegian America days. “Sailing day was like old home day. Everyone was already friends. It was like a big club,” he recalled. “One of them, a Mrs. Green, had the same suite year after year. She used to give cocktail parties in her suite and had the bathtub filled with ice and Champagne bottles.”

“The SAGAFJORD was perfect in those days – impeccably served and fed,” according to Chisholm. “But it was actually very basic in décor. But this was all quite deliberate – it made the passengers stand out. There were always fabulous clothes and great jewels. And I remember a passenger called ‘Madame Chapeau’ because she had a different hat for every outfit!”



QE2, VISTAFJORD & SAGAFJORD together at Port Everglades.



“I also remember that the SAGAFJORD once got stuck on a sandbar in the River Plate during a 45-day Round South America cruise,” concluded John Chisholm. “But to retain the ship’s perfect image, the captain announced that we were simply stopped because of very busy shipping traffic. I also remember a summer cruise when the SAGAFJORD and her “near” sister, the VISTAFJORD, were to meet in a Norwegian fjord and then sail in together. The plan was to have a great photo shoot to celebrate some Norwegian America Line anniversary. But no, the SAGAFJORD’s mast cut a power cable that stretched across the fjord. The cable fell on the deck, the ship had to be stopped and so the photo shoot was canceled.”



SAGAFJORD, renamed the SAGA ROSE departing from Copenhagen, July 2003.

The SAGAFJORD, by then forty-four years old, soldiered on until October 2009. Amidst rumors that it might become a hotel ship, the veteran liner was in fact sold to Chinese scrappers in May 2010 and demolished near Shanghai, at Jiangyin.

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**SHIP NEWS**  
**Compiled by Pat Dacey**  
**HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS CELEBRATES 60th ANNIVERSARY**



Princess Anne unveiling a plaque honoring the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ship's launch in the Columba dining room. *(Photo: Hebridean Islands Cruises)*

On Tuesday March 12, Hebridean Island Cruises celebrated the 60th anniversary of the launch of their flagship vessel, the 48-passenger cruise ship Hebridean Princess, formerly the MV Columba, with a formal lunch on board attended by H.R.H. The Princess Royal.

HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS was Launched on March 12th, 1964, at the Hall Russell yard in Aberdeen, Scotland as the MacBRAYNE car ferry and Royal Mail Ship COLUMBA. She was initially RMS then MV COLUMBA based in Oban for the first 25 years of her life. Originally ordered by The Secretary of State for Scotland, COLUMBA was the third of a trio of near-identical ferries built to serve the Western Isles. They all were chartered to David MacBrayne Ltd. and were built as "Citadel Ships", equipped to serve as floating nuclear shelters for members of the Scottish Government and or Royal Family in the event of a national emergency. Carrying up to 600 passengers, and 50 cars, she sailed between the Scottish Islands before an extensive rebuilding as Hebridean Princess and being re-named by H.R.H. Duchess of York on April 26, 1989.



Princess Anne greeting staff in the Tiree Lounge. *(Photo: Hebridean Island Cruises)*

The vessel is the only cruise ship to have received a Royal Warrant having been chartered by Queen Elizabeth II to mark her 80th birthday in 2006 and again for a two-week family vacation in 2010.

Of the anniversary, Hebridean Island Cruises Managing Director Ken Charleson said “We were delighted to welcome HRH The Princess Royal back on board HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS to help us celebrate such a momentous occasion. Since 1989, HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS has established herself as the epitome of luxury, small-ship Scottish cruising, earning an enviable reputation for her renowned level of service and attention to detail.”

Charleson added, “It is testament to her design and build quality that HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS is still sailing the waters for which she was designed and built. After thirty-five years of luxury cruising, HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS has outlived MV COLUMBA.”



Princess Anne departing HEBRIDEAN PRINCESS, March 12, 2024.  
(Photo: Hebridean Island Cruises)

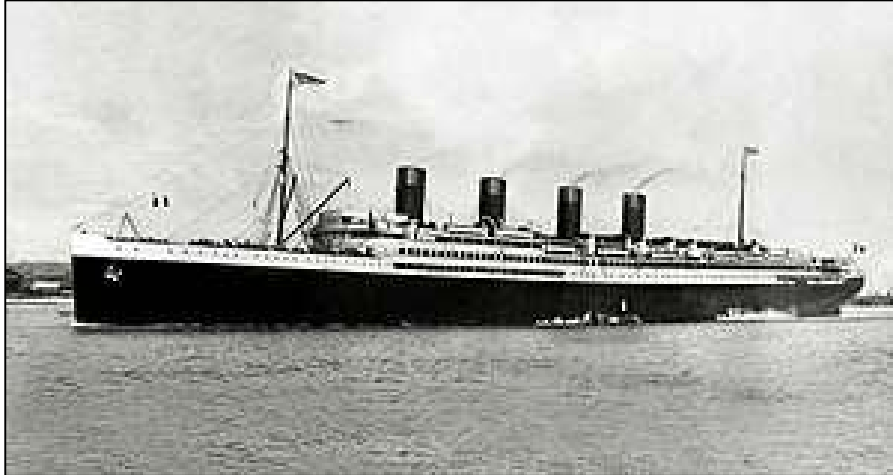
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Members may submit the following for consideration for publication in The Porthole: photos, news, cruise details, and articles that may be of interest to your fellow members. Please direct submissions to [wsspony@gmail.com](mailto:wsspony@gmail.com). Please note published materials are subject to editing and are not necessarily the opinion of the WSS-PONY Branch.

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## FRANCE (1912) PAINTING SOLD



(Photo: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

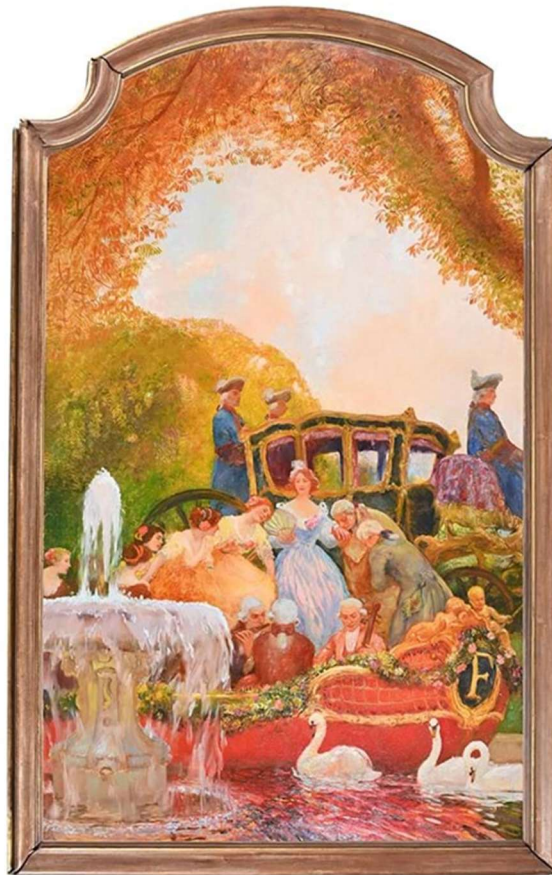
A painting commissioned for the FRANCE of 1912 recently sold at auction on February 21, 2024, by Dreweatts, which is a leading auctioneer of Fine Art in the United Kingdom, for an undisclosed price. The large-scale painting is by the celebrated French Painter, Gaston La Touche (1854-1913) and was placed above the FRANCE staircase in the grand two-tiered First-Class dining room. Known as the “Chateau de l’Atlantique” or the “Versailles du Mer”, the interiors of the FRANCE were opulently decorated in the gilded Louis XIV style, emulating the famous French Palace of Versailles. FRANCE was also credited for bringing the grand staircase to the ocean liner, a fashion which prevails in modern cruise ships. The staircase in the dining room was reportedly copied from the Parisian Hotel de Toulouse in Paris.



First-Class dining showing the large-scale painting (10.2' x 6.25') above the grand staircase.

(Photo: [www.dreweatts.com](http://www.dreweatts.com))

After being withdrawn from service in 1932, the FRANCE sat at Le Harve until she was finally retired after 21 years and sent to the breakers in Dunkirk, France in 1935. The painting, removed from the ship was passed to the private collection of Henri Cangardel, Chairman of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (CGT), before entering a private collection in London. Its location was mysteriously unknown for twenty-five years, between 1990 and 2015. In 2015, it emerged for an exhibition.



*L'Arrive de la Princesse* (10.2' x 6.25') by Gaston La Touche (1854-1913)  
 (Photo: [www.dreweatts.com](http://www.dreweatts.com) )

The painting titled *L'Arrive de la Princesse* shows a beautiful woman who, having stepped out of her carriage, is being fawned upon by her courtiers as they escort her to a waiting barge. La Touche, cleverly and knowingly has the FRANCE's opulent First-Class dining viewers literally looking up at the central royal figure with those bowing and curtsying to her in the painting.

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