



## YARMOUTH CASTLE BURNING PRESENTED BY ERIC TAKAKJIAN

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 6:30PM (ET) ZOOM MEETING**



Of 552 people aboard for a weekend roundtrip between Miami and Nassau on November 13, 1965, a total of 90 would perish when the cruise liner SS YARMOUTH CASTLE caught fire and sank near Great Stirrup Cay in the Bahamas.

Although the survival of over 450 people from the inferno was nothing short of a miracle, this tragedy marks the deadliest passenger ship disaster off the coast of the United States since the burning of the liner SS MORRO CASTLE off New Jersey in 1934.

Drawing from his newly published book, *Eric, Yarmouth Castle Burning*, Eric will review details of the tragedy and the subsequent accident investigation that eventually changed US and

international standards for the construction and operations of passenger ships. He will also discuss what became of the Yarmouth Steamship Company and its leadership.

**Eric Takakjian** is the master of the CHINCOTEAGUE, a 504-foot, ocean-going articulated tug and barge engaged in the coastwide petroleum transportation trade. He has been sailing ships and ocean-going tugboats to various corners of the world since 1978. Eric and his wife, Lori, owned and operated the oceanographic research vessel QUEST for 17 years, conducting oceanographic and shipwreck research in the northeastern United States. He has conducted extensive historical research on the naval history of the region. A diver since 1972 and an avid shipwreck diver since 1975, he has been a National Fellow of the Explorers Club since 1997. Eric also has been a member of the Steamship Historical Society of America since 1989 and is now serving on its board of directors.



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**THE ORIGINAL CHELSEA PIERS -  
NEW YORK'S MARITIME GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL  
PRESENTED BY WILLIAM ROKA**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 6:30 PM (ET) ZOOM MEMBER MEETING**

**CARNIVAL CRUISE LINE NEW BUILD DEVELOPMENT  
A BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK  
PRESENTED BY GLENN APRILE  
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 10AM (ET) ENCORE PRESENTATION**

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**MEMBER PHOTOS**



*The outbound CARNIVAL VENEZIA passing the Statue of Liberty, October 2025. (Photo: Justin Zizes)*



*PONANT'S LE BOREAL in New York Harbor, October 2025. (Photo: Justin Zizes)*

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Are you a member with a ship photo, possible article or an idea to share?  
If so, please send an email to [wsspony@gmail.com](mailto:wsspony@gmail.com).



*LOGOS HOPE docked in Nassau, Bahamas, October 2025, where some PONY Branch members had a chance to visit while on the PONY Branch 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Cruise. LOGOS HOPE is a floating book fair and cultural and educational hub visiting global ports. She was built in 1973 as the ferry GUSTAV VASA, employed in Swedish and German ports and later provided ferry service in the Faroe Islands as the NORRÖNA. (Photo: Denise Dacey)*



*Princess' MAJESTIC PRINCESS in New York Harbor, October 2025. (Photo: Justin Zizes)*

## THE PONY BRANCH 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY WAS CELEBRATED ABOARD THE CELEBRITY SUMMIT BY STUART GEWIRTZMAN

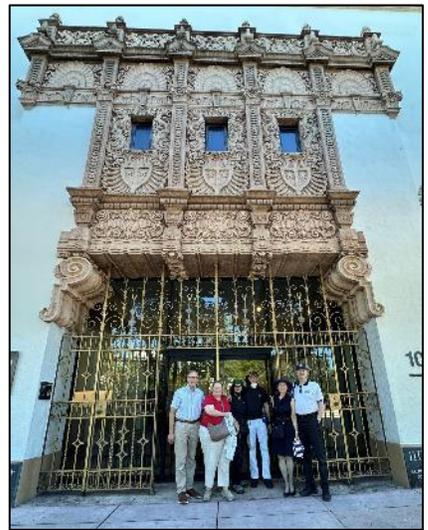


*Cruise attendees in the Rendezvous Lounge onboard the CELEBRITY SUMMIT behind the new PONY Branch burgee in honor of our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Notice the burgee's lightship logo, a tribute to the World Ship Society's parent UK organization's 1947's founding and logo.*

The year 2025 marks 60 years since the founding of the World Ship Society – Port of New York Branch. To commemorate this milestone, 19 PONY Branch members and guests headed to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, to embark on a five-night 60th Anniversary cruise on board the CELEBRITY SUMMIT. The festivities began on Sunday, October 12, one day prior to sailing, the group traveled by Brightline train to Miami to visit the Wolfsonian museum, a division of Florida International University. After a reception graciously sponsored by the museum's Treasurer and PONY Branch member Tom Ragan, attendees were treated to a private tour led by Chief Librarian Frank Luca. The museum Director, Michael Hughes, was also in



attendance at our special museum visit. A highlight of the tour was a chance to examine a curated sample of the museum's extensive collection of ocean liner and cruise ship memorabilia that were put on display for our visit.



*(Left and Above) PONY Branch members at The Wolfsonian museum, a division of Florida International University, located in the heart of the Art Deco District of Miami Beach.*

The following day the group set sail on the CELEBRITY SUMMIT for Key West, Florida, and Nassau in the Bahamas. The SUMMIT, a 90,940 GT, 2,218 passenger, Millennium-class cruise ship, originally entered service for Celebrity Cruises in 2001 and appeared to be in excellent condition after a month-long refit in a shipyard in the Bahamas earlier in the year. In addition to enjoying the fine food and entertainment on the ship, those attending were treated to two engaging presentations by Captain Terry Tilton, U.S.N. (Ret); the first focusing on over 100 years of maritime disasters as reflected in over 20 ships represented in Terry's personal builders' plate collection; and the second on the storied history of Ingalls Shipbuilding. The group was also treated to a private reception in the SUMMIT's Rendezvous Lounge on each of the two sea days during the cruise. Sunny weather followed us to Key West and to Nassau, where the SUMMIT was joined in port by MSC SEASCAPE, DISNEY DREAM, DISNEY MAGIC and the MV LOGOS HOPE, originally built in 1973 as the car ferry GUSTAV VASA and now serving as a floating book fair and community outreach platform.



*(Left) Celebrity Group Concierge, Jana, took excellent care of our group and is shown at one of our private group receptions. (Right) CELEBRITY SUMMIT shown in Key West, FL.*



*(Left) PONY Branch member Paul Immerman (left) at Kermit's Key Lime Shoppe in Key West, FL. (Right) Board members Bob Allen (left) & Stuart Gewirtzman (right) at Sloppy Joe's bar in Key West.*



The World Ship Society – PONY Branch 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Cruise attendees sincerely thank Frank Luca, Michael Hughes, Tom Ragan and Astrid Garcia from The Wolfsonian-FIU. We also thank the wonderful crew of the CELEBRITY SUMMIT including our excellent Group Concierge, Jana. Thanks also to Captain Terry Tilton, for his excellent presentations and to our PONY Branch Vice Chairman and Special Programs Chairman, Pat Dacey, who expertly and seamlessly organized the week’s cruise and the many events enjoyed by our members in the company of fellow ship enthusiasts.

*(Left) PONY Branch members Rich Turnwald and Matt Rihl enjoying the festivities on the bow of the CELEBRITY SUMMIT during the sail away from Nassau.*

*(Photo credits: Denise Dacey, Stuart Gewirtzman, Marjorieann Matuszek, Ellen Meshnick and Rich Turnwald)*

Visit our website [PONY Branch 60th Anniversary Cruise on CELEBRITY SUMMIT – World Ship Society](#) for more photos related to this story.

For additional Wolfsonian ocean liner and cruise ship archives and exhibit photos and details, as well as more WSS-PONY Branch visit photos and details go to the following Wolfsonian blog: <https://wolfsonianfiulibrary.wordpress.com/2025/10/31/a-wolfsonian-welcome-for-cruise-line-enthusiasts/>.

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**HOLIDAY PARTY AT TONY’S DI NAPOLI**  
**UPPER EAST SIDE LOCATION**  
**1081 3<sup>RD</sup> AVENUE BETWEEN 63<sup>RD</sup> and 64<sup>TH</sup> STREETS**  
**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 12 - 3PM**



Lunch with salad, pasta, entrée, dessert, and coffee/tea.

\$35 per member and \$50 per guest with a maximum of one guest per member.

Cash bar. Taxes and gratuities included.

**An invitation and registration link was emailed to all PONY Branch members.**

**Join us for an afternoon of holiday festivities with your fellow members!**

## 2026 NEW MEMBERSHIPS & MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

**Membership includes all digital Porthole mailings, member meetings and member event invitations.**

\$45 – Single  
\$65 – Single Patron  
\$70 – Family  
\$90 – Family Patron

**Family Memberships** include one additional person.

**Patron Memberships** provide priority access to special events with capacity limitations.

### 2026 Patron Membership Promotion

**Receive a free WSS-PONY Branch Embroidered Canvas Baseball Cap**

1 free cap for each 2026 patron member. Offer limited to one cap per person.

One color and size with an adjustable back strap.



Notice the cap's lightship logo, which is the first logo of our parent organization, World Ship Society, UK (Founded 1947).

**Join or renew online today at our website:**  
**[Membership Application or Renewal – World Ship Society](#)**

## A SPECIAL INVITATION FROM OUR FRIENDS AT STEAMSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA



*“Steamer CONNECTICUT” by Antonio Jacobsen, (Image: Griswold Inn Collection/Paul Foundation)*

Did you know that John Fitch was born in 1743 upstream from Essex, CT and went on to run the first steamboat service in the country in 1787? To commemorate its steamboat roots, the SSHSA 2025 Annual Meeting and 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration will take place in Essex, CT. **PONY BRANCH members and friends are invited to join SSHSA for the planned November 16 – 17 weekend events.**

Events have been carefully curated to include exploring the Connecticut River Museum and its exhibits dedicated to the early steamboat industry on the river. Those in attendance, we will enjoy a private guided art tour at the historic 1776 Griswold Inn by the inn’s owner, Geoffrey Paul. All events will also provide a wonderful opportunity to meet and connect with your fellow SSHSA and WSS-PONY Branch ship enthusiasts.

Importantly, as part of the weekend’s Sunday Dinner Program, **Ted Scull, long-time WSS-PONY Branch member and former Chairman, will be honored with the SSHSA 2025 Samuel Ward Stanton Award for Lifetime Achievement.**

### **Saturday, November 15 (\$75)**

1PM: Scotch Plains Tavern Lunch & Presentation, "Bill-of-Fare or Billboard? The Role of Ocean Liner Menus in the High Stakes Promotion of Ocean Travel" by Astrid Drew

3PM: Connecticut River Museum Private Guided Tour

5PM: Reception at The Griswold Inn

Dinner on your own

### **Sunday, November 16 (\$125)**

10AM SSHSA Annual Meeting at the Connecticut River Museum

Time TBD, Private Guided Griswold Inn Art Tour by Inn Owner, Geoffrey Paul

2PM-3PM Griswold Inn No-Host Wine Bar Reception

3PM -6PM SSHSA Dinner & Award Program at the Griswold Inn Wine Bar & Steamboat Room

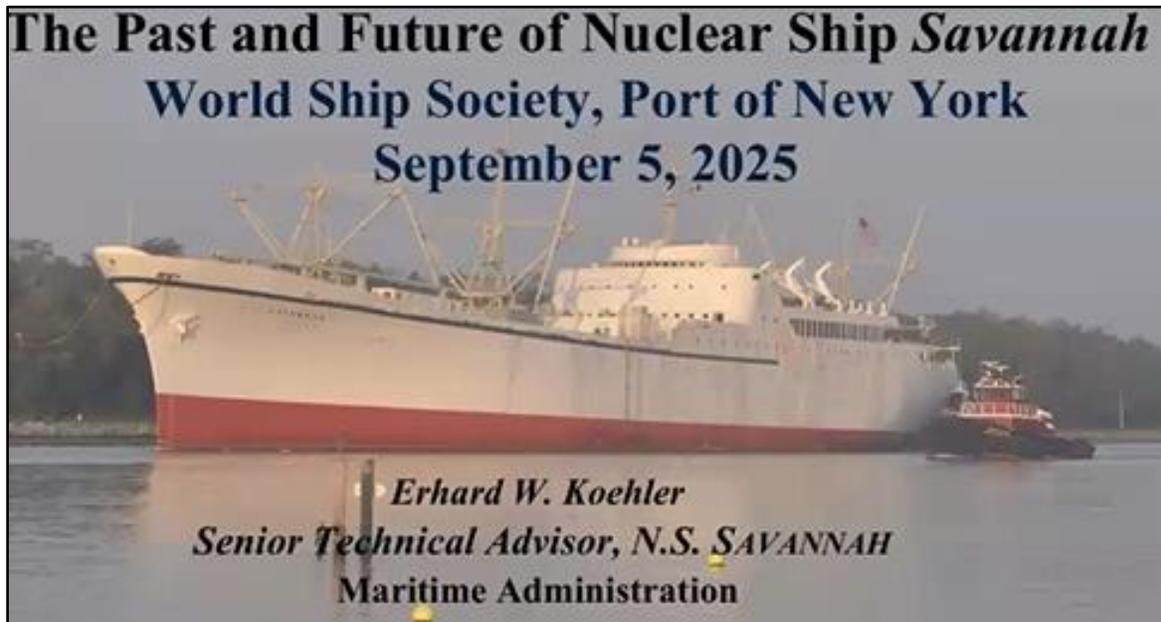
### **Both Saturday and Sunday (\$175)**

**Hotel reservations, if needed, are independently arranged.**

**Register using this link: [DonorPerfect Forms](#)**

**QUESTIONS: [wsspony@gmail.com](mailto:wsspony@gmail.com)**

**SHIP'S LOG**  
**NUCLEAR SHIP SAVANNAH PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**  
**BY ERHARD W. KOEHLER**  
**RECAP BY PAT DACEY**



2025 is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SAVANNAH program, which was proposed in 1955 as the centerpiece for President Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace Program. NUCLEAR SHIP SAVANNAH is a storied ship registered as an International Historic Engineering Landmark (1983), a Nuclear Engineering Landmark (1991) and, very importantly, a National Historical Landmark as the World's First Nuclear Powered Merchant Ship (1991). SAVANNAH was also recognized with the 2012 Steamship Historical Society of America's (SSHSA) Ship of the Year Award. This list of accomplishments and recognition is a milestone that very few ships ever achieve, especially when considering how long SAVANNAH was in service. On September 5, 2025, the PONY Branch was pleased to welcome Erhard Koehler who presented his program, "The Past and Future of Nuclear Ship Savannah" to our audience via Zoom.

Erhard Koehler, the Senior Technical Advisor for N.S. SAVANNAH for the United States Maritime Administration (MARAD), brought his unmatched knowledge as well as his passion for the SAVANNAH to our audience through an extensively researched program packed with remarkable photos and facts. Erhard's relationship with the SAVANNAH began in 1992 when he eagerly jumped at the opportunity to oversee SAVANNAH's return to MARAD from the Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum that took place in 1994. Since then, he has been involved with SAVANNAH in multiple positions of greater responsibility culminating as Senior Technical Advisor responsible for all of SAVANNAH's program activities, operations, maintenance, repair, custody and preservation. Now, even after 33 years with N.S. SAVANNAH, Erhard's enthusiasm for the ship continues and it was apparent during his excellent presentation.



*The ship's sponsor, Mamie Eisenhower, during the July 2, 1959.*

Starting at the beginning of the Atoms for Peace proposal in 1955, Erhard detailed the ship from concept to construction highlighting President Eisenhower's great respect for the merchant marine as a source of "binding the world together" and his insistence that there would be no military involvement at all in the design, construction, and operation of the "peace ship." The goal, which was memorialized in legislation, was to build "a practical merchant vessel of combined passenger and cargo design" to stress the safety and practicality of a nuclear merchant ship. For a better understanding of the entire life of N.S. SAVANNAH, Erhard divided the program into four parts, with each detailing a significant period in the history of the ship. He began with

construction and operation (1956-1970), then defueling and deactivation (1971-1980), followed by her time as a museum ship (1981-1994) and ending with her government retention program from 1994 until the present.

Ultimately named the N.S. SAVANNAH after the S.S. SAVANNAH of 1819, which was the first steam ship to cross the Atlantic utilizing steam power, the N.S. SAVANNAH during her career achieved all four core objectives and accomplishments of the program by 1967. The first three core objectives were that a nuclear merchant ship was accepted as peaceful, reliable and viable. The fourth core objective achieved was to establish the necessary infrastructure in the international maritime industry to support operations by a nuclear-powered ship.

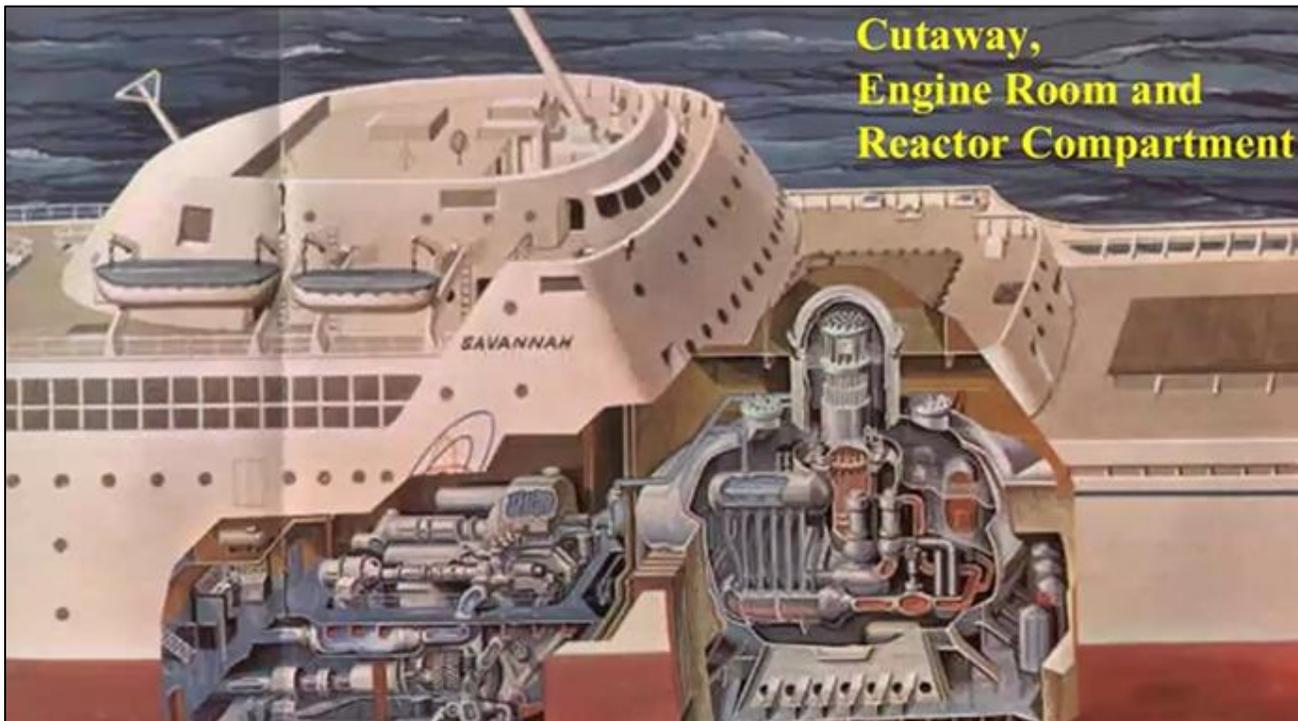
Completed in 1962, SAVANNAH initially sailed for States Marine Lines until they were embroiled in a major labor dispute from 1962-1963 when their operational contract was terminated and transferred to American Export-Isbrandtsen Lines which sailed SAVANNAH between 1965 to 1970. During this time, SAVANNAH was a favorite and considered one of the most reliable ships in their fleet and during her career had no negative incidents directly related to her nuclear power plant.



*(Foreground) N.S. SAVANNAH on a rare port of call to New York City (c. 1967). (HOMERIC at right is also shown.)*

In 1970, SAVANNAH was prematurely withdrawn from service for economic reasons. SAVANNAH took a short final voyage to New Orleans where the ship was drydocked and by September 1971 defueling was completed although her power plant remained "wet" to permit future refueling. By January of 1973, the decision was made to permanently retire the nuclear plant, leading to another dry docking to prepare the ship for the reserve fleet lay-up. By 1980, South Carolina was interested in obtaining SAVANNAH for a museum ship for its new Naval and Maritime Museum at Patriots Point near Charleston. Because of the active nuclear power plant license which could not be transferred, South Carolina had to charter the ship from MARAD. After lackluster success as a museum ship due to various museum operating

issues and Hurricane Hugo in 1989, leaks were discovered in her hull, and the ship was permanently transferred back to MARAD in 1994.



While sitting in the James River Reserve Fleet, in 2002, the maritime administrator directed MARAD to plan for the decommissioning of the ship. This process includes dismantling the nuclear power plant so that the Nuclear Regulatory Facility License can be terminated in a controlled decommission process which is now slated for 2026, when the ship is planned to be disposed of by MARAD. Additionally, MARAD had to build a decommissioning plan, get funding and define “a middle ground” to best address the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act. In addition to decommissioning modifications, between 2016-2017 SAVANNAH’S principal public spaces were restored, including the dining room, main lobby, veranda and main lounge to allow visitors the experience of the ship as it appeared in the 1960’s.

Currently MARAD is accepting applications from interested parties willing to take the ship and operate it as a museum with Savannah, GA already expressing serious interest in her acquisition.



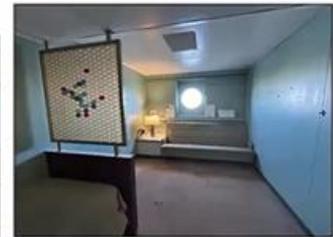
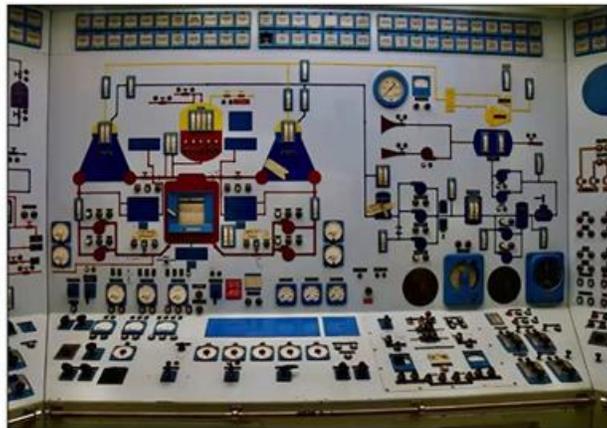
*Removal of the reactor vessel on November 8, 2022, at Pier 13 in Baltimore, MD.*



*The Main Dining room while in service (left) and today (right).*

### **SAVANNAH is a museum ship in all but name.**

Visitors can experience virtually every area of the ship that was available to passengers in the 1960s, many of which retain original features and furnishings, including staterooms, galley, bridge, laundry, engine and control rooms.



Erhard concluded by participating in a robust Q&A session where he continued to share his insight and answer questions from our audience members before highlighting some myths and legends about N.S. SAVANNAH.

The World Ship Society – PONY Branch thanks Erhard for an educational and enlightening evening and wishes N.S SAVANNAH and MARAD well in their quest for a permanent home where SAVANNAH can continue to live on as a museum ship to honor the “Atoms for Peace” Project and the U.S. Merchant Marine.

*(Images: Erhard W. Koehler Collection)*

## SHIPS IN PORT DINING ON THE ILE DE FRANCE BY BILL MILLER



*The New York City's Chelsea Piers in 1929 with the ILE DE FRANCE (left), DE GRASSE, PENNLAND, OLYMPIC, BALTIC and DUCHESS OF ATHOLL.*

When a young student was heading to Paris to study art in the 1950s, he unexpectedly discovered French cooking, the art of cuisine. He was aboard the celebrated ILE DE FRANCE and, on which it was said, more seagulls followed her than any other Atlantic liner. The ILE and in fact the entire French Line were noted for their fine kitchens. The student finally landed at Le Havre and quickly changed his major – he would study cuisine in Paris. His name was Craig Claiborne and he went on to become the food editor of none other than the *New York Times*.

The late C. M. Squarey was a huge fan of the 44,300-ton ILE DE FRANCE. After having worked for Cunard in the 1930s and as their sales agent out in the Far East, he joined the huge Thomas Cook & Son travel firm just after the Second World War, in the late 1940s. His talents as a passenger ship enthusiast, keen voyager and detailed writer were quickly put to good use. He was sent out to appraise passenger ships, often when they were brand new, either on trial runs, short “invitation-only” preview trips or on actual maiden voyages. His vast collection of observations and critiques were used in Cook Company newsletters, and eventually found their way into a published edition, *The Patient Talks*, produced by Cook’s in London in 1955. Mr. Squarey’s comments throughout are very interesting.

In the annals of ocean liner history, the French Line has been noted for their perfectly run ships, flawlessly served and fed liner passengers, and for their exquisite décor. In ways, they had the most prized reputation of all trans-Atlantic passenger ship companies. There was, of course, the sumptuous

NORMANDIE (1935), then the likes of the PARIS (1921), LIBERTE (1950) and their final liner, the FRANCE (1962). But almost unique, as if in a class of its own, was the ILE DE FRANCE (1927). She had a most enviable reputation coupled with a huge following. It was a ship of style, romance and innovative décor – the beginning of sleek, streamlined, now cherished Art Deco on the high seas. A three-stacker as built, it returned from valiant wartime duties in the summer of 1949 and carried on faithfully until decommissioned and sold to Japanese scrappers in early 1959.



*A 1955 lifeboat drill at New York City's Pier 88.*

Mr. Squarey visited the 1,400-passenger, three-class ILE in September 1949, soon after her return to trans-ocean service, and seemed to have not just fallen in love, but madly in love with the ship. He was most impressed and wrote: “Here, indeed, is a romantic ship, a dramatic ship and a stately ship – romantic because of her reputation in pre-war times, dramatic because of her distinguished war record and stately because she portrays all the finest traits and characteristics, as well as the arts, of that history-steeped nation whose flag she flies so honorably. And this ship is so utterly and superbly French that one scarcely dares to talk, to write, about it in other than the French language.”

Mr. Squarey continued, “Striding up what must be the world’s longest gangway, I entered the grand foyer of this and, in two blinks, sensed that certain vitality and zest for life that is a product of the French temperament and French way of living. Amongst other things that struck me were the bell boys in their smart red rig, the boulevard effect of the promenade deck with rows of bright red deck chairs, the orchestra playing at embarkation time and the iced water laid on around the ship.”



*A luxurious first class double.*



“And then comes to food – and where food is supremely good, who can refrain from talking about it?” concluded Mr. Squarey. “Here are three subtle compliments: Firstly, the French Line advertisement, ‘It is harder to diet on the ILE DE FRANCE than any other ship’. I like that one. Secondly, an American onboard said to me, ‘I don’t know a French ship that isn’t good – they don’t know how to spoil good food.’ There is a sting in that. Thirdly, there is the story about a press reporter asking the chef indignantly, ‘It will be the finest food in the world.’ And then to emphasize his point, he added, ‘There are always more seagulls following the ILE DE FRANCE for food scraps than any other ship on the ocean!’”



*The handsome ILE makes a mid-day departure off lower Manhattan.  
(Images: Bill Miller Collection)*

## SHIP NEWS

# THE 1896 CABIN ABOARD MS FRIDTJOF NANSEN

### A STEP BACK IN TIME

COMPILED BY PAT DACEY



MS FRIDTJOF NANSEN – HX EXPEDITIONS

HX Hurtigruten Expeditions is poised to celebrate 130 years of expedition cruising by offering guests traveling aboard the 2020-built MS FRIDTJOF NANSEN on voyages after January 29, 2026, the opportunity to stay in a recreated cabin experience resembling an Arctic cabin circa 1896 (*bottom photos*). Offering a glimpse of what it would have been like for early explorers over 130 years ago, the cabin will have the glow, reminiscent of flickering oil lamps, shiplap covered walls and a warm light radiating from the recreated stove, all while taking in the scent of timber mingling with salty air.

HX is offering this fully immersive experience while onboard with a completely transformed cabin by AROS Marine, which will include historically sourced props, exclusive 130-year-old bed linen, bespoke 130-year-old robes and a bathroom with 130-year-old touches.



AROS Marine took inspiration from Hurtigruten's earliest passenger accommodations and during the golden age of exploration including FRAM (1893-1912) (*shown at left*) which Fridtjof Nansen used on his Arctic expedition from 1893-1896.

The Arctic cabin experience can be booked on 2026 voyages only as a \$522 add-on to your regular fare for one night per voyage with 50% of the profits supporting the HX Foundation as part of their €130K per ship goal for their anniversary fundraising initiative.

HX believes that for those that love history or immersive experiences, this is a unique and limited-edition experience.



(Images: HX Hurtigruten Expeditions)

Members may submit the following for consideration for publication in The Porthole: member photos with descriptions and dates taken, 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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