



## 25 YEARS OF NAUTIQUES - WHAT'S HOT, WHAT'S NOT, WHAT'S CHANGED & WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING PRESENTED BY DON LEAVITT

**FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 6:30PM (ET) ZOOM MEMBER MEETING**



It has been 25 years of deck plans and ship china, interior brochures and agency posters, liner furniture and fixtures. Don Leavitt purchased Nautiques in 2001 and took it online. Looking back over a quarter of a century, Don will share his experiences in buying and selling millions of dollars' worth of ocean liner memorabilia. Which items and ships are hot these days and which are not? What to collect for the future? Tune in to find out.



After careers in journalism and innkeeping, in 2001 **Don Leavitt** bought Nautiques and switched it from catalog to online sales. He lives in Baltimore and summers in New Hampshire with husband Todd, two golden retrievers, and a 17-year-old cat who still rules the roost. Don is a World Ship Society member and a past president of the Steamship Historical Society of America.

*(Images and Photo: Don Leavitt)*

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## THE FRENCH LINE'S VILLE D'ALGER OF 1935 A MEDITERRANEAN NORMANDIE & ALGERIA'S MOBILE COLONY PRESENTED BY JOHN H. PERRY **SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 10 AM (ET) ENCORE ZOOM MEETING**

## MEMBER PHOTOS



*ODYSSEY OF THE SEAS, Jan 22, 2026, St. Kitts (Photo: Preston Baker)*



*CELEBRITY BEYOND, Jan 22, 2026, St. Kitts (Photo: Preston Baker)*



*NORWEGIAN EPIC, Jan 24, 2026, St. Thomas, USVI (Photo: Preston Baker)*



*SEABOURN VENTURE, February 6, 2026, Dalglish Bay, Pourquoi Pas Island and Lagoon Island, Antarctic Peninsula. Latitude: -67.72° Longitude: -67.74, Antarctica (Photo: Denise Dacey)*



*G ADVENTURES EXPEDITION, February 8, 2026,  
Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego Province, Argentina (Photo: Pat Dacey)*

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## **QUEEN MARY IS IN THE HOUSE!**

**DISCOVER THE PRESERVATION OF THIS MOMUNMENTAL SHIP MODEL  
PRESENTED BY MARTINA CARUSO, DIRECTOR OF COLLECTIONS AND  
EXHIBITIONS AT SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM  
THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 6PM (ET) ZOOM MEMBER MEETING**

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**FOR NEW OR RENEWING MEMBERSHIPS PLEASE GO TO:  
[Membership Application or Renewal – World Ship Society](#)**



*NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ENDURANCE, February 8, 2026,  
Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego Province, Argentina (Photo: Pat Dacey)*

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**WSS-PONY BRANCH 2027 MEMBER GROUP CRUISE  
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ROUND-TRIP MANHATTAN, NEW YORK – SAINT JOHN, NB, CANADA**

*Interior Cabin: \$522 per person  
Oceanview Cabin: \$644 per person  
Balcony Cabin: \$782 per person*

Cabin pricing is based upon double occupancy and includes taxes and fees. Gratuities not included. Cabin prices shown are in effect until June 2027 or until reserved cabins sell out. Please note, cabins and fares outside those listed above may be reserved within the Group ID.

To learn more: [4-Day Canada Cruise from Manhattan - Carnival Cruise Line](#)

***All reservations are made by calling CARNIVAL Group Reservations  
at 866-721-3225 with the PONY Group ID: QF83X3.***

**SHIP'S LOG**  
**THE ORIGINAL CHELSEA PIERS**  
**NEW YORK'S MARITIME GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL**  
**PRESENTED BY WILLIAM ROKA**  
**RECAP BY ALAN ZAMCHICK**



William Roka, a welcome returning speaker to the World Ship Society-Port of New York Branch and WSS-PONY board member, delivered a richly detailed and engaging lecture on the history and significance of New York's Chelsea Piers. His talk traced the evolution of Manhattan's waterfront from a chaotic jumble of early wharves to the grand architectural statement that became the Chelsea Piers.

Roka began by asking the essential question: why were the Chelsea Piers built at all? To answer it, he first sketched the state of New York Harbor before 1870, already the busiest port in the world, yet little more than an improvised patchwork of piers, slips, and anchorages serving ships from the North Atlantic, South America, the Caribbean, and, after 1825, the Great Lakes via the Erie Canal. Between 1845 and 1865, ship traffic doubled from two to four million tons annually; by 1916 it had nearly quadrupled again to eleven million. As demand surged, the city pushed relentlessly into the rivers. Nearly a third of Manhattan's landmass today is man-made landfill, created through the sale and filling of "water lots."

William continued, "some of the most dramatic examples lie around the South Street Seaport—everything from Pearl Street to the river's edge is artificial. On the West Side, by 1837 the shoreline had already been extended to include a short-lived 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue. By the 1870s and 1880s, the waterfront had become overcrowded, unsanitary, and hopelessly disorganized. Grain barges, ferries, produce boats, and passenger ships all competed for space in what Roka described as a noisy, smelly tangle."

The first proposal was simple: build new piers farther into the Hudson. But the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which controlled the rivers, refused to allow further encroachment. Instead, the city was forced to move inward, cutting 250 feet into Manhattan to create room for new, modern piers. A handsome set of piers was built in the 1890s—but they were obsolete almost immediately. The age of the superliner was approaching. Between 1900 and 1915, the size of the largest passenger ships tripled, and the vessels like MAURETANIA, LUSITANIA, and the OLYMPIC-class liners simply could not be accommodated. Add to it that wealthy transatlantic travelers were hardly impressed by disembarking into the meatpacking district.

There was also a strategic concern: rival ports—Boston, Philadelphia, even Montauk via a Pennsylvania Railroad connection—were vying to lure the great liners away from New York. J. P. Morgan Jr., whose International Mercantile Marine controlled White Star, Red Star, the American Line, Leyland, and others, exerted enormous pressure on the city to build a new, world-class pier complex.

Thus emerged the Chelsea Piers, conceived not only as the largest but also the most beautiful piers in the world. Built during the City Beautiful movement under Mayor George McClellan and designed by Warren & Wetmore—the architects of Grand Central Terminal—the project required clearing existing homes and businesses, driving massive pilings into the riverbed, and constructing reinforced-concrete structures on a monumental scale. Nine great piers from 12<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets rose between 1895 and 1910 (*Below photo*). The LUSITANIA arrived in 1907 before the façades were even finished. Completed at a cost of \$25 million (roughly \$6 billion today), the piers were city-owned and leased to IMM, Cunard, the French Line, and the White Star Line.



Their architectural details were striking: pink granite, copper globe finials, molded concrete ornamentation symbolizing land and sea commerce, and keystones crowned with Neptune or Aphrodite. Mercury, God of Travel, appeared over the smaller entrances. Inside, two levels housed watchmen's offices, customs stations, freight-handling areas, money-exchange counters, and separate waiting rooms for first, second, and third-class passengers. One of the most advanced conveyor systems of the day carried baggage from the street level up into the pier. Sadly, only one known photograph survives of a First-Class Waiting Room – for the French Line at that (*Below photo*); none have surfaced for Cunard or White Star. William asks if anyone has seen another to please let him know.



In 1911, the OLYMPIC arrived at White Star's Pier 59 - so large at 883 feet that she extended into the river. The city soon granted permission to lengthen the piers to over 900 feet. These facilities remained the primary gateway for America's great liners until the mid-1930s, when the new "Superliner Piers" at 46<sup>th</sup>–55<sup>th</sup> Streets opened.

Roka vividly described the bustle of a Chelsea Piers sailing: baggage accepted two days in advance, longshoremen working in gangs of twenty to thirty, and customs inspections that vexed first-class passengers. Customs duties—especially the 20 percent levy on jewelry—led to ingenious smuggling attempts involving coat buttons, book spines, shoe heels, and even shaving-brush handles. Officials, often tipped off by European counterparts, were usually one step ahead.



For third-class passengers and steerage travelers, the experience was very different. Most were immigrants bound for Ellis Island. Roka showed remarkable period footage of ships arriving and departing, including LUSITANIA reversing into the North River and OLYMPIC approaching Pier 59. After quarantine inspection, first and second-class passengers were cleared at the pier, while immigrants waited to be ferried to Ellis Island—a process that could take hours.

Roka detailed the historical significance of Pier 54 (*Left photo*), the Cunard pier, which witnessed two of maritime history's most dramatic moments. In April 1912, the

CARPATHIA arrived there with survivors of the TITANIC after dropping the TITANIC lifeboats at White Star's Pier 59. The lifeboats (*Below photo*) then vanished from the historical record. Three years later, on May 1, 1915, LUSITANIA departed Pier 54 on her final voyage; by May 7 she had been sunk by a German submarine in just eighteen minutes. A numbing film clip of departing souls was shared by William - their soon-to-be-shared fate - a historical backdrop.



During World War I, the Chelsea Piers became a major troop-transport hub. Roka shared evocative footage of MAURETANIA returning soldiers home. Immigration slowed dramatically after the 1924 quota laws, but transatlantic travel revived in the Roaring Twenties. Hollywood even captured the glamour: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (set in 1924) includes a Chelsea Piers departure scene. In 1936, the U.S. Olympic team sailed from Chelsea aboard the US Lines' MANHATTAN for the Berlin Games.



By the mid-1930s, however, decline had begun. The West Side Elevated Highway overshadowed the piers, their decorative elements deteriorated (*Left photo*), and the great liners moved uptown. A garbage incinerator rose at Gansevoort. By the 1960s only cargo ships remained, and by the 1970s the Chelsea Piers stood abandoned—faded remnants of what had once been America's grand maritime front door. By 1991

just Pier 54's façade remained, providing today's Little Island a fitting entrance (*Below photo*).



Roka's presentation brought this lost world vividly back to life, reminding us how central the Chelsea Piers once were to New York's identity and to the millions of people who passed through them. We thank William for his nostalgic, evocative and richly illustrated presentation.

*(Photos and Images: William Roka Collection)*

**SHIPS IN PORT**  
**SUMMER VISITOR -- THE PROVENCE**  
**BY BILL MILLER**



*The PROVENCE at Pier 45, at West 10th Street, in Greenwich Village.*

We do not know if they served hot dogs or had a picnic on deck, but when the French liner PROVENCE arrived in New York for the first time, it was more than a special occasion. It was the Fourth of July in 1963. That morning, the white-hulled, flag-dressed liner was greeted by a spraying fireboat and a trio of Moran tugs, which later nudged the 580-foot long ship into Pier 42 at the foot of Morton Street in Lower Manhattan. Chartered to New York-based Caribbean Cruise Lines, the 13,600-ton ship would spend a summer making cruises to Bermuda and Nassau.

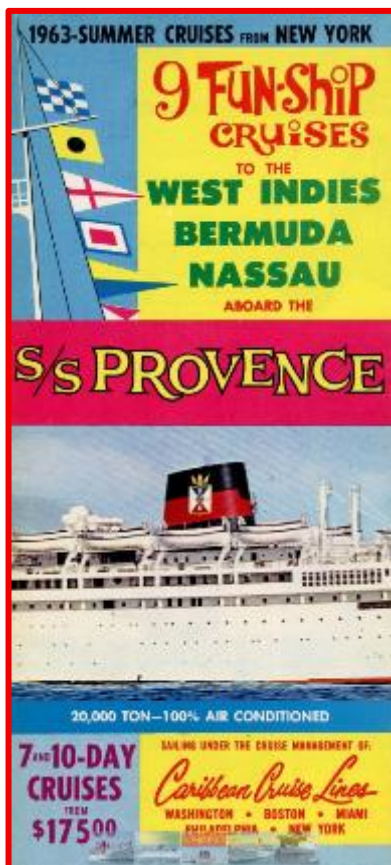
Overall, the PROVENCE had an interesting, quite varied life. For example, when Swiss-Italian based MSC Cruises' ACHILLE LAURO burned and then sank off East Africa early in December 1994, it was a great loss – and left a big gap in the Company's schedules. Among other problems, the 23,600-ton ACHILLE LAURO was bound for a long and profitable charter in South Africa. Fortunately, MSC (but operating as StarLauro Cruises) had just bought Costa Cruises ENRICO COSTA, the former PROVENCE. But the ship was still at Genoa, awaiting an extensive refit before becoming the SYMPHONY and then making her debut in Mediterranean cruising from Genoa. Suddenly, it was needed in South African waters, at Durban, to assume that charter intended for the ill-fated ACHILLE LAURO.

"I was at home in Sorrento [near Naples] and sick in bed with flu when I saw the ACHILLE LAURO burn and sink on Italian television," remembered Captain Giuseppe Cocurullo. "I was still quite sick when, two or three days later, MSC's Naples office called to say that I must join the ENRICO COSTA/SYMPHONY at Genoa. It did not have her refit but must leave Genoa in three days for Durban."

The SYMPHONY was 44 years old at the time. The 18-knot ship had been built just after World War II, in 1950, for French owners, Marseilles-based Transports Maritimes, but at a British shipyard, Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson at Newcastle. Then called PROVENCE, it sailed the Marseilles-East Coast of South America run, carrying 1,284 passengers in four classes. But by 1963, with that South Atlantic service in decline, it did those charter cruises from New York. The seven-night trips had minimum fares of \$195; an upper-deck suite sold for \$500.



*As built, the PROVENCE carried over 1,300 passengers in four classes and had 6 cargo holds.*



The PROVENCE was sold to Costa in 1965, becoming the ENRICO C and then, in 1983, changed to ENRICO COSTA. Early on, she served on the Italy-South America run, but later ran only cruises: the Mediterranean, Northern Europe and, in winter, South America. In 1979, during a long refit, it was made over for 742 all-one class cruise passengers. It was extensively refitted and converted from steam turbine to diesel propulsion in 1989-90. Starlauro Cruises bought it in September 1994, but within a year it was incorporated into MSC Cruises.

“Unfortunately, we had a big task in front of us,” added Captain Cocurullo, remembering his first visit to the ship at Genoa in December 1994. “The ship was in very poor condition. The Italian authorities did not even want to renew her operating certificate because of the deterioration. But we left Genoa in three days. One hundred crew were onboard. We reached Durban on Christmas Eve. During the 15-day voyage to South Africa, we cleaned and painted day and night. But there was leakage everywhere. We had to work in the lounge with umbrellas! Two hundred more crew met us at Durban. They were South Africans and Madagascans. For most of them, it was their first time at sea. Fortunately, our first cruise with passengers was a success. Travelers had been suspicious following the ACHILLE LAURO fire, but soon they found the SYMPHONY to be a wonderful if older ship. Word spread. Soon, we were

*Above: Promoting 1963 cruises on the chartered PROVENCE.*

fully booked. Later, the ship was based year-round in South African waters and vacationers found MSC cruises from Durban to be a great experience, a wonderful adventure!”

The SYMPHONY changed hands again, transferring in 2000 to Greek-based Golden Sun Cruises and becoming their AEGEAN SPIRIT. We did a trip on her, then a fifty-year-old veteran, that summer and cruised from Piraeus to the Greek islands. The food and service were good, we had a good-sized, forward-facing cabin and the entertainment pleasant. The only negative was the open decks, which were in very poor condition. The teak decking at the stern and surrounding the pool were the worst of them and seemed not to have been looked after for a long, long time.



*In later days as Costa's ENRICO COSTA.*



*The end of the line; being scrapped in India.*

In 2001, the ship was given another name, becoming the OCEAN GLORY I for Panama-registered Festive Holidays. But operations were troubled, monies were short and, by July, the ship was detained at Dover by British authorities. A month later, newspaper headlines detailed unpleasant conditions for the ship's 250 caretaker crewmembers – there was no food, onboard conditions were poor and no one had been paid in weeks. Soon, the ship was auctioned off for debts and took on her eighth if temporary name: CLASSICA. Indian scrap merchants paid \$1.7 million for the ship and had it towed out to the beaches of Alang for demolition.

*(Photos and Image: Bill Miller Collection)*

**SHIP NEWS**  
**COMPILED BY PAT DACEY**  
**HISTORIC FIRSTS FOR THE NEW YEAR**

**QUEEN MARY 2 HISTORIC PASSAGE**

In January, as part of her 108-night journey around the world, QUEEN MARY 2 began her historic passage through the Panama Canal's NeoPanamax Agua Clara Locks on Saturday, January 24. Following an overnight stay at the Cocoli Mooring Station, the ship continued her transit of the NeoPanamax Cocoli Locks before passing under the 1962 built Bridge of Americas on Sunday, January 25.

"As the world's only ocean liner, QUEEN MARY 2's maiden transit through the Panama Canal marks another extraordinary milestone for Cunard," says President, Katie McAlister. "Our world-famous voyages truly deliver enriching, meaningful and unique experiences for our guests, and the transit through the Panama Canal forms an iconic element of this magnificent Queen's 108-night World Voyage, where guests will also visit memorable destinations like Los Angeles, Sydney, Cape Town, Hong Kong and Singapore, before returning to Southampton."

Following the transit, QUEEN MARY 2 celebrated a reunion with QUEEN MARY (1936) on February 2, in Long Beach marking the first time in 20 years since the two ships were together.

Cunard had previously made history with the Panama Canal when in 2014, former Cunard Commodore Ronald Warwick was awarded the title of Panama Canal Honorary Pilot after traversing the canal over 50 times. The award, only given to a few individuals in the history of the canal, is granted by the Panama Canal Authority.





*(Above two photos: QM2 Passing through the Agua Clara Locks with the 2019 Atlantic Bridge in the background. (Photos: Cunard)*

## **PANAMA CANAL MILESTONE**

The Panama Canal and Disney Cruise Lines made history on February 2 with the inaugural transit of DISNEY ADVENTURE, the largest and highest capacity NeoPanamax cruise ship to ever transit the interoceanic waterway.

The passage of this massive cruise ship, measuring 208,000 gross tons and with capacity for approximately 6,700 passengers, took place as part of her positioning voyage. The vessel is owned by Disney and is the eighth ship in the Disney Cruise Line fleet and the first and only vessel of the Global Class.

The vessel was originally ordered on May 11, 2016, by Genting Hong Kong for its Dream Cruises brand. Construction began with the keel laying on September 11, 2018, at the Rostock Shipyard of MV Werften, a Genting subsidiary. Progress was slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to the financial collapse of MV Werften and Genting. Disney purchased the vessel in 2022, estimated to be 60–80 percent complete.

She is planned to operate year-round from Singapore until at least early 2031, marking Disney Cruise Line's first ship to be based outside the United States. The itineraries will feature a new concept for the company in which the ship itself is "both the journey and the destination," offering 3-night and 4-night voyages entirely at sea with no port calls.

The vessel accommodates approximately 6,700 passengers which is supported by a crew of 2,500 and features 2,111 staterooms.



*DISNEY ADVENTURE transiting the Panama Canal. (Photo: NewsRoom Panama)*

For fiscal year 2026, more than 40 NeoPanamax cruise ship transits are expected to transit the canal.

Previously, the record for the largest passenger vessel to transit the canal was held by Norwegian Bliss, with a capacity of 5,000 passengers and 168,000 gross tons. The transit of Disney Adventure surpasses that benchmark by 24%, or approximately 40,000 gross tons.

## **SEABOURN VENTURE REACHES 70° SOUTH, SETS RECORD**

Seabourn announced after crossing the Antarctic Circle, their expedition ship SEABOURN VENTURE reached 70°00.045'S during its 12-day Antarctica exploration voyage from January 28 to February 9, 2026, setting a Seabourn and Carnival Corporation record for reaching the most southerly point on the Antarctic Peninsula.

The voyage completed Seabourn's first-ever exploration of George VI Sound, venturing well beyond the peninsula's more familiar routes. George VI Sound is a major Antarctic feature spanning 300 miles and is mainly covered by a permanent ice shelf, separating Alexander Island from Palmer Land.

Additionally, guests landed directly onto Antarctic sea ice at approximately 69.5° S for a champagne toast at the most southerly point any Seabourn guest has ever stood.

The expedition also brought guests ashore at historic Base E on Stonington Island, a rarely visited former British research station offering a link to mid-20th-century Antarctic exploration. Base E was established in 1946 and rebuilt in 1960 as a two-story building. The station is located at 68.11° S, making it one of the most southerly historic sites on the Antarctic Peninsula. Important scientific research took place at Stonington, including geology, meteorology and biology.



*SEABOURN VENTURE breaking ice at 70°00.045'S (Photo: SEABOURN)*

“Congratulations to Captain Simon Bishop and his team and Expedition Leader Luqui Bernacchi,” Seabourn said on social media. “This is a journey defined by exploration, milestones and once-in-a-lifetime moments.”

*(Sources: Disney Cruise Line Blog, Maritime News, Cruise Industry News, Cunard, Seabourn, NewsRoom Panama and Wikipedia)*

Members may submit the following for consideration for publication in The Porthole: member photos with descriptions and dates taken, ship news, and maritime 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, if printed, are not necessarily the opinion of the WSS-PONY Branch.

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