

# Sinking the *United States*

THE BATTLE TO SAVE THE WORLD'S FASTEST  
OCEAN LINER AND AMERICA'S FLAGSHIP

PRESENTED TO

**SMA** | SOCIETY OF  
MARITIME  
ARBITRATORS

*April 9, 2025*

PRESENTED BY

**Charles Anderson**



# Topics

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- Early History
- Service Years (1952-1969)
- Post-Service Owners
- Then & Now Images
- Post-Service Years/Proposals
- Litigation (2022-2024)
- Sale (2024)
- The Horizon



# Early History: Concept and Design

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## Legendary Naval Architect William Francis Gibbs

- Law degree from Columbia
- No formal training in naval architecture
- Obsessions: speed and fire prevention — and secrecy during construction of the *SS United States*

# Early History: Concept and Design

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Legendary Naval Architect William Francis Gibbs



Liberty Ships



SS America

# Early History: Role of US Navy

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## US Navy Interest and Funding

- Gibbs & Cox designed 74% of all US Navy ships and 63% of all US cargo ships during WWII
- Need for high-speed passenger liner that could serve national defense with two engine rooms
- Convertible for carrying 14,000 troops, 172-bed hospital, armaments
- Battle over subsidies

# Early History: Designed for Speed

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## Hull

Innovative narrow design

- LOA: 990 feet
- Beam: 101.5 feet



## Weight

Superstructure primarily aluminum

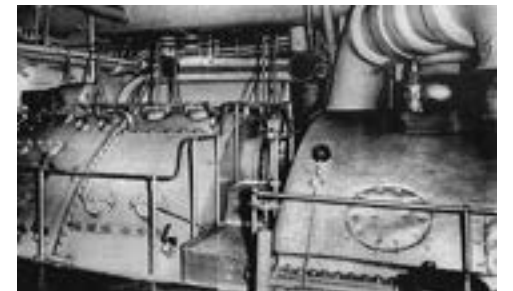
- Less weight
- Lower center of gravity



## Propellers

Two 4-bladed outboard, two 5-bladed inboard

- 18-foot diameter, efficient reverse operation
- Manganese bronze to reduce cavitation



## Power Plant

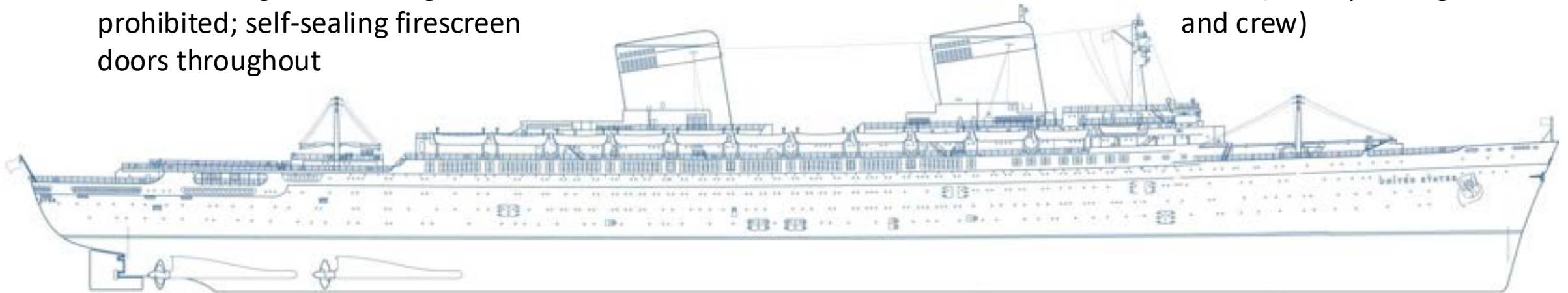
8 boilers, 4 double-reduction geared steam turbines

- 1,100 degrees steam at 1,145 lbs. per square inch
- Total 240,000 SHP

# Early History: Designed for Safety

**Fire Safety:** Exceeded Navy safety standards; vigorous testing; wood prohibited; self-sealing firescreen doors throughout

**Lifeboats** and rafts for 4,060 (3,010 passengers and crew)



**Rudder:** 70 degrees hard over to hard over in 30 seconds

**Two independent engine and boiler rooms**

**19 bulkheads, 20 watertight compartments;** bulkheads rose to upper decks with no conduits or piping passing through; redundant remote controls for watertight doors

**Hull:** Double-thick Navy standards; US Coast Guard deemed safe for 1,800+ mile tow in open Atlantic in Feb 2025

# Early History: Other Innovations

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- First commercial use of tempered glass
- First commercial microwaves
- Largest use of aluminum in construction, land or sea
- First theater lighting dimmers
- First liner with air conditioning throughout





# Early History: Construction

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- Largest ocean liner ever constructed entirely in the US
- 3,100 workers in Newport News VA drydock
- Utilized products, materials, components from virtually every state



# Early History: Christening and Launch

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June 23, 1951, Newport News VA



# Early History: Trials

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*SS United States* on sea trials sailing at 20 knots astern.



- Dock Trials: February 1952
- Builder Trials: May 1952
- Sea Trials: June 1952
- Delivery to NY: June 20, 1952

# Early History: Maiden Voyage Eastbound



SS United States arrives in Southampton on July 8, 1952 after shattering the Atlantic speed record on her maiden voyage (3 days, 10 hours, 40 minutes)

**MAIDEN VOYAGE  
QUADRUPLE SCREW TURBINE STEAMER  
UNITED STATES**  
Commodore Harry Manning  
Captain, U. S. N. R.

**Abstract of Log**  
From NEW YORK to SOUTHAMPTON, via LE HAVRE

Voyage 1, Eastbound

DATE	LAT. N.	LONG. W.	HAULT. MILES	SPEED	WIND	REMARKS
July 3						
" 4	41-12	55-43	696	34.11		Departure Ambrose L. V., 2:56 p.m., EDT
" 5	45-03	41-42	801	35.69	SW-4	Slight Sea
" 6	48-04	22-41	814	36.17	SW-4	Moderate Sea
" 7	49-49	01-14	823	36.21	Var-5	Moderate Sea
" 7			47		Var-5	Bishop Rock abeam 6:16 a.m., BST Arrived Havre L. V., 1:24 p.m., BST

Passage Ambrose L. V. to Bishop Rock:  
3 Days, 19 Hours, 40 Minutes — Average Speed: 25.59 Knots

Total Distance, NEW YORK to LE HAVRE: 3,191 Miles  
Steaming Time: 3 Days, 17 Hours, 48 Minutes — Average Speed: 25.53 Knots

NOTE: A Nautical Mile is approximately 1.15 per cent longer than a Statute or Land Mile

**These passages are world records. It is the first time in a century that an American ship has captured the Blue Ribbon of the North Atlantic. The United States Lines is right-fully proud of the achievement. We believe you are too.**

Left Havre L. V., 12:46 p.m., BST, July 8, 1952      Arrived Nab Tower, 3:37 p.m.  
Distance, Le Havre to Nab Tower: 75 miles  
Steaming Time: 2 Hours, 51 Minutes — Average Speed: 26.31 Knots

◀ “Abstract of Log” card given to passengers to commemorate the maiden voyage that captured the Blue Riband

# Early History: Maiden Voyage Westbound



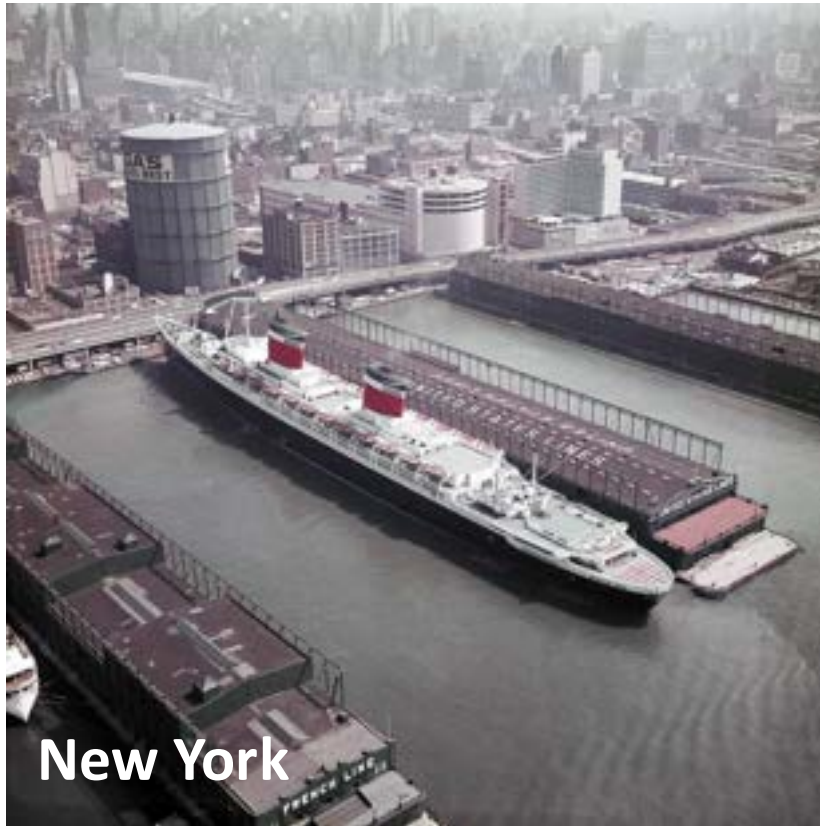
*SS United States* on her triumphant return to New York after breaking both eastbound and westbound speed records



Hales Trophy

# Service Years: Ports of Call

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# Service Years: *SS United States* Masters

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**Harry Manning**  
(1952-1953)

Maiden voyage

- Heralded for earlier rescues at sea
- Skilled navigator selected by Amelia Earhart



**John Anderson**  
(1953-1964)

Longest serving master

- Recognized for excellent seamanship, insistence on discipline, and good service to passengers
- Docked *SS United States* multiple times in NYC without the aid of tugboats



**Leroy Alexanderson**  
(1964-1969)

Previously XO of the *SS United States*

- Became Commodore of the entire US Lines 52-ship fleet
- Served as Captain until the ship's layup in 1969

# Service Years: Maritime Stories

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# Service Years: Maritime Stories

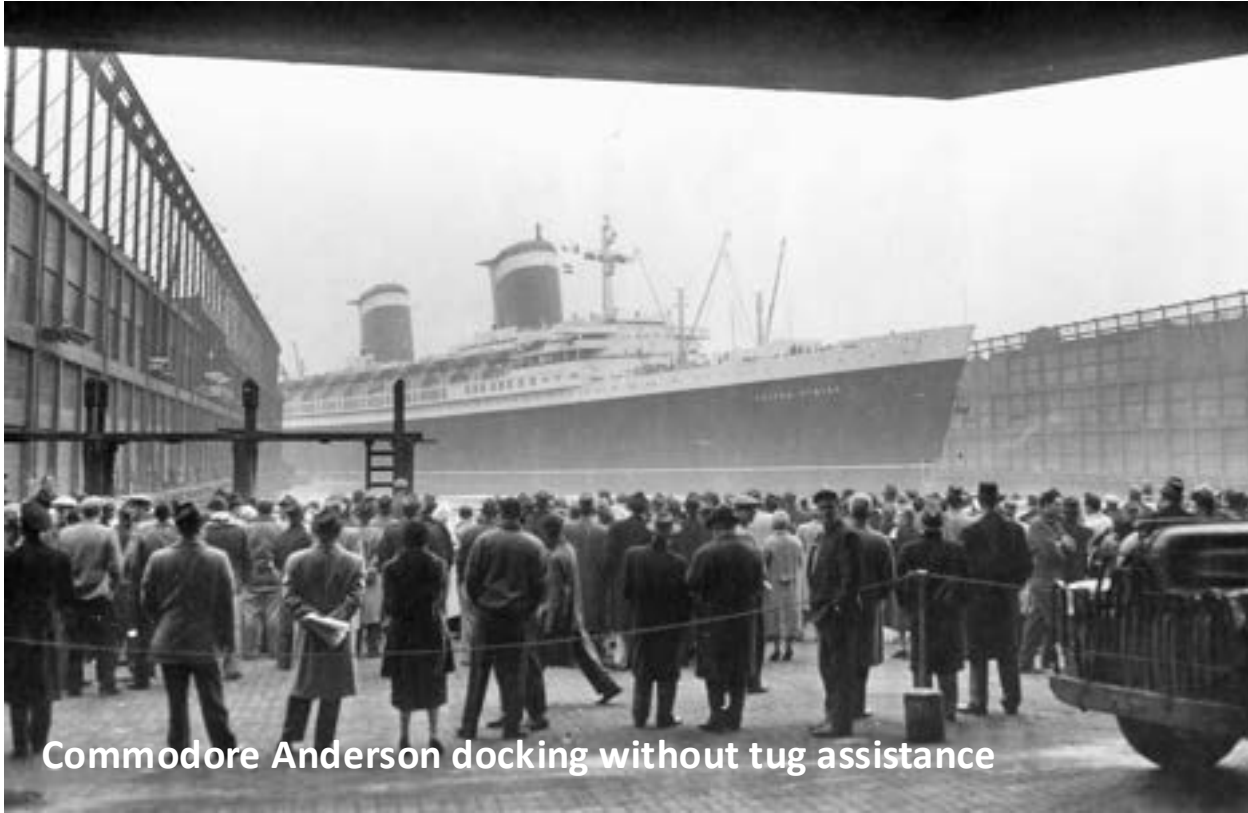
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The Duke and  
Duchess of  
Windsor in the  
Navajo Lounge



# Service Years: Maritime Stories

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# Post-Service: Circumstances of Withdrawal

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- Dramatic rise in jet air travel
- Fuel costs
- Labor costs and disputes
- Halt of US Navy annual subsidy
- **1969: Withdrawal of SS *United States* from service and lay-up in Newport News and Norfolk VA until 1992**

# Post-Service: Subsequent Owners

- US Maritime Administration
- Richard Hadley (drydock inspection and auction)



  
**NORFOLK INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL  
 NORFOLK, VIRGINIA  
 OCTOBER 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14**

**BENEFIT PREVIEWS**  
 (TO BENEFIT THE UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY MUSEUM)  
 LOS ANGELES: SEPTEMBER 14 • CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL  
 HOUSTON: SEPTEMBER 21 • GUEST QUARTERS GALLERIA WEST  
 NEW YORK: SEPTEMBER 28 • SEVENTH REGIMENT ARMORY  
**PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS**  
 LOS ANGELES: SEPTEMBER 15, 16 • CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL  
 HOUSTON: SEPTEMBER 22, 23 • GUEST QUARTERS GALLERIA WEST  
 NEW YORK: SEPTEMBER 29, 30 • SEVENTH REGIMENT ARMORY  
**PUBLIC AUCTION**  
 OCTOBER 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14  
 NORFOLK INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL  
 NORFOLK, VIRGINIA  
**GUERNSEY'S AUCTION**  
 TUXEDO PARK, NEW YORK 10987 • 212-794-2280  
 CATALOGUE: \$125, \$5.00 by mail.

  
**FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS**

Stateroom dressers, desks, vanities and end tables, in high gloss enameled aluminum with polished aluminum pulls. All exhibit superior workmanship and are typically the Art Moderne style consistent with the rest of the ship. Due to the range of sizes, colorations, pulls and number of drawers, the estimates have a broad range from a low of \$100 per unit to a high of \$1000 per unit.

Rectangular low table	\$100-200
Circular low table, various sizes	100-300
Flip top game table	150-250
Eched glass window, dining room	125-175
Deck chair	300-350
Tubular aluminum bunk bed	200-250
Fabric upholstered dining room armchair	\$200-250
Fabric upholstered dining room side chair	150-200
Fabric upholstered lounge armchair	200-250

# Post-Service: Subsequent Owners

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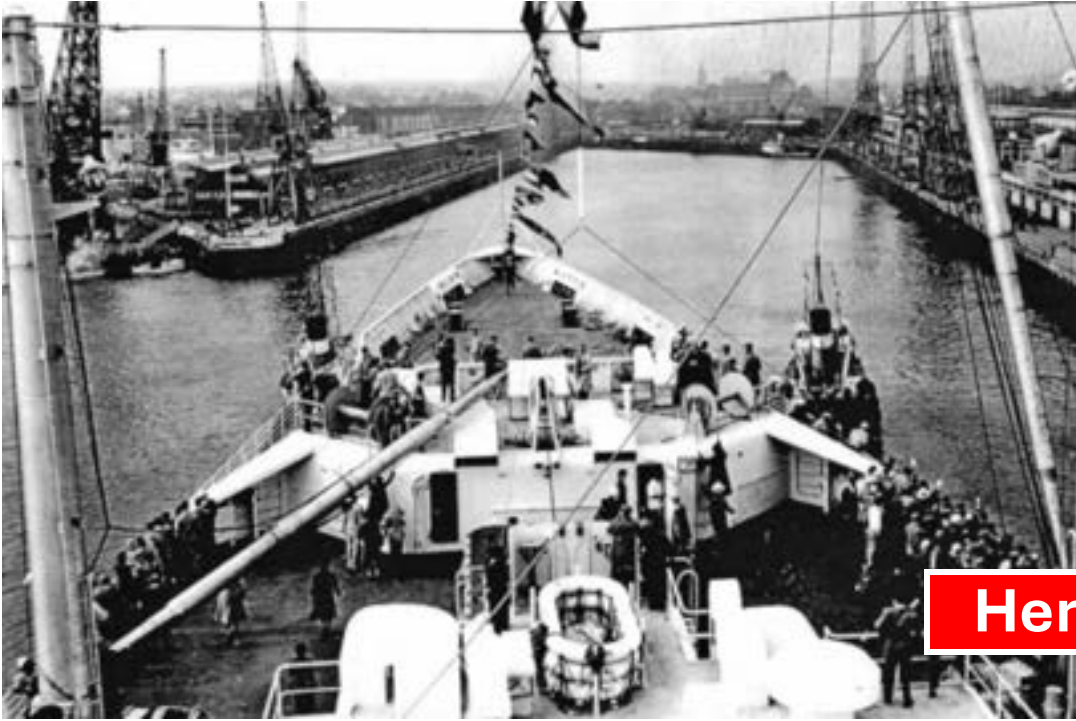
- **US Marshals:** Seized SSUS from Hadley
- **Marmara Marine:** Purchased SSUS, towed to Turkey and Ukraine for asbestos removal and other remediation
- **US Marshals:** Re-seized when Marmara failed; ship towed to Philadelphia in 1996
- **Edward Cantor:** Purchased in 1997
- **Norwegian Cruise Lines:** Purchased from Cantor's estate in 2003



Marmara Marine towing SS *United States* to Turkey

# Then and Now Snapshots

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Her Bow



# Then and Now Snapshots



Her Bridge



# Then and Now Snapshots

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**First-Class Ballroom**





# Then and Now Snapshots

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Sports on Promenade Deck



# Then and Now Snapshots

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"The Currents" mural  
now displayed in the  
Smithsonian

**First-Class Observation Lounge**



# Then and Now Snapshots

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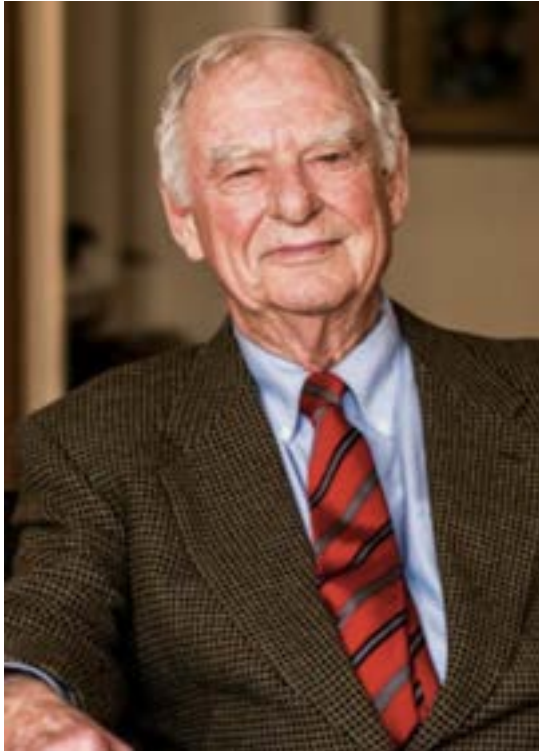
**Her Iconic Funnels**



Funnels will be removed before reefing and refurbished for the museum site

# Post-Service: Gerry Lenfest

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- Norwegian Cruise Line's efforts to sell the ship were unsuccessful, and they began accepting bids from scrappers
- July 2010: Conservancy receives a leadership grant from Philadelphia philanthropist **H.F. "Gerry" Lenfest** enabling the ship's purchase as well as upkeep for 20 months
- The first time in the vessel's history that a group concerned primarily with the vessel's historical significance and preservation owned her

# Post-Service: SSUS Conservancy

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- 2009: Non-profit formed
- 2010/2011: Lenfest grant, Conservancy ownership
- 2012: “Save Our Ship” Campaign
- Secured ship’s listing in the National Register of Historic Places
- Helped secure passage of the *SS United States* Preservation Act of 1992
- 2011-2024: Every monthly pier rental payment made on time and in full while assessing potential developers and various proposals

# Post-Service: Crystal Cruises Interest

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# Post-Service: RXR/MCR Proposal

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- Permanently moored, 600,000 sq ft hospitality and cultural space
- 1,000-room hotel, luxury restaurant, museum, retail, event venue and public park
- Location near Javits Convention Center and connecting to Manhattan's High Line
- Creation of 5,700 jobs, revitalization of Manhattan's West Side



# Litigation: Penn Warehousing Claims

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- Pier operator PW doubled monthly rental charge and sought eviction
- Bench trial before Judge Anita Brody of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
- Court dismissed rent claim but ordered removal of ship in 90 days
- RXR abandoned redevelopment plans because NY state and city refused to grant approvals for dock space



# Litigation: Practical Outcome

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- Court-ordered timeline required Conservancy to secure an alternative pier within 90 days
- Pier search involved the US Navy Inactive Ships Division, public officials, and ports in every major US city
- No piers met the three requirements of accessibility, suitability, and availability
- Conservancy was faced with scrapping or reefing

# Sale: Okaloosa County FL Purchase

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Photo Credit: Elizabeth Robertson/Staff Photographer/*Philadelphia Inquirer*

- Planning the world's largest artificial reef, Okaloosa County FL purchased the ship for \$1 million in October 2024
- An additional \$1 million set aside from the \$10.1M budget will go toward a land-based museum in partnership with the Conservancy
- Remediation of the SSUS for reefing is underway in Mobile AL, and expected to take 10-12 months

# Sale: Okaloosa County Plans

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- The County is experienced in remediation and reefing of hundreds of vessels
- Her funnels will be removed for the museum, allowing her to be reefed in shallower waters for pleasure divers
- No explosives will be used in reefing



# Horizon: Towing SS *United States*

On February 19, the SSUS was guided by tugs from Pier 80 in Philadelphia and down the Delaware River beneath three temporarily closed bridges on her way to Mobile AL.



◀ Less than eight feet of clearance under the Walt Whitman Bridge

# Horizon: Towing SS *United States*

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Thousands gathered along the Atlantic shores over the next week to witness her historic voyage and capture images of her unique profile as she passed by.



# Horizon: Towing SS *United States*

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Off the shore of Pompano Beach FL, the Captain of Royal Caribbean's *Utopia of the Seas* diverted course to approach the SSUS, telling the passengers over the PA about the history they were witnessing — and blasting his whistle three times in honor of the SS *United States*.



Image captured by the Captain of the *Utopia of the Seas* himself

# The Horizon: The Legacy Preserved

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An immersive experience, the planned **SS United States Museum** will feature multimedia displays, interactive exhibits and hundreds of artifacts from the ship never seen before by the public. It will honor America's Flagship and inspire generations to come.

# The Horizon: The Legacy Preserved

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Today the **SS United States Conservancy** remains steadfastly committed to honoring and preserving the legacy of the *SS United States*.

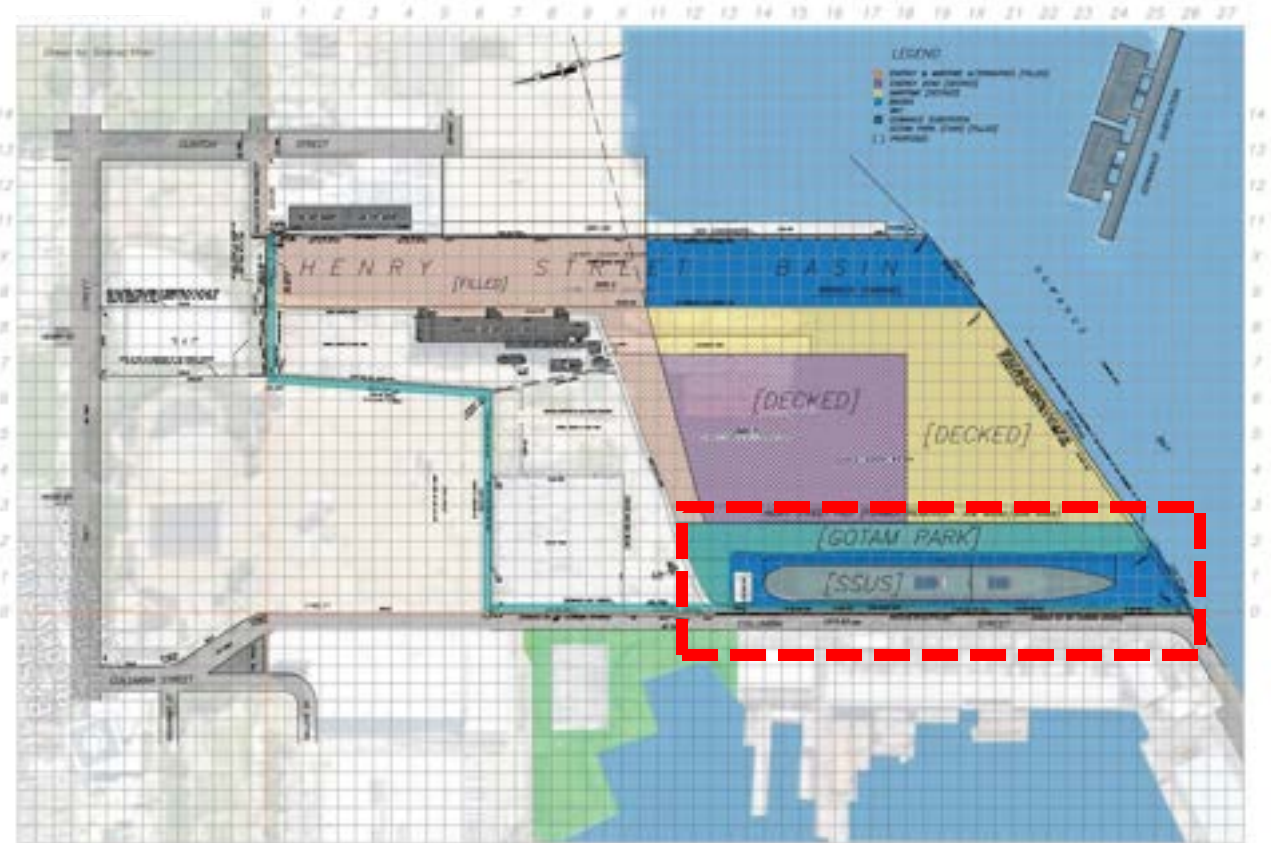




# The Horizon: But... Is the Battle Over?

“The New York Coalition to Save the SS United States” (not affiliated with the Conservancy) has launched a last-minute campaign to prevent the reefing and return the ship to New York as a “tourist attraction, cultural facility or industrial/residential complex.”

▶  
Gowanus Terminal in Red Hook



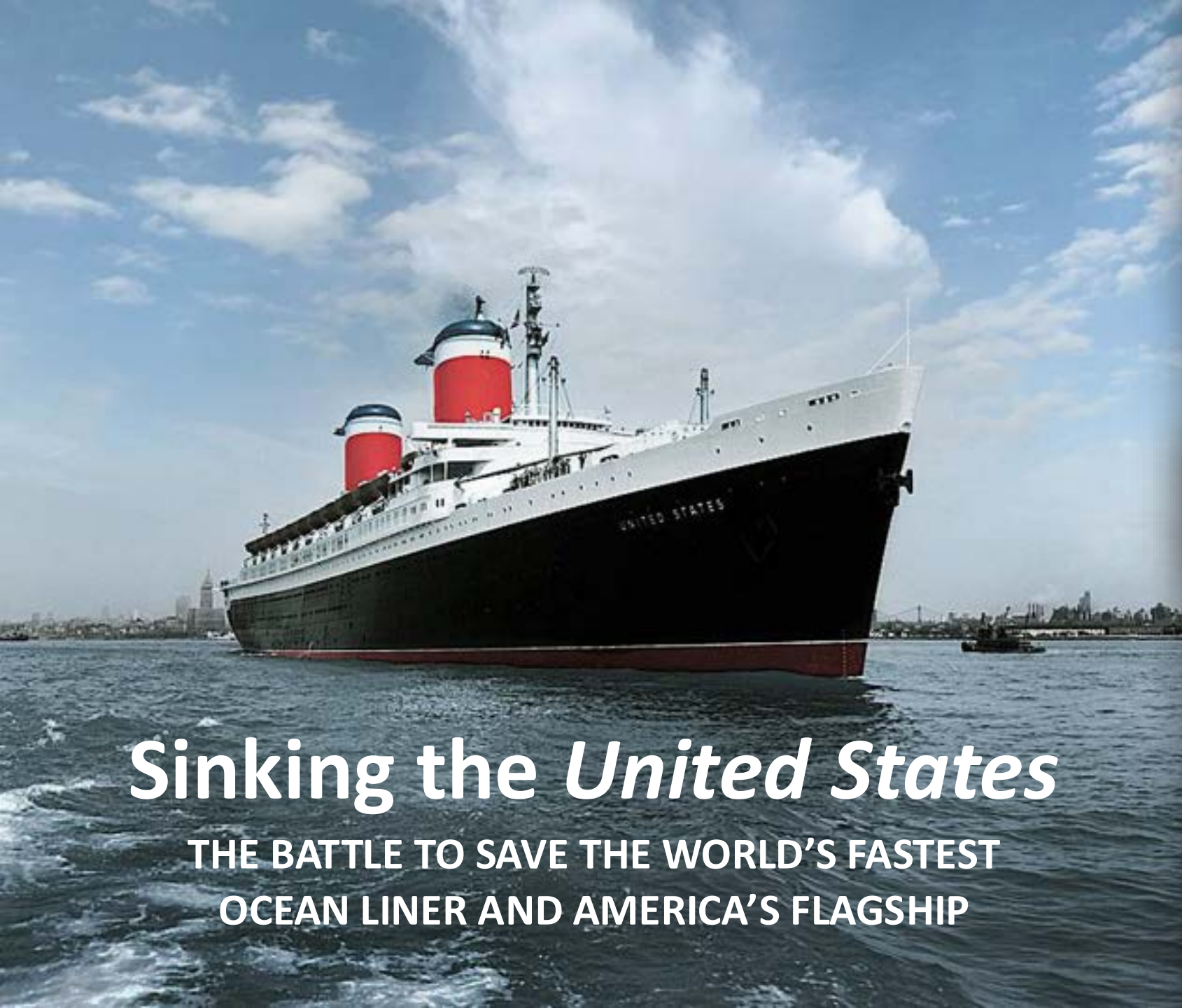
# The Horizon: But... Is the Battle Over?

The Coalition...

- Sent an open letter to President Trump asking him to issue an Executive Order for US Government to take ownership
- Filed suit in US District Court for Northern Florida for injunctive relief pending Executive Branch action



Images from *The Coalition to Save the SS United States*



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