

The *SS United States* built in 1903,.

SS United States is a luxury [passenger liner](#) built in 1952 for the [United States Lines](#) designed to capture the trans-Atlantic speed record.



SS United States is a luxury passenger liner

Built at a cost of \$78 million,^[9] the **ship is the largest ocean liner constructed entirely in the US, the fastest ocean liner to cross the Atlantic in either direction**, and even in her retirement retains the [Blue Riband](#) given to the [passenger liner](#) crossing the [Atlantic Ocean](#) in regular service with the record highest speed.

Her construction was partially subsidized by the US government, since she was designed to allow conversion to a troop carrier should the need arise.^[9] *United States* operated uninterrupted in transatlantic passenger service until 1969. Since 1996 she has been docked at Pier 82 on the Delaware River in Philadelphia.

Construction

Inspired by the exemplary service of the British liners [RMS Queen Mary](#) and [Queen Elizabeth](#), which transported hundreds of thousands of US troops to Europe during the [Second World War](#), the US Government sponsored construction of a large and fast vessel that would be capable of transporting large numbers of soldiers. Designed by renowned American naval architect and marine engineer [William Francis Gibbs](#), the liner's construction was a joint effort between the [United States Navy](#) and [United States Lines](#). The US government underwrote \$50 million of the \$78 million construction cost, with the ship's operators—United States Lines—contributing the remaining \$28 million. In exchange, the ship was designed to be easily converted in times of war to a [troopship](#) with a capacity of 15,000 troops, or a [hospital ship](#).^[10]

The vessel was constructed from 1950–1952 at the [Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company](#) in [Newport News, Virginia](#). The keel was laid and the hull was constructed in a [graving dock](#). *United States* was built to exacting Navy specifications, which required that the

ship be [heavily compartmentalized](#) and have separate engine rooms to optimize war-time survival.^[11] A large part of the construction of the *United States* was with pre-fabricated sections. For example the ship's hull comprised 183,000 separately fabricated sections.^[12]

To minimize the risk of fire, the designers of *United States* used no wood in the ship's framing, accessories, decorations or interior surfaces. Fittings, including all furniture and fabrics, were custom made in glass, metal and spun glass fiber to ensure compliance with fireproofing guidelines set by the US Navy. Specially commissioned artwork included pieces by fourteen artists, including [Gwen Lux](#). Though the [galley](#) did feature a butcher block, the clothes hangers in the luxury cabins were aluminum. The ballroom's [grand piano](#) was of a rare, fire-resistant wood species—though originally specified in aluminum—and accepted only after a demonstration in which gasoline was poured upon the wood and ignited, without the wood itself igniting.^[13]

The construction of the ship's superstructure involved the largest use of [aluminum](#) in any construction project to that time, and presented a [challenge to the builders in joining](#) the aluminum structure to the steel decks below. The significant use of aluminum provided extreme weight savings. At 105 ft (32 m) abeam, *United States* was built to [Panamax](#) capacity, ensuring that the ship could clear the [Panama Canal](#) locks with 2 ft (0.6 m) clearance on either side.^[14]

United States had the most powerful [steam turbine](#) in a merchant marine vessel. The ship was capable of steaming astern at over 20 [kn](#) (23 mph; 37 km/h), and could carry enough fuel and stores to steam non-stop for over 10,000 [nmi](#) (12,000 mi; 19,000 km).^[15]

Captains of *United States* included Harry Manning, Roy Edward Fiddler, [John Anderson](#) and [Leroy J. Alexanderson](#).

Speed records



[SS America](#) (Foreground) and *United States* (Background) in New York.

On her [maiden voyage](#) on 4 July 1952, *United States* broke the transatlantic speed record held by *Queen Mary* for the previous 14 years by over 10 hours, making the maiden crossing from the [Ambrose lightship](#) at [New York Harbor](#) to [Bishop Rock](#) off [Cornwall](#), [UK](#) in three days, 10 hours, 40 minutes at an average speed of 35.59 kn (40.96 mph; 65.91 km/h) The liner also broke the westbound crossing record by returning to America in three days 12 hours and 12 minutes at an average speed of 34.51 kn (39.71 mph; 63.91 km/h), thereby obtaining both the eastbound and westbound speed records and the [Blue Riband](#)—the first time a US flagged ship had held the speed record since the [SS Baltic](#) claimed the prize 100 years earlier.

United States maintained a 30 kn (35 mph; 56 km/h) crossing speed on the North Atlantic in a service career that lasted 17 years.

United States lost the eastbound speed record in 1990; however, she continues to hold the Blue Riband as all subsequent record breakers were neither in passenger service nor were their voyages westbound.^[16]

The maximum speed of *United States* was deliberately exaggerated, and kept obscure for many years. An impossible value of 43 kn (49 mph; 80 km/h) was leaked to reporters by engineers after the first speed trial.^[17] Her actual top speed—38.3 kn (44.1 mph; 70.9 km/h)—was not revealed until 1977. A [*Philadelphia Inquirer*](#) article reported the top speed achieved as 36 kn (41 mph; 67 km/h)^[18] while another source reports that the highest possible sustained top speed was 35 kn (40 mph; 65 km/h).^[19]

Post-service



SS *United States* at sea, circa 1950s

By the late 1960s, the market for Transatlantic travel by ship had dwindled. The *Queen Mary* had been retired in 1967 and the *Queen Elizabeth* in 1968. The *United States* was no longer profitable. While *United States* was at Newport News for annual overhaul in 1969, the shipping line decided to withdraw the ship from service, docking the ship there. After a few years, the ship was relocated to [Norfolk, Virginia](#). Subsequently, ownership passed

between several companies. In 1978, the vessel was sold to private interests who hoped to revitalize the liner in a [time share cruise ship](#) format. Financing failed and the ship was placed up for auction by [MARAD](#). In 1979, [Norwegian Cruise Line](#) (NCL) was reportedly interested in purchasing the ship and converting it into a cruise ship for the Caribbean, but decided on purchasing the former [SS France](#) instead. During the 1980s, *United States* was considered by the US Navy as a troop ship or a hospital ship, to be called the **USS *United States***, but this plan never materialized.

In 1984, the ship's remaining fittings and furniture were sold at auction in Norfolk. Some of the furniture was installed in Windmill Point, a restaurant in [Nags Head, North Carolina](#). Following the closure of the restaurant in 2007, the items were donated to the [Mariner's Museum](#) and to [Christopher Newport University](#), both in [Newport News, Virginia](#).^[20] One of the ship's propellers is mounted at the entrance to the [Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum](#) in [New York City](#). Another propeller is mounted on a platform near the waterfront at [SUNY Maritime College](#) at [Fort Schuyler](#), NY. Across the Long Island Sound from [SUNY Maritime College](#), a third propeller is mounted at the [United States Merchant Marine Academy](#) and is used as a teaching aid for merchant mariners. A fourth propeller is mounted at the entrance of the Newport News Mariner's Museum. In 1992, a new consortium of owners purchased the vessel and had the vessel towed to Turkey and then Ukraine, where she underwent asbestos removal in 1994. The interior of the ship was almost completely stripped during this time. No viable agreements were reached in the US for a reworking of the vessel, and in 1996 *United States* was towed to her current location at Pier 84 in South [Philadelphia](#). The ship is easily visible from shore and [Interstate 95](#), directly across Columbus Boulevard from the Philadelphia [IKEA](#) store.

While *United States* lost the eastbound transatlantic speed record in 1990 to [Hoverspeed Great Britain](#), an [Incat](#)-built [Norwegian](#)-owned wave-piercing [catamaran](#) ferry, she still holds the [Blue Riband](#) for the westbound transatlantic speed record.^[9]

In 1999, the SS United States Foundation and the SS United States Conservancy (then known as the SS United States Preservation Society, Inc.) succeeded in having the ship placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Models of the *United States* have made appearances in two major films, [2012](#) and [The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep](#). The *United States* herself appears in the 1962 Disney film "Bon Voyage". Also the films, [Munster, Go Home!](#) 1966, [Baby Mama](#) 2008, and in the 1955 film *Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*. A birds eye view of *United States* is shown during the opening

scene of the movie, [West Side Story](#). In April 2012 it was announced that the upcoming [Niels Arden Oplev](#) film *Dead Man Down* starring [Colin Farrell](#) will feature scenes shot on board the SS *United States*.^[21]

In 2003, [Norwegian Cruise Line](#) (NCL) purchased the ship from the estate of Edward Cantor when the ship was put up for auction after his death, with the stated intent of fully restoring the ship to a service role in their newly-announced American-flagged Hawaiian passenger service called [NCL America](#).^[22] The SS *United States* is one of only a handful of ships eligible to enter such service because of the [Passenger Service Act](#), which requires that any vessel engaged in domestic commerce be built and flagged in the US and operated by a predominantly American crew. In August 2004, NCL commenced feasibility studies regarding a new build-out of the vessel, and in May, 2006 [Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay](#), chairman of [Malaysia](#)-based [Star Cruises](#) (which owns NCL), stated that the company's next project is "the restoration of the ... *United States*."^[23] By May 2007, an extensive technical review had been completed, with NCL stating that the ship was in sound condition. The cruise line has over 100 boxes of the ship's blueprints cataloged. While this documentation is not complete, NCL believes it will provide useful information for the planned refit.^[24] However, when NCL America began operation, it used [Pride of America](#), [Pride of Aloha](#), and [Pride of Hawaii](#), rather than *United States*, and later withdrew *Pride of Aloha* and *Pride of Hawaii* from Hawaiian service.

In February 2009, it was reported that Star Cruises, to whom *United States*' ownership was transferred, and NCL were looking for buyers for the liner.^{[25][26]}

A group of the ship's fans keeps in touch via the Internet and meets annually in Philadelphia. The ship receives occasional press coverage, such as a 2007 feature article in *USA Today* and there have been various projects through the years to celebrate the ship, such as lighting it on special occasions.^[27] A television documentary about the ship, titled [SS United States: Lady in Waiting](#), was completed in early February, 2008 and was distributed through Chicago's [WTTW TV](#) and American Public Television with the first airings in May, 2008 on PBS stations throughout the U.S.^[28] *The Big U: The Story of the SS United States*, another documentary about the ship, is currently in development by Rock Creek Productions.^[29]

It was reported in March 2010 that scrapping bids for the ship were being collected. Norwegian Cruise Lines, in a press release, noted that there are large costs associated with keeping *United States* afloat in her current state—around \$800,000 a year—and that, as the SS *United States* Conservancy has not been able to tender an offer for the ship, the company was actively seeking a "suitable buyer."^[30]

Preservation efforts

Ever since 2009, when Norwegian Cruise Line offered the ship for sale, there have been numerous plans to rescue the liner from the scrap yard. The SS *United States* Conservancy—a group trying to save *United States* has been trying to come up with funding to purchase the ship.^[31] On July 30, 2009, [H. F. Lenfest](#), a Philadelphia media entrepreneur and [philanthropist](#), pledged a matching grant of \$300,000 to help the United States Conservancy purchase the vessel

from Star Cruises.^[32] A notable supporter—former U.S. president [Bill Clinton](#)—has also endorsed rescue efforts to save the ship, having sailed on her himself in 1968.^{[33][34]}



An artist's rendering of the planned "multi-purpose waterfront complex".



An artist's rendering of the planned "multi-purpose waterfront complex". By May 7, 2010, over \$50,000 had been raised by The SS United States Conservancy^[35] and on July 1, 2010, the Conservancy struck a deal with [Norwegian Cruise Line](#) to buy SS *United States* from them for a reported \$3 million dollars, despite a scrapper's bid for \$5.9 million. The Conservancy was given until February 2011 to buy the ship and satisfy [Environmental Protection Agency](#) concerns related to toxins on the ship. They now have 20 months of financial support to develop a plan to clean the ship of

toxins and make the ship financially self-supporting, possibly as a hotel or development.^{[6][36]} SS United States Conservancy executive director Dan McSweeney has stated that likely locations for the ship include [Philadelphia](#), [New York](#) and [Miami](#).^{[6][37]}

In November 2010, the Conservancy announced a plan to develop a "multi-purpose waterfront complex" with hotels, restaurants and a casino along the [Delaware River](#) in [South Philadelphia](#) at the proposed location for the stalled [Foxwoods Casino](#) project. A detailed study for the site was revealed in late November 2010, in advance of Pennsylvania's 10 December 2010 deadline for a deal aimed at [Harrah's Entertainment](#) taking over the casino project.^[38] On December 16, 2010, the Gaming Control Board voted to revoke the casino's license.^[39]

The SS United States Conservancy assumed ownership of SS *United States* on February 1, 2011.^{[40][41]} In March talks about possible locations in [Philadelphia](#), [New York](#) and [Miami](#) continued. In New York City, negotiations with a developer are underway for the ship to become part of the Vision 2020,^[42] a waterfront redevelopment plan totaling US\$3.3 billion. In Miami, Ocean Group in Coral Gables was interested in putting the ship in a slip on the north side of [American Airlines Arena](#).^[43] With an additional US\$5.8 million donation from [H. F. Lenfest](#) the conservancy had about 18 months from March 2011 to make the ship a public attraction.^[44]

On August 5, 2011 the SS United States Conservancy announced that after conducting two studies focused on placing the ship in Philadelphia it was "not likely to work there for a variety of reasons." However, discussions to place the ship in her original home port of [New York](#) as a stationary attraction are ongoing.^[45] The Conservancy's grant specifies that the refit and restoration must be done in the [Philadelphia Navy Yard](#) for the benefit of the Philadelphia economy, regardless of her eventual mooring site, the Conservancy continues to negotiate with possible stakeholders in the New York area.

By February 7, 2012 preliminary work has begun on the restoration project to prepare the ship for her eventual rebuild, although a contract has not yet been signed.^[46] In April 2012 a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was released as the start of an aggressive search for a developer for the ship. A Request for Proposals (RFP) is expected to be issued in May.^[47] A developer will be

chosen by the end of 2012 with the intent of putting the ship in a selected city by summer 2013. [\[48\]](#)

In July, 2012 the SS United States Conservancy launched a new online campaign called "Save the United States", a blend of social networking and micro-fundraising, that allows donors to sponsor square inches of a virtual ship for redevelopment, while allowing them to upload photos and story content about their experience with the ship. The Conservancy announced that donors to the virtual ship will be featured in an interactive "Wall of Honor" aboard the future SS United States museum. [\[49\]\[50\]](#)



United States Lines

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The SS *United States*, flagship of the United States Lines in the 1950s

United States Lines was a transatlantic [shipping company](#) that operated cargo services from 1921 to 1989, and [ocean liners](#) until 1969—most famously the [SS *United States*](#)

1920s



SS *Princess Alice*, later **SS Princess Matoika**, c.1915

The company was formed with three ships from the tonnage of the failed [United States Mail Steamship Company](#).^[1] Two of the ships, [America](#) and [George Washington](#), were originally German vessels that had been seized during [World War I](#) and kept as reparations. *America* and *George Washington* made [New York–Bremen](#) runs, while [Centennial State](#) ran from New York to [London](#). One of the founders was [Kermit Roosevelt](#), son of U.S. President [Theodore Roosevelt](#).

Additional ships were acquired in 1922 and renamed after various US presidents. The 52,000 ton [Leviathan](#), formerly the *Vaterland* and one of the largest liners in the world, was acquired in 1923.

Throughout the 1920s the line accumulated debt, and in March 1929 the line was sold to [P.W. Chapman Company](#), and reorganized as "United States Lines Inc." of Delaware.^[2] The stock market crash made matters worse, and in 1931 the remaining ships were sold to "United States Lines Company" of Nevada.

1930s

In 1932, the [SS Manhattan](#), at a cost of approximately \$21 million dollars became the first ship actually built for the line, followed the next year by [Washington](#). In 1940, a new [America](#) joined them.^{[3][4]}

In 1932, United States Lines offered to build a passenger liner, called U.S. Express Liner, which would also double as a mail ship, which would dramatically decrease the time of delivery for trans-Atlantic mail by catapulting an aircraft when it was within range. Congress refused to give a guarantee on trans-Atlantic postal rates and it was never built.^[5]

1940s

In [World War II](#), the ships were converted into [troopships](#). The *Manhattan* became [USS Wakefield](#), and the *Washington* became the [USS Mount Vernon](#).^[6] The flagship *America* became the [USS West Point](#).^[7] After the war, the company began to build smaller and cheaper ships, and operated a number of [cargo ships](#), all named beginning with "American" or "Pioneer".

Duquesne Spy Ring

Main article: [Duquesne Spy Ring](#)

In 1941, two [Nazi](#) spies, Franz Joseph Stigler and Erwin Wilhelm Siegler, worked for United States Lines as members of SS *America*'s crew. While on the SS *America*, they obtained information about the movement of ships and military defense preparations at the [Panama Canal](#), observed and reported defense preparations in the Canal Zone, and met with other German Agents to advise them in their espionage pursuits. They operated as couriers transmitting information between the United States and German agents aboard. Stigler worked undercover as chief butcher. Both remained on the SS *America* until the U.S. Navy converted that ship into the USS *West Point*.

Stigler and Siegler, along with the 31 other German agents of the Duquesne Spy Ring, were later uncovered by the [FBI](#) in the largest espionage conviction in U.S. history. Stigler was sentenced to serve 16 years in prison on espionage charges with two concurrent years for registration violations; Siegler was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on espionage charges and a concurrent 2-year term for violation of the Registration Act.

1950s-1980s



[SS United States](#) and [SS America](#) in New York.

With government subsidy for her construction, the SS *United States* entered service in 1952. She was (and still is) the largest ocean liner built in the United States and the fastest ocean liner ever built. She immediately set [transatlantic](#) speed records, capturing the [Blue Riband](#) from the *Queen Mary*. But competition from [airliners](#) brought the glory days to an end; in 1964 *America* was sold to [Chandris Line](#), and *United States* was withdrawn from service in 1969. (She is presently docked along the Delaware River in South Philadelphia.)

After the termination of passenger services, United States Lines continued to operate as a [container ship](#) line, being bought by containerization pioneer [Malcom McLean](#) in 1987. By the 1980s the line operated 43 vessels and was a leader in international shipping. It spent over \$1B in rapidly expanding its fleet and acquiring two competitors but just as the new vessels were delivered international freight rates fell. The company filed for bankruptcy on 24 November 1986. Most of the vessels were sold to pay creditors and in the reorganization plan filed on 5 July 1988 the company was formally liquidated by 1992.^[8]

The name was revived briefly in 2000 and 2001 as a brand name of [American Classic Voyages](#), but in October 2001 the company filed for bankruptcy.

See also: [Pride of America](#)

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Remaining as artifacts left behind by the company are several piers in [New York City](#). Pier 76, United States Lines Terminal, was constructed as a cargo pier on [West Side Highway](#) at what was then the foot of 36th Street, and is now in use by the NYPD. Neon letters spelling *United States Lines* are located on the west side of the pier, facing [New Jersey](#). One letter *I* on the sign was working until 2002. The sign can be seen by the arriving [NY Waterway](#) ferry passengers or those taking the New York Circle Line water tour of Manhattan. As of 2008, the sign is badly deteriorated and in need of repair. The pier head building facing the street is also marked with the Line's name, at each end. Pier 86, United States Lines' passenger pier, still exists, although

the pier building has been demolished. The [USS Intrepid museum ship](#) is now permanently berthed at the pier.

Ships

Name	Years Active for USL	Notes
SS Acadia	1939	Chartered from Eastern SS Lines for one voyage ^[9]
SS America (1905)	1920-1931	former <i>Amerika</i>
SS America (1940)	1940-41, 1946-1964	USS West Point (1941-1946)
<i>SS American Astronaut</i>	1969-1988	Container ship, IMO 6916861 ^[10]
<i>SS American Banker</i>	1985-1987	1962-built container ship, IMO 5277153 ^[11]
<i>SS American Commander</i>	1963-1967	Type C4-S-57a cargo ship ^[12]
<i>SS American Contender</i>	1963-1967	Type C4-S-57a cargo ship ^[12]
<i>SS American Contractor</i>	1963-1967	Type C4-S-57a cargo ship ^[12]
<i>SS American Corsair</i>	1963-1967	Type C4-S-57a cargo ship ^[12]
<i>SS American Courier</i>	1963-1986	Type C4-S-57a cargo ship ^[12]
<i>SS American Crusader</i>	1963-1967	Type C4-S-57a cargo ship ^[12]
<i>SS American Defender</i>		
<i>SS American</i>		

Farmer

[SS American Flyer](#) 1946-1964 Type C2-S-B1 cargo ship [\[13\]](#)

SS American Hunter

SS American Importer

SS American Lancer 1969-1987 Type C7-S-68c container ship [\[10\]](#)

SS American Lark 1969-1987 Type C7-S-68d container ship [\[10\]](#)

[MS American
Leader](#) 1941-1942 Type C1-B cargo ship

SS American Leader
(2) 1946-1970 Type C2-S-B1 cargo ship, ex-*Twilight* [\[14\]](#)

SS American Legion 1968-1987 Type C7-S-68c container ship [\[10\]](#) Flagship after the retirement of the [SS United States](#). In service 2012 as *Horizon Challenger*.

SS American Liberty 1968-1988 Type C7-S-68d container ship [\[10\]](#) In service 2012 as *Horizon Discovery*.

SS American Lynx 1968-1988 Type C7-S-68d container ship [\[10\]](#)

SS American Merchant

SS American Racer 1964-1983 Type C4-S-68a cargo ship [\[10\]](#)

*SS American
Ranger* 1965-1983 Type C4-S-68a cargo ship [\[10\]](#)

*SS American
Reliance* 1965-1983 Type C4-S-68a cargo ship [\[10\]](#)

*SS American
Resolute* 1965-1969 Type C4-S-68a cargo ship [\[10\]](#)

SS American Reporter

SS *American Rover* 1965-1969 Type C4-S-68a cargo ship [\[10\]](#)

SS *American Scout*

SS *American Shipper*

SS *American Trader*

SS *American Traveler*

[SS California](#) ([MS Uruguay](#))

SS *Centennial State*

SS *Ernie Pyle*

[SS George Washington](#) 1921-1931 Later USS *Catlin* (AP-19)

SS *Granite State*

SS *Hudson*

SS *Iroquois*

SS *John Ericsson*

[SS Leviathan](#) 1923-1933 former [Vaterland](#)

SS *Lone Star State*

[SS Manhattan](#) 1932-1941 later USS *Wakefield* (AP-21)

SS *Marine Falcon*

SS *Marine Flasher*

SS *Marine Jumper*

[SS Marine Marlin](#)

SS *Marine Perch*

SS Marine Shark

SS Marine Swallow

SS Marine Tiger

[SS Old North State](#) 1921-1922 See SS President Van Buren

[SS Orizaba](#) 1939 Chartered for one voyage from Ward Line^[9]

SS Panhandle State

SS Peninsular State

[SS Pennsylvania](#) (MS Argentina)

SS Pioneer Glen

SS Pioneer Myth

SS Pioneer Ming

SS Pioneer Tide

[SS Potomac](#)

SS President Adams

[SS President Arthur](#)

*SS President
Fillmore*

*SS President
Garfield*

[SS President
Harding](#)

*SS President
Monroe*

SS President Polk

[SS President
Roosevelt](#)

SS President Taft

[SS President Van
Buren](#)

1921-1924 Named *Old North State* 1921-1922

[SS Princess
Matoika](#)

1921-1922 Originally SS *Kiautschou* (German Passenger Liner, 1900)

[SS Republic](#)

[SS St John](#)

1939 Chartered from Eastern SS Lines for one voyage^[9]

SS *Shawnee*

1939 Chartered from Clyde Line for one voyage.^[9]

[SS Susquehanna](#)

[SS United States](#)

1952-1969 Laid up in Philadelphia, PA, 2012

[SS Virginia \(MS
Brazil\)](#)

[SS Washington](#)