1. Introduction

The phrase “They that go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters” is often used when speaking about sailors. It comes from Psalm 107 of the Bible and the phrase continues, “These see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep”. Travel by boat has been one of mankind’s activities for thousands of years. The earliest representation of a ship under sail appears on an Egyptian vase from about 3500 BC. The Romans called the Mediterranean “Mare Nostrum”--“our sea”, and created an empire encircling it. For 500 years their ships helped enlarge and consolidate their empire, and linked the edges of their world to the center at Rome. In the 15th century, advances around the world in shipbuilding, navigation and sailing resulted in voyages of discovery from both the Orient and Europe. Growth and development of sea going vessels occurred over the next several centuries. The time between the end of the 19th century and World War II is considered the "golden age" of ocean liners, and ship travel was "the cutting edge" of technology and glamour. For almost all of that time, it was also the only commercial means of travel, for both passengers and freight, across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.

Several branches of history led to this activity and to the mail-carrying role of these ships, especially those sailing the largest ocean, the Pacific. These include the 1807 invention by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston of the first commercial steamboat; the California Gold Rush of 1848, starting at Sutter's Mill in January and being reported by the New York Herald on the East Coast in August 1848; the opening of Japan to commercial trade with the US in 1855 by Commodore Robert Perry (who oversaw construction of the Navy's second steam frigate, USS Fulton, in 1837-39 and commanded it after its completion 1839-1840); and the 1891 United States Post Office creation of the first US Seapost Service on ships traveling between the US and Germany, with expansion to other routes in the next 50 years. This narrative tells the story of several of the companies engaged in the transPacific service, and some of their actions that flowed from these events. In this area, the history of the companies is the history of the mail.

Any history record in the world contains many branches and offshoots from the main topic and it is often hard to keep to one narrative line. The intersections of people and events with one another are one of the things that make history so interesting. Postal history, and this story, is no different. It is in this record of events large and small that we can feel the power of the past. As postal history and stamp collectors, we often have the privilege of actually touching pieces of that past as well.

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This story begins as so many others do, both long ago (as in fairy tales) and in a dealer’s fifty-cent box. The cover shown in Figure 1 is quite plain, the only ornamentation being the red of the stamp and the tan and white of the censor label. This envelope was postmarked in Manila, PI, on November 23, 1941, and contained a Christmas card expressing “glad tidings and peace to men of goodwill” being sent home by a soldier. The fighting of World War II in Europe and Africa had been occurring since September 1939. The next phase of the war, the one that would involve the United States, was only two weeks from its start. How and when did this holiday card travel from the Philippines to the United States? Why was this envelope censored, when it was mailed in peacetime from a US citizen in a US Possession to the continental United States?

To find the answer, we have to look at both the way the letter traveled from the Philippines to the US and the time it traveled to answer why it was censored. The story of the way this letter and mail in general traveled across the Pacific Ocean is the story of the shipping companies plying their trade.

2. TransPacific Shipping
Pacific Mail Steamship Company
The California Gold Rush of 1848 occurred at the same time as the formation of one of the longest existing companies in the US-Asia trade. This was the Pacific Mail Steamship Line. The company originally went into business to carry mail along the West Coast between Panama and California. The Pacific Mail’s first ship, the California, was a steam-driven wooden paddle wheeler that departed from New York in October 1848; this was before the discovery of gold in California had become well known. After going around the tip of South America, the ship stopped in Peru (December) and Panama (January) to pick up any passengers who were on route to San Francisco. Instead of a few, there were almost 1,000 of gold-seekers waiting to board. They had made their way down the East Coast, crossed the Isthmus and were looking for a way to head north to the gold fields. After a crowded hard voyage, the California was the first steamship to sail into San Francisco Bay, arriving in February 1849. All but one of the ship’s crew deserted immediately to find their fortune in the goldfields. In April, the ship had finally assembled a new crew at wages 10 times higher than
normal for the journey south, and on May 1, left for Panama with 54 passengers and $346,000 in gold.

In the intervening years, the Pacific Mail both acquired and built ships to satisfy the needs of the expanding California trade and built it to be the largest and fastest passenger-freight shipping line in trans-Pacific operation. One of the company’s goals became the construction of the world’s first transcontinental railroad, across the almost 50 miles of the Isthmus of Panama. With the opening of the Panama Railroad in 1855, service between Atlantic and Pacific sides of the isthmus was reduced from four days to four hours and the Pacific Mail eventually became responsible for carriage of the US mails from New York to San Francisco via Panama. With the completion of the US transcontinental railroad in 1869, the preeminent position of the Panama route to California was reduced, as was the volume of mail and passengers. Meanwhile, Pacific Mail remained active in the transpacific service arena. In 1859, an American ship on the Hawaiian route discovered and claimed Midway Atoll. When the Pacific Mail heard of the discovery, they pressed the US government to claim the island, so that they (Pacific Mail) could build a coaling station there. In 1865, Pacific Mail purchased its chief rival, the Atlantic Mail Steamship Company to create a through sea route from New York to San Francisco. Also in that year, the U.S. government awarded Pacific Mail the first US mail contract for service between San Francisco and the Far East. As a result of the mail contract, in January 1867, with the sailing of the SS Colorado, the company launched the first US regularly scheduled trans-Pacific steamship service with a route between San Francisco, Hong Kong, and Yokohama, and extended service to Shanghai. This route led to a large travel trade of Japanese and Chinese immigrants to the California area as well as an increased import/export trade with the Orient.

In 1875, Mail contracted New Zealand Office to operate, for 10 years, the route of Auckland to San Francisco via Honolulu, and to carry a New Zealand Office agent to provide postal services. In 1884, as a significant business entity, Pacific Mail was chosen as one of the 11 companies to be included in the first stock index, the Dow Jones Transportation Average, created by Charles Dow. With the loss of the New Zealand mail contract, however, the company started to encounter financial
difficulties. In 1893, the Southern Pacific (SP) Railroad acquired a controlling interest in Pacific Mail, and the company was able to rebuild. At the time of the Spanish American War in 1898, Pacific Mail's ships were very involved in transporting troops and supplies. Immediately after the Battle of Manila Bay, Admiral Dewey specifically requested a speedy dispatch of ammunition, and it was sent on a Pacific Mail steamer.

Pacific Mail already had two of the largest and fastest combination passenger-freight ships, and added two more, the *Manchuria* and the *Mongolia*, to its Pacific service in 1904. **Figure 2** is a postcard written on board the *Manchuria*, postmarked in Yokohama on February 15, 1905 and marked with a receiving cancellation in San Francisco on March 4, 1905. The front of the postcard has both a Japanese era calendar (38-2-15) and a Gregorian calendar (15-Feb-1905) postmark. The year 1905 was the 38th year in the reign of Emperor Meiji (October 1868 to July 1912). During this "Period of Enlightened Rule" (the meaning of the name "Meiji"), Japan started its modernization and rose to world power status. Among the many changes, a "one reign, one era name" system was adopted, wherein era names would change only upon imperial succession. The Meiji Restoration returned the emperor to a preeminent position in Japanese authority, ending the authority of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). During this period, effective power had rested with the Tokugawa shoguns, not the emperor, as the shogun controlled foreign policy, the military and feudal patronage. The Meiji period was also the start of the trend toward developing representative government. The 1889 Constitution of the Empire of Japan provided for a bicameral legislative branch and a cabinet responsible to the emperor and independent of the legislature. On the economic side, the Meiji rulers adopted British and North American forms of free enterprise capitalism. Japan gradually took control of much of Asia’s market for manufactured goods, beginning with textiles. The economic structure became very mercantilist, importing raw materials and exporting finished products. The industrial economy expanded rapidly, leading to Japan’s emergence in the 1920’s as a major industrial nation.

Among its many voyages, and similar to other ships of the line, the *Manchuria* frequently carried immigrants from Asia to its terminal point of San Francisco. In 1910, the US government opened Angel Island in San Francisco Bay as its primary station for immigration from the Pacific Rim. From 1910 to 1940, approximately 175,000 Chinese, as well as smaller numbers of Japanese, Koreans and other Asians, who sought legal entry into the United States, had to be processed through Angel Island. The immigrants were detained on the island for weeks or months to determine if they should be “excluded” from staying in the US. Under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, laborers were prevented from emigrating unless family members were already residents in the US. During their detention, people had to answer questions about details of family histories and daily life so that the inspectors could determine if the answers matched those given by their US relatives. The station was closed in 1940 because a fire destroyed most of the buildings. Currently, the Angel Island Immigration Station
Foundation, in partnership with the California State and National Park Services, is working to preserve and present the history of the Chinese immigration. Japanese ships, such as the America Maru of the Toyo Kisen Kaisha, were also involved in the immigration trade.

In the Panama Canal Act of 1912, the US Congress decreed that any shipping company owned by a railroad would not be able to use the soon-to-be-opened Panama Canal. This was intended to block formation of transportation monopolies for the shipment of goods between the East and West coasts of the US. With recent memories of the large influential trusts that controlled major commercial activities, including oil and transportation, this legislation was an extension of laws such as the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. In specific, this legislation raised the question to the management of the SP as to the continued benefit of ownership of the shipping line. The Southern Pacific Railroad decided to remain concentrated in railroading, and starting selling off individual ships. The Manchuria and her sister ship the Mongolia were sold to Atlantic Transport Line for use in transAtlantic trade. Atlantic was part of the International Mercantile Marine Company (IMMC), which was a trust formed in the early twentieth century as an attempt to monopolize the shipping trades. It was founded by owners of American (American Line, Red Star Line and Atlantic Transport Line) and British (White Star Line and Leyland Line) shipping firms, and financed and led by JP Morgan & Co.

Eventually, Southern Pacific sold the Pacific Mail name and the remaining ships to the Grace Line. This shipping concern started in the 1890’s with ships going from New York to the west coast of South America, via the Strait of Magellan. In 1913, the company started routes sailing from the US to the Pacific coast of South America. The activities of several subsidiaries were consolidated into the Grace Steamship Company beginning in 1916. The firm originally specialized in traffic to the west coast of South America; then expanded into the Caribbean. With the acquisition of the Pacific Mail name and ships, Grace expanded its activities to include the transPacific service and started passenger service to South America from New York until the Emergency Fleet Corporation, in 1917 requisitioned these ships, with all others, for war shipping.
Seapost vs. Paquebot Mail

Figure 3 shows an envelope with a Pacific Mail crest and return of the SS Manchuria on the back flap. This envelope was mailed onboard the ship outbound from San Francisco and has a hand stamped “PACKET BOAT.” marking in purple on the front of the envelope underneath the postal cancellation. This occurred when the envelope was brought to the post office in Honolulu after the Manchuria docked. The letter was postmarked in Honolulu on March 14, 1906, and was carried by ship back to San Francisco. It was received and back stamped there on March 25, about one month before the famous earthquake.

Most mail carrying ships in the late 1800’s-early 1900’s did not have on-board post offices. It was not until 1891 that the US Post Office created and operated the first US Seapost Service. “Seapost Service” is defined as the operations and markings of governmental postal employees operating a post office aboard a seagoing ship on a route where a fixed schedule is maintained. The idea was to take advantage of the ship’s transit time to sort and prepare mail for offloading and delivery at the port of destination. For example, at the Port of New York, mail would be transferred to a special vessel while a transatlantic ship was entering the port and docking. Locally addressed mail was dispatched and occasionally delivered before the passengers completed all screenings and disembarked. The establishment of this service in conjunction with the German Post Office was done on board transatlantic ships between the US and Germany. In addition, joint services with the British and French post offices were implemented in the early 1900’s. One of the most famous stories about Sea Post Offices is that of the RMS Titanic, when three US (William Gwinn, John March and Oscar Woody) and two British (Jago Smith and JB Williamson) postal clerks died in the 1912 sinking. They are remembered by several accounts as being more concerned with moving and saving the registered mail than themselves. Figure 4 is a postcard mailed on board the Kaiser Wilhelm derGrosse of the North German Line (NDL) in April 1905. The barrel killer to the left of the postmark contained a number that identified the specific Sea Post, ranging from 1 thru 20 and this type of marking was used from 1891 thru 1914. Published accounts in the philatelic literature report that the same number in the killer appears in connection with different ships. This has lead to the hypothesis that the number was assigned to a senior postal clerk rather than a particular ship, as was done later in both transAtlantic
and transPacific services. This period of transatlantic services stopped with the advent of WWI.

In 1921, US Sea Post service was restored on the transAtlantic ships of the United States Lines. In 1924, joint US-German Sea Post service was resumed on ships of United States Lines, North German Lloyd and Hamburg-American. The US Post Office was in charge on the voyage to Europe and the German Post Office was in charge on the voyage to the United States. Figure 5 is a postcard mailed on board the Albert Ballin of the Hamburg-American Line in November 1928. The cancellation, as it was on a German ship, reads “Deutsch Amerikanische Seepost” and is franked with the proper 15-pfennig postage. As a side note, the Ballin was named after the managing director of the Hamburg-American Line from 1899 to 1918. The ship was renamed the Hansa in 1935 on the direct order of Adolph Hitler because Herr Ballin was Jewish.

In the 1920's, Sea Post Service was also expanded to include routes to Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal Zone, South America and transPacific travel. Figure 6 shows a May 1941 late use of the New York to Valparaiso (Chile) cancel on ships of the Grace Line. To comply with the Jones-White Act of 1928 and keep its mail contracts, Grace built four new ships, the Santa Rosa, Santa Paula, Santa Lucia and Santa Elena, and established the first passenger service between New York and Seattle in 1932. Other companies soon complained that, since Grace ships were subsidized for foreign trade they should not compete in the intracoastal business. At the end of 1934, Seattle was removed as a port of call.
and the service ended in San Francisco. The *Santa Lucia*, one of the new ships, was reassigned to the South American run. This mail service started in 1928 on Grace’s regular route to the west coast of South America, originally terminating at the Canal Zone but was extended to Valparaiso in 1930. Although US Sea Post service had been discontinued on the transAtlantic routes in October 1939, South American routes were continued until October 1941 when it became too dangerous because of submarines. Pacific service remained in operation until the US entry into the war in December 1941.

“Paquebot” mail, however, is separate and distinct from Seapost mail. The latter is processed on board a ship by a seagoing post office while the former is processed ashore by a regular post office in a port city. If a ship did not have an onboard post office, any loose letters or cards mailed at sea would usually be given to the ship’s purser. At the next port, the purser would deliver all mail received during the voyage to the post office serving that port. This mail would usually not have postage stamps of the receiving country, and would not be acceptable under normal circumstances. To address this issue, in 1891 the Universal Postal Union established special handling regulations for such mail from ocean-going vessels. Under UPU regulations, letters and cards posted at sea that are franked with postage stamps of the country under which the vessel is flagged, and in accordance with that country’s postal rates, will be accepted as valid and cancelled by the receiving country. If the vessel is in port when the postcard or letter is turned in, the mail must carry the stamps of the country in whose waters the vessel is located. The British Post Office first implemented this process in 1892. In 1893, the UPU modified its regulation to require the French word “paquebot” (by packet boat) be marked on the letters and cards. This addition was formally ratified at the next UPU conference in 1897.

**Figure 7** is a typical example of paquebot marking and usage. This postal stationary envelope originated from the island of Curacao, which is the largest and most populous of the three islands of the Netherlands Antilles, part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was carried on board a ship in 1905 that docked in New York. Handed in to the US Post Office for delivery, the postage indicium was cancelled with a paquebot marking. On
the reverse side are an “opera glass” marking indicating that the postage paid was correct and a receiving stamp from the final destination in the coal country of northeastern Pennsylvania.

Figure 8 illustrates an interesting combination of Sea Post and Paquebot markings. The envelope was mailed on board the SS Washington, operated by the United States Lines between the US and Germany, which carried a joint US-German Sea Post office. The cover shown was mailed on board on the voyage to the United States, and the correct German postage of 25 pfennig was applied and cancelled. Under the joint US-German Sea Post operating rules, this was appropriate. The Washington, however, was operated under the US flag; therefore under the UPU rules, US postage was required. The Paquebot marking was applied on board the Washington to validate the German postage stamp used and allow the envelope to be accepted and delivered by the US Post Office.

In another one of the offshoots of history, the Washington, on June 11, 1940, sailing with the American flag prominently displayed and fully lighted, was stopped by a German submarine about 180 miles from the Portuguese coast. The submarine signaled “stop, heave to” “torpedo the ship” and “10 minutes to abandon ship” After an hour of repeated messages “American Ship”, which were met with a repeated “10 minutes to abandon ship”, the U-boat signaled “Thought you were another ship; please go on, go on!” The captain of the Washington was Harry Manning, who had been the chief navigator and radio operator for Amelia Earhart on her first attempt to circle the globe in March 1937, flying west from San Diego. Earhart had met Manning when she returned from England on his passenger liner in 1928, after being the first woman to fly over the Atlantic as a passenger. The round the world flight, piloted by Earhart and carrying Manning and Fred Noonan, was delayed when Earhart’s plane crashed while attempting to take off from Hawaii, and was shipped back to California for repairs. The second, and ultimately fatal attempt, left Oakland in May, flying in the opposite direction as a result of changes in global wind and weather patterns along her planned route. Earhart’s navigator on this final flight was Fred Noonan. He was
an experienced mariner and aviation navigator who had established most of the Pan American Airways seaplane routes across the Pacific as well as training their navigators for the route between San Francisco and Manila. It was the development of this aviation route and distance flying that eventually lead to the failing of long distance ship travel for other than leisure.

Dollar Steamship Company
One of the largest US companies involved in Pacific shipping was the Dollar Steamship Line, started by Robert Dollar in 1900. Its original intent was to operate coastal steamships to move lumber from the family sawmill in the Pacific Northwest to markets along the West Coast. As a way to expand sales and markets, Robert Dollar looked to the Orient and traveled there in 1902. He began the company’s participation in international shipping, first with chartered vessels and then with company owned and operated ships. The cover in figure 9 shows an envelope with the Dollar corner card and distinctive flag with the “$” sign. It was sent by surface mail, in 1904, from San Francisco to the American Consul at Chefoo, China, and took 26 days in transit, via the Japanese liner America Maru. The America Maru, owned Toyo Kisen Kaisha (Oriental Steamship Company) was built in England in 1898, and was in the primary business of carrying emigrants from Japan, China and Korea to Honolulu and San Francisco. During World War II, the ship was converted to a transport and was sunk by the USS Nautilus (SS-168) in early 1944. The envelope has a receiving backstamp of the US Postal Agency in Shanghai, which opened in June 1867, only a few months after the first arrival of the Pacific Mail SS Colorado. Run by the American Consul General until 1907, the US postal agency in Shanghai allowed American travelers and businessmen a way to send their mail at U.S. domestic rates (3¢ for the first ½ ounce) compared to using other foreign (British, French or German) post offices at a ten-fold cost (30¢ to 72¢ for the same weight). The Dollar Company continued to expand its trade and operations in the decade that followed, and grew in...
influence in the Asian business and financial world. Robert Dollar created his own export cargo by making a deal with China’s only iron mining and production company to import pig iron into the U.S. With the start of the WWI in Europe in 1914, the worldwide shipping needs greatly exceeded the available vessels. Trading on the inflated market, Dollar Steamship made a significant profit in 1915 with the sale of most of its ships. Because of this, over the new few years Dollar Steamship kept its operations small, but also kept an eye on its competitors and established a practice of purchasing stock in them in order to eventually gain controlling interest.

World War I
When the US entered WWI in 1917, the government, through the US Shipping Board (USSB) created the Emergency Fleet Corporation. This entity was made responsible for acquiring, building and operating sufficient cargo and passenger ships to supply the needs of the US military in France and Italy. This charge ultimately included construction and operation of shipyards and component factories and mills, as well as training and employing merchant mariners. In August 1917, the Emergency Fleet Corporation commandeered 431 ships under construction in US shipyards, and in October requisitioned use of all American steel cargo and trans-ocean passenger vessels, for use in cargo and troop transport. The Division of Operations of the Emergency Fleet Corporation itself became a ship operator, and assigned management of vessels to commercial companies for operation. Some of the original owners of the requisitioned ships were compensated this way, by being able to earn revenues even though they no longer could make decisions about the use of the ships. The division also allowed other operating organizations, such as companies that were only ship charterers or agents, to be appointed as managing agents. These companies were told to manage the ships as if they the company, not the US Shipping Board, were the owners.

Among the many ships taken over by the US Navy, the Pacific Mail’s Manchuria was operated by the US Navy from 1918-1919 as a troopship to and from the European war zone. The USS Manchuria was the first US merchant ship outfitted with weapons and a US Navy Armed guard in WWI, and was the first US merchant ship to fire on a U-boat in the Atlantic. After being returned to Atlantic Transport, the Manchuria resumed commercial operation, working in trans-Atlantic trade until 1923. At that time, the ship was transferred by IMMC from trans-Atlantic service under the American Line to US East Coast to West Coast inter-coastal service via the Panama Canal for the Panama Pacific Line.
US Shipping Board arranges for charters of its ships after World War I

After the war, the US Shipping Board wanted to strengthen and upgrade the US merchant marine fleet. Vessels started in 1918 were still coming off the slipways in 1919-1921. In 1920, Congress passed the Merchant Marine Act, which contained provisions for charters and eventual sale of excess ships acquired or built by the US government for WWI. Excess ships were allocated to American shipping companies, who acted as managing agents and operators on assigned routes. Pacific Mail, Admiral Oriental and United States Lines operated a number of ships in the early 1920’s under this arrangement. Most of these operations proved immensely profitable to the shipping companies, but at the expense of the government.

In 1920, Pacific Mail had a total of 46 ships in its fleet, the largest number that the company ever had. Figure 10 is an envelope mailed in October 1921 to a passenger on the SS Hoosier State, sailing from San Francisco. It has a backstamp showing receipt by Pacific Mail after a week’s journey cross-country. The ship, newly built, was one of a class that were approximately 535 feet in length overall, between 12,000 and 14,000 tons displacement, carried between 500 and 900 passengers and were capable of 18 knots. In early 1921, Pacific Mail had became the managing operator of five of these “535” ships and transPacific routes. Originally constructed under state nicknames, Pacific Mail renamed the ships the President Pierce, Cleveland, Wilson, Taft and the Hoosier State became the President Lincoln. Figure 11 is a postcard issued by Pacific Mail “Operators for U.S. Shipping Board” showing the President Wilson after the change of the name. In addition, Pacific Mail owned and continued to operate other smaller ships for its’ Central American service. In the same time period, United States Lines became the managing operator of seven ships and transAtlantic routes. The five “502” ships were the renamed President Adams, Garfield, Monroe, Polk, Van Buren and the two “535” ships were the renamed President Harding and Roosevelt.

Another competitor in the transPacific trade was the Pacific Steamship Company, operating under the trade name of the Admiral Line. In 1916 HF Alexander had consolidated several smaller coastal shipping lines operating out of Seattle and had entered into transPacific trade. Pacific Steamship had been managing
operator for the USSB for a number of vessels on the trans-Pacific route and by 1921 was interested in purchasing replacement ships. The Shipping Board was not satisfied with Alexander and Pacific Steam’s operations. The USSB was concerned about excessive charges from the company on prior charters, duplicate sailings from the Pacific Northwest ports of Seattle and Portland to the Orient and what seemed to be a rapid expansion of shipping activities without staff or financing in place to support the operations. Robert Dollar, starting in 1919, had been quietly making stock purchases in Pacific Steamship. In 1922, Dollar entered into the discussion with the USSB and Pacific Steamship. Based on their ownership of a large share of stock of Pacific Steamship and the overall successful operation of Dollar Steamship and in combination with the USSB’s dissatisfaction, Robert Dollar persuaded the USSB that he would fund, form and operate a new corporation within Pacific Steamship. It would be called the Admiral Oriental Line (operating with the trade name “Admiral Oriental Mail”) and would be the managing operator for trans-Pacific service with five “535” ships, renamed President Grant, Jefferson, Jackson, Madison, and McKinley. Pacific Steamship, under Alexander’s management, would still operate US West Coast shipping under the “Admiral Line” trade name. This was agreed to by the Shipping Board, who ordered Pacific Steamship to accept these terms, which increased Dollar’s share of the trans-Pacific market. Figure 12 is a company business envelope showing the original Admiral Oriental Line flag. It was mailed from Singapore in 1929 and is addressed to its’ successor organization, the American Mail Line.

At this point, note that in the 1920’s-1930’s time period, there were a total of 23 passenger ships with the moniker “President”. Dollar Steamship owned and operated 21 of them, and United States Lines owned two (President
Harding and Roosevelt). With the exception of two ships built in 1930/31 (President Hoover and Coolidge) and two purchased from another shipping company (President Johnson and Fillmore) these ships were built under the US Shipping Board’s direction as cargo/troopships for World War I. The ships originally had different names, but when leased out for commercial service, the USSB renamed them, starting the “President” series. In fact this ship naming convention is what led to the naming of the American President Lines (APL), successor to Dollar Steamship. The individual President names, however, were used many times over on cargo ships built and operated by APL over the next seventy years. During the years, names were changed either when ship ownership changed or marketing needs decided it. The collector or historian must know this so that, as shown in figure 13, when finding an envelope from the President Monroe of 1983, it is realized that it is not the same ship (or even close to it) as the President Monroe of 1923.

US Shipping Board starts to sell excess ships
In 1923, the Shipping Board started selling off its ship inventory. Dollar Steamship bought seven of the “502/522” President-series ships it was operating under the names of the President Adams, Garfield, Harrison, Hayes, Monroe, Polk and Van Buren. All seven ships were of similar size-- approximately 522 feet length overall, 10,500 tons displacement, carried between 150 and 250 passengers-- and were capable of 14 knots. Two of the ships (Harrison and Hayes) had been operated by a West Coast brokerage firm on the route between the US West Coast and the South American East Coast via the Panama Canal. United States Lines had operated the other five ships on their transAtlantic route. While Dollar got the ships, they did not get the US-UK operating routes. This forced a change in Dollar’s planned round-the-world service; London to New York travel was eliminated and replaced with a crossing of the Atlantic after the port of Marseilles. With the acquisition of these ships, Dollar Line both expanded its transPacific operation, and, in 1924, instituted a scheduled “Round the World” (RTW) service. The President Harrison was the first ship to operate this service for the Dollar Line, with a planned travel time of 106 days for passengers and cargo. Figure 14 shows an envelope with a Dollar Line/SS President Harrison corner card mailed by a passenger on a round the world trip. The passenger must have been on business in Bombay when he mailed the letter, as the President Harrison’s port of call was Colombo, Ceylon.
In this same set of sales, United States Lines purchased, among others, the two 535” ships (President Harding and Roosevelt) and the London-New York routes that USL had been operating since 1921.

Figure 15 show a postcard of the President Harding and a United States Lines stationary envelope mailed on board the ship in December 1925. The postmark reads “U.S.GER.SEA POST/DEC 22 1925/S.S.PRES.HARDING” and has the number “4” in the oval barrel cancel. This was a new and different style duplex cancellation. With the reinstitution of the joint service in November 1924, old cancellation devices had been used on the ships in service throughout 1925. According to “United States Sea Post Cancellations” (ed. Philip Cockrill, 1988), it was originally thought that the type of device shown “came into use early in 1926 (possibly late 1925 but no “1925” dates have been recorded so far)”. This makes the cover shown both a confirmation of Mr. Cockrill’s speculation as well as the possible EKU. Figure 16 is a variation on this cancellation, this time from the President Roosevelt. The postmark reads “U.S. SEA POST/MAR 30 1932/S.S.PRES.ROOSEVELT” and has the number “3” in the oval barrel cancel. As shown, the wording around the top half of the dial has been altered removing the letters “GER.” The words “SEA POST” have been moved to the left to fill in the space, but the move created a pronounced gap on the top right side. In this space very faintly can be seen the outline of the letters “OST’ from their original location. Cockrill reports that a cancellation device with only “U.S. SEA POST”, the date, ship’s name and numeral in the killer was supplied to three new American ships that entered transAtlantic service in 1926-1927; to this point in time, nothing similar to this dial has been seen nor have there been reports about existing ships changing their devices.
The United States Lines also began operating the SS *Leviathan*, which was 900 feet length overall, 54,300 tons displacement, carried 1,100 passengers and a crew of 1,200, and capable of 26 knots. This was the former Hamburg-America SS *Vaterland* which was interned in New York in 1914, seized by US Government in 1917 after the US entered the war, and used by US Navy as troopship 1917-1919. In this service, on one crossing she had 14,416 troops on board - more human beings than had ever before sailed on a single ship. The *Leviathan* was then reconverted to passenger service in 1922 but was never a profitable venture; it was not uncommon for her to make a crossing with 700 or 800 passengers. There was no other American liner of comparable size or speed, which created imbalances and gaps in the sailing schedules of USL. Figure 17 is a United States Lines stationary envelope mailed on board the ship in September 1932. It is franked with 8 cents US postage and endorsed “Air Mail”. The envelope must have weighed more than one ounce as it was marked with the ship’s Sea Post Office postage due marking. This was a “T” circled by “S/P/O/10”, with the “10” being the *Leviathan*’s Sea Post Route number. There is also a penciled manuscript “T/Due 13c”. From August 1928 through June 1934, for the only time in the history of domestic airmail or 1st class letter mail, the USPOD charged more for the second ounce of mail than for the first ounce. Starting in July 1932, the domestic airmail rate was 8 cents for the 1st ounce and 13 cents for each additional ounce. One thought articulated in the literature is that the POD was trying to discourage patrons from sending packages by airmail because the POD did not yet have the capacity to carry quantities of such mail. When the letter arrived in California, 13 cents in postage due stamps were added and the expense was collected from the recipient.
The year 1923 also saw the start of official US Seapost operations on trans-Pacific ships. The first service was on Admiral Oriental ships sailing from Seattle to the Orient, with the cancellation device reading “U.S. Sea Post Trans Pacific” and the route number in the killer device. This was followed by service on Pacific Mail ships departing San Francisco with the cancellation device reading “U.S. Trans Pacific Sea Post”. As a result of Dollar Line obtaining control of the Admiral Oriental and Pacific Mail ships, in 1926 a new cancellation was created reading “U.S.T.P Sea Post” that contained the ship’s name with in the die hub cancel and the route number in the killer device. In 1924, operation of joint US-German Seapost service was again started on the transAtlantic ships; the prior service had been stopped at the beginning of WWI. Also in this year, as an accommodation to support the new Dollar Line RTW service, the New York, Havana & Canal Zone Sea Post was created for ships on the NY to Canal Zone portion of the trip. The assigned postal clerk traveled only between these two points. For the Pacific crossing, clerks boarded in San Francisco or Seattle, and got off in Manila for the return trip to the US. Figure 18 illustrates these various styles of Sea Post Service cancellation postmarks.
In another set of sales in 1925, Dollar Steamship purchased (for $141,000 cash down and a 10-year mortgage) the five “535” ships for which Pacific Mail had been the managing operator. Wishing to stay in business, Pacific Mail/Grace also attempted to buy them. They submitted a bid to the government of $6,750,000, consisting of a down payment of $1,250,000 cash and the balance in preferred stock in a new company. The Dollar Line’s bid was over a million dollars lower than Pacific Mail’s bid, but it was 100% cash. The Shipping Board decided that the Pacific Mail bid did not meet the terms of the tender and thus, Dollar Steamship Company gained itself another $30 million worth of ships on the cheap and was now able to expand its westbound around-the-world service.

Without the President ships and its trans-Pacific service, Grace formed a new entity, the Panama Mail Company, to operate the small ships formerly owned and used by the Pacific Mail in Central American sailings. The following year, Grace Line sold the Pacific Mail name and flag to a San Francisco investment syndicate. The syndicate, in turn, sold the corporate shell to Dollar Steamship, ending the existence and operations of Pacific Mail as a company. Figure 19 shows an envelope and a postcard mailed and postmarked on the President Wilson in 1926. The envelope from June, and the postcard from November are both franked with $0.02 postage. This was the correct letter 1st class domestic mail rate and, in the period of 1925-1928, the correct rate for picture post cards or other privately produced mailing cards, as distinguished from the US government issued postal cards payable at a $0.01 rate. That same year, the Admiral Oriental Line (controlled by Dollar SS) purchased (again using a small cash down payment and a 10-year mortgage) five “535” ships for which they had been managing operator. Several months later, to the dismay of the Seattle business community, Dollar moved the home office of Admiral Oriental to San Francisco and adopted a new trade name.
of “American Mail Line” for the Pacific Northwest-Orient shipping service. Figure 20 shows this line’s flag and an envelope mailed on the President McKinley, one of this group of ships, with the purser handstamp noting it as sailing as part of the “American Mail Line”.

Continued Growth of Dollar
In the last half of the 1920’s, the Dollar Line continued to be successful. It had acquired a large fleet of nearly new ships, and was using them in regular and frequent service for passengers and cargo on its transPacific and Round the World routes. By 1927, the latter service had started to show a net profit. The overall US Merchant Marine, however, was not doing so well. Due to higher wages paid to US Mariners, and higher construction cost in US shipyards than overseas, it was more expensive to operate a US flagged ship. By 1914 the U. S. Merchant Marine was carrying less than 10% of U. S. trade, and after WWI, competition from British and Japanese lines was very strong. The Panama Canal also made it reasonable for US East Coast shipping lines to route traffic thru the Canal and directly to the Orient. As a means of supporting the industry, Congress passed the Jones-White Act of 1928. This law contained two major provisions. First, the Government agreed to lend shipping companies up to 75% of new construction costs for ships that would sail under American registry and that would be available to the Navy for use in an emergency or war. The second provision was to give ship owners large payments for carrying mail, to be based on ship tonnage and speed. A similar mail subsidy provision had been used to support the developing transcontinental railroads in the late 1800’s and would be used again in the near future to support the growth of the airline industry. The mail payments under the Jones-White Act would help offset the increased operations cost of sailing under US registry and try to put U. S. ships on an equal footing with directly subsidized foreign liners. Based on the existing Dollar Lines fleet, the company was awarded mail subsidies of $7 per nautical mile, which added $3 million a year of revenue to the company’s ledger. Figure 21 is the reverse of a Dollar Steamship shipboard postcard showing the routes sailed by Dollar as they tallied over 425,000 miles in a year.

As the Shipping Board continued to sell off ships, Dollar Steamship and its subsidiaries continued to try and buy them to maintain its dominant position in
the trans-Pacific market. In 1928, the USSB sold all 39 of its remaining Pacific Coast merchantmen. The largest group (21 ships), operating out of San Francisco and Los Angeles, was bought by a joint subsidiary of the Matson Navigation Co. and the American Hawaiian Steamship Co. Of the 18 ships operating out of the Pacific Northwest, 11 were sold to Columbia Pacific Shipping. Seven remaining ships and routes were operated by American Mail, which sought to buy them. This effort was met with resistance from the local business community. The USSB finally awarded their purchase to a new local Seattle owned company named Tacoma Oriental Steamship Co., which instantly became a competitor of American Mail for Pacific Coast shipping and the Asian hardwoods trade.

After several months of negotiations, in a follow-thru on the Jones-White Act provisions, Dollar Steamship in 1929 obtained funding from the USSB for new ship construction and renovations. Dollar took out a 20 year mortgage loan for 75% of the projected $20.5 million construction and fit-out of two new 22,000-ton ships (the 502’s were 10,500 and 535’s were 14,100) that would be the largest ships built in the US and the height of travel luxury at that time. Dollar Steamship also borrowed an additional $1.25m for renovations on existing ships and $1.25m to purchase Mongolia and Manchuria, which were renamed President Fillmore and Johnson, from the Panama Pacific Line/IMMC. These two ships, originally used by Pacific Mail in the Orient trade, had been transferred by IMMC in 1924 from use in trans-Atlantic service under the American Line to use in US East Coast to West Coast inter-coastal service via the Panama Canal for the Panama Pacific Line. While in service on this routing in 1927, William S. Cherry, an African explorer who was traveling on the Manchuria, drowned as the ship was off the Mexican coast. The story as reported by Time Magazine was that "some valuable papers blew across the deck. Explorer Cherry gave chase; the ship listed; he fell overboard." Figure
22 is an envelope mailed from the first voyage of the President Johnson under Dollar ownership. Although the official Dollar Lines sailing schedule lists the President Harrison as the assigned vessel on the third RTW voyage of 1929, the President Johnson was substituted and assigned this as her regular sailing rotation. Leaving New York on Jan 31, 1929, with its' new name barely dry, a temporary postmark device was improvised. From the impression shown, it appears as if it were one solid cut block of type attached to a handle to make a handstamp device. Reviewing the literature, this cancellation is listed by Cockrill as a “Provisional Marking” and it is not reported used again after this voyage. Figure 23 shows a Dollar Line stationary envelope with a President Johnson corner card. This was mailed in Hong Kong on February 22, 1930 by a passenger who had just disembarked, as listed in the published schedules.

Stock Market Crash of 1929 and Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930
All seemed to be going well for the world and for Dollar Steamship. But then the Stock Market Crash of 1929 occurred. From an all-time high of 381 in early September 1929, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) gradually decreased to 326 on October 22. In a series of major selling sessions over the next six business days, the DJIA was driven down to 230. While there were interim increases over the next several months, the stock market continued to fall for nearly three more years, reaching an ultimate low of 41 in July 1932. Two theories are the most widely advanced as the reason of the Crash. The first is that speculators in share purchases were using borrowed money for more than 2/3 of the face value of the stocks being bought, leading to an economic bubble and share price levels that were in excess of real value and unsustainable. The second is the market anticipation of the changes proposed by the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, which would increase tariffs on over 20,000 imported goods from 26% to 50%. This would cause the prices to rise so high that foreign countries would not be able to competitively sell their goods in the US. Many countries retaliated after the bill was passed in 1930, adding their own tariffs, which ultimately resulted in a decrease of American exports and imports by 50% and a contraction in real international trade of 14% between 1929 and 1932. This tariff change had a direct effect on the Dollar Lines as export cargoes from the Far East would sharply decrease. In addition, the overall economic effect of the depression impacted personal and business profits, which left less spendable income for traveling. It took a few years for all of these factors to catch hold of the worldwide economy at large.

Decade of Change
At the start of the 1930’s, Dollar
Steamship seemed ready to continue its preeminence in the passenger and cargo trade on the transPacific route as well as being a force in around-the-world shipping. The company had designed and obtained external funding for the construction of two luxury liners, as well as renovating several others. The new "jewels in the crown", the President Hoover and the President Coolidge were built and launched in 1930/1931. Figure 24 is a cover mailed onboard the President Coolidge when it made its inaugural arrival at Honolulu in November 1931. Both of the new ships were designed to carry 845 passengers and a crew of 324 in plush accommodations and art deco furnishings that emulated the best hotels of the era. The ships also had outdoor pools, spacious staterooms and lounges, private telephones, barber shop and beauty salon, a gymnasium and even a soda fountain. Designed to travel at 20 knots and hold 600,000 cubic feet of cargo, these ships were expected to draw more traffic and advertising for the company. As a result of the Hoover and Coolidge entering revenue service, the USSB increased the Jones-White Act mail subsidy, bringing it to $8 million annually. This included both an increase in rate from $7 to the maximum of $12 per nautical mile and increased miles with more ships in operation and more miles sailed because of the Round-the-World services.

In the marketplace, competition in passenger and freight service had increased as world trade declined. As a way of responding, Dollar Steamship implement routing changes that placed 4 ships in the Seattle –Manila service and 8 in RTW service. This allowed the company to improve its competitive position against Panama Pacific and Grace Line services in US East Coast-West Coast traffic via the Panama Canal.

Dollar was also appreciated for its perceived good business skills, and in 1931 the US Shipping Board suggested and approved a Dollar bid for control of United States Lines. United States Lines came into being after the United States Mail Steamship Company had failed to successfully operate Government owned ships on the North Atlantic after World War I. The U.S. Shipping Board took over U. S. Mail Steamship Co. operation in 1920 and formed the United States Lines in August 1921. After the company lost to the Dollar Line in its bid to buy the five "502"s it had been operating, United States Lines acquired five other vessels refitted to carry passengers in the New York - London service. In March 1929, P.W. Chapman Co bought the routes and
ships from the Shipping Board and operated under the name United States Lines Inc., of Delaware. In late 1931, Chapman failed to meet his payments and the USSB foreclosed. The company was taken over by a combination of interests, and Dollar Steamship began investing with intent to obtain control. International Mercantile Marine Co (IMMC), however, was also interested, and opposed Dollar’s attempt to purchase US Lines.

It was in this period (1932 –1933) that International Mercantile Marine placed the SS Washington and SS Manhattan (acquired thru takeover of Transatlantic Steamship Co, and North Atlantic Steamship Co) into service for the United States Line. Figure 25 is a postcard mailed onboard the SS Manhattan, which, along with the SS Washington, were the largest liners ever built in the United States up to that time, and eclipsed only by the SS United States thirty years later. IMMC finally gained control of the company in 1934, operating it through a newly formed subsidiary, the United States Lines Company of Nevada. In 1943 IMMC had decided that “United States Lines” had a better public resonance than “International Mercantile Marine” and arranged for United States Lines of Nevada to merge into IMMC and change its name to United States Lines Company. For the rest of its history, US Lines was the premier shipping company operating under the United States flag, both the largest and the most prestigious. Its flagship, the SS United States, was the biggest passenger ship ever built in the US and the fastest ever. On her maiden voyage, documented by the cover in figure 26, she broke the “Blue Riband” transAtlantic speed record that had been held by the R.M.S. Queen Mary for fourteen years. Although retired in 1969 due to competition from air traffic and rising operating costs, the United States held both the eastbound and westbound speed records until 1990. In that year, the Hoverspeed Great Britain, a 242-foot long, ocean-going catamaran, surpassed the United States’ eastbound record. To date (2007), no ship has yet taken away the United States’ westbound record, even though she sits immobile and stripped of fittings in Philadelphia, PA. Purchased by Norwegian Cruise Lines in 2003, the company says they have continuing interest in renovating her, but sources at NCL in 2007 claim plans for her conversion to an active cruise ship for the NCL America fleet seem highly unlikely in the current marketplace.

American-Hawaiian Steamship Company, LASSCO and Matson /Oceanic Dollar Steamship made a different but again unsuccessful acquisition attempt in the late 1920’s when it tried to acquire the American-Hawaiian Steamship Co. as a way to increase its presences in the traffic between the US West Coast and Hawaii. Dollar management had seen the market share, feeder business and profits that were being made by Matson Navigation
Company in the Hawaii trade. Matson is credited with introducing mass tourism to Hawaii. The Moana Hotel Waikiki, which opened in 1901 and was the first hotel amidst the bungalows and beachhouses was purchased by Matson in 1932 and operated along with the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, which the company opened in 1927. Both establishments were Pacific retreats for the rich and famous, including President Franklin Roosevelt and Duke Kahanamoku, the Olympic swimmer who popularized the sport of surfing. For most of the period from the early 1880’s until the early 1920’s, Matson and Claus Spreckels’ Oceanic Steamship Company, which later became its subsidiary company, would control much of the shipping between Hawaii and the US west coast.

Matson Navigation was incorporated in 1901, and primarily operated Australian and South Pacific routes via Hawaii. The company’s founder, Captain William Matson, initiated the custom of passengers throwing their leis into the sea as the ship passed Diamond Head. The lei floating away would signify that the passenger would return again to the shores of Hawaii. In 1926, Matson took over the Oceanic Steamship Company (Spreckles Line), and reorganized the two companies as the Matson-Oceanic Line. Oceanic Steamship had operated from California to New Zealand and Australia via Hawaii. It had its roots in a fleet of sailing vessels created in 1878 by Claus Spreckles, a major sugar planter in Hawaii, to move raw sugar to his refinery in California. He incorporated the Oceanic Steamship Company in 1881 to operate under the Hawaiian flag, which then placed the ships under the US flag when Hawaii was annexed in 1898. In 1885, Oceanic Steamship succeeded Pacific Mail Steamship as the operator for the New Zealand Maritime Post Office route from Auckland to San Francisco via Honolulu and continued as operator until 1901. Having developed excess capacity beyond the needs of the sugar business, Spreckles expanded Oceanic into general shipping operations and developed a mail and passenger line to Hawaii and Australia, as reflected in the advertising cover illustrated in figure 28. The company was financially dependent on US trans-Pacific mail contracts then awarded by Congress. Oceanic thrived when it had the contracts, carrying items...
such as the 1894 Hawaii to Germany postcard in **figure 29**, but the experienced economic problems when it didn't. In the early 1920's, other companies had surpassed Spreckles in the sugar business, and this raised the basic question as to the future need for a captive shipping company. As a result, Oceanic Steamship was sold to Matson Navigation Co. in 1926 and operated as a Matson subsidiary.

In 1927, Matson-Oceanic recognized that another competitor, the Los Angeles Steamship Company (LASSCO), which had been in the Hawaii trade only since 1922, carried more passengers between Hawaii and Los Angeles than did Matson. Formed in 1920, LASSCO was started to operate fast coastal ships between Los Angeles and San Francisco. In 1922, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce approached LASSCO with a plan. The Chamber would charter two German-built WWI prize passenger liners from the US Shipping Board and have LASSCO operate them on the Los Angeles to Hawaii route. One ship was originally the *Grosser Kurfurst*. It had sailed for North German Lloyd, was interned in New York in 1914 and seized by the US Government in April 1917. The ship was given to the US Navy for transport duty and renamed the *Aeolus*. Another ship, the *Friedrich der Grosse*, had the same history and was renamed the *Huron*. The two ships were refitted for their new service and given new names, becoming, respectively, the *City of Los Angeles* and the *City of Honolulu (I)*, and service to Hawaii began in September 1922. The *City of Honolulu (I)* had barely started operating when it burned while at sea off California in October 1922, and was abandoned without loss of life. Another former German passenger liner, the *Princess Alice* (also seized in 1917) became the *Princess Matoika* in US Navy service and appears to have become the *City of Honolulu (II)* in 1927. Throughout the 1920's, business continued to improve for LASSCO on both its Hawaii and coastal routes. As with other companies, the post-stock market crash economy reduced both freight and passenger traffic; on top of that, in 1930 a fire destroyed the *City of Honolulu (II)* at its berth in Honolulu. With increasing passenger traffic and competition on the route to Hawaii, Matson added the S.S. *Malolo*, capable of 22 knots, in 1927 and was constructing three other ships. LASSCO started negotiations with Matson, and was absorbed into Matson as of January 1931. The ships of LASSCO were then still operated out of Los Angeles as a subsidiary of Matson-Oceanic.
At this time, there was great interest in improving the speed of mail delivery in general, and a number of plans were developed to speed up mail deliveries to and from ships in particular. The goal was to avoid delays in unloading the mails due to customs and health inspections, as well as allow for the latest possible outbound dispatch. The common element was to use air transportation to meet a trans-oceanic ship, and exchange mail. On the Atlantic Ocean, the French postal authorities started catapult mail in 1928, launching an airplane from the Ile de France. German ships also used this method of speedy delivery, launching an airplane from the ship to the shore before the development of aircraft that could dependably carry mail non-stop across the Atlantic. Ships crossing both the North Atlantic and South Atlantic oceans were equipped with airplanes and catapult equipment. When they came within the aircraft’s range of the opposite shore, they would catapult the aircraft off the ship and the plane would fly the remaining distance with the mail. In this way, 1 or 2 days would be saved in the transmission time. Because of harsh winter weather on the North Atlantic, this service was limited to the months of May through October. The first German catapult mail flight took place in July 1929, from the S.S. Bremen to New York, and service continued over the next six years. Once longer-range aircraft were developed, catapult mail service became obsolete. Figure 30 is one example of this premium service. On this letter, 25 Reichpfennigs was the basic letter rate and 50 Reichpfennigs was the premium for the catapult flight from the SS Europa of the North German Lloyd line. Another method tried on the SS Leviathan used the Adams Airmail Pickup system. This required that an airplane be outfitted with a long take up boom ending in a hook. First the plane dropped the incoming mail, housed in a cargo container. Then, flying twenty feet off the surface, the pilot used the hook to snag a rope stretched between two poles to which a container of mail was attached. The envelope in figure 31, carried in this type of pickup on land, has a cachet that illustrates the equipment used.
immediately following the takeover of LASSCO by Matson, the first attempt of a shore to ship transfer occurred in January 1931, using the *City of Los Angeles* and an airplane taking off from the Glendale, CA airport. The airplane collected the latest mail after the ship’s departure, and flew it out to the ship as it sailed westbound to Hawaii. In June 1931, the opposite transfer, ship to air, was tested, using the *City of Los Angeles* and the airship *Volunteer*. Again, the experiment was a success. In this case, the mail was picked up from the *City of Los Angeles* while it was 40 miles offshore, and delivered to the San Pedro, CA post office within 45 minutes. The system was never put into operation, however, because the costs for the air transfers exceeded the value of the time saved.

Dollar Steamship wanted to buy American-Hawaiian Steamship Co as a way to increase its share in the traffic and profit being made by Matson between the US West Coast and Hawaii, but they were unable to make the purchase happen. The original focus of American-Hawaiian was on the Hawaiian Islands, carrying sugar and pineapples to the continental US, and providing service between New York and Hawaii. The company’s management shifted it away from the islands in 1916 to take advantage of high freight rates in the wartime North Atlantic and lost business in the islands. As a result, most of their future business was in providing intercoastal (US Atlantic-to-US Pacific coast) and foreign services. The president and controlling shareholder of
American-Hawaiian did not want to sell and Dollar Lines could not utilize their usual tactic of buying shares quietly until they held a controlling interest. In addition, Matson/Oceanic did not want the merger as it would produce another and stronger competitor in the Hawaiian trade. As a response to the takeover attempt of American-Hawaiian, Matson made it known that it was prepared to compete in the trans-Pacific and RTW trade against Dollar. They had already launched a new *Matsonia* in 1927 and had started plans for construction of the liners *Mariposa*, *Monterey* and *Lurline*. These were launched between 1930 and 1932. Dollar and Matson reached a 10-year agreement that provided that Matson would not compete against Dollar in trans-Pacific trade if Dollar would pay Matson an annual fee and if Dollar would not solicit for West Coast-Hawaii passengers unless they had a terminal destination other than Hawaii.

An interesting sidelight of the route sailed by Matson was when they stopped at Niuafo'ou Island, Tonga, better known as “Tin Can Mail Island”. Because there is no safe harbor, when copra traders set up operations on the island in the 1880's they had to develop a method of communication with passing ships. Ship crews would seal incoming mail for the island in a ship's 40-pound biscuit tin, and then throw the tin overboard where native swimmers would retrieve them. Starting in 1929-1930, two European copra traders living on the island, Walter Quensell and Charles Ramsey, started placing the Niuafo'ou postmark and one or more of many different cachets as special marks on the mail. The swimming mail lasted until 1931 when a shark killed a swimmer; from then on, mail was brought in by outrigger canoe. Following a volcano eruption in September 1946, the island was evacuated but eventually repopulated. By January 1962, Matson Cruise Lines again began stopping and allowing passengers to use the “Tin Can Mail”. *Figure 33* shows two envelopes carried by Matson ships as part of their South Pacific routing. The cover at the top, mailed to the Republic of Honduras, has a cachet on the front stating that it was thrown from the *SS Mariposa*. It is postmarked February 1935, and on the back, the flap has an Oceanic Line inscription, along with a rubber handstamp from Quensell. The envelope at the bottom represents the more modern “Tin Can Mail” service, postmarked January 1969. This envelope has the Matson Line logo on the front, and a handstamp on the back indicating that it was mailed from the *SS Monterey*.

**Business Downturns**

The impact of the worldwide depression and decreases in imports/exports started to be felt in the Dollar organizations in the 1931-1933 period. The first public sign was the request of Dollar to the USSB, in 1931, for a two-year moratorium on the repayment of its ship construction mortgage loan. Both the *President Hoover* and *Coolidge* were sailing with less than full passenger loads. In addition, competition from Japanese lines NYK and OSK and the Canadian Pacific Railroad for passengers had increased. The foreign lines were operating ships that were newer than most of the Dollar fleet and had been built with improvements in service, speed and accommodations. As a means of attracting more travelers,
fares were reduced on the around-the-world service by approximately one-third. As noted earlier, even though the company had received an increase in the mail subsidiary to $8 million, Dollar Steamship reported a $1,000,000 loss from operations in 1932. Cash flow declines continued in 1933 as a result of decreased business and Dollar reported another $1,000,000 loss from operations as well as being unable to meet current mortgage repayment for the ship purchases of 1925 and 1929. Despite this, in 1932 the Dollar Line purchased the almost bankrupt Tacoma Oriental Steamship Company. This was the Seattle-based, locally owned competitor to the American Mail Line in Pacific Northwest that had been formed in 1928 to prevent American Mail from acquiring additional ships from the USSB.

As a result of the cash flow difficulties, the Comptroller General of the US investigated and reported that Dollar management had been enriching themselves by diverting funds from the company’s working capital for personal gain. Hundreds of thousands of dollars for commissions and fees were paid directly to the Dollar family for work done in conjunction with their ordinary management responsibilities, such as negotiating the purchase of the ships from the USSB. These payments were in addition to significant salary draws from each of the various operating companies. The Comptroller demanded that defaulted mortgage payments (approx $3.3 million principal and interest for the 1925 and 1929 ship purchases) be made from the $8 million annual mail subsidy or that tighter financial control, overseen by the Shipping Board, be placed on the company. To avoid bankruptcy that would occur if the cash from the mail subsidy were not available for operations, USSB implemented a plan to exercise financial oversight over an unwilling Dollar Lines management.

The Beginning of the End
Several events occurred in the middle years of the 1930’s decade that really sealed the fate of Dollar Steamship and its associated companies. The first, in 1933, was the capsizing of the President Madison while it was undergoing repairs at dock in Seattle. Figure 34 is a cover posted from the Madison as it was sailing out of
the Philippines almost exactly one year before the accident. Repairs were being made to the hull at the same time as cargo was being loaded. This caused a change in the stability in the ship, resulting in a list to starboard, where hull plates were still missing as repairs continued. The ship took on water and capsized. It was insured for $1,000,000, and Dollar Steamship collected its settlement. Based on its cash flow problem, declining business and the remaining useful life of the ship, Dollar chose to raise the ship but not make repairs to put it back in service. Instead, they used the insurance money to completely pay off the mortgage on the ship and make back payments on other outstanding loans.

Again let the flag of caution of “name confusion” again wave. The President Madison (I) that capsized in 1933 was a “535” ship built in 1921 and operated by Admiral Oriental/American Mail Line out of Seattle. After sitting idle for six years, it was sold by the American President Lines (successor to American Mail and Dollar Steamship) to the Philippine government in 1939 and renamed the President Quezon. This ship is entirely different from, and should not be confused with, the President Madison (II). That ship was originally a “502” series ship built in 1921; it was operated by Dollar Steamship from San Francisco as the President Garfield (I). Taken over by American President Lines in 1939, it was renamed President Madison (II) in 1940 and was chartered to the US Navy to move the “China Marines” from Shanghai to the Philippines during November 1941. The ship was bought by the Navy in March 1942, converted to a troopship and renamed and operated as USS Kenmore (AP-62). [This USS Kenmore should not be confused with the USS Kenmore (AP-162, AK-221), a Liberty ship built in June 1943, converted to a troopship and acquired by the US Navy in that November.] The ship was then converted in 1944 into a hospital ship and renamed USS Refuge (AH-11). The ship was renamed President Madison again in 1946 and scrapped in 1948. In researching the history of these ships, it is important to trace details to make sure which ship is being discussed. Figure 35 shows covers from the President Garfield in 1938 before it became the Madison (II) and from the USS Refuge in 1945 before it was changed back to the Madison (II).
As part of the overall labor movement, longshoremen and seamen operating out of San Francisco sought recognition of their union and improved working conditions. When the employers association did not agree, the men staged a strike in May of 1934. It was quickly joined by seamen on all of the West Coast, with a result that by July no commercial shipping was occurring out of any West Coast port. At the end of July, binding arbitration was recommended by a Presidential board, and was accepted by both the unions and employers association. The arbitration settlement handed down in April 1935 granted most of the unions’ demands for increased pay and recognition. Even with the mail subsidies, the additional increase in the cost of operating commercial passenger and freight ships only widen the difference between the US ships and the foreign flag carriers directly subsidized by their governments. By late 1935, despite additional collateral and increased operating economies, Dollar owed current payments to the USSB in the amount of $3 million on its long term total debt of $15 million, as well as $5 million to banks, suppliers and other creditors.

It is not knowable how much attention Dollar Lines management would have paid to it, but on November 22, 1935 Pan American Airways made the first mail/cargo flight of their Martin M-130 Flying-boat China Clipper. It inaugurated Foreign Airmail Route #14 (FAM 14), leaving San Francisco, stopping at Honolulu, Wake Island and Guam and arriving in Manila, Philippine Islands, in a total trip time of five days. This compared favorably to the average five to seven days trip by sea from San Francisco to Honolulu and a total trip time of 20 days to Manila. Figure 36 shows a juxtaposition of a first flight cover of FAM 14, flown from San Francisco and back stamped on arrival in Manila on November 29 and a Sea Post envelope mailed just a week later on board the President Hoover by someone connected with Pan Am Airways as the ship sailed west to complete its the Pacific crossing to the Asian mainland. In October 1936, Pan Am flew the first scheduled passenger flights from San Francisco to Manila, and implemented an extension to Hong Kong in April 1937. These flights were the first steps to a major change in not only the transportation of mail over both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans but also the entire passenger sailing industry.

All during this time, the Dollar ships continued to sail, carrying mail and passengers on business and pleasure. One passenger was General Douglas MacArthur. He
had retired from the US Army in 1935 and sailed on the Dollar Line from San Francisco to Manila. Once there, he was appointed Field Marshall in the Philippine Army, and served as a special US Military Adviser. The post was the de facto commander of the Philippine Armed Forces and was a special role arranged between President Quezon and President Roosevelt. On this 1935 voyage, he met Jean Marie Faircloth, who would become his second wife. After their marriage in New York in 1937, the MacArthurs again traveled on the President Coolidge, sailing back to Manila in May 1937. Figure 37 shows a cover postmarked on the President Hayes in March 1936 as it sailed in the “Round the World” service. It is franked with a 6 cents airmail stamp rather than with the usual 3c stamp for 1st class mail. As a result of the Air Mail Act of 1934 which opened airmail routes to competitive bidding, transferred rates and regulations to the Interstate Commerce Commission and safety regulation to the Department of Commerce, and a rate reduction from $0.08/1st ounce & $0.13 for additional ounces to $0.06/ounce for all ounces, domestic airmail pound-miles rose substantially as did air passenger traffic.

In the summer of 1936, as a result of Senate Hearings in 1933, a USPOD report on shipping industry mail subsidies from 1935 and a recent government report of policy suggestions for the merchant marine, Congress passed Merchant Marine Act. Its purpose was "to further the development and maintenance of an adequate and well-balanced American merchant marine, to promote the commerce of the United States, to aid in the national defense". The new law contained policies for the direct subsidization of construction and operation of ships on designated routes, established the US Maritime Commission to oversee the operations of the act, appropriated funds to build 65 new ships and provided for federal training for merchant marine officers, laying the groundwork for the US Merchant Marine Academy (1943). Before this could be implemented, at the end of September 1936 the labor agreements resulting from the 1934 strike expired. The unions of the seamen, longshoremen, and cooks and stewards acted together demanding changes in wages, overtime payments and hiring practices. At the beginning of the negotiations, Dollar management estimated the impact would be a $1.8 million increase in annual operating expenses. Since the employers again did not accede to the unions, a strike was called in October, and went on to idle 230 ships on the West Coast. The Dollar companies had to refund tickets for cancelled voyages, as well as pay other companies to return overseas passengers. At the same time, with their ships inactive, they could not earn any freight revenue. This strike also lasted three months before a final settlement was reached that met the unions’ demands.

1937-The Decisive Year for the Dollar Lines
During 1937, several physical and financial events occurred that individually would have been challenging for any company, but in combination with the already depressed world market and precarious financial position of the company were death knells to the Dollar Lines.
The year started with the dissolution of the almost-always financially unstable Tacoma Oriental Steamship subsidiary. It had filed for bankruptcy in November 1936, and the company assets were sold at auction to satisfy creditors. In March 1937, The Admiral Line also filed for bankruptcy. This was the coastal shipping business of Pacific Steamship, operating out of Seattle as a feeder for the American Mail transPacific service. Dollar Steamship had taken control of the Admiral Line in 1932 but the effects of the Depression had caused it to operate at a loss. Dollar was trying to sell its interest in the company, but continued poor business and the maritime strike of the previous fall were obstacles too large to overcome. Approximately 15 months later, the Admiral Line ceased operations and Pacific Steam went out of existence.

As part of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, the United States Shipping Board was disbanded and a new oversight organization, the US Maritime Commission (MC), was created. One of the Commissions’ first tasks was to end the Jones-White Act subsidies and institute the new direct operating subsidy. In the first quarter of the year, the MC settled old contracts with 23 companies representing 32 of 43 existing mail contracts and made new six-month subsidies with 16 companies covering 220 mail routes. In total, $8 million of 1928 mail subsidies were replaced with $4.6 million of 1936 operating subsidies. In addition, $500,000 was authorized for mail carriage based on weight alone. Three large companies did not reached settlement by June---Munson Steamship (in bankruptcy proceedings), United Fruit and Dollar Lines. The Dollar settlement was held up by a lack of information and detailed data from Dollar on management and resources. The Commission also decided to apply any impounded mail subsidies to the unpaid current debt owed by Dollar and not to operating costs. This action was very likely to put Dollar and American Mail into bankruptcy. The MC blamed Dollar management’s unwillingness to cooperate and provide financial information for the Commission’s delay in taking final action on operating subsidies for the company. Based on changing economic and world political conditions, however, Dollar management didn’t want just an operating subsidy but decided to seek a way to discharge the company’s debts and personal responsibility for those debts.

While discussions continued about the financial ability of the company to stay afloat, the two newest ships of the fleet were actually being challenged to stay physically afloat. On March 6, 1937, while outbound from San Francisco in a thick fog, the President Coolidge hit and sank the Frank H. Buck, an oil tanker owned by the Associated Oil Company.
Co, near Lands End, past the Golden Gate Bridge. Sailing on her first westbound voyage since the start of the maritime strike in the fall, the ship carried 680 passengers (about 75% of capacity). The ships collided head on and the *Frank H. Buck*’s bow was cut open by the *Coolidge*’s bow. Witnesses described the *Buck* after the crash as being "bow down and stern up", but the ship floated over to Lands End and went aground on rocks. All of the crew and almost all of the 67,000 barrels of oil cargo were recovered, and some of the ship’s wreckage can see be seen today at low tide. The damage to the *Coolidge* was also severe. Her bow had been bashed in from the waterline to halfway to the top, and the starboard side had a hole that was 20 feet wide. Repairs to the ship took 10 days, at a cost of approximately $250,000. The *Coolidge* left San Francisco again on March 25, 1937, and by June was back on her normal schedule. **Figure 38** illustrates a commemoratives cachet for the 5th anniversary of the *President Coolidge* that is cancelled in July 1937. Note that the cachet is amended “Delayed By Strike” since the actual 5th anniversary would have been in November 1936.

The other physical loss came in December 11, 1937, near Hoishoto Island off southern tip of Taiwan, when the *President Hoover* ran aground. The captain, having been informed of Japanese-Chinese fighting around Shanghai, had sought to take a different route to save time as well as bypass the Shanghai area. The grounding of the ship had torn off the bottom almost clear back to the engine room. Several attempts were made to salvage the vessel, but she was declared a total loss. **Figure 39** illustrates a postcard mailed from the *Hoover* and postmarked on August 10, 1937, four months before it was lost. The sender of the card had been in Tokyo on business and attended a session of the Japanese Diet. The message reads, “All very excited and working up war spirit just as we did in 1916”. This is appropriate as the Japanese armed forces had invaded China on July 7 and occupied Peking on July 28. This was the second major step in the Japanese expansion into Asia, the first being the occupation of Mongolia in 1932. The invasion of China expanded the need and reaches of Japanese military control, and lead to the actions in Indo-China in 1941.
Although the Dollar Line had operated through the Great Depression, the combination of slower economic times, increasing operating costs and mounting deficits, the loss of the

Hoover and war nervousness all had their effect on the company. In January 1938, as a result of negotiations with the US Maritime Commission (MC) in exchange for a cash infusion by Dollar management and acceptance of a MC-appointed Vice President and Treasurer at Dollar Steamship Company, the MC provided a 6-month operating subsidy for Dollar Steamship and American Mail. In June 1938 the President Coolidge was “arrested” in San Francisco for an unpaid debt of $35,000. A bond of $70,000 was put up so the ship could be released for its trip to Asia. After examinations and reports of the operations of the company, the MC did not renew the operating subsidy and all operations of Dollar and American Mail were suspended as of June. Figure 40 is an envelope mailed on the President Cleveland in May 1938, just before the suspension of operations. At this time, almost all of the Dollar fleet was at sea, and it took until October for them to complete their voyages. Assuming from the return address of this cover that the Cleveland was near Hong Kong, it would have taken until almost the end of July for it to complete its regularly assigned voyage to New York. On this cover also notice the error in the letters in the top left half of the dial. “U.S.I.P” appears instead of “U.S.T.P”.

The most immediate reason for the Dollar Lines’ failure was the world economy and the fighting in Asia. The Sino-Japanese war in China had caused passenger bookings and cargo quantities to drop markedly. At the same time that income had dropped, operating insurance costs had greatly increased, further affecting the profitability. With current year net loss of $4.3 million, liabilities of $17 million, and a fleet with a market value of $10 million, the Dollar family and management assigned their voting stock (about 90% of the total common stock) of Dollar Steamship Lines to the MC in return for release of all liabilities resulting from the
millions borrowed in the 1923-1929 period for ship purchases and renovations as well as new ship construction.

On August 15, 1938, the US Maritime Commission took ownership of the Dollar Line. As part of the agreement, the name "Dollar" was not to be used but the jobs of all employees below the senior management level were kept. The Maritime Commission appointed William Gibbs McAdoo as Chairman of the Board of the new entity and Joseph Sheehan, Executive Director of the Commission, became President. The new entity was called the American President Lines (APL), and officially came into being in November 1938. Instead of the "$" sign that had adorned the funnels of the Dollar ships, the new company symbol was a white eagle.

**Figure 41** is a cover from the first sailing of the *President Coolidge* as an APL ship, seven years after its maiden voyage. This ship, as well as the rest of the passenger fleet, stayed in service on the Trans Pacific and Round the World routes. **Figure 42** is a postcard mailed from the Coolidge, dated December 9, 1940. The front side illustrates the APL “Spread-wing Eagle “logo. The reverse shows the *Coolidge*, in Hong Kong Harbor, with the white eagle on its funnels.

3. War Service

US activity before
December 1941
During the next (1938-1941) three years, the Coolidge and the other President ships continued to sail the Pacific and the world. Figure 43 shows two letters, one from the captain of the President Taft with a Dollar Lines corner card and the other from the President Cleveland with an APL corner card. The captain of the Taft at this time was Orel Pierson, USNR, who was captain of the President Harrison on December 8, 1941. The Harrison and the President Madison were chartered by US Navy to bring the "China Marines" (4th Marine Division) from Shanghai to Manila. On the way, while under observation, Captain Taft grounded the Harrison so that it would not be captured and used by the Japanese. Pierson and the crew of 154 men and 1 woman steward were captured and imprisoned until the end of the war. The Japanese salvaged the ship, and renamed it the Kakko Maru. For two years and eight months the ship transported Japanese troops and raw material from captured territories. There were rumors that she was torpedoed and repaired, and the name changed again to Kachidoki Maru. This ship’s story ended in September 1944 when the submarine USS Pampanito torpedoed the Kachidoki Maru, carrying 900 British Prisoners of War from the River Kwai area.

The Coolidge was used to evacuate the families of US servicemen from China and Japan as World War II raged in Europe and the military threat from Japan started to increase. On January 16, 1941 the Coolidge arrived in San Francisco with 832 passengers from the Pacific Rim. This was a new record for passengers carried on a merchant ship on a regular run, but the Coolidge eclipsed itself in March when she carried over 1,000 passengers to the United States.

On May 28, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a state of national emergency and in June 1941, the Coolidge was taken over by the Maritime
Commission as a troop transport for the Army. Figure 44 shows an envelope postmarked on the Coolidge on its last non-military voyage. The letter is postmarked June 20, 1941 inbound to San Francisco. Twenty-five other ships of the APL also entered government service over the next four years, some operated by charter as part of the US Army Transportation Service, and some actually commissioned as ships of the US Navy. Of these, seven were lost in wartime service. The Coolidge’s first voyage on a full-time basis for the Army began at San Francisco on July 15, 1941 and sailed the familiar route to Honolulu and Manila. Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, the Coolidge sailed this route, transporting troops and supplies for the US, as well as carrying regular commercial passengers. The last peacetime passenger voyage for the President Coolidge departed Manila on November 27, 1941. It was on this voyage that the envelope illustrated in Figure 1, the reason for this entire tale, was carried. The ship was en route to Hawaii and the continental United States when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor occurred.

To keep all of these activities in context, we must briefly review the state of military affairs at that time. This article is intended only to be a brief sketch on the reasons for and the history of Japanese military actions in Asia and the Pacific Ocean in the late 1930’s-early 1940’s, so as to place the movements of the Coolidge in context. By 1931, the Japanese population had been increasing at a rate of 1 million per year, and this continued growth required larger amounts of natural resources and raw materials to support the economy. The US depression had affected a major foreign market for Japanese silk, and conflicts in China between the Nationalists and the Communists were affecting imports and exports. Even though Manchuria was a part of China, Japan had invested heavily in the area. When the Chinese nationalists raised a political challenge over the Japanese control of the South Manchuria Railway, the Japanese militarists created an excuse, and invaded. After establishing control over all of Manchuria, the Japanese set up the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1933. Over the next seven years, the military influence in Japanese society and politics continued to grow, affecting and directing national policy. There remained a continued need for raw materials, particularly oil, and Japan proposed to satisfy its increased needs by enlarging its control in China and Southeast Asia. In July 1937, as the first part of this expansion, Japan invaded China. They rapidly conquered the northern part, occupied Peking in July, but encountered strong resistance in southern areas. Chiang Kai-shek continued to govern the large interior portions of China outside of the immediate Japanese control. To isolate the Nationalist forces from outside support, in 1940, Japan forced the closure of the Burma Road in the west and the Indochina frontier in the south, and moved to consolidate their control over the coastal areas. After the defeat of France and Holland by Germany, Japan sent troops, in September 1940, to occupy the northern part of Indo-China. In September, Japan entered into a defensive alliance, the Tripartite Pact, with Germany and Italy. In July 1941, Japan occupied the southern part of Indo-China, and proclaimed a joint Franco-Japanese protectorate for the area. All of this was in furtherance of the Japanese
policy, as stated by Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoye in January 1941 “I am convinced that the firm establishment of a Mutual prosperity Sphere in Greater East Asia is absolutely necessary to the continued existence of this country.” Shortly after this comment, Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka said “The Co-Prosperity Sphere in the Far East is based on the spirit of … Eight Corners of the Universe under One Roof…We must control the western Pacific…if this request is not heard, there is no hope for Japanese American relations”. The “Co-Prosperity Sphere” would have Japan in political, military and economic control of countries that would provide raw materials to Japan and then be a captive market for their exports. It was the Japanese intent to include all countries of the Pacific Rim in this arrangement, willingly or by force.

After the invasion of China, the United States implemented measures to try and curb Japanese economic and military power. A significant action was the establishment of an embargo on all vital war materials. In July 1940, federal licensing restrictions were placed on exports of aviation fuel and high-grade scrap iron and steel, and these items were completely embargoed after September 1940. The US also froze the financial assets of Japan in the US and sought ways to increase aid to China. Aid to Chinese forces included sales of military equipment and supplies, as well as the support of capable US military commanders. These included Colonel Claire Chennault and the American Volunteer Group, a.k.a., the “Flying Tigers”, as well as General “Vinegar Joe” Joseph Stillwell. After the July 1941 occupation of southern Indo-China, the United States enacted a total embargo on trade with Japan, eliminating all sales of petroleum and other raw materials. From internal reviews, the Japanese military estimated that, in the event of war, their oil reserves would last, at best, only until 1943. So, in September 1941, the Japanese government had decided to prepare to go to war with the United States and other Western powers if no agreement could be reached to resume trade.

War Warning
The Japanese sent emissaries from Tokyo to Washington to negotiate with the US in October 1941, the same month that Admiral Hideki Tojo became Wartime Prime Minister, in addition to his role as Military Minister. The United States’ demand for trade resumption was simple: Japan had to give up all of its land conquests in Asia since 1931. The Japanese did not accept this demand; instead, they countered with a proposal to allow retention of bases in northern China. Ultimately, the US rejected this counter-proposal. Unknown to the Japanese while these negotiations were taking place, US intelligence service had been able to decipher several Japanese code systems, including their diplomatic code. US negotiators were therefore aware of what instructions the Washington emissaries were receiving from Tokyo. The US had also decrypted some of the Japanese naval and merchant marine codes, and was able to intercept messages relating to military and ship movements. As the trade discussions faltered in November, the US noted movement of large numbers of Japanese
naval vessels, and other indications that the Japanese armed forces were preparing for war. In no dispute is that the US military tracked the southern movement of the fleet that was destined to carry out the invasions of the Philippines, Dutch East Indies, Singapore and Hong Kong. There is, however, a continuing discussion whether the US was aware of the fleet that left Hitokappu Bay, on the northern island of Etorufu, and ultimately carried out the attack on Pearl Harbor. Based on what information was known, or surmised from reading the coded Japanese radio messages, the US Navy on November 25 declared the North Pacific Ocean to be a “Vacant Sea “, and ordered the diversion of all US and allied shipping out of the area. This was done to clear all traffic out so that the track of any potential Japanese invasion force would stand out clearly. Merchant ships, including the President Coolidge, were routed south to the Dutch East Indies, traveling through the Celebes Sea, and between New Guinea and Australia, via the Torres Strait, then travel east-northeast, leading to Hawaii. Warnings based, in part, on the contents of Japanese diplomatic messages were sent to the Hawaiian and Philippine commands on at least three occasions in the last week of November 1941. Specifically, on November 27, the US military issued a “war warning”, and told commanders to expect an aggressive move by the Japanese within the next few days, including amphibious landings in the Philippines and Dutch East Indies.

November 1941 Travels of the President Coolidge
The last voyage of the President Coolidge was an unusual one. The ship sailed from Manila on November 27, 1941 under the command of Henry Nelson, USNR. He was still the captain when “friendly” mines at Noumea accidentally sank the Coolidge in June 1942. By then the ship had been converted into a troopship with a 5,000-man capacity. An investigation proved that information about the minefield was not given to the captain until he was in the middle of it, at which point the ship had already struck a mine. Fortunately the ship was near land, and, with one exception, all of the crew and troops were able to safely evacuate. Based on passenger and official reports of the final prewar sailing, the ship took a circuitous route to Hawaii, arriving December 17, and reached San Francisco on December 25, 1941.

On its westward trip, from San Francisco to Manila in November 1941, the President Coolidge traveled with the US Army Transport Hugh L Scott, and was escorted by the USS Louisville (CA28). The increased military activity of the Japanese, as well as the political war rhetoric had caused the U.S. to begin reinforcing its outposts in the Pacific. In 1939, a naval review board recommended construction of an airbase on Midway Atoll, and rated it in the Pacific Ocean as second in strategic importance only to Pearl Harbor. Construction stated in March 1940, and Midway Naval Air Station was commissioned in August 1941. As far back as 1935, the Navy was exploring cooperative agreements on Wake Island with Pan American Airlines for use of its “China Clipper” seaplane base. In January 1941, Navy and navy contractor personnel arrived to begin fortifying the island and establishing a naval air base.
Regarding the Philippines, it had been a basic assumption of US military war planning for the last decade that Japan would strike there first, in case of war with the United States. A wing of 35 new B-17 bombers and 107 P-40 fighters were flown or shipped to the islands, and were based primarily at Clark Field. In addition, the Army sent, in at least two movements, additional ground troops including two tank battalions. On a previous voyage, the Coolidge left San Francisco on September 8 and arrived in Manila on September 26, 1941, and transported the first deployment of the additional troops. Three companies, approximately 400 men, of the 194th Tank Battalion (Light), a National Guard unit, sailed with the ship’s other passengers. Carried in the cavernous cargo hold of the Coolidge were 54 M3 Stuart 14-ton tanks, 19 half-tracks and the other combat vehicles of the 194th. When this force arrived in Manila, they had the distinction of being the first U.S. Armored Force deployed overseas in what was to become World War II. Over the next several months, the troops dealt with organizational problems in trying to obtain supplies, including gasoline and live ammunition, and in trying to study the surrounding terrain, using the only maps available-- service station maps.

The USAT Hugh L Scott, which sailed with the Coolidge, was previously the President Pierce of the American President Lines. Ships prefixed “USAT” were Army owned and operated by Army Transport Service (A.T.S.), a section of the Army Quartermaster Corps. The ship’s officers were licensed mariners and both officers and merchant mariner crews were Army civilian employees. The larger transports also had Army owned officers and merchant mariner crews. The ship's officers and merchant mariner crews were Army employees. The ship was purchased by Dollar Lines in 1925. Under both Dollar and APL, she sailed the route of New York-Cuba-Panama Canal-California-Hawaii-Japan-Shanghai-Hong Kong-Manila, taking 110 days for a round trip. Figure 45 illustrates an envelope mailed on the ship was in APL service, and this envelope was postmarked about 15 months before the US Army Transport Service requisitioned the vessel. After entering Army service, the ship was renamed, in honor of General Hugh Scott, who was Army Chief of Staff in WWI. It made four voyages to the Far East, including the one described here, before sailing to the East Coast in July 1942. There it was transferred to the Navy in August 1942, converted to an attack transport and commissioned September 7, 1942 as USS Hugh L Scott (AP43). The ship participated in Operation Torch and sailed for the North Africa landings near the end of October. On November 8, she landed her troops at Fedhala, French Morocco. Three days later, while at anchor unloading supplies after the landings, she was torpedoed by the German submarine U-130.
On this November 1941 voyage to Manila, the Hugh L. Scott transported the 192nd Tank Battalion (Light). This was another National Guard unit and the second half of the Philippines armored force. They had embarked at San Francisco, and after enjoying brief liberty at Hawaii, stopped at Guam and finally docked in Manila on Thanksgiving Day, 1941. The 192nd joined the 194th Tank Battalion and the 17th Ordnance Company (Armored) to form the Provisional Tank Group, United States Army Forces in the Far East. At this point in time, armed forces in the Philippines consisted of 10 Philippine Scouts divisions (American officers and Filipino troops), including the 91st Coast Artillery Regiment and the 26th Cavalry, the Philippine Division (with one American and two Filipino regiments) and assorted Army Air Force and Navy personnel. Americans in the defense of the Philippines totaled about 25,000 men plus a few American nurses. On the return trip to the United States, the Scott was likely carrying US civilians and military dependents leaving the actual war zone of China or the expected war zone of the Philippines. The Scott sailed with the Coolidge for the entire return voyage to Honolulu and San Francisco.

Last Peacetime Departure
When the President Coolidge sailed from Manila for the last time, on November 27, it was subject to the “Vacant Sea” directive, calling for travel south from Manila. The US Navy had also commanded all merchant ships to sail in convoys, and so the USAT Hugh L Scott departed Manila with the Coolidge. Their escort ship for the return voyage was again the USS Louisville. Commissioned in January 1931, the Louisville operated with the U.S. Fleet and on independent missions, mainly in the Pacific. She also visited the Caribbean, the U.S. Atlantic coast and Latin American ports. During the winter of 1939 the Louisville participated in fleet exercises in the Caribbean and returned to the west coast in May 1940. After participating in fleet problems off Hawaii in the fall of 1940, the ship sailed from the West Coast for an extended cruise through the Panama Canal to eastern South America. Figure 46 is a cover postmarked on the ship on Navy Day, 1940. The Louisville was in Montevideo, Uruguay, just before a stopover in Brazil. There she received orders to proceed to South Africa. As a neutral ship, Louisville crossed the South Atlantic with her American flag spotlighted to warn off U-boat attacks. At Simonstown, South Africa, she received $148 million in British gold for deposit in the United States. She then sailed for New York City, delivered the gold and
returned to the Pacific. After the start of the war, she took part in U.S. aircraft carrier raids in the central and southern Pacific in February and March 1942, operated in the Aleutians area, and late in 1942 participated in the final months of the Guadalcanal campaign.

For the return trip in November 1941, the Louisville left Manila on the same day as the Coolidge and Scott, but proceeded independently to a rendezvous point off of Tarakan, East Borneo. The Louisville met up with the other two ships on November 29. The trio continued south from Tarakan, and turned east off of Java. They steered for the Torres Strait, between the tip of Australia and the island of New Guinea. After passing through the Torres Strait, the ships passed to the south of Port Moresby. They continued roughly east, passing between Santa Cruz Island in the Solomon and Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu) to Pago Pago, and then turned northeast to Hawaii. During the voyage, the Louisville was informed of the Pearl Harbor attack, and the existence of a state of war between the United States, Japan, Germany and Italy. On December 13, the ships crossed the Equator northbound near Latitude 157 degrees. Ironically, this is the same approximate latitude used by the Japanese, heading south, when they attacked Pearl Harbor. Finally, on December 17, 1941, the convoy of the SS President Coolidge, USS Louisville and USAT Hugh L Scott arrived in Pearl Harbor, Honolulu. The trip had taken about 21 days to travel from Manila to Hawaii, a voyage that normally took about 17 days.

First Wartime Arrival
When the President Coolidge arrived at Pearl Harbor, the damaged US Navy ships at anchor or on the harbor bottom were still smoldering. All the passengers, even those continuing onto San Francisco, had to leave the ship for a couple of days while alterations were made to create a small hospital on board. On the evening of December 17, Lieutenant Ruth Erickson, NC (Nurse Corps), US Navy, a nurse stationed at the Pearl Harbor Naval Hospital, was ordered to pack a bag and be ready to leave. Lt. Erickson was on duty on December 7, and had both witnessed the attacks and helped care for those injured in them. With two other nurses, she was transported from the hospital to the piers where she boarded the SS President Coolidge. The nurses’ job, together with a number of corpsmen, was to accompany injured sailors on the trip back to San Francisco. The military command decided that patients who would need more than 3 months treatment should be transferred to the continental US (CONUS). On December 18, medical supplies were taken on board and, on December 19, 125 patients were taken on board the Coolidge. Passengers traveling to San Francisco were also allowed to return to the ship that day. Two Navy doctors on the passenger list from the Philippines were placed on temporary duty to assist the nurses and corpsmen. Together with the USAT Scott, carrying 55 patients and eight volunteer nurses from the Queens Hospital in Honolulu, the two ships sailed in the afternoon of December 19, in a convoy of 8 or 10 ships. Accompanying them were the cruiser USS Detroit (CL8) and the destroyer USS Cummings (DD365), which rendezvoused with the two passenger ships off Diamond Head and convoyed
them to the West Coast. Both of these vessels had been in Pearl Harbor on December 7. The Detroit actually got underway, and set up antiaircraft fire that accounted for several Japanese planes.

According to Lt. Erickson, the Coolidge traveled without exterior lights and the doors and portholes were closed at night to prevent light showing. No one was allowed on deck, even during the day, and the outside temperature was colder than normal. Passengers were given to understand that the ship had traveled farther to the north of its regular track, as a precaution against submarines. It was a high-speed run, making twenty-two knots for most of the five-day journey. The Coolidge and Scott docked and disembarked the wounded at San Francisco’s Embarcadero. Two ferries met the ship and, with ambulances transferred the patients to the naval hospital at Mare Island as well as civilian hospitals. The Detroit and Cummings then anchored off Yerba Buena Island, south of the suspension section of the Oakland Bay Bridge.

4. Censorship
   Beginnings
   Since the beginning of the European War in 1939, Great Britain had been censoring the transit mails from other countries. The primary stations for this activity outside of the UK were Bermuda and Trinidad, and Jamaica was added later. This plan was called Imperial Censorship, and included all trans-Atlantic mail and mail from South American and the Caribbean. US officials originally objected to this censorship of US mail, but the British government refused to modify their program. Figure 47 is an envelope sent surface mail from the Republic of Ireland to the US in June 1941, and shows the Bermuda censorship with the familiar “PC 90” label. It also has an Irish censorship tape. During World War II, Ireland remained neutral both because of strong anti-British feeling and because of the economic problems of the time and the neglect of the military since the Irish Civil War of 1922-23.
In late 1940, when it appeared that the US would eventually become part of the war, the military submitted a recommendation to President Roosevelt for the structure of a censorship organization. The US Army, in early 1941, sent a representative to Bermuda to study the British censorship operations. Having obtained detailed operational information, the Army, Navy and Post Office Department submitted a revised plan to the president, which he accepted. The program called for censorship of international communications, as well as subjecting the press and broadcast industries to the mandatory censorship authority of the Federal Government. In November, a committee was appointed by the President, and headed by the Postmaster General. Its charge was to produce a detailed plan of implementation for a censorship agency, including the necessary enabling legislation. By December 7, 1941, the committee had a detailed report from J.Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, which showed how a censorship organization could be created, how various federal agencies could collaborate and cooperate, and recommended that the Director of Censorship should be answerable only to the President. This report, along with the other planning done by the military and postal departments, provided the framework for the establishment of the Office of Censorship operations in the US during WWII. Using this framework the military was able to implement a basic system immediately after the war declarations in early December. In the period December 12-20, postal censorship offices were opened in 9 cities (6 in the continental US and 3 US territories/possessions (Honolulu, Cristobal, CZ and San Juan, PR). The only mail to be examined was incoming and outgoing international mail. This was defined as all mail having a country of delivery different from a country of origin. This category also included, according to the Office of Censorship Regulations, all mail starting or ending in the US or its possessions, or transiting through the US, or its territories and possessions. Figure 48 shows examples of mail originating in the
US Virgin Islands and Hawaii that was sent to the continental United States and thus was subject to censorship under the rules. The earliest censorship marks on civilian mail from Hawaii was a hand stamped marking reading “Released by I(nformation) C(ontrol) B(oard)” and a number, used into mid-1942.

The declaration of war with Japan suspended mail service from the US to Japan, and countries under their occupation or attack. After December 7, airmail received in Hawaii and destined for countries in Asia and the western Pacific was marked “Return to Sender/Service Suspended” and sent back to CONUS. This also affected mail to our new allies, Australia and New Zealand, as Pacific flight operations of Pan Am were cancelled. Surface mail was treated the same way. Figure 49 illustrates an envelope mailed at the $0.03 1st class surface rate from New York to the Philippines. Postmarked in New York on November 15, it probably took a week to get to San Francisco, to make a ship connection to the Philippines. Assuming it made it to a departing ship the following week, it would have arrived in Hawaii sometime in the week beginning November 30, and been “on the docks” awaiting further transport to the Orient during the attack. As with other mail outward-bound, it was marked “Service Suspended” and returned to the sender.

The Cover
The Figure 1 envelope was mailed on November 23, 1941, in Manila, PI, with a 6 centavos stamp for 1st class surface mail service. How and when did this holiday card travel to the United States? It was carried on the eastbound voyage of the SS President Coolidge, which departed Manila on November 27, 1941, accompanied by two military ships. Following US Navy orders, the Coolidge sailed on a circuitous route to Hawaii. During this trip, Japanese military forces attacked Pearl Harbor and other locations in Asia, bringing about the formal participation of the United States in World War II. The President Coolidge arrived at Honolulu on December 14, and took on wounded military personnel for transport to the continental United States (CONUS). Departing Hawaii on December 17, and sailing in a convoy protected by US Navy warships, the vessel arrived at San Francisco on December 25, 1941.
Why was it censored when it was mailed in peacetime from a US citizen in a US Possession to the continental United States? With the declaration of war against Japan, Germany and Italy on December 8-9, 1941, the US government activated its plan for the censorship of international civilian mail. Censorship stations were opened around the country starting in mid-December 1941. In San Francisco in particular, the first full day of operations occurred on December 15, 1941. After the arrival of the President Coolidge on December 25, 1941, the mail from the ship was unloaded and sent to the Office of Censorship for review. The definition of “international and transit mail” included all mail starting or ending in the US or its possessions, and so this envelope was subject to examination. After being opened, reviewed and resealed by the Censorship office, it was returned to the US Post Office Department for delivery. Later, the San Francisco office concentrated its efforts on the review of airmail going to Hawaii or international mail from/to the Pacific, and largely ignored surface mail. This process was based on the premise that if important information (military or economic) was going to be transmitted, airmail would be necessary for the time value of the information. Surface mail would simply take too long.

5. Conclusion
With the start of the US’s active fighting in World War II, civilian shipping was pressed into service to support the military effort. Twenty-two ships operated by American President Lines in 1941, as well as vessels from Matson, Grace, United States Lines and others, entered military service in one form or another. Seven of the APL ships were part of the larger total of ships that were sunk, damaged, captured or detained. In the decade after World War II, ocean liners had their last hurrah as a primary mode of passenger transportation. Passenger ships continued to be the largest, fastest and most glamorous vessels afloat, and were patronized by society and celebrities. The trans-Atlantic route between Europe and North America was the most prestigious route, with the great liners...
competing for the fastest crossing. Passengers returned to the TransPacific sailing as well.

The decline of the industry came from the accelerated development of aircraft during the war, including multi-engine bombers and transports with long range and large carrying capacity. Surplus C-47 airplanes, which Dwight Eisenhower called one of the most important weapons in the war, were converted to the civilian version DC-3 and became the standard equipment of almost all the world’s airlines. The ready availability of this low cost and easy-to-maintain aircraft boosted the worldwide air travel industry. Jet aircraft technology developed for military use in late World War II and the Korean War was soon transferred to commercial use, and the first jet passenger aircraft flew in 1953. Airlines began to erode the market share for intercontinental passenger and mail travel that had been owned by ships for the last century, and in the mid-1960’s, more people crossed the Atlantic Ocean by plane than by ship. The Boeing 707 and Douglas DC-8 led the increase in long distance commercial jet travel, and the Boeing 747 was the final blow. It became no longer fashionable, practical, or economical to travel by boat. In 1974, to boost a declining market, Cunard Line started promoting the idea of pleasure cruises, where the ship itself, not a destination, was the reason for the trip. This type of ships is designed for luxury, comfort and entertainment. For example, consider the Freedom of the Seas, launched in 2006. At 160,000 gross tons, it was 3 times as large as the SS United States when launched in 1952. Carrying more than 3,600 passengers and a crew of 1,800, its recreational features include whirlpools that extend 12 feet beyond the sides of the ship, a water park, geysers and a cascading waterfall, an ice-skating rink, a 9-hole miniature golf course and a rock-climbing wall.

Now, in the first decade of the 21st century, the dozens of passenger vessels and companies of, the United States, England, France, Germany and Japan have vanished, and the seas are as empty of regularly scheduled passenger ships as in the days before Columbus. Oh, well, we could do worse that sitting back and singing along with Bobby Darin—“Somewhere beyond the sea, somewhere waiting for me, my lover stands on golden sands, and watches the ships that go sailing”.

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