

THE GREAT WESTERN

THE FIRST ATLANTIC LINER

Purpose: Purpose of this exhibit is to illustrate the part played by the Great Western Steam Ship Company in the development of steam transport on the North Atlantic.

Steam propulsion on maritime vessels was introduced in the early 18th century. Early steam vessels sailed in areas where refueling opportunities were available, limiting them to areas near shore lines and ports. By the late 1830's ship design and advances in the design of the steam engines reached a point where consideration of regular steam powered crossings of the Atlantic might be considered.

Prior to this point only two vessels with steam power capability had attempted Atlantic crossings. The first was the Savannah, a small sailing vessel with wooden paddle wheels that could be detached when not used. It is doubtful the paddle wheels were used in the open ocean so this crossing should not be considered. The second was the Royal William; a Canadian built paddle wheel steamer that crossed in the 1830's to be sold in Belgium. The Royal William was outfitted as a war ship and became the first steam vessel to fire a shot in war time.

During a meeting of the Great Western Railroad Company board after the completion of their railroad line London to Bristol the thought of continuing the railroad westward was not possible. It was suggested by their engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel that they make it longer by building a steam ship. As a result the ship that ushered in a new era of transatlantic travel was built.

Treatment: The exhibit is organized by year of operation. It does not contain any of the information relating to the other steam ship companies that competed with the Great Western Steam Ship Company.

Top left and top right headings provide navigation assistance.

TOP LEFT corner of first page for each year is in large type and bold and establishes the year for that section. Following pages for the section will show smaller type and by subdued

TOP RIGHT corner of first page highlights special information displayed on that page. This may include information about the cover that warrants the cover being at that point in the exhibit.

Information relating to the story line is in a special font and boxed, the only in the exhibit in this format. Information relating to the cover appears under or near the cover. Arrival and departure information appears in a blue shaded box near the appropriate cover. The arrival and departure information in this exhibit is the result of several years research in London by the exhibitor collaborated by other sources.

This exhibit introduces two new concepts. First the length of each voyage is listed in the blue shaded with arrival and departure information. Second the markings are identified at the bottom of the pages or if only a couple of marks in the description of the cover.

Knowledge: My primary philatelic interest is American sailing packets. I have researched arrival and departure dates of these vessels that operated on the North Atlantic during the period 1818 to 1840. This

information was published in a definitive work on this subject, *North Atlantic Packets 1818-1840*. Continued research has extended the data base out to 1848. Work is continuing to include the French packets arrival and departure data during this period.

During the development of my research techniques I researched the arrival and departure dates of the Pioneer Steamers, but before I was able to publish this research another author published it. I have used my research to verify this data.

Rarity: Cover rarity varies greatly. A maroon backing indicates significant item. Items with this backing are not necessarily rare but are especially noteworthy, for example express mail, double forwarding agents or rates greater than four times postal rates. Availability takes precedence over price in determining rarity.

Many of the new items in this exhibit were acquired from the Richard Winter sale and have provided a significant expansion and increased spectrum to the exhibit.

Condition: This exhibit contains covers more than 150 years old. This type of ephemera was seldom stored in a protected environment. Covers are in "as found" condition showing normal wear and tear. Any restored or repaired material is noted in cover descriptions.

Efforts to acquire material in the best condition were used and are being pursued. Quest for additional material remains a goal. More items will surface that will enhance the exhibit.

Significant items: Basis for highlighting significant items is not based solely on philatelic rationale. Events during a period of philatelic development occur in varied situations and elements. Thus improvements in the delivery of postal services rendered by improvements in marine vessels are also considered.

Highlighted items in this exhibit reflect conditions and events that highlight improvements in postal services and variances in postal fees.

References:

1. Denis Griffiths, *Brunel's Great Western*, 1985.
2. Colin, Tabart, *United Kingdom Letter Rates Inland and Overseas 1635 to 1900*, Second Edition 2003.
3. Colin, Tabart, *Robertson Revisited A Study of the Maritime Postal Markings of the British Isles based on the work of Alan W, Robertson*, 1997, with supplement.
4. Frank Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail*, 1956.