

# SS SAVANNAH

## Historic Crossing

*By John Pollock*

In reference to steamships, which SAVANNAH is one, history books have taught us that Robert Fulton in the United States and Henry Bell in the United Kingdom were two major pioneers in this method of ship propulsion, and who developed it for commercial transportation purposes. In 1807 Fulton's ship the CLERMONT which had a pair of 15 ft. paddle wheels, and driven by a steam engine carried passengers on the Hudson River. He had built CLERMONT after observing the trial run of a paddle-wheel steamboat on the River Seine in Paris during a visit there in 1802. In 1812, Bell constructed a steamship called the COMET which plied the inner waters of the west coast of Scotland carrying passengers, mostly up and down the Firth and River Clyde. This operation established the first commercial steamship in Europe.

It's also common knowledge that the first steamship to cross the Atlantic Ocean from the United States to Europe occurred in 1819, and that was the 320 gross tons SAVANNAH, the subject of this article. She was launched on 22 August 1818, and built as a sea-going, fully rigged sailing ship having three masts and a built-in auxiliary steam engine that provided additional power, if, and when needed. The ship was constructed for the owners as a commercial venture and was designated a packet boat that can carry passengers. Even though SAVANNAH's main propulsion was by sails, the steam engine was hooked-up to two removable paddle-wheels that were stowed when the ship was utilizing wind power, sails only. Prior to departure of this Historic Crossing, SAVANNAH's owners had advertised to carry cargo and passengers for the voyage, but there were no takers. Perhaps passengers and merchants alike were apprehensive and reluctant, thinking it as being more of an experimental risky voyage.

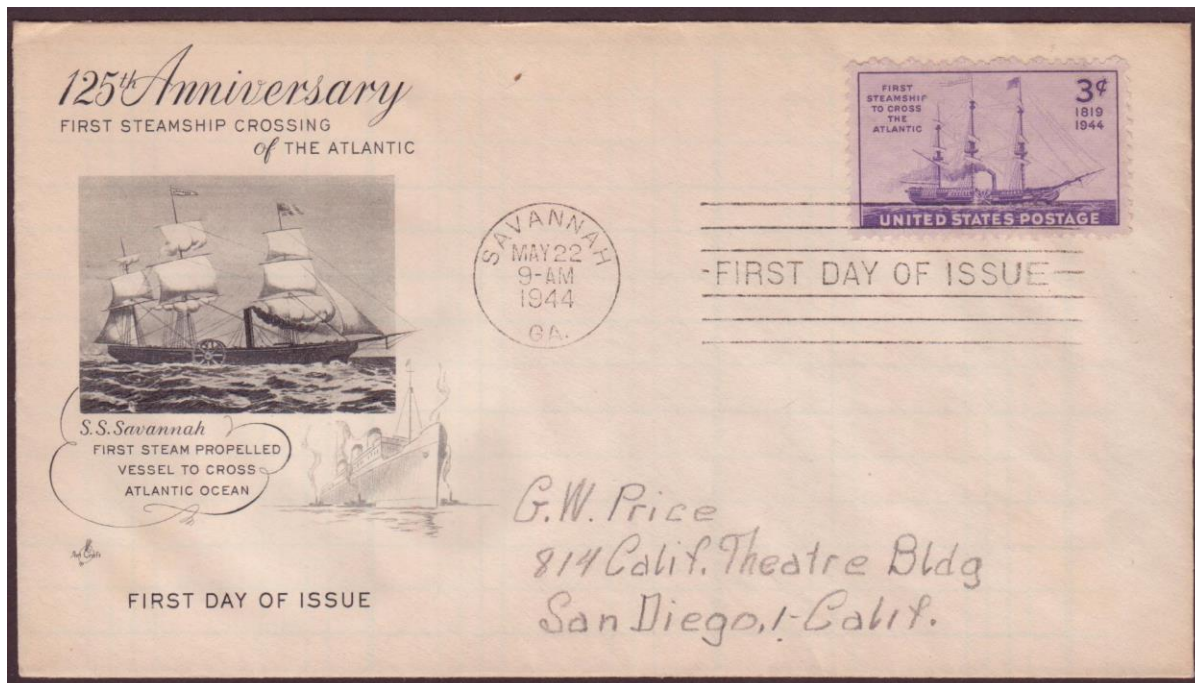
The ship departed on 22 May 1819 from Savannah, Georgia, the starting port for the crossing, and arrived at Liverpool, England, on 20 June. She was under the command of Captain Moses Rogers, who used steam power for only 80 hours during the 29 day crossing, the balance of course by sails. Nearing the end of the crossing, when SAVANNAH was approaching the Irish coastline and under the steam mode at that time, a British Royal Navy cruiser, noting the smoke billowing from the ship approached her thinking she was on fire, in trouble, and required assistance. However, the British crew was astounded to find that it was an American steamship that had been navigated all the way across the Atlantic Ocean.

When Savannah arrived in Liverpool she was given a rousing welcome. Afterwards, she cruised to Sweden, Russia, Denmark, and Norway to demonstrate the new era of steam propulsion, and was given the same welcome treatment as in England. On her return journey to the United States, Captain Rogers sailed SAVANNAH using the power of sails only.

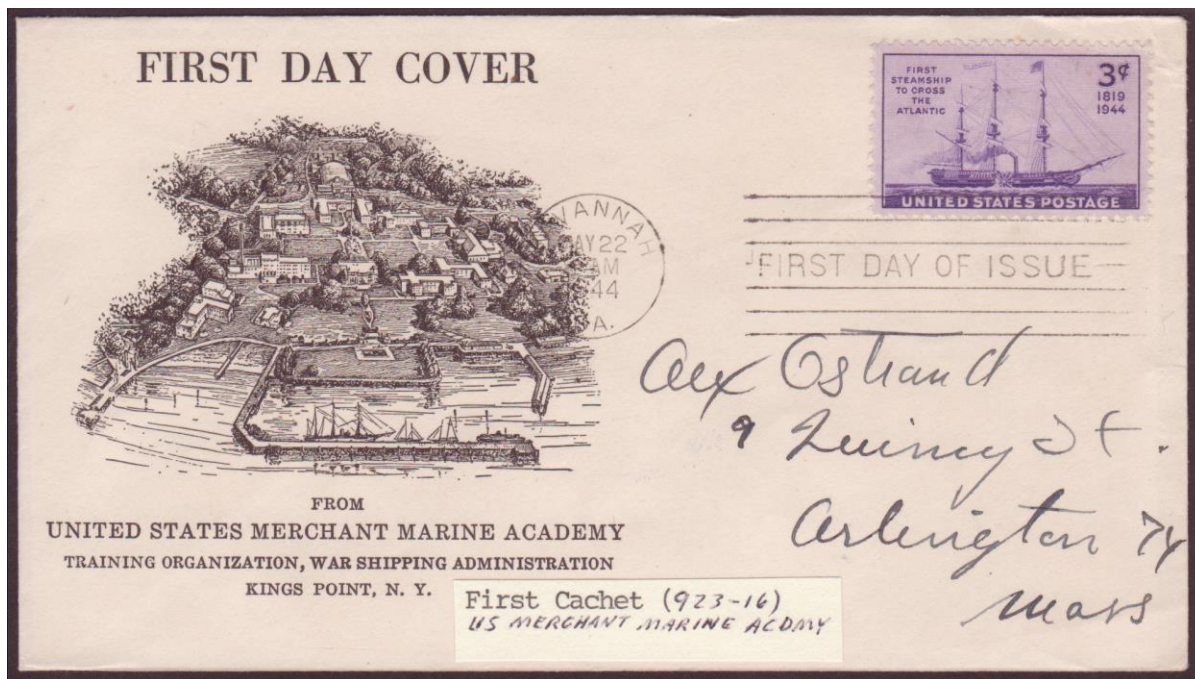
To commemorate this event one hundred and twenty-five years later, on 22 May 1944, the Post Office Department issued a 3-cent Steamship "Savannah" 125<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary stamp (Scott 923). When the announcement was made to commemorate the event, many cachet makers got into the act and produced over 333,000 First Day Covers from two official cities, Savannah, Georgia, and Kings Point, New York. Many others were processed as unofficial first days from other cities.



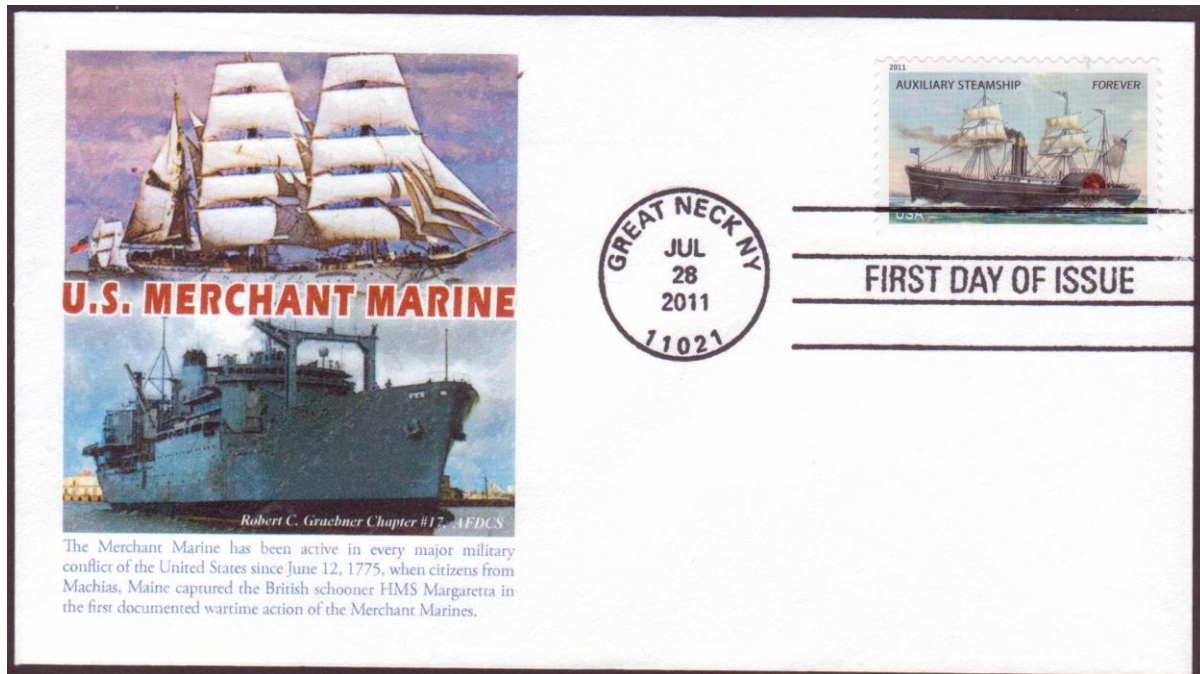
**Figure 1** illustrates a First Day Cover with a cachet that was created by a thermographic process resulting with a heavy raised design. Attached within the design is a small photograph of an image of SAVANNAH glued to the envelope indicating a cover produced by cachet maker W.G.Crosby.



**Figure 2** shows a typical ArtCraft First Day Cover where the artistic design on the cover is produced by engraving, resulting in a high quality printed image. Collectors of ArtCraft, cachet makers, and others interested in the ArtCraft operation which has been in existence for 75 years, will have the opportunity to observe that operation on the pre-convention tour, which will take place on Thursday, 14 August 2014. The 59<sup>th</sup>.Annual AFDCS convention is scheduled for 15-17 August 2014 in Somerset, New Jersey.



**Figure 3** is a First Day Cover produced by the United States Merchant Marine Academy. The cachet depicts an artistic rendering of the Academy at Kings Point, New York. This cover is the Academy's First Cachet (923-16).



**Figure 4** illustrates a First Day Cover for the U.S. Merchant Marine-Auxiliary Steamship Forever stamp issued on 28 July 2011, (Scott 4549), with a Great Neck, New York postmark. I mention this stamp and cover commemoration because of the tie-in to SAVANNAH and the importance that the nation has given to the remembrance of those early days of steam navigation. The cover was produced by the Robert C. Graebner Chapter # 17 AFDCS.

When SAVANNAH returned to the United States shortly after her Historic Crossing, the owners had to sell her because of financial problems. Apparently, she was not successful as a commercial steamship. The new owners converted the ship to a regular commercial sailing ship by removing the engine, and sailed her between New York and Savannah until she was wrecked off Long Island on 5 November 1821.

The decline of the ocean-going paddle steamship started about 1846, and was coincident with the introduction of a new kind of steamship, this one powered by a screw propeller. By 1881 all trans-Atlantic paddle ships had been withdrawn, ending an historic era in shipping.

References

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