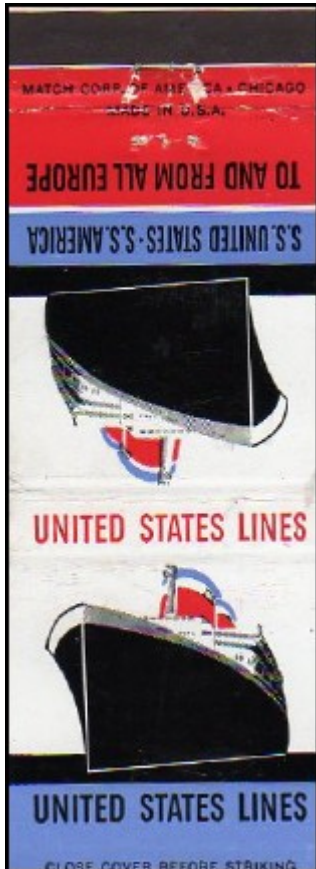


Great Ships of the Seas: *United States*

What better way to close out our series on great steamships of the Atlantic than with the *United States*! In her first summer, she was the most newsworthy ship afloat. Not only was she the American Lines' flagship, and, indeed, the country's flagship, but she was also large, and the fastest liner in existence. Everyone wanted to see this triumph of engineering.



Her designer, William Francis Gibbs, had begun conceptualizing her as early as World War I. Plans began in earnest in 1943. The project was contracted to the Newport News yards in Virginia, and the first keel plates were put in place in early 1950. The liner was named by Mrs. Tom Connally, wife of the Texas senator.

The *United States* made her maiden crossing in early July 1952. Margaret Truman was on board, representing her father. The trip was a record-breaker: 35.5 knots eastbound, and 34.4 knots westbound. Her time beat the previous record-holder, the *Queen Mary*, in 1938.

For an entire decade, the *United States* carried a full load of passengers (1,930, including large numbers of American military personnel and their families in the tourist class in both directions across the Atlantic). Her decline started in the early sixties, with rising costs of fuel and labor. The government helped with generous subsidies. Despite the fall in the North Atlantic passenger trade, she was still thought of very much in terms of prestige, as a national symbol. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the Eisenhowers, Roosevelts, Fords, Vanderbilts, etc. had traveled in her season after season.

When the *America* was sold off in mid-1964, it was only a matter of time for the *United States*. She was dry-docked in 1980, awaiting her eventual fate.

