

Link for private group: <http://www.save-the-delta-queen.org/a-new-chance-for-the-delta-queen/>

Fans of Delta Queen riverboat bid farewell in Ohio

By Terry Kinney, Associated Press Writer | October 22, 2008 © Associated Press

CINCINNATI --Filled with memories of a slower-paced, more gracious era, steamboat aficionados flocked to the Ohio River for what could be the Delta Queen riverboat's final visit to its former home port.

The 82-year-old sternwheeler is scheduled to shut down because Congress has refused to grant another exemption from a federal law that bans overnight passengers on boats that are largely made of wood. The exemption expires Oct. 31, and congressmen from the Cincinnati area say they will renew the fight for another one next year.

But as the Delta Queen pulled away from a landing here Tuesday, tears flowed and cameras snapped among onlookers, passengers and crew members.

Stephanie Siegrist, 31, of Villa Hills, Ky., said she went to see the boat because it held pleasant memories of her grandparents, who lived near the river in Rising Sun, Ind.

"You could see it from their house," Siegrist said, brushing away tears. "My grandpa had all kinds of pictures over the years; he would take another one whenever it went by."

Massachusetts native Tom Adams, the Delta Queen's first mate, worked on oceangoing ships before joining the riverboat's crew last year.

"Everybody here is sad to see it end; this boat is a living legend," Adams said. "It's definitely a different type of vessel, different type of crew and different type of group that rides these boats. It's really nice to see the dedication these passengers have."

One such passenger is Sherrin Kraus, who along with her husband, Ken, boarded the Delta Queen in Nashville, Tenn., a week ago for a 7-day excursion.

"We went for our 25th anniversary, our 35th anniversary and next spring would be our 45th anniversary," she said. "This was our 45th anniversary trip because we don't know what the future's going to bring, but we're worried. If she doesn't survive this last onslaught, it's the end of an era."

Kraus can see the 285-foot steamboat and other river traffic from her home in Hanover, Ind., midway between Cincinnati and Louisville, Ky.

"I've been in love with this boat since I was 5 years old," Sherrin Kraus said Tuesday as she wished the Delta Queen bon voyage.

Built in 1926, the boat is the last operational overnight steam-powered sternwheeler in the United States. It has four teak decks and accommodates 174 passengers, all in outside staterooms.

Delta Queen was locally owned from 1946 to 1985, and Cincinnati -- once America's busiest inland port -- was its home. The boat was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989.

It will spend the winter in New Orleans, as usual, while its owners, Majestic America Line, look for a buyer. Until then, farewell events are planned along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

Republican Rep. Steve Chabot, whose congressional district includes part of Cincinnati, said he hopes to extend the Delta Queen's career.

"I look forward to seeing the Delta Queen return to Cincinnati next spring," Chabot said in a statement. "The fight to save the Delta Queen is far from over."

House Minority Leader John Boehner, whose district includes suburbs north of Cincinnati, said the 1966 Safety at Sea Act was intended for oceangoing vessels and never should have been applied to the sternwheeler.

On the Net:

Majestic America Line: <http://www.majesticamericaline.com>

Save the Delta Queen campaign: <http://www.save-the-delta-queen.org>

Economy, safety regulations map out the end of the line for many classic ships

By Gary A. Warner — The Orange County Register © Orange County Register / Story appeared in the Commercial Appeal © Commercial Appeal

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On Oct. 18, the Queen Elizabeth 2 slipped out of its berth on the west side of Manhattan and sailed out of New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty on its final voyage across the Atlantic.

On the Mississippi, the paddle-wheeler Delta Queen just churned the "Big Muddy" between Cincinnati and Memphis before the national historic landmark ties up for the last time.

Already, the windjammers Mandalay, Polynesia and Yankee Clipper sit in Caribbean ports, seized as collateral from a bankrupt cruise line, and new safety rules make it unlikely they will ever unfurl their sails again.

A sour economy and tough safety laws are rapidly bringing more than two dozen storied ships to their final chapter.

While the cruise industry likes to focus on the dozens of big, bright cruise ships that have rolled off the assembly lines around the world, there is melancholy -- and outright dismay -- at the loss of famous liners. Veteran voyagers say many of the new ships look like floating apartment buildings tipped on their sides. The older ships that look like, well, ships are becoming scarce for the seagoing aficionado.

"The boat itself is the experience," said Franz Neumeier, who has organized a Save the Delta Queen group. "It's an experience of history; it feels so familiar, so like home."

For seagoing ships, the looming deadline is the Safety of Life at Sea standards, which will go into effect Oct. 1, 2010. The main requirement that will be difficult to meet is that nearly all materials be fireproof. Sprinkler and evacuation system standards require expensive retrofitting.

During the recent economic boom, many cruise lines talked of spending the money to upgrade ships to meet the new standards. But with the sudden downdraft of investment and credit, the ships' futures range from odd to doomed.

The SS United States appeared on the verge of a storybook return to the seas. Built in 1952, she set trans-Atlantic speed records before retiring in 1969. Norwegian Cruise Lines stunned the cruise world by unveiling a plan in 2006 to bring the liner back to service.

The idea stalled and now the onetime pride of the American maritime fleet seems consigned to rust at a nearly abandoned anchorage in Philadelphia.

It would be a better fate than that of the SS Norway, which began life in 1961 as the SS France. One of the last great steamships, she suffered a major engine room accident in 2003.

Norwegian spoke of repairing the damage, but in the end sold the ship to a small cruise line in Asia, which then sent it to be broken up for salvage in India.

Cruising author and history buff Thomas Scull wrote a melancholy piece for CruiseCritic.com listing the older ships likely to be gone by 2010. Of the classic Saga Rose, he had this to say:

"Aficionados treasure its elegant ocean-liner profile, impressive upward sheer to the bow, wood paneling, two-deck-high ballroom and dining room, beautiful semicircular forward-facing Britannia Lounge, and expansive teak deck. Built for trans-Atlantic crossings and long-distance cruises, the former Sagafjord has enjoyed a long, successful career and will reach the age of 45 in 2010. It is very unlikely that it will be upgraded."

Sure to garner media attention will be the fate of Quail Cruises' liner Pacific, which sails on budget voyages in the Mediterranean out of Valencia, Spain. Why would anyone care about an old ship based in Europe? Because the Pacific is the former Pacific Princess, best known for its starring role as "The Love Boat" in the old TV series.

Also uncertain is the fate of the Regal Empress -- at 55, the oldest major ship still operating. It is running two-night trips between Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Nassau, Bahamas, for Imperial Majesty Cruise Line. With its stepped-up wedding-cake decks and small rear pool, it has the look of a post-World War II liner.

Scull listed several other ships unlikely to survive the double whammy of expensive upgrades during a downturn in business: Ausonia, Dalmacija, Grand Victoria (formerly World Renaissance), Kristina Regina (Bore), Le Diamant (Song of Flower), Oceanic II (Kungsholm), Royal Star (San Giorgio), Serenade (Jean Mermoz), The Emerald (Santa Rosa), The Topaz (Empress of Britain), Nordstjernen, Lofoten and Black Prince.

The list of ships likely to be upgraded is shorter. Saga Ruby will get an overhaul from Saga Cruises; the new Orient Line (reviving a famous cruising name) says it will pay to have its only ship -- the Marco Polo II, built in 1969 as the Maxim Gorky for a German cruise line -- brought up to the new safety standards.

The grandest exit will be for QE2, which left New York for the last time recently, bound for Southampton, Britain. From there, it will head to Dubai.

It will become a permanently moored hotel in that Middle East fantasyland that already has the world's most expensive hotel and is soon to have the world's tallest building.

QE2 already had ceded its role as the primary Cunard ship plying the Atlantic to the larger, more cruise-ship-like Queen Mary 2. The hotel route is also still a possibility for the SS Rotterdam, the popular Holland America ship that was sold, then retired during the economic downturn of the late 1990s.

QE2 hopefully will do better as a hotel than its ancestor, the original Queen Mary, which has struggled financially as a hotel in Long Beach, Calif. But it will likely do better than its immediate

predecessor, the original Queen Elizabeth, launched in 1938 and sold in 1968, only to catch fire and be scrapped in Hong Kong.

For many seagoing vacationers, the saddest departures are the classic millionaires' yachts that had been converted to small sailing ships.

Sea Cloud, built in 1931 by E.F. Hutton for his wife, Marjorie Meriwether Post, will retire from Sea Cloud Cruises. Already gone are the yachts of Windjammer Barefoot Cruises, the Miami-based company that went bankrupt this year. Its fleet includes the Mandalay and Polynesia.

The ships are anchored around the Caribbean, waiting for the legal unraveling of the cruise line's financial troubles.

All the wooden ships will not be able to continue cruising -- they'll either go into private hands or retire as permanently moored tourist attractions.

A similar but separate fate awaits the Delta Queen, the 1926 paddle-wheeler owned by Orange County-based Ambassadors International and sailing under Majestic America Lines. The ship has needed regular waivers of Coast Guard safety standards. Congress has said the exemptions will end this year.

Neumeier and other "Save the Delta Queen" supporters have argued that the ship is an American classic that has operated safely for decades and never wanders far from shore, making an emergency manageable.

Reign ends: Delta Queen sails into uncertain future

By Michael Lollar of the Commercial Appeal — Thursday, October 30, 2008 ©Commercial Appeal

The red stern wheel of the Delta Queen churned as the 82-year-old wooden steamboat pulled into Memphis before dawn Thursday for what could be her last stopover.

More than 150 Memphians lined the bank at Greenbelt Park on the north end of Mud Island for what began as a somber farewell ceremony, until it was interrupted by a fisherman who could have been a character in Mark Twain's "Life on the Mississippi."

Delta Queen historian Bill Wiemuth was asking the crowd to help save the Delta Queen from being banished by Congress as a fire hazard. Just then, a fisherman in a metal boat clanked up to the bottom of the concrete ramp beside the Delta Queen.

"I fish down here all the time. These boats aren't usually here," said Frayser resident David Reape, looking up at the towering stern-wheeler, the crowd on its decks and on the riverbank. Undaunted, he reached into his boat and proudly pulled out a 40-pound catfish that flopped back and forth when he laid it on the ramp.

As the crowd laughed, Wiemuth stopped in midsentence: "I've been upstaged by a fish," he said. And as the crowd gathered to look at Reape's catch, the Delta Queen's calliope player joined the act by playing the theme from "Jaws."

The ominous music could have been a metaphor for the Delta Queen's endangered status. Through a series of congressional exemptions, the last of America's wooden steamboats still plying the waterways has been excused from the 1966 Safety of Life at Sea Act that classifies boats with wooden superstructures as fire hazards.

But the latest exemption has been stalled in the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure by its chairman, Rep. James Oberstar of Minnesota.

He has received campaign donations from unions representing workers for the cruise line that once operated the Delta Queen.

When the line was sold to Majestic America Cruise Line in Seattle, the workers became nonunion. At that point, Oberstar, who had voted for past exemptions for the Delta Queen, refused to support further exemptions.

Queen supporter Jim Herron of Tampa, Fla., followed the boat's 10-day journey from Cincinnati to Memphis for a video documentary. He stood beside the boat on Thursday calling Oberstar and U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, his Senate counterpart, "two no-good SOB's" for failing to support another exemption.

U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen of Memphis, a co-sponsor of a bill to exempt the boat, was part of Thursday's ceremony, promising to push for a new exemption when the House reconvenes.

He said Oberstar "is my chairman. I'll have to vote against him, but I've done it before and I'll do it again."

The last exemption expires Saturday, so when the Delta Queen leaves Memphis tonight to winter in New Orleans, she will travel only with her crew, an uncertain future and a legacy close to her passengers.

"It's like part of the heartbeat of America," said passenger Thurston Faulkner.

Wiemuth, the historian, said the Delta Queen has every fire precaution possible. The boat's exterior is covered in fire-retardant paint. Sprinklers and smoke alarms are installed throughout the boat, and a fire crew patrols the boat.

"I feel safer on this boat than in my own home," he told the crowd Thursday.

Boarding the boat is like stepping back into another era, with vintage music, white linen tablecloths, gleaming brass, polished woods and a 19th-century sensibility with everything but Howard Keel and Kathryn Grayson as part of its "Show Boat" cast.

Borrowing from Mark Twain, a former riverboat captain, Wiemuth said it's true that "traveling on a steamboat, there's nothing to hang a worry or a fret upon. It all dissipates like the morning fog."

-- Michael Lollar: 529-2793

Mississippi Delta Grassroots Caucus

October 28, 2008

The historic steamboat Delta Queen is making a tour of key stops along the Mississippi to end their 2008 tour, and on Saturday, November 1, 2008, the Queen will stop at Helena-West Helena, Arkansas and hold a Save the Delta Queen rally. We want to encourage all the people in the Delta to come out to this rally and would like to keep in touch with all of y'all about it. As explained below, the

fight to save the Delta Queen is NOT over, because Congress will be coming back in session in mid-November and our supporters in Congress plan to support legislative efforts to keep her operating.

Other key stops on the tour include Thursday, Oct. 30 in Memphis, Tennessee at approximately 5 p.m., then Helena at approximately 4 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008, then Greenville, Mississippi on Sunday, Nov. 2, at about 4 p.m., then Vicksburg, Mississippi on Monday, Nov. 3 at about 4 p.m., then Nov. 4, Tuesday, in Natchez, Mississippi about 4 p.m., then Baton Rouge, Louisiana about 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2008. The final stop will be in New Orleans, time still to be determined. These times are approximate.

National media coverage of the Delta Queen recently included Good Morning America, national CNN, the New York Times, USA Today, and others. The media and public outcry is what saved the Delta Queen the last time an effort was made to terminate her, and that is what will save her again.

Please keep in mind that the Congressional effort to keep the Delta Queen operating is still very much alive. For one key point, Congress will be coming back in session on Nov. 15, 2008, and some of our key supporters in Congress plan to attach riders to other key legislation granting the exemption to keep the Delta Queen operating, as she has done for over 40 years now. Even if we lose that vote, our supporters plan to re-introduce legislation next year.

So, while the current exemption ends on Nov. 1, 2008, this fight is not over. The Majestic America will hold a farewell tribute to the Queen because this will be the final visit of the 2008 season. This does not mean, however, that the opponents of the Delta Queen have won the war. The last time this happened, back in 1970, there was a final tour all the way down to New Orleans, and the outcry from the public and the media was so loud that Congress reversed course and passed the exemption to keep the DQ operating, and every Congress since has done the same.

Congress is talking about how we need to do everything possible to help people in economic distress during the recent financial meltdown. Well, admittedly this is a small-scale issue, but it would take all of five minutes to pass this exemption and help people economically in Helena-West Helena, Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, Baton Rouge, Cairo, Illinois, and New Orleans, as well as all the way up the Ohio and other tributaries of the Mississippi where the Queen travels. **AND THIS EXEMPTION DOES NOT COST ONE PENNY OF TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS.**

The Delta Queen has an exemplary safety record, is on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, promotes environmentalism and appreciation of the natural beauty of the Mississippi--as Mark Twain wrote, "Helena occupies one of the prettiest situations on the Mississippi"--and injects much-needed tourist dollars in many Delta communities that really need it like Helena.

We have many supporters in both houses--in the Senate, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Sen. Thad Cochran and Roger Wicker (R-MS), Sen. David Vitter (R-LA), Sen. George Voinovich (R-Oh), Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL), Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Sen. Evan Bayh (D-IN), Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and many

others. In the House, supporters include Rep. Mike Ross (D-AR), Rep. John Boozman (R-AR), Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), Rep. Charles Pickering (R-MS), Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO), Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-KY), Rep. Rodney Alexander (R-LA), Rep. Charles Melancon (D-LA), Rep. John Tanner (D-TN) and many others. So we have an imposing coalition who will fight for us in mid-November when Congress comes back in session.

The only reason the opponents of the Delta Queen are trying to shut her down is to a misguided application of the Safety of Life at Seas Act, which was designed to cover sea-going vessels, not a riverboat with an exemplary array of safety features, a steel hull, extensive sprinkler systems, and a safety system so impressive that the maritime engineering expert, Jay Webster, has testified that the Delta Queen is "as safe, if not safer than any passenger vessel on the Mississippi River." Mr. Webster is a nationally recognized marine engineer with 30 years experience and a former instructor at the maritime engineering school at the State University of New York.

If Mayor Valley in his remarks could take note that the coalition of the Delta Grassroots Caucus all up and down the Mississippi River supports the Delta Queen and we have all been contacting our Members of Congress from southern Illinois and Missouri and down to New Orleans, that will emphasize the point that we are talking about not just Helena, but many other communities up and down the Great River!

We will be trying to get the word out to get people to attend this rally. We understand the Delta Queen will come to Helena about 4 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008. Let's get a good turnout to help save the majestic old vessel that is such a big part of our heritage in Helena-West Helena, the state of Arkansas, and the whole Delta region.

Other stops included Cincinnati, Ohio, where Vicki Webster and her "Save the Delta Queen" campaign have been very active, Cape Girardeau, Missouri today, Memphis on Friday, Helena on Saturday, then Vicksburg, Natchez, Baton Rouge and New Orleans on through about Nov. 6, 2008.

Thank you very much. Lee Powell, MDGC (202) 360-6347

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