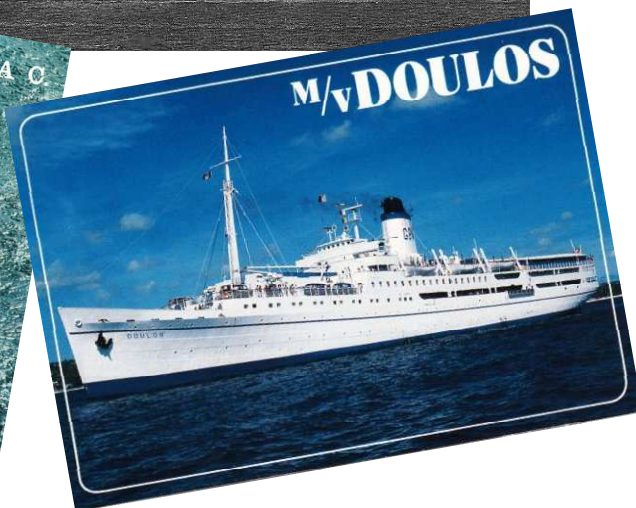
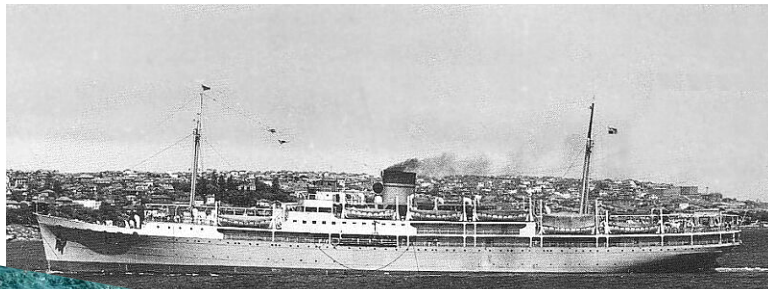


# ***SS MEDINA***

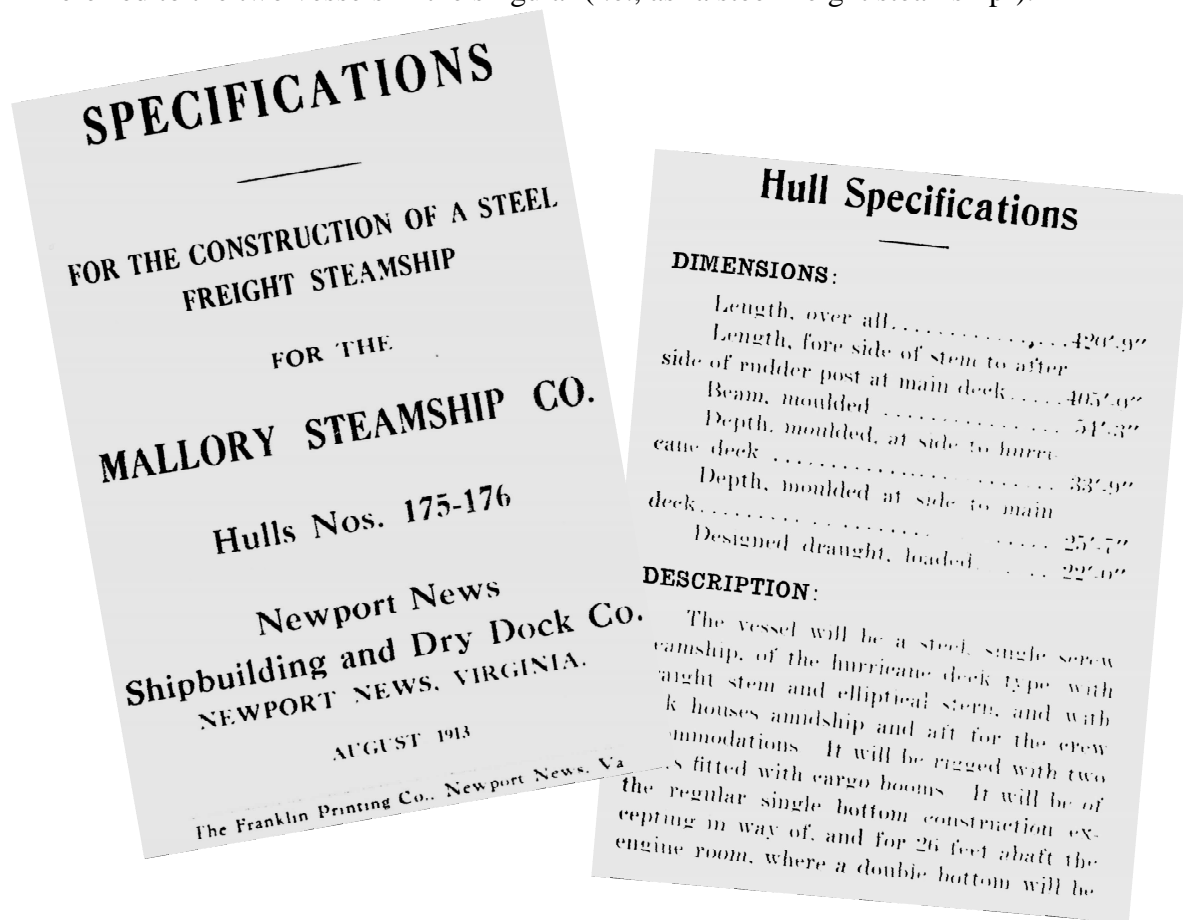
***NNS Hull #176...95 Years of Service...and Counting!***



Built in 1914, this sturdy vessel has had a remarkable career approaching a century of continuous service. When she was laid up at the end of 2009, Guinness' Book of Records listed her as the world's oldest active ocean-faring passenger ship. If not for the need to comply with the 2010 version of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), she would still be active today and living up to the last of her four names...DOULOS...which is Greek for 'servant'. Amazingly, for the fourth time in her extremely long life, this over 95 year-old well-built creation of the craftsmen of Newport News has escaped the ship breakers! This is her truly remarkable story...



On August 28, 1913, the Mallory Steamship Company contacted for two freighters to be built by the Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company. Specifications for the two vessels apparently were drafted by the shipyard for the owner, since the title page of a 186-page, cloth-bound book only refers to the vessels by their NNS Hull numbers. In addition, the document's printer was a Newport News firm that, perhaps inadvertently, referred to the two vessels in the singular (i.e., as 'a steel freight steamship').



Less than three pages were required to provide dimensional information and a general description for the two cargo ships' hulls. The rest of the specification book was devoted to detail descriptions for all parts of the ships' hulls and machinery. Some of these details included by-gone items, such as booms, ports and chutes for coal handling, an 'ice house' and mosquito screens for the crews' living quarters.

Navigational equipment required to be furnished by the shipbuilder included nautical instruments and compasses considered state-of-the-art at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But there was no mention of radios, which was then in its infancy, and radar and GPS devices were inventions not even imagined until several decades later. A list of owner-furnished equipment included china, silverware and linens. Furniture to be supplied by the owner specifically mentioned an unknown number of roll-top desks.

Names selected for the two freighters were derived from rivers in Texas. NNS Hull #175 became the SS NECHES and #176 was named SS MEDINA. Both vessels were delivered in 1914. The keel for NNS Hull #176 was laid on January 21, 1914 and officially became the SS MEDINA when she was christened just a few months later on August 22, 1914. Her sponsor was a 15 year-old Newport News native, Frances Stuart Semmes, only daughter of Bernard B. Semmes. Bernard Semmes served as the fifth mayor of Newport News; from September, 1912 until September, 1916.



In the following vintage photograph, Miss Semmes is on far left. Standing next to her and apparently serving as one of two maids of honor for the event is her mother, Frances L. Semmes. Her father is behind them; perhaps looking towards the James River and the just-launched MEDINA. The gentleman on the far right is Albert L. Hopkins, president of the shipyard at that time. Mr. Hopkins served as shipyard president for less than 14 months. He was one of numerous Americans who lost their lives when the British steamship LUSITANIA was sunk in May of 1915, drawing America into World War I.

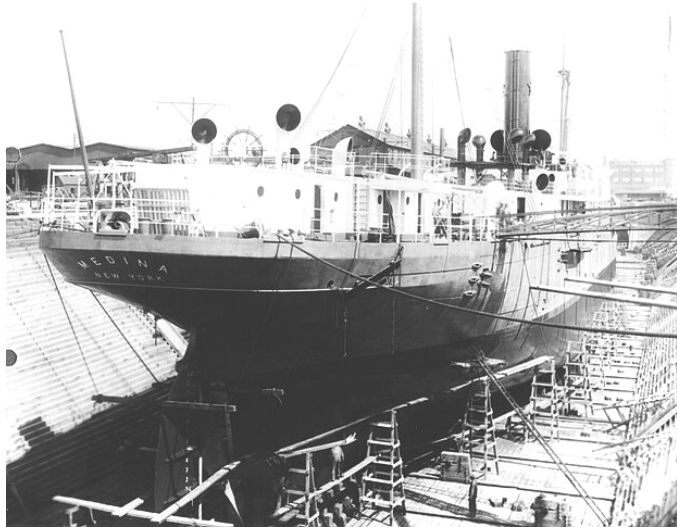


The MEDINA was obviously in a high stage of completion when launched, for she was delivered just five weeks later on September 29, 1914. Total elapsed time, from keel laying until delivery, was less than nine months. One reason for the rapidity of construction was due to the normal work week at NNS, which in those days was 50 hours a week (in 1913, the regular work week was six, ten-hour days, but that proved impractical because of limited daylight hours during the wintertime).

A steamship of modest proportions by today's standards, she measured 421 feet long and displaced 9,245 tons. At the time of her completion, MEDINA was fitted with four coal-fired boilers and a single, triple-expansion engine rated at 4,100 Shaft Horse Power. Her top speed was listed as 14 knots.

Finishing touches were applied to the steamship in Dry Dock #2 just prior to her delivery. Her sister ship, the SS NECHES (NNS Hull #175) was completed first and apparently her sea trials were so satisfactory that MEDINA did not have to undergo similar testing.

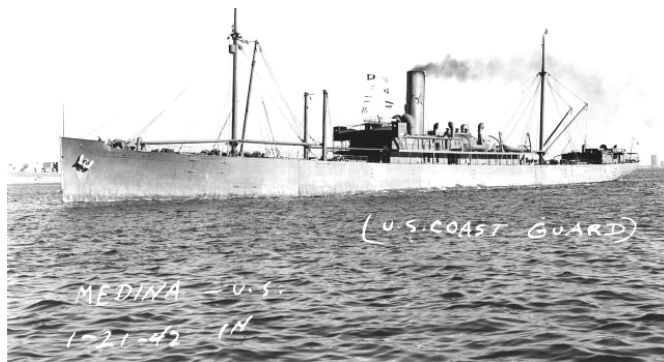
The Mallory Steamship Company first utilized the MEDINA for transporting onions from east Texas to her home port, New York City. On occasion, she also called on Mexican ports.



In the September 1914 issue of *International Marine Engineering* she was referred to as "One of the most modern and largest freight steamships operating on the Atlantic coast." When World War I broke out, she became a supply ship for the US Army, but was placed under the operational control of the US Navy. In August of 1918, the SS MEDINA was the Commodore's Flagship in a convoy of about twenty ships enroute to Europe. During that arduous voyage, two ships in her convoy were torpedoed, but the MEDINA escaped without harm. Following cessation of hostilities, MEDINA was returned to her original owners.

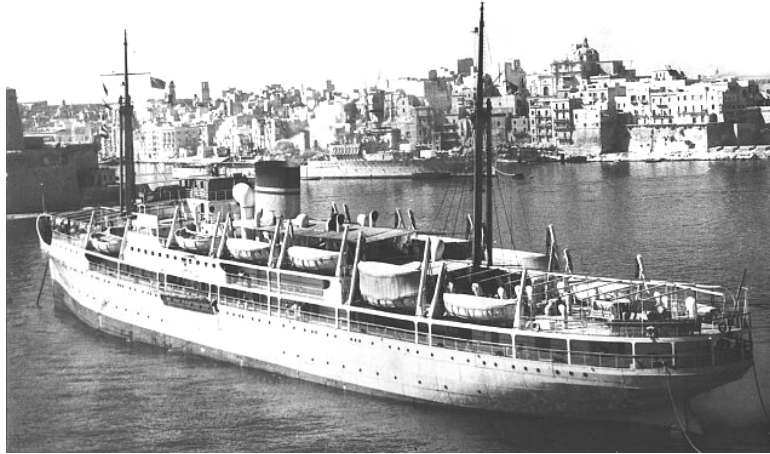
In 1922, she was modernized and her boilers converted to burn oil. Ten years later, the Mallory Steamship Company merged with another shipping firm and became known as the Clyde-Mallory Lines. After 1935, MEDINA spent some time under charter to the Cuba Mail Line, in service between New York and several Caribbean ports.

During World War II she served once again as a military supply ship. Reportedly, during her second stint of wartime service, SS MEDINA rammed a Canadian corvette class naval vessel almost cutting it in half. She apparently suffered little damage as the result of this mishap.



After World War II, MEDINA once again returned to civilian ownership. Faced with ready access to numerous and more modern vessels, her owners had the freighter laid up and placed for sale on the open market. It was anticipated that she would be purchased by a ship breaker and reduced to scrap. However, she was acquired in 1948 by Genaviter, an Italian company and then converted in 1949 in La Spezia, Italy. Her superstructure was enlarged extensively and her tall black funnel was replaced with a more modern-looking one.

MEDINA was given a raked bow, and accommodations for up to 981 passengers were added, including 287 First Class passengers. However, her 694 Tourist Class passengers were berthed in basic dormitory style spaces. Upon completion she was given a new name, SS ROMA.



In 1950, ROMA was chartered to the "International Roman Catholic Travel Committee" and undertook a series of four Pilgrimage voyages from America to Italy. Then, her owners decided to try her out on the Australian immigrant service. In early October 1950, she embarked 949 refugees; the vast majority of whom were from Eastern Europe countries. Most of her passengers had gone through the horrors of World War II, and were looking forward to a new peaceful life in Australia.

The long voyage from Europe to Australia proved difficult for both passengers and crew. Many of her passengers suffered severe sea sickness, and her crew was kept busy dealing with numerous mechanical problems during the long voyage. Her slow rate of progress required a stop in Ceylon for repairs and also to take on additional provisions and fuel oil. ROMA finally arrived at her destination on December 18, 1950, after a full two months at sea.

But that was only the beginning of the ship's difficulties. Her owners abruptly declared bankruptcy, leaving the crew 'high and dry' for almost three months. Finally, the Italian Consulate came to the rescue and arranged a charter for the SS ROMA with another Italian shipping company. Upon her return to Italy, she was arrested due to her debts to the shipyard who had converted her from a freighter to a passenger ship.

At this point, she was 36 years old and her machinery was in bad shape. Once again, she was laid up, and her future looked very bleak. In April of 1952, the SS ROMA was sold at auction to the only bidder present; another Italian shipping company, Costa Lines.



Shortly thereafter, the vessel was registered in Genoa and renamed FRANCA C. Costa then had her converted for use as South American & Caribbean liner. Her propulsion machinery was replaced with a diesel engine that could develop 4,200 Shaft Horse Power which gave the ship a respectable speed of 15 knots. Further additions to her superstructure were made and she was fitted with a more modern funnel that had the Costa Lines' logo...a large "C" painted on both sides. This conversion work was completed in January of 1953 and on the last day of that month the M/S FRANCA C left Italy on her first voyage to the Caribbean.

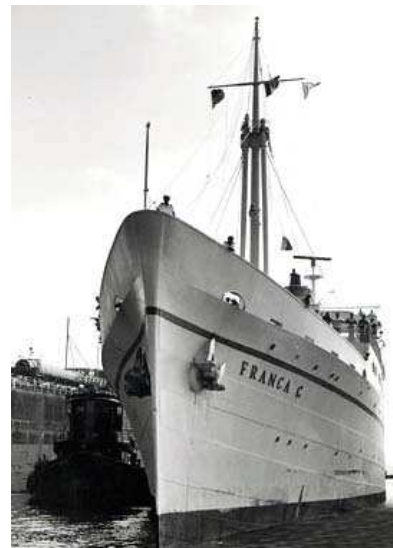
For the next several years, she made regularly scheduled trips between Italy, and Central and South America. In 1957, her funnel was modified yet again, by adding a pipe-like extension to help keep diesel fumes and smoke away from her open passenger decks, aft. In 1959 she was withdrawn from the trans-Atlantic trade and transformed into an all first class cruise ship, operating out of Genoa.



An important part of her transformation was the addition of air conditioning through the 45 year-old vessel. As a one-class cruise ship, her number of passenger berths was reduced to 552, and all her passenger cabins were fitted with private baths. In addition, her original main mast was removed and a swimming pool installed in her aftermost cargo hold. Then, she was based in Miami during the winter months and marketed as the 'New M/S FRANCA C Happy-Go-Luxury Cruise to the West Indies'. During the summer months, she returned to Europe to participate in the Mediterranean cruise trade.

During the mid-1960s, she twice returned to her birthplace for dry docking, underwater repair work and below waterline repainting. The image on the right shows her being moved into position for dry docking at Newport News Shipbuilding by the shipyard's tug HUNTINGTON (NNS Hull #356).

FRANCA C continued cruising until 1970. By then the ship was 56 years old, and her owners had begun to think seriously about taking her out of service and selling her for scrap. But her stout, all-riveted hull still had a lot of life left, and her first diesel engine had been replaced just a few years previously with a newer and larger diesel engine rated at 8,100 Shaft Horse Power.





A decision was made to keep FRANCA C in service, and during a brief overhaul many of her passenger spaces were refurbished internally. On February 4, 1971, she began a series of 14 day cruises in the Mediterranean. In 1974 she returned to the Caribbean and made a series of three and four day cruises to Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao and Margarita.

FRANCA C returned to Europe at the conclusion of the 1977 Mediterranean cruise season and her owners once again contemplated ending her career. Most ocean-going vessels remain in service for 30 to 40 years. At age 63, it was logically assumed by most maritime observers that she would be scrapped. However, certain passengers on the ship's very last cruise had decidedly different ideas.

Several representatives from a Christian charity organization were onboard during her last cruise under Costa Lines' ownership, looking for a ship suitable for their operations. FRANCA C was still in excellent condition, in their opinion, and also deemed well suited for their purposes. In addition, her asking price was reasonable; less than a million dollars. On November 4, 1977, a formal agreement was signed, transferring her ownership to GBA (which stands for Gute Bucher fur Alle, or Good Books for All), an affiliate of a German Christian organization whose primary mission is to distribute heavily discounted educational and religious books worldwide.

GBA renamed her DOULOS and commenced to modify her for a new career as a floating bookshop and Christian ministry. Understandably, her casino was removed and replaced by several offices, classrooms and conference facilities. Her pool was also removed and a huge book store installed in its place, capable of storing and displaying hundreds of thousands of books covering a wide range of subjects.



On June 3, 1978, the M/V DOULOS commenced her fourth career, at the unlikely and advanced age of 64. For almost 32 more years, she continued to sail the oceans of the world! During that lengthy period of time, her crew and staff numbered between 320 and 350...and were all volunteers! Funding for this noble effort came from churches of all denominations, community groups and corporations from around the world. Each volunteer crew member would typically serve for anywhere between a few months, up to as much as two years.

After her initial fifteen years of such service, it became apparent that DOULOS required some significant repair work to keep her sailing safely. That work commenced in May of 1993, in Cape Town, South Africa. Over 170 volunteers flew there from four continents to minimize the cost of what was dubbed 'the electrical project'.

That effort involved replacing much of the ship's original DC electrical system and replacing it with a modern AC system. A number of other major modifications and hull repairs were also made during this refit period. The extent of this work is illustrated by the photo on the right.



M/V DOULOS left Cape Town in mid-November, 1993; refreshed and ready to continue her unique style of missionary work for another sixteen years. While in service, she celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1994 and her 90<sup>th</sup> in 2004. In 2006, while in Bahrain, a new satellite system was installed and fitted in a dome aft of her funnel, providing this ocean-going veteran with the very latest in communication and navigation systems.







Under the name DOULOS, this venerable vessel has established a remarkable record. Since 1978, when she first served as a Christian missionary ship, the M/V DOULOS has been visited by more than 21 million people. She has visited 603 ports of call in 104 countries, world-wide.

Over the last 32 years alone, she has travelled over 350,000 miles under her own power—equal to sailing around the world sixteen times. In the fall of 2009, DOULOS was placed in dry dock in Singapore. In addition to routine maintenance work, inspections were conducted to determine what needed to be accomplished to allow her to continue sailing through at least the end of 2010; and possibly for several additional years.

A hull survey indicated that her riveted hull was still in remarkably good condition, with plate thicknesses exceeding those of modern ships. But other surveys conducted by marine safety authorities indicated that in addition to the absolute necessity for removing a large amount of combustible material, further and unexpected major repairs would be required to allow her to satisfy the SOLAS regulations, effective 2010, and thus remain in service.



Estimates indicated that all these changes would cost in excess of \$10 million; far beyond the economical feasibility of keeping this over 95 year-old vessel in service for a few more years. When the ship's operational certificate ran out on December 31, 2009, her owners made the difficult decision to dispose of DOULOS and replace her with a more modern vessel, the LOGOS HOPE, which is compliant with SOLAS 2010.

Several groups showed an interest in acquiring DOULOS, but initially none of these expressions of interest yielded any tangible results. Faced with what seemed to be the inevitable, her owners unloaded her books, and other equipment and stores. Most of her volunteer crew were also dispersed; leaving only a skeleton crew of 35 to possibly sail her from Singapore to some final destination. It seemed that her next (and last) port of call would almost certainly be a scrap yard...



But then, within just a few weeks of selling her for scrap, DOULOS' owners received an intriguing proposal; albeit at first a somewhat mysterious one. In rapid succession, three news releases announced that the MV DOULOS will be preserved, after all:

- March 3, 2010: "An offer was made recently by a party interested in preserving the ship, and who has access to the resources needed to make this a viable proposition. This offer has been accepted, subject to agreeing on the details in a memorandum of agreement."
- March 12, 2010: "The 'memorandum of agreement' to sell *Doulos* has been signed, setting in motion the process towards handover of the ship to the Singapore-based buyer."
- March 18, 2010: "Ownership of the *MV Doulos* was officially transferred today to Mr. Eric Saw, Director and Chief Executive of BizNaz Resources International Pte Ltd in Singapore for an undisclosed amount."

That most recent announcement provided additional details about Mr. Saw (characterized as a Christian businessman), his Singapore-based firm and his intentions for preserving DOULOS. His interest and dedication to saving this ship is underscored by his comments, when signing the transfer paperwork:

*"My family and I have been on board the Doulos on many occasions whenever she visited Singapore. But it never, ever occurred to us that we would one day be the stewards of this remarkable, historic ship! We see the Lord's hand very clearly in this transfer of stewardship, and pray that we will be worthy and faithful stewards."*

After extensive renovations are completed, reportedly to cost over \$5 million, the ship is expected to be transformed into a floating hotel and permanently moored in Singapore harbor. Plans include an onboard exhibit telling the story of the ship's remarkable history. Other features to be incorporated include meeting rooms, one or more restaurants and a book store.



A slight change in her name is also being contemplated by her new owners:

Inspired by the Bible verse Isaiah 49:6, Mr. Saw announced at the transfer ceremony:

*"Our plans are to rename her **Doulos Phos** where she will, in her new role, be both a servant and a light."*

~ *Postscript* ~

On three prior occasions during her abnormally long career, the NNS-built SS MEDINA seemed to be in the twilight of her existence and destined to be scrapped. But each time, she escaped that fate. Each time, under a new name and after being extensively modified to fulfill a different role, her career was improbably expanded and extended. Now, it appears, she has for a fourth time escaped from the clutches of the ship breakers.



The still-strong riveted hull of the MV DOULOS (ex SS MEDINA, SS ROMA, M/S FRANCA C) is a shining example of an old shipbuilding term: “*Built Hell for Stout*” (as the additional illustrations on the next page further indicate).

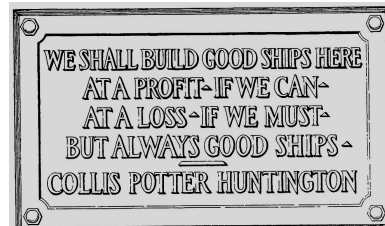
Yet, as remarkable and unlikely as the new lease on life granted to NNS Hull #176 may seem, she is not the only vessel built by Newport News craftsmen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that is still afloat.

At least four other NNS-built vessels, three of which...remarkably...still retain their original names, also enjoy this unique distinction. There may be even more...

- Hull #49 - the ferry BINGHAMTON - delivered in 1905 - after 62 years of service, she became a floating restaurant in the Hudson River where she is today.
- Hull #84 - the tugboat BATH - delivered in 1908 - still in service and currently operating in the Caribbean under her original name.
- Hull #114 - originally the cable ship JOSEPH HENRY, now named THALIS O. MILISSIOS - delivered in 1909, in service as a cable ship in Greece until 1983 - fully restored in 1991 - now serving as a floating museum in Piraeus, Greece.
- Hull #147 - the battleship USS TEXAS (BB-35) - delivered in 1914, a veteran of two world wars and the only surviving example of the United States Navy's Dreadnought era - located at the San Jacinto Battleground near Houston, Texas.

And, as every Newport News shipbuilder knows, the Company's Hull #1, the tug DOROTHY, was restored in 1976 and is on permanent display in front of the company's main office building.

Always good ships...indeed!



*Bill Lee*  
April, 2010



*~ Appendix ~*



Original riveted structure in a cargo hold



Lignum vitae shaft bearing in stern tube



Lube oil separator - original equipment



Sea chest, valves and strainer - circa 1914



Original propulsion shaft, riveted frames in shaft alley and aftermost line bearing (green box-like, hinged structure on top of bearing cap was initially filled by hand with lube oil). Fill lines (yellow) added later during one of the ship's many modernizations.