



The Steamship Historical Society of America (SSHSA) and the Support of Heritage Vessels

(*SS United States*, *SS Columbia*, *SB Delta Queen*, *NS Savannah*, *SY Cangarda*, & other privately or publicly owned “threatened” ferries, tugs, military vessels, historic boats, ships, cargo carriers, freighters and passenger liners of all shapes and sizes)

Through recording, preserving, and educating, the mission of the SSHSA is to share the impact of engine-powered vessels, their crews, and their passengers with future generations. SSHSA has been fulfilling its mission since 1935. While SSHSA works to preserve (relatively small) objects, photographs, ship plans, artwork, logs, and more, our mission does not include the ownership or stewardship (historic preservation) of physical ships. This was a policy decision made early in the 1950s after SSHSA leaders championed the *Brinckerhoff* ferry, which was subsequently transferred to Mystic Seaport Museum. Mystic later determined that the ferry was beyond its stewardship means, and it was unfortunately scrapped. As a result, the SSHSA board realized that specific vessel preservation is an all-encompassing effort requiring laser focus and hundreds of thousands, or in the case of thousand-foot ocean liners, hundreds of millions of dollars. For the last 75 years, SSHSA has instead focused on being the country’s leading advocate, in a broad sense, for all engine-powered vessels.

The society shares in the belief that heritage ships are extremely important as lasting artifacts and are most valuable in illustrating the innovation, technology, and preservation of maritime history, and SSHSA supports the hundreds of like-minded organizations across the country (and world) that strive to fundraise, acquire, preserve, restore, maintain, and use heritage vessels in this field.

SSHSA has, and continues to do so today, promoted lectures, ShiPosiums, and fundraisers for historic preservation organizations around the globe dedicated to saving ships, offering tours, and fighting the good fight to protect these unique maritime resources. In addition to supporting other dedicated organizations, SSHSA has contributed to preserving the history of these heritage vessels, such as the *SS United States*, by disseminating information in a wide variety of other ways.



In our coveted quarterly *PowerShips* magazine alone, SSHSA has published about twenty articles, with countless regional columns' mentions over the decades that have kept all readers educated on the ship's history, the work others have done to try to save the *Big U*, and her current state of becoming an artificial reef. Those interested can find a series of lesson plans online, including an oral history interview documenting the story of one woman's journey immigrating to the United States from Germany after the Second World War on board the SS *United States*. SSHSA staff also interviewed a former VP of United States Lines to document the move from breakbulk cargo to containerization. The organization's YouTube Channel features dozens of historic films, including a promotional film called *The Superliner United States... At Your Service!* from SSHSA's archive that has over 53,000 views as of May 1, 2025. The SS *United States* has also been honored with the SSHSA **Ship of the Year Award**, and her iconic image serves as the symbolic focal point on the Ship History Center sign located on US 1.

SSHSA continues to document, preserve, and educate the public on the history of vessels, such as the SS *United States*. Thousands of records can be found in our online catalog, including over 125 digitized materials related to the *Big U*, but there are many more materials that SSHSA houses in our secure library, archives, and collections that are not yet digitized. These precious documents are safeguarded and maintained because the organization has raised the financial resources to ensure their protection. Each year, SSHSA's annual budget is obtained thanks to the support from generous members, friends, and donors. No political earmarks or tax dollars come to the organization. SSHSA raises funds, and those go directly to support its clear, concise mission.

While the board, staff, and members of SSHSA empathize with how the maritime community may feel about the ultimate fate of the SS *United States*, it is out of SSHSA's scope to raise funds to steward and preserve historic ships. The saga of the SS *United States* seems sealed at this stage, but SSHSA will continue our work to ensure that future generations never forget about the *Big U's* importance to maritime history and heritage.