



by Alexandra Edwards

Delta Queen Rests in Chattanooga

Last month, Chattanooga welcomed the arrival of the famous and historic paddle steamer the Delta Queen.

After 82 years of cruising the rivers, as well as serving her country, she is taking a rest on the banks of the Tennessee River at Coolidge Park, Chattanooga.

Manufactured in 1926 by the William Denny and Brothers shipyard in Dumbarton, Scotland, the Delta Queen and her sister boat Delta King were shipped in pieces to Stockton, California. The vessels were assembled by the California Transportation Company and serviced the river between Sacramento and San Francisco.

The name "Delta" was derived from the San Joaquin River Delta route the boats took on their excursions from Sacramento to Stockton. Nicknamed 'million dollar boats' they were the most luxurious and expensive sternwheel passenger steamers ever commissioned.

However, by 1940 progress had made way for a new highway linking Sacramento to San Francisco and the river boats were driven out of service.

During World War II, both vessels were requisitioned

by the Navy as receiving ships for naval reservists in the San Francisco Bay. They later served the Navy as emergency hospital transports.

After the war, the Delta Queen was purchased by Green Line Steamers of Cincinnati, Ohio, for use on the Mississippi River system. Using a tug, the Queen was towed via the Panama Canal across 5,261 miles of open sea to New Orleans and later on to Pittsburgh where she received a major overhaul.

Since 1948, though owned by several different companies, the Delta Queen has served as a regular passenger service cruising the waters of the Ohio, Mississippi, Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers between



weighs 1,650 tons. Its cross-compounded steam engines generate 2000 indicated horsepower, powering a stern mounted paddlewheel.

decades, the Delta Queen cruised the waters of the Mississippi and its tributaries from New Orleans to Memphis, St. Louis to St. Paul, Cincinnati to Pittsburgh and more.

The million dollar boat has given pleasurable and many memorable moments to its passengers. Some famous and very important passengers have been aboard including three U.S. Presidents; Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter.

Since 1970, Delta Queen had continued to operate under a special Presidential Exemption from the Safety of Life at Sea Law (SOLAS) (Public Law 89-777), a law designed to protect the public from injury in the unlikely event of fire. The law forbids any vessel, foreign or domestic, from operating from a United States port carrying over 50 overnight passengers if it is constructed primarily of wood.

Despite opposition from the Coast Guard, owners of the Delta Queen had managed to satisfy the law in order to gain the exemptions. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent adding fire retarding coatings to the

decks, modern sprinkler systems, sophisticated electronic monitoring systems, crew training in fire fighting and suppression, to gain



Stairway Inside Delta Queen

the needed exemption. However, when the same bill went to Congress in April 2008 it was defeated.

The bill's failure was due



Cabin Inside Delta Queen

to opposition of the exemption by two key law makers, James Oberstar, D-Minn, and Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, stating that the

boat's advanced age and wood construction presented an unacceptable safety risk and that the boat's workers are not unionized.

Though after huge public support from the Save-The-Delta-Campaign, which ended with a letter to then President Bush requesting an executive order to grant the exemption for the historical vessel, the beloved Delta Queen was forced to cease service as a passenger ship by end of 2008.

The 82 year old Queen of paddle steamers has however managed to retain her dignity and is now chartered by entrepreneur Harry Phillips who brought the ship to Chattanooga, where it will temporarily be moored and operate as a historic boutique hotel. The vessel took her final cruise from New Orleans arriving at Coolidge Park, Chattanooga on February 11.

Phillips, along with partner Sydney Slome who will be hotel manager, have experience in preserving historic properties and intend to keep the river boat atmosphere with Dixieland jazz and cabaret shows. The ship/hotel, scheduled to open in April, will accommodate up to 200 passengers and will be accessible to both overnight guests and daytime visitors. Nightly rates will range

from \$79 - \$125 for standard cabins and \$175 for suites. Educational tours on steamboat technology will also be available.

Pleas for the SOLAS exemption for the Queen are still ongoing and hopefully one day she will proudly cruise the the southern rivers that know her so well, but for now she's taking a well deserved rest.

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