

Collecting Ship Lines

by
Mike Prero

Every time I think of Ship Lines, I think of the *Titanic* for some reason (I'm sure the Ship Line companies won't be heartened to hear that). And then I recently finished reading



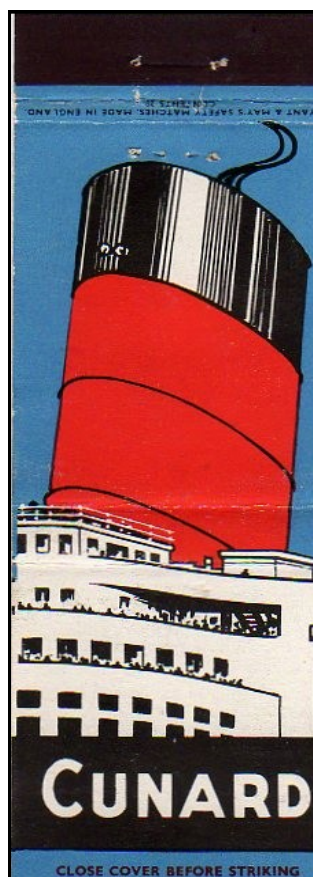
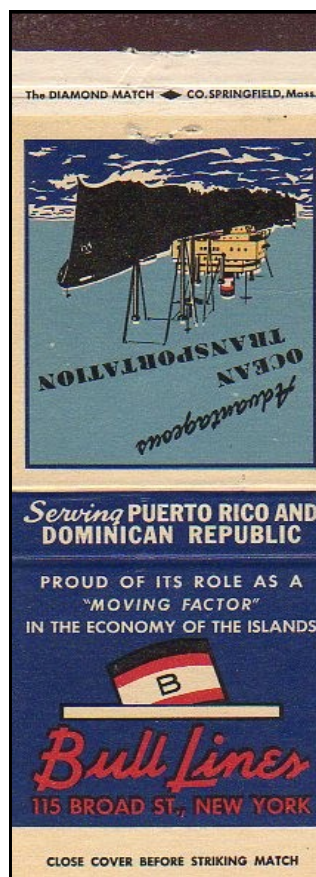
The Perfect Storm, after which I vowed never, *ever*, to travel on the ocean! Be that as it may, Ship Lines are a very popular category, and I, a committed landlubber, even still collect them, myself.

There is a different kind of nostalgia, here. There's a sense of power, elegance, and grace about the great passenger liners that's missing in the biggest airplane or the sleekest train. It's just not the same. When you watched *Titanic*, that elegance you saw never existed in any other form of transportation.

You know, the older you get, the more it seems that the Golden Age of everything has already gone and passed—the Golden Age of radio, the Golden Age of movies, the Golden Age of trains. Thus, it's hardly surprising that we missed the Golden Age of Ship Lines, as well. What ended it?...The advent of transoceanic airlines and, later, World War II, when many of the great passenger ships of the era were lost—such as American President Line ships such as Presidents Coolidge, Grant, Harding, Harrison, Johnson, and others (and those are the ship casualties of just *one* of the ship lines).

That doesn't mean that Ship Lines are dead or that new covers aren't being issued anymore. The newer lines, such as Princess Cruises, etc., have put out a variety of covers, but, of course, the quality pales in comparison to the older, classic Ship Line covers. Ah, those Cunard covers, those great P&O's, those really nice American President 40-strike Matchoramas, the old Anchor Line covers...all gone...never to be issued again. And, sadly, these days any Ship Line issues at all are few and far between.

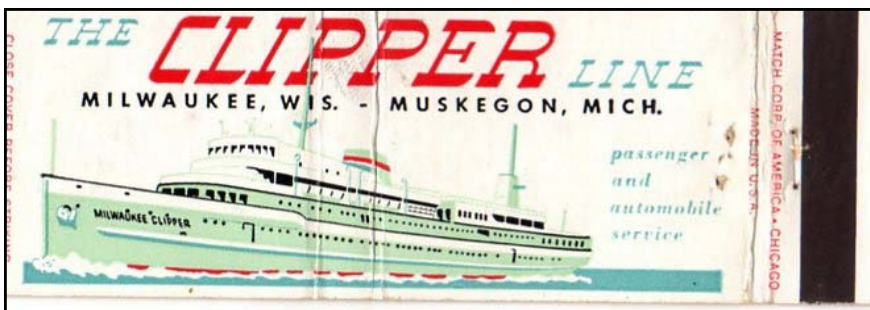
I'm not sure how other collectors define this category, as far as what qualifies for their collection and what doesn't, but for my own purposes I also include in this category all commercial shipping: tugboat companies, ferries, paddlewheels going up and down the Mississippi, etc. And, you can always let your imagination go even further. I have a collection of "port" covers (as in port authority), for example, housed as an 'introduction' to my Ship Line collection.



This is a rather deceptive category in the sense that you can easily get that first handful of Ship Line covers...but, after that, the going is tough! What does that mean for newer collectors? Well, we might say...they missed the boat!..But not entirely, because, for the collector, when the going gets tough, the tough get going...which means that to get anywhere in this category you have to be patient and determined. Because this is a large, popular, well-established category, you can frequently find Ship Line lots in the various hobby auctions. You can also get them in trade, but what you're normally going to get in trades are the newer, really common covers...not the goodies. But, if you're new to the category, what the hey! They're *all* goodies!



Part of this category entails the foreign entourage, since "Ship Lines" by no means indicates only U.S. ship lines, and there are some great foreign entries to be had here, to be sure. The most common, and, thus, easily attainable, are those from Britain (Cunard, P&O, Union Castle, etc.), but you'll eventually come across German covers (North German Lloyd, etc.), New Zealand (Union Steamship Company), Ireland (Ulster Steamship Co.), Finland (Viking Line), Venezuela (Venezuela Line), Japan (Yamashita Shinnihon Line), Israel (Zim Lines), and lots of others.



Cunard, by the way, issued a very nice box set; Luckenback Steamship Co. issued at least two Jewels; and the Inces Nassau Line issued at least one Contour.



As far as size goes, Sid Barlow, England, reported having 2,640 different Ship Line covers in January 2002. I'm assuming that that 2,640 figure represents a pretty good collection. It's certainly bigger than mine! The 'parent' category of Transportation has always been popular, but this particular subdivision—Ship Lines—has long been a staple of the hobby.

