

page; click on "Page 1" & note list of other pages from that issue (9) above "go to" is the word search." Click there; in a little box insert a given word like "Endara"; follow with "enter" key. Note # of times it shows, and by pointing and clicking you can jump to those pages to read the item. This covers how to search that particular issue. Searching thru all issues is more complicated; Paul will tell us how later after we've absorbed these steps. As I write this I haven't even tried it yet, but I can't wait; some ICCers are far better on this, but man is this ever a great first lesson. Local papers like "Panama American" & "Star & Herald" are not yet digitalized; given state of the reel-to-reels in various libraries I have doubts that this can come about, but we can always hope.

STAMP TO MARK PANCANAL OPENING IN 2014?: How many ICCers have taken pen to hand & stated in YOUR OWN WORDS how much you'd like a Pancanal Centennial stamp/s in 2014. It's such a significant anniversary that it seems to my biased mind it's an idea whose time has come; what a great chance for the USPS (if they're still in biz in 2014) to issue a sheet with trains, steamshovels, boats & the like (topics that delight many collectors who may only have a passing interest in our Pancanal *per se*. Since this issue is chock-a-block full already I have no space to show you what I wrote so you can only imagine the level of rhetoric that left from 17 Wentworth Street to the powers-that-be at SAC % Stamp Development / US Postal Service / 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW Room 3300 / Washington, DC 20260-3501.

THE FIRST TRANSITS (by Bob Karrer, Bill Fall & Tag Stewart: What more appropriate topic can be chosen for the August issue? Yes, it is the ICC's 36th birthday which falls on that greatest of days on the Istmo, but let's go back a few decades to the week the world fell into the Great War, or as some called it "The War to End All Wars." But we Zonians and Panameños have our own greatest day indeed, and for all intents and purposes that is ICC-Day 1914, when the former cement carriers *Cristobal*, *Advance*, *Panama* & *Ancon* of the Panama Railroad Steamship Line passed from the Atlantic to the Pacific under the watchful eye of The Colonel who followed their trips on his very own self-propelled railroad car (Fig. 5-1) not-so-jokingly referred to by Gold &

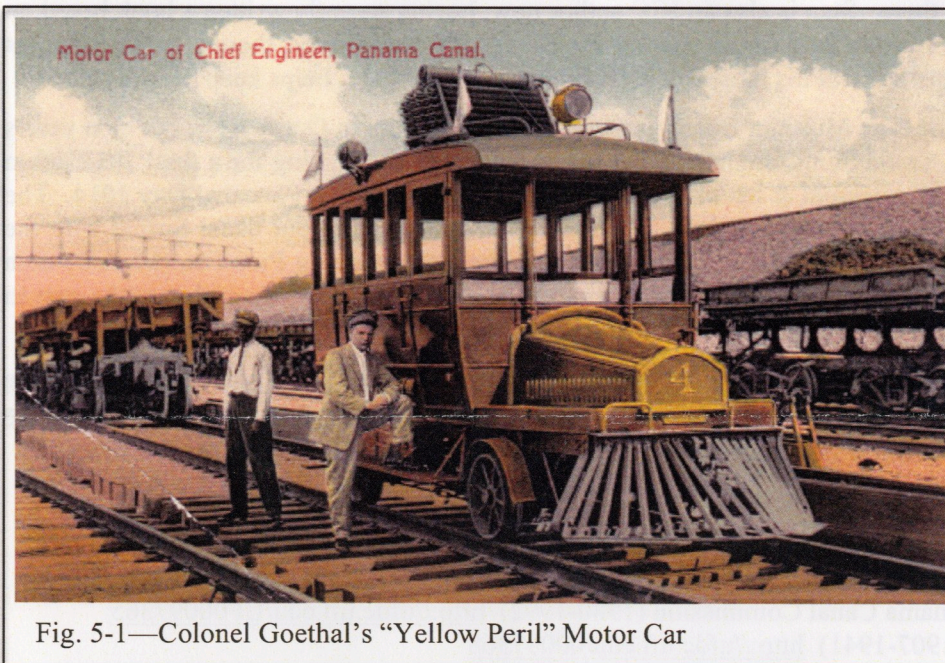


Fig. 5-1—Colonel Goethal's "Yellow Peril" Motor Car

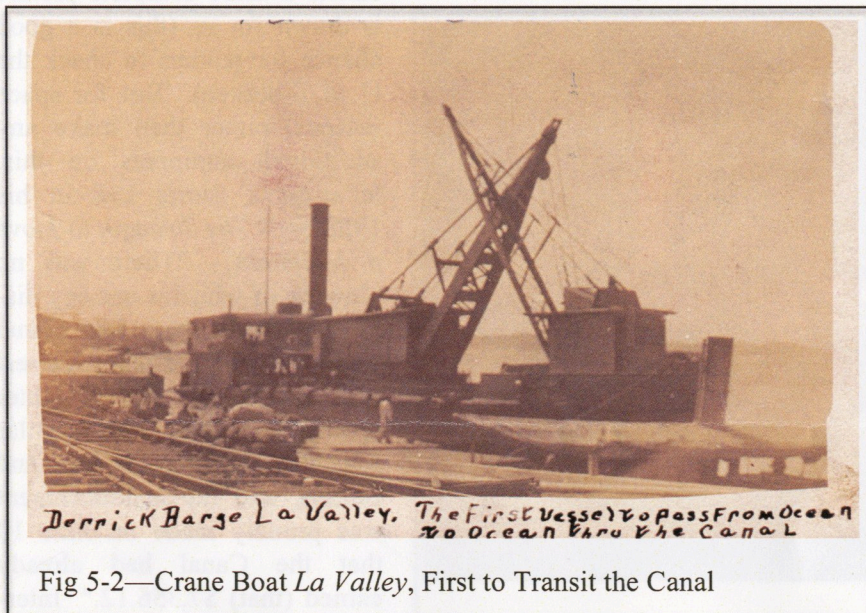
Silver employees alike as the "Yellow Peril" (named in honor of her color but also in its own way reflecting the dread that much of White America felt at the time when contemplating the perceived "threat" represented by the very idea of unlimited Chinese immigration into the USA - hence the term well known to historians "Yellow Peril."

When Tag Stewart broached the subject of an article on the August 1914 transits as the Canal was being readied for commercial traffic, I responded with a resounding "Yes", and so he did some research and

came up with some great references. Just about all ICCers will recognize the S.S. *Ancon* and her August 15th First Official Trip, and others (especially the coin and PPC folks) know that the S.S. *Cristobal* preceded *Ancon* by over a week. So, what I've done is to meld parts of the story from various sources with the realization that there's a lot more out there in most every book ever written on the American construction effort. In many books some really cool "factoids" are related for us to enjoy, and that is what I propose to emphasize here.... So read on folks.

First, neither of these guys are even the first to make the transit; in fact, the first sea-to-sea voyage ended on January 7, 1914, and the honors went to the old French era crane boat *Alex. La Valley*. It was recognized even

that early that this was a momentous occasion, even if it went unheralded and without anybody important finagling a passage. The venerable *Panama Canal Record* (PCR) of that same date says it best in its lead article:



Derrick Barge La Valley. The First Vessel To Pass From Ocean To Ocean Thru The Canal

Fig 5-2—Crane Boat *La Valley*, First to Transit the Canal

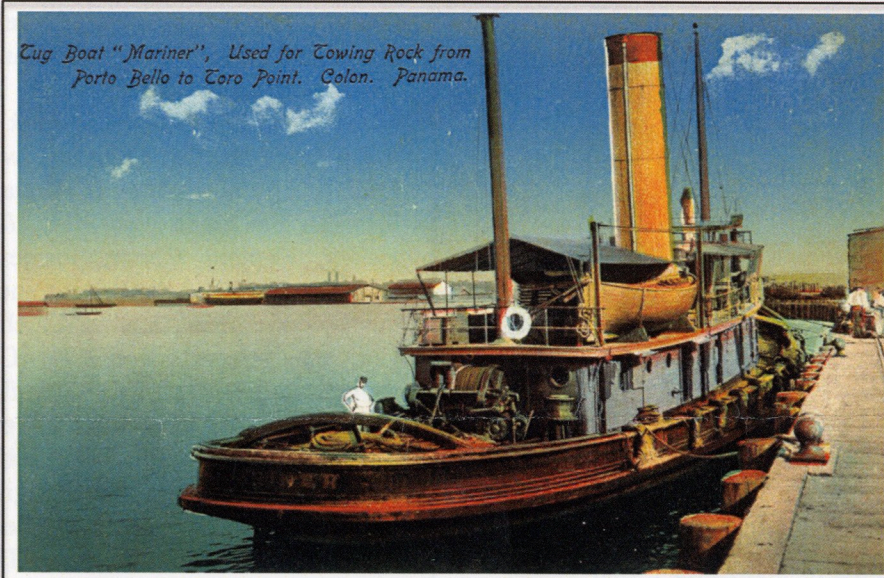
"First Steam Vessel Through the Canal / The first passage of a self-propelling vessel through the Canal "from salt water to salt water" as described in the 1914 *Year Book of the Society of the Chagres*" was effected on the morning of January 7, when the crane boat *Alex. La Valley*, Captain Carter, formerly engaged in the Atlantic entrance, but recently operating in Culebra Cut, was passed from the Cut through Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks to the Pacific entrance. Barges from the Pacific side, passed about in the dredging operations, had previously been handled to the Atlantic side. The *La Valley* left Pedro Miguel Lock at 9 a.m., reaching Miraflores locks

at 10:15, and was passed into the Pacific channel at 11:05 a.m. No passengers were carried, only the crew being allowed on the vessel. *The La Valley* is a unit of the old French floating equipment; it was built by Lobnitz & Co. of Renfrew, Scotland, in 1887, and rebuilt at the Cristobal dry dock shops in 1905. It is an iron hull, twin screw vessel, with a length of 186 feet; beam 41 feet, and depth of 15 feet, equipped with forward and amidship cranes, the forward crane having a lift of 5 tons, and the amidship crane a lift of 56 tons...." I waded thru the PCR for the period from September 1913 and found almost no references to *La Valley*, the first being in the Dec 3 issue when she is recorded as towing Dredge #1 from Culebra Cut through Gatun Locks and down to sea level on the 2nd. A later note tells us that the "derrick barge *La Valley*" will be brought up to Gamboa; this move evidently set the stage for her historic crossing the next month. In my collection of Canal images I found one (Fig. 5-2) depicting our crane boat/derrick barge. It is an undated photo of her in the center of the real photo at work somewhere along the Canal. Of course, her historic trip has been often mentioned, and McCullough's *Path Between the Seas* covers is thusly: "The first complete passage of the canal took place almost incidentally, as part of the new workaday routine, on January 7, when... which had been brought up from the Atlantic sometime previously, came down through the Pacific locks without ceremony, without much attention of any kind. That the first boat through the canal was French seemed to everyone altogether appropriate." Well, we can see that the famous author in this case gives *La Valley* less credit than she deserves, and there certainly was enough published about that initial completed transit (as we've already seen) to insure her immortality. And yes, without that PCR first page item I suppose we'd be hard pressed today to learn which ship actually did make that initial transit, even if it did take many days to finally accomplish. Yet, the bit about her being French in retrospect does seem like a nice (but most likely unintended) gesture.... Don't you think?

So, despite the blockages that developed with seemingly never-ending landslides in Culebra Cut, the round-the-clock operations of a veritable fleet of dredges managed to open a growing channel through the muck, clay and rock and so COL Goethals agreed to offer a very limited service via towed barges through the Cut from sea to sea. This is first mentioned in the PCR's June 10, 1914 issue. **"First Earnings of the Canal -** Commercial use of the Panama Canal began in May 18, when three barges loaded with sugar diverted from the Tehuantepec route by the American Hawaiian Steamship Co. left Balboa in tow for Cristobal. Since that time barges have been going through the Canal in tow more or less regularly, and will probably continue to do so along as the car shortage exists, or until the Canal is permanently opened for the passage of ocean going vessels. The total earnings in canal tolls on cargo and ballast tonnage from the date abovementioned until the end of the month is placed at \$7,356.12... The only cargo handled from Cristobal to Balboa was a load of angle iron through the Canal on May 25. Under the existing arrangement, the PRR Co. is charged with all tolls, and, in addition pay for

towage, but the latter charges confined as nearly as possible to actual cost. The charge for tolls on cargo tonnage is \$1.20 per net ton of 100 cubic feet...." They are pretty droll figures, but in the PCR a couple of weeks

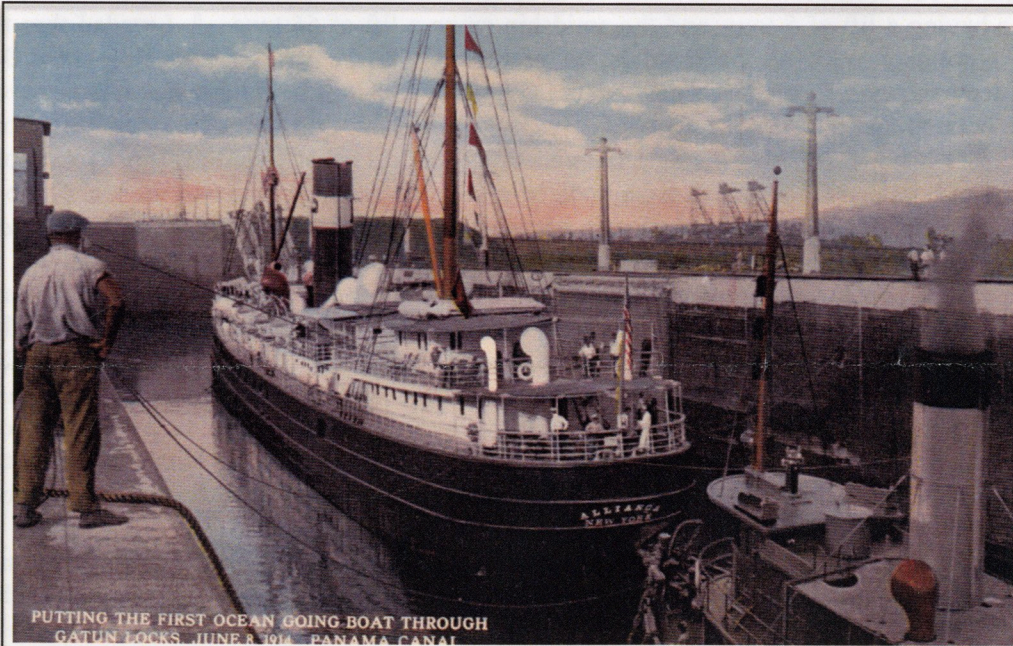
earlier a more complete picture is drawn for us (this is a good chance for readers to check the U of F source). But for space reasons, rather than make any additional comments on this, let's quote Storrs Lee in his 1958 book *The Strength to Move a Mountain*. "There was no blowing of whistles nor any display of triumph.... The Canal was in business. During the rest of May and into June a lighter service operated on regular schedule between Colon and Balboa, and the announcement was proudly made on June 10 that the Canal had already earned (that) \$7,356.12." Interestingly, the tug that hauled those empty barges across the



Tug Boat "Mariner", Used for Towing Rock from Porto Bello to Toro Point. Colon. Panama.

Fig. 5-3—ICC Tugboat Mariner

Isthmus had originated on the Atlantic Side, and so when *the Mariner* (Fig. 5-3) made the return transit over to Balboa she was the first to make such uninterrupted crossings and definitely opened up that "path between the seas."



PUTTING THE FIRST OCEAN GOING BOAT THROUGH GATUN LOCKS, JUNE 8, 1914, PANAMA CANAL

Fig 5-4—First Lockage Gatun Locks by SS Allianca Southbound with Tug Cocoli

The next big event (my opinion) was the *Allianca* on June 8th. Like many of the PPC fanáticos I have seen a number of both printed PPCs like the one by Maduro (Fig. 5-4) in Gatun Locks as well as real photos (Fig 5-5) as she was re-entering the locks after her swing through the lake, and for a long time I've wanted to see just what this was all about. And now, dear readers, here's the story:

Allianca was the first "ocean going" steamer to make a lockage, and here is what COL Goethals referred to a "test voyage." John Collins as Editor of the 1914 SOC Yearbook, described it thusly: "Colonel Goethals has never been through the Canal. This is one of the most remarkable facts concerning the opening. But he saw to it that the old canal men were on the first ship that made the passage.... "Test voyages," the Colonel called them. Something tells me that these "test voyages" were made for the purpose of giving the real canal builders the first

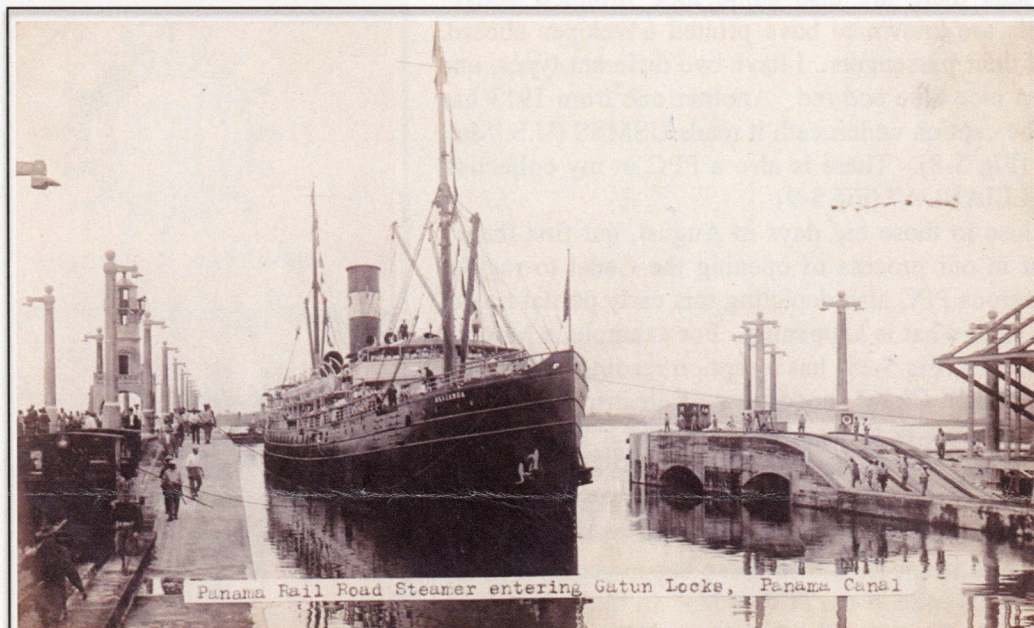


Fig. 5-5—SS Alliance Northbound From Gatun Lake June 8, 1914

chance. It could be found out tomorrow whether this is true, simply by asking him; but he might say "No," and I'd rather think he did this." Collins in this item was actually referring to the later trip by the S.S. *Cristobal*, but it applies equally to this *Allianca* lockage. As usual, the authoritative story comes from the PCR in its June 10, 1914 edition: "The *Allianca* of the Panama Railroad Steamship Line (PRRSL) was passed

through Gatun Locks from the Atlantic channel to Gatun Lake and return on Monday forenoon, June 8, making it the first ocean going passenger vessel to enter or pass the locks of the Canal. It carried a number of people in addition to the officers and crew, and officials were concerned in its operation.... The ship arrived in the approach channel to the locks at 6:45 a.m...

left the lockage at 8:48 a.m., and after describing a wide circle in the lake returned to the approach. Towing on the down lockage was begun at 9:52 and the ship entered the approach channel from the lower lock at 11:33, returning to its dock at Cristobal immediately thereafter. During the progress of the vessel through the locks it was wholly under the control of the lock operating force. Dynamometers were attached to the towing lines during a part of the trip to reg-



Fig 5-6—SS Ancon Northbound in Gatun Locks (the 84th lockage at Gatun)

ister the pull of the towing machines. The Canal tug *Cocoli* was locked up to Gatun Lake with the "*Allianca*." (note the two vessels in Fig 5-4). That same issue noted another steamer, the S.S. *Ancon* (Fig.5-6), would make a test run on the 11th, but by then lockages were commonplace so there is no PCR coverage.

For we postal historians there are also some nice *Allianca* souvenirs. The PRRSL vessels are known to have printed envelopes aboard, apparently for the use of their passengers. I have two different types, one from 1907 (Fig. 5-7) in a nice blue and red. Another one from 1913 has the same logo but now the caption underneath it reads USMSS (U.S. Mail Steam Ship) "Allianca" (Fig 5-8). There is also a PPC in my collection with a handstamped "ALLIANCA" (Fig 5-9)

Now we are getting close to those big days in August, but first there's another significant event in our process of opening the Canal to regular business. There are numerous PPC also depicting this early partial transit but they give us no clue as to what is happening. For example, a Maduro 300 Series card dating to 1919 (Fig 5-11) has a caption reading "Operation of Miraflores Locks, SS "Santa Clara", under tow of electric locomotive Panama Canal". But, in looking at this one gets no clue it is 1914, and neither does it gives you any idea of its significance. "Well", you ask, "Just what is its meaning then"? It's really very important since it was the first commercial ship to test the locks on the Pacific Side.... Yes, this one shows the ship that helped to bring an end to those tug-towed transits by the *Mariner*. There is precious little in the PCR either. In fact I found only one direct reference to it in the June 17, 1914 issue: "**The Santa Clara May Try the Pacific Locks** / The *Santa Clara* of the W.R. Grace and Co.'s steamship service, which is due to arrive at Balboa on Thursday morning, June 18, many be taken through the Pacific Locks to Culebra Cut and return, soon after its arrival, for a trial similar to that made by the steamers *Allianca* & *Ancon* at Gatun Locks. The *Santa Clara* is of 6,000 gross tons and was built at the Cramp (sic) shipyards at Philadelphia in 1913. It has a length of 401 feet, breadth of 54.8 feet and molded depth of 28 feet. It is loaded with tow and a half million feet of lumber for the Panama Canal."

What actually transpired when the *Santa Clara* arrived was slightly different and reflects the tentativeness of those early days. She actually had a two day test, arriving at the lower approach of Miraflores Locks at 3:20 p.m. on the 18th, and the lockage there was completed by 4:40 p.m. Continuing across Lake Miraflores her second lockage at Pedro Miguel took only 30 minutes. She then turned around (slowly I bet) in the channel, and tied up on the lock walls. On the next day she continued her trip, & cleared Miraflores Locks, with a delay being incurred due to the discharge of passengers at the lower flight of the locks. This certainly explains the people seen on the decks in Fig 5-10... one has to wonder if they spent the night aboard, and what revelries took place while they bided their time. I guess what she did was to defer the unloading of her lumber and then "volunteered" to test the locks."

There were obviously numbers of invited guests aboard for the "test run." Who were these guests? One wonders if Pancanal charged anything or was it a public relations gambit?... or was the Grace Line just currying favor with The Colonel??? I believe think that Pancanal recognized that they needed many opportunities to test the new procedures and personnel, and to develop an SOP, so they arranged with Grace Line to "borrow" their ship to test both Pacific Side locks. It was a win-win situation for everybody, so that's how it likely went down. Luckily we can now identify and better appreciate our images of these early test runs.



Figs. 5-7 & 5-8



Fig. 5-9—"Allianca" hand stamp on PCC

In the ensuing weeks other test lockages were made and work continued on Culebra Cut to ensure a smooth passage for that long-awaited Opening Day trip which was finally set for August 15th. Interestingly, one of these test lockages involved the *Ancon* which was to become much more famous on August 15th, as we will see in the October ICCJ. Since the shipping line for the PRR was between Cristobal and the United States, many of these test runs involved PRR vessels and were at Gatun where there were three locks to "play with." Anyway, the 1914 *Annual Report of the ICC and Panama Canal* has some information on her lockage, which was the 84th to take

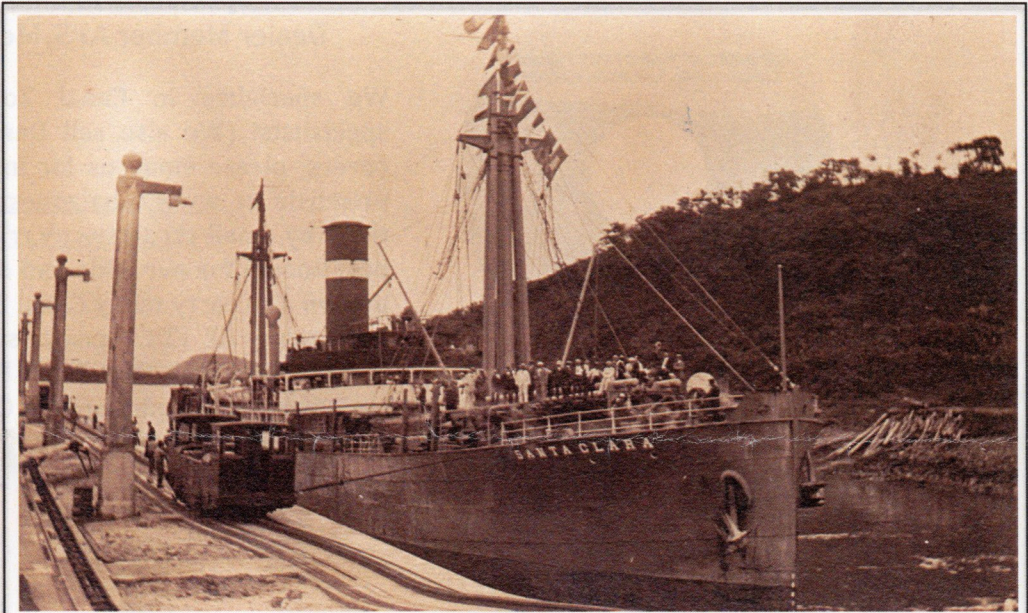


Fig 5-10—*Santa Clara* Northbound First Pacific Lockage June 18, 1914

place at Gatun on June 11, 1914. In this case she went up into Lake Gatun and returned shortly thereafter. In these initial lockages the most problems seemed to be with the towing locomotives and who was in charge of them, so in *Ancon's* case her passage was carefully monitored and took place without a hitch. However, for our



Fig. 5-11—*Santa Clara* South Bound The Next Day June 19, 1914

purposes the next "big day" was a by-invitation only transit of SS *Cristobal* from Cristobal to Balboa and return on August 3-4, 1914, and this will be the main topic for the next issue.... also, between the Cristobal's transits and the 15th Pan Canal arranged for other ships to make the run, probably mostly to continue to tweak lock SOPs but also to afford an opportunity for more old-timers to enjoy a trip too. So, hang in there dear readers as

we further examine those exciting days of mid-1914 as the Panama Canal readied itself for what we today pretty much take for granted.

THE FIRST TRANSITS PART 2 (by Bob Karrer, Bill Fall & Tag Stewart): THE S.S CRISTOBAL'S LAST REHEARSAL & CANAL TRANSIT: In the last ICCj we took a look at the seemingly endless procession of test drives, so to speak, and we saw how the bugs were constantly being worked out in the operation of the locks in general and the procedures for moving the ships through that "Path Between the Seas." However, it was hoped that a final dress rehearsal would do the trick, and also many of the old timers still awaited their turn to see the Canal from the water. This most important part of the Panama Canal Story is the subject for this month's Issue, and it leads up to the end of the Construction Era in the first official transit on August 15th. But, there is a lot more to this story than meets the eye, and to show you how it passed in those first days of August 1914 is the purpose of this month's ICCJ.

As an aside, please note this is for September 2011, and we editors who missed the change of the months in the last one are using this platform to apologize for that screw-up! I always say one can never have too many editors & proof readers, but between me, Bill & Tom none of us caught the switch from August to June-July after the first page. So, please get out your pens & make the change; you can also do it electronically if you received it that way... very disconcerting it is, but our hearts were in the right place, and the content was in my opinion really nice, so I hope we are pardoned. With that out of the way, let's get on with the Tale of the *Cristobal*.

There are two best collectibles associated with this transit in my opinion. And, I am sure that the coin collectors (numismatists) amongst us will agree that the 24mm bronze medal that made the transit and later sold as souvenirs in the PanCanal commies for many years. (Fig. 6-2). At the very least these medals are certainly a must for the numismatically inclined ICCers.

First Ocean to Ocean Transits 1914	
Craneboat La Valley	January 7
SS Cristobal	August 3
SS Advance	August 9
SS Panama	August 11
SS Ancon	August 15

Table 6-1

ICCer Julius Grigore in his excellent 1972 work "Coins & Currency of Panama" has a lot more of this story. In it he states that the "medal design was suggested by Miss Elizabeth Rodman, a relative of Captain Hugh Rodman, USN, Superintendent of Martine Transportation for the Panama Canal operation at the time." ... and whose name was later given to the Navy's Rodman Naval Station on the West Bank opposite Balboa. The J.F.N. initials on the medal are for John F. Newman of New York City, who was both the designer and minter. "The

Cristobal's voyage was significant because she carried on board 50,000 pieces of the Panama Canal Completion Medal. These represented the entire issue and were consecutively numbered. They were (allegedly intended - ed) to be passed out worldwide to heads of state, (dignitaries)... and members of the press corps covering the opening of the Panama Canal." (it is my opinion that limited numbers were indeed passed out to visiting dignitaries, but I doubt that large numbers were given that royal treatment -ed) I do agree with Grigore when he asserts that "Of the 50,000 medals struck, it is highly probable that at least each of those 200 personages making the official transit received his memento. But they were not all distributed (at the



time), as the Panama Canal received a March 24, 1920 letter from Newman (asking about) disposition of residual medals that were carried on the first ship through the Canal. How this disposition was made is still a subject of great mystery." I must say that there will always be some controversy over just which transit the medal is commemorating. Some will say it is the *Ancon* on the 15th, but I've always heard it referred to as the "Cristobal Medal." So, take your pick. Grigore also notes that former ICCer Burt Davis

(now deceased) "recalls that some Completion Medals were on sale in the Canal Zone Commissaries for \$1 back in 1926." Does it really matter which or both ships carried the medals? Not a sou as far as your Editor is concerned so call them what you will... They are still ever-so-cool. In case you can not read the caption

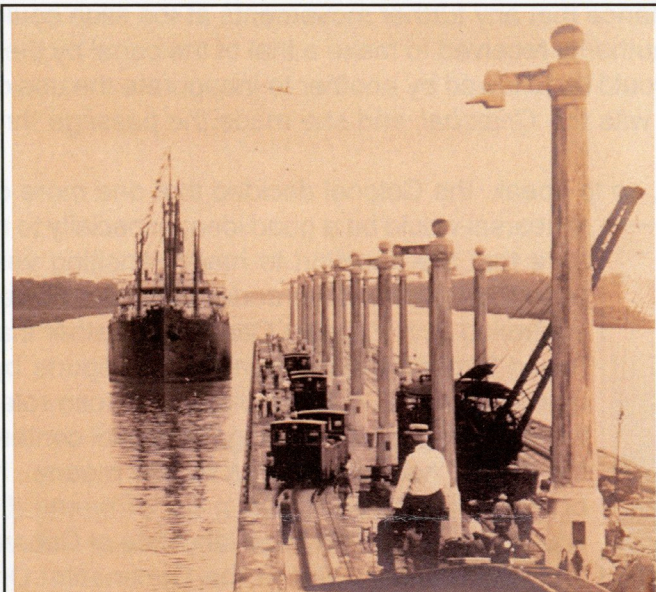


Fig. 6-3--The ever vigilant Goethals supervises the approach of the *Cristobal* to Gatun Locks on Aug 3.

on the reverse of the medal, it reads "This medal copyrighted and bearing a serial number is one of 50,000 carried on the vessel making the first passage through the Panama Canal as authenticated in certificate signed by (signed) George W. Goethals, Chief Engineer and Chairman, Isthmian Canal Commission."

People are always interested in "values." This medal is a mixed bag of late; while not uncommon, interest is definitely rising (likely due to the approaching completion of the New Panama Canal). For nice ones (uncirculated condition) a couple of years ago \$50 on e-Bay was high, but in today's market \$75 is probably pretty much the going price. Ones with a 3-digit serial number would be higher too, and I expect the sky would be the limit if ever a 2-digit example showed up. My copy is really neat as it's in its original made-to-shape wooden box.

To show the relative insignificance that this voyage as seen in the eyes of the residents of Brain Hill at Culebra, the article describing it in the "Panama Canal Record" (PCR) of August 5, 1914, while it is a lead item in that issue, it does not have much detail – it reads "**Steamship "Cristobal" Makes Test Trip between Entrances Channels** / In anticipation of the opening of the Canal to traffic on August 15, as directed by the Secretary of War, a test voyage from Cristobal to Balboa was made on Monday, August 3, by the steamship *Cristobal* of the Panama Railroad Steamship Line. A return trip was made on Tuesday, August 4. The *Cristobal* is a steel twin-screw steamship of 9606 gross and 6195 net tons. It is 439.5 feet long overall, 58 feet in the beam, and was drawing about 25 feet of water at the time of passage. It is a sister ship of the *Ancon* with which an official opening voyage will be made on August 15. The *Cristobal* left Dock 9, at Cristobal, shortly after 7 a.m., stopped before the lower guard gates of Gatun Locks at 8; entered Gatun Lake shortly after 11; entered Culebra Cut at 1 p.m.; reached Pedro Miguel at 2.30; reached Miraflores Locks at 3.40; entered the Pacific channel about 5.45; and arrived opposite Balboa about 6.30. The voyage was without operating incident, other than some minor difficulties with towing locomotives at Gatun and Pedro Miguel Locks. On the return trip the *Cristobal* left Balboa at 7 30 a.m., August 4, and arrived at Cristobal at about 4 p.m. It is expected to operate the Advance through the Canal on Sunday, August 9. Applications for passage by old employees will be received at the office of the Governor."

As usual the PCR is the single best source, or one of the, but there are several others that add to the picture that also add depth to the story. And, as usual COL Goethals and the thousands of canal workers



Fig. 6-4--Dredges clearing Cucaracha slide, July 1914

from all parts of the Globe learned once again that nothing came easy on the Panama Canal. The 1915 Annual Report of the Governor (ARG) and many of the authors point out some of the stuff that was going on behind the scenes, all of which did have an effect on the work as well as the *Cristobal's* trip. For example, that ARG noted, "at the close of the previous fiscal year Cucaracha slide was the only obstacle to the passage of ships. During July, 1914, a channel had been dredged through the obstruction 150 feet wide and of sufficient draft to pass vessels drawing not in excess of 30 feet. Fig. 6-4 shows a group of dredges hard at work on Cucaracha in July: from left they are the *Corozal*, *Cárdenas*, *Mindi*, *Chagres*, and in the foreground the old French *Badger*. The dredges were (by then) excavating material

faster than it was falling in, and there seemed no chance that any further movements at the slide could obstruct the channel. These facts were reported and authority received to make a trial of the canal by the passage of one of the PRR ships, which if successful, would be followed by another to inaugurate the use of the canal by commerce. The ship selected for the trial was the *Cristobal*, and she made the passage through the canal with slight delays...."

So, with the August 15th date being set in stone, so to speak, the Colonel decided that one more dress



Fig. 6-5--Stern view of *Cristobal* in Gatun Locks.

rehearsal would be a good idea, especially to make sure that the decision to have transiting vessels pass through the locks under their own power but controlled by a Panama Canal pilot, rather than be towed through the locks in fits and spurts by the newly installed GE locomotoras... whose role was thereby relegated to holding the vessel centered in the locks... not an easy task by any means. None of this would have meant a hill of beans if they couldn't deal with the huge landslide at Cucaracha that filled Culebra Cut at the Continental Divide. The ARG makes it seem so "ho-hum", but this was far from the case as that illustration clearly shows. This problem vexed the Builders almost as soon as water was admitted into the Cut the previous Oc-

tober. Initially the many dredges of all types that were brought in were hard-pressed to stop the forward momentum of the slide, but after some 3 million cubic feet of spoil had been removed at least work could begin on the actual blockade.

Joseph Bucklin Bishop was much more succinct and spilled a number of "secrets" in his Goethals biography "Goethals: Genius of the Panama Canal." In it he relates in detail the problem of how to get the ships through the locks: "For years this voyage had been looked forward to as a great event in the history of world. The date was August 3, 1914. Perhaps it was just as well, for this trial trip was not a smooth one. Writing to... the Washington office, Goethals reported confidentially: "We passed the *Cristobal* through the slide successfully and without difficulty of any kind, and the vessel was handled through the Cut in a most masterful manner. An unexpected weakness developed in the lock-operating force. -X- (I wonder who this mysterious

"X" was - ed?) contended at Gatun that two locomotives on either end would be sufficient to do the work (Fig. 6-6). The whole strain of the ship moving into the lower lock burned out a motor on one of the towing locomotives and caused considerable delay. At Pedro Miguel one of the cables of the towing locomotive parted, but another one took its place. When the vessel was brought into the locks, things looked rather squally, and I feared damage to the gates, but they succeeded in stopping her in time. At the upper end of Miraflores a similar condition obtained, but I telephoned down and they were using three locomotives on either side and the ship was halted much more easily (Fig. 6-7). It has made me rather skeptical on the towing propo-

sition, the motors being alternating current of constant speed operating at two knots an hour and are altogether too fast for heavy ships. The cable drum can only be operated by jerks, so that the steadily increasing power can be applied by neither towing locomotive nor cable drum. There is absolutely no elasticity in the line itself, and, based on these defects, the possible danger to the gates on account of the speed of the locomotives, it may be necessary to use the ship's motive power; consequently, I have directed that the pilots take charge of towing and handling of ships, as they will be the best judges of the speed and the advisability

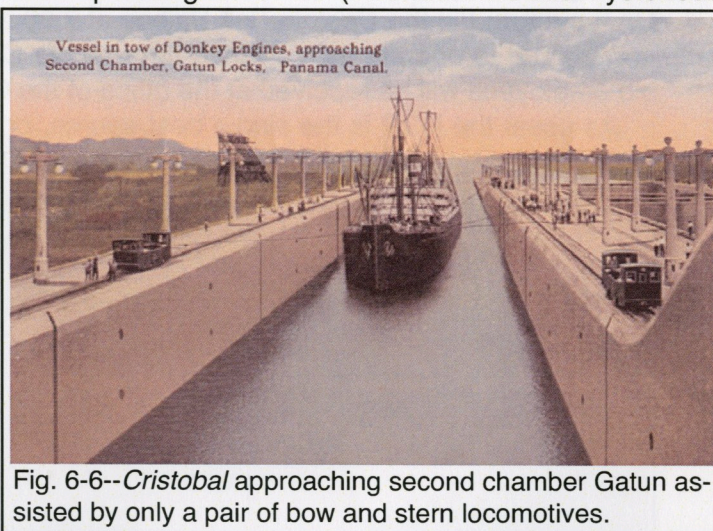


Fig. 6-6--*Cristobal* approaching second chamber Gatun assisted by only a pair of bow and stern locomotives.

of using the ship's power should the necessity therefore arise. I am having the pilots drill with the locomotives so as to develop team-work, and in order that they may have actual experience before the *Ancon* is put through, I have decided to use the *Advance* and the *Panama*, the former on Sunday and the latter on Tuesday, for this training, as there will be little opportunity after the *Ancon* goes through. If the requests on file to pass ships are there any criterion of what we are liable to have at the outset. I sincerely trust the Secretary of War will send down a list of the guests for the *Ancon*, for unless card passes are issued it will be difficult to control the mob." On the 13th of August he wrote to Bishop that "I was very much surprised at the weakness which developed in the operating force at the locks. The condition of affairs which

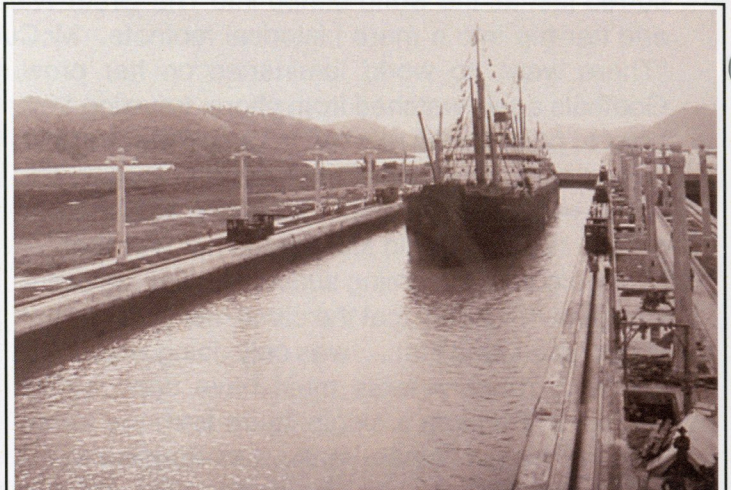


Fig. 6-7--*Cristobal* upper chamber Miraflores Locks Aug 3 assisted by six towing locomotives.

arose made it impossible for me to accept the responsibility of an accident, due to the landlubbers in charge of the ship, and I am afraid -X-'s feelings are hurt on account of my giving the Navy charge of the ships and towing locomotives (soon to be changed to the system we still see today -ed). Since the passage of the *Cristobal* the lock forces have been drilling with barges and tugs to develop teamwork in the operation of the

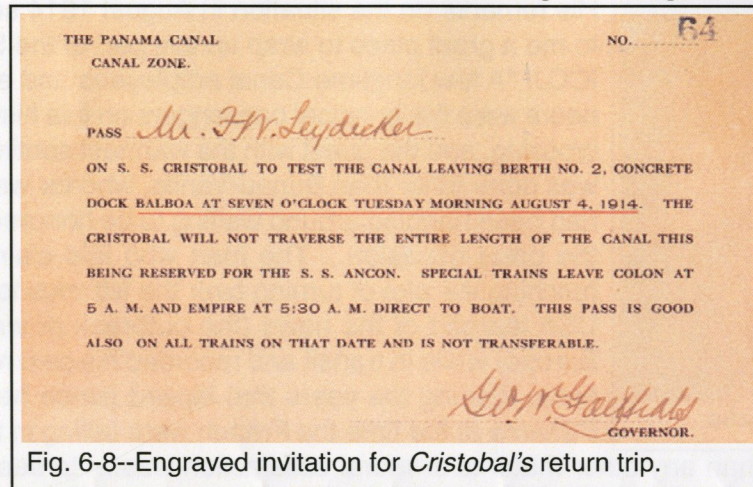


Fig. 6-8--Engraved invitation for *Cristobal's* return trip.

towing locomotives, and we passed the *Advance* and *Panama* without a hitch and with more rapidity than under the old system. On Saturday, August 15th, we will put through the *Ancon* and open the Canal to commerce."

I guess this shows the never-changing-validity of the old maxim: "One can never test a hypothesis too many times - RJK in 2011." This type of reporting tells us well the effect that Joseph Bucklin Bishop had on the success of the initial coast-to-coast transit as a crowded "trip." The memorabilia associated with it must include one of the signed Cristobal-Balboa or Balboa-Cristobal engraved invitations. (Fig. 6-8) shows us

one for the Balboa-Cristobal transit. I have never seen a complete set of these invitations although we will show one for the historic *Ancon* trip on the 15th in the next issue. The point is that *Cristobal's* trip was very important, as it was the initial coast-to-coast transit as a "trip." That these invitations were a highly prized souvenir and demonstrating of one's importance I know of no complete listing of the lucky ones. In the "Year book of the Society of the Chagres 1914" edited by John O. Collins, author of other Panama Canal related works, there is a list of the Cristobal to Balboa transit; sadly there is no list of those who made the return trip.

Yes, there was still a full complement of attendees for both of *Cristobal's* trips. We've seen that the big show planned had to be cancelled early on, but those who were in on the activities were justly proud just the same. So, just as we must accept that Lady History marches to a different drummer, and in the ultimate coincidence *Cristobal's* trips oc-



Fig. 6-9--*Cristobal* passing Contractor's Hill.

curred just as the world drifted into The Great War, thus relegating the former PRR cement boat *Cristobal* and her trip into a mere historical footnote. McCullough describes the pageant that did occur quite well:

"There were no world luminaries on her prow, Goethals again watched from shore, traveling from point to point on the railroad." The only impressive aspect of the event was "the ease and system with which everything worked," as wrote one man on board. "So quietly did she pursue her way that... A strange observer coming suddenly upon the scene would have thought that the canal had always been in operation, and that was only doing what thousands of other vessels must have done before her." In Panama a single figure from the temps de lux, Philippe Bunau-Varilla was standing at the rail of the *Cristobal* as she entered the locks at Pedro Miguel, at the start of her descent to the Pacific, he being one of the very few who had come especially for the occasion."...and so what was to be a wondrous and hugely public event degenerated into a short story likely to be buried in the back pages of the world's newspapers.

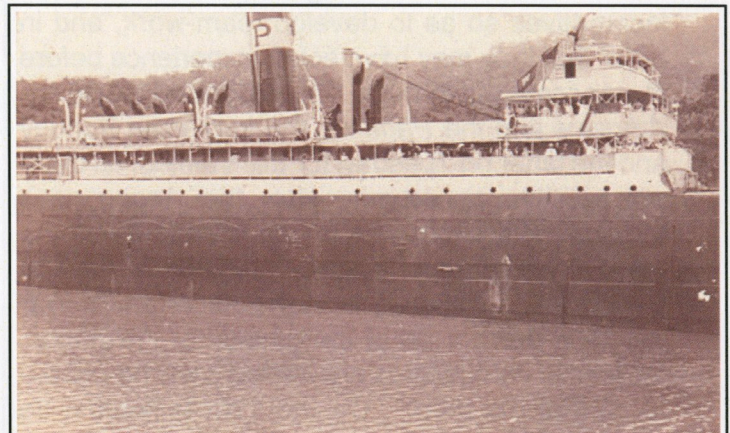


Fig. 6-10--Passengers on *Cristobal* northbound transit.

Yet for Your Editor there are few of the Isthmian authors who are so eminently quotable as Storrs Lee in his 1958 opus "The Strength to Move a Mountain."



Vessel about to clear from Pedro Miguel Locks into Channel beyond on her way to Colon on the Atlantic side. Panama Canal.

Fig. 6-11--*Cristobal* northbound Pedro Miguel Locks.

His remarks on the situation in August 1914 seem to me a great place to wrap up this part of the Sept ICCJ; "A few longtime Canal employees and engineers were the principal passengers on this historic crossing, and the guest with the warmest sentiment was none other than Bunau-Varilla, who for weeks had been hanging around waiting to be honored on the great occasion... The man who laid claim to hatching the plot of turning over the Isthmus to the USA learned of the news (the outbreak of war in Europe) while in transit and recorded his own reactions: "During the years that lapsed (since he left Panama at the time the French were failing in their

monumental effort) ... What I desired more than any other material or moral satisfaction was... to see the immortal creation of the French genius at Panama finally completed for the utility and the service of civilization." In fact, as Storrs Lee puts it... "Goethals appeared to be arranging a family picnic while the countryside about him was going up in flames."

From my collection I have selected a few PPC views of the now-famous-to-ICCers transit of the *Cristobal* to be shared with the readers. Unfortunately I have but one of Colonel Goethals at Gatun Locks on August 3rd (Fig. 6-3), but we can also imagine he is in every one of these shots in spirit. First, there is a Vibert & Dixon view (Fig. 6-6) titled "Vessel in tow of Donkey Engines, approaching Second Chamber, Gatun Locks". Remember the Bishop note about initially using only the two pairs of locomotoras... well, here is the proof. Next, a nice real photo of our girl passing Contractors Hill (Fig. 6-9) after carefully having cleared one of the slide areas at Culebra. Note the dredging activities



Fig. 6-12--*Cristobal* northbound viewed from Culebra.

at her bow and in the canal behind her. This is one of my favorites, a close-up of *Cristobal* and many of the guests (Fig. 6-10) looking out as she passes through the confines of Culebra Cut. I wonder if Bunau Varilla is in this shot? On her return trip on the 4th *Cristobal* is seen here in this Vibert & Dixon card passing through Pedro Miguel Locks (Fig. 6-11). Note there are now six locomotoras in use to help guide her through the locks. Lastly Figure 6-12, another real photo of the return trip on the 4th. Taken from the Culebra townsite the dredges seen earlier are pretty much all on display here. I see many umbrellas but no COL Goethals in the people observing the passage.

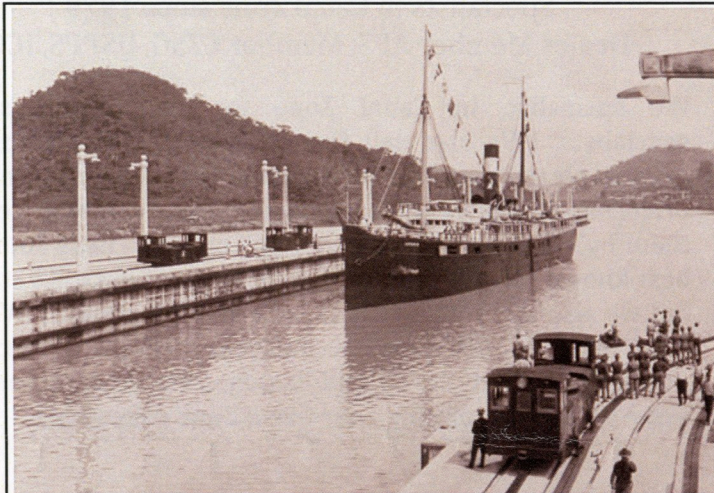


Fig. 6-13--*Advance* entering Pedro Miguel Locks Aug 9.

Remember that little chart early on? Did you all look at it to see all the ships we have yet to deal with? Well, so far we've literally beat the *Cristobal* to death... but wait (as the telemarketers love to say on TV)...there's more. "We will triple your deal." So, let's cover those two additional PanCanal/PRR

steamers who are also known to have made canal transits before the *Ancon* made hers. The first of them is the *Advance* on August 9, which was mentioned in the August 5 PCR. The transits of both the *Advance* and *Panama* are nicely covered in the August 12th PCR which also mentions that other types of vessels took part in the drills at all the locks. So, when the 9th came around things were definitely on the upturn as procedures were being ironed out. Thank heavens for this as the absolute deadline of the 15th was just around the corner... and we can all rest assured that The Colonel was not about to end up with any egg on his face if it was at all possible to avoid. So, here's what that PCR had to say:

"Further Passages of Vessels Between Entrance Channels. / Since the passage of the steamship *Cristobal* from Cristobal to Balboa on August 3, and its return to Cristobal on August 4, test voyages between the terminal ports have been made with all of the Panama railroad vessels available. The successive voyages have resulted in greater smoothness in handling through the locks and in a reduced time of transit. The *SS Advance* (Fig 6-13) was taken from Cristobal and to and through Miraflores Locks, on Sunday, August 9, and returned on the same day as far as Gatun, being locked through to the ocean the following morning; and the *SS Panama* (Fig 6-14), which arrived from New York on August 10, made a similar trip on August 11. On both of these trips, as on the passage of the *Cristobal*, old employees, with members of their families, were carried by invitation of the Governor. On Saturday, August 15, the *Ancon* will pass from deep water in the Atlantic to deep water in the Pacific, and will officially open the Canal to commerce between the oceans. It will carry cargo to be transferred at Balboa for shipment to north and south Pacific ports."



Fig. 6-14--*Panama* return trip northbound in the Cut Aug 11.

So, this finishes up the September ICCJ... we can all assume that the work of pushing these PanCanal/PRR vessels through the whole lock system in the days just prior to the main trip were quite successful as the transit of *Ancon* was a resounding success from all reports. But wait, no more on her as she'll get her full due in the upcoming October ICCJ.

Our two cover pictures this month are Panama Scott Nos. 214 & 215 depicting the *SS Panama* as the third vessel to transit of the Canal in both directions prior to the official opening on August 11, 1914.

to the Museum still stands. One thing we are doing with the U of F is to get more of the references digitalized, so in a sense you'll be contributing towards making our times in Panama last into perpetuity. You know it's the nagging time of year, so get me off your case NOW

THE FIRST TRANSITS PART 3 (by Bob Karrer, Bill Fall & Tag Stewart): Over the last two Issues we've seen that contrary to the previous understanding of many readers there was a veritable parade of ships that passed from sea to shining sea through the Panama Canal in the weeks prior to that first one we've all read about, and even seen on various stamps like the "Celebrate the Century" issue honoring the Nineteen-teens.

In fact, that official opening of the Canal on Aug 15, 1914 was deemed to be the perhaps most important event of the 1910-1919 Decade as in the souvenir sheet it was the one singled out as the separate-from-the-others engraved stamp. For this reason the stamps depicting the *Ancon* at Miraflores



Fig. 7-1 Celebrate the Century

Locks (US 3183f & RdeP C448) are on our cover.

For some collectors (including your editor) the pursuit of the many nicely cacheted First Day Covers is a worthy pursuit too, as these examples show (Figs. 7-1 to 4). In my collection of "keepers" I have literally dozens of them, and every so often a new one appears on e-Bay or at a show, (some for as little as \$5 plus or minus). They'd be worth recording a (CZSG??? handbook one day..... hmmm.



Fig. 7-2 Celebrate the Century

But, enough of this postulating, so, let's get on with the show. In the last issue we covered the pretty well known early August two-way trip by the *S.S. Cristobal* and the far lesser known transits by her fellow Panama Line sister ships *Advance* & *Panama* plus seemingly endless practice lockages by all manner of craft in order to prepare one and all to successfully meet the designated official opening to be held on the 15th for all the world to see. Sadly it was to be literally overwhelmed by the outbreak of World War I, and so in most newspapers of the time it received scant attention.... it was as if the pages of the Muse of History had turned to the New, while the great project of Yesterday was now "history."

Tickets for this voyage were the Ultimate Prize, and just as it was with the *Cristobal* a few days earlier there was an engraved invitation signed by the Colonel Himself. Figure 7-5 shows that at least some were retained by those fortunate few. This Pass from Tag Stewart's collection was assigned to Major Douglas Settle, who at the time of the *Ancon's* passage was Commanding Officer of a battalion of the Tenth Infantry Regiment assigned to Camp Otis at Las Cascadas from July 4, 1914 to April 14, 1916. During World War I in France he rose to serve as Colonel of the 9th Brigade, Fifth Inf Div, on the front lines before retiring in 1920. Sadly for your editor, this one has escaped my clutches for all of these years. Again I was asked about "values." I believe I'd spring for a C-Note for too, whereas a lesser transit like my *Cristobal* would possibly go for a somewhat lesser amount.

On the 29th of July the "Panama Canal Record" (PCR) carried as its lead article a brief one-paragraph notice that reads: "**Opening of the Canal to Traffic.** The Secretary of War has announced that the Panama

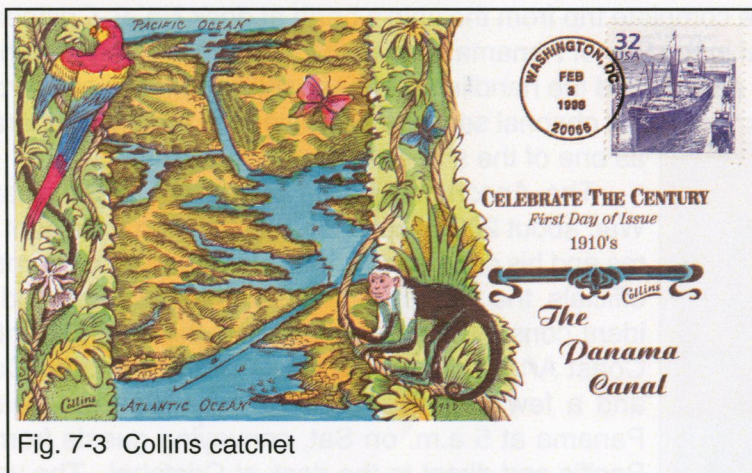


Fig. 7-3 Collins cachet

Canal will be opened to traffic on Saturday, August 15, to vessels drawing not to exceed 30 feet of water. This stipulation is made, because of the conditions at Cucaracha Slide, which although greatly improved, would not admit of the passage of vessels with absolute safety drawing a greater depth of water. This restriction, however, probably does not affect any vessel now using the Panama route regularly, either in the Atlantic or Pacific.” Well, talk about underwhelming “excitement”.... eh?

Interestingly, our old friend from the French Era Philippe Bunau-Varilla also made news in this issue when it was noted he had arrived on

the United Fruit Co. steamer *Tenedores* on July 24th... “He will spend several days on the Isthmus inspecting the Canal.” Well, it seems his quest for some recognition was met as he did get one of those engraved invitations to transit on the *Cristobal* soon thereafter... but it’s also worth noting that he was pointedly not invited to partake of the *Ancon’s* subsequent trip through the Canal.

Another tidbit was in the Aug 12 PCR: **“Further Passages of Vessels between Entrance Channels.** Since the passage of the steamship *Cristobal* from Cristobal to Balboa on August 3, and its return to Cristobal on Aug 4, test voyages between the terminal ports have been made with all of the Panama railroad vessels available. The successive voyages have resulted in greater smoothness of handling through the locks and in a reduced time of transit... old employees, with members of their families, were carried by invitation of the Governor (Goethals). On Saturday, Aug 15, the *Ancon* will pass from deep water in the Atlantic to deep water in the Pacific, and will officially open the Canal to commerce between the oceans. It will carry cargo to be transferred at Balboa for shipment to north and south Pacific ports.”.... again, underwhelming!!

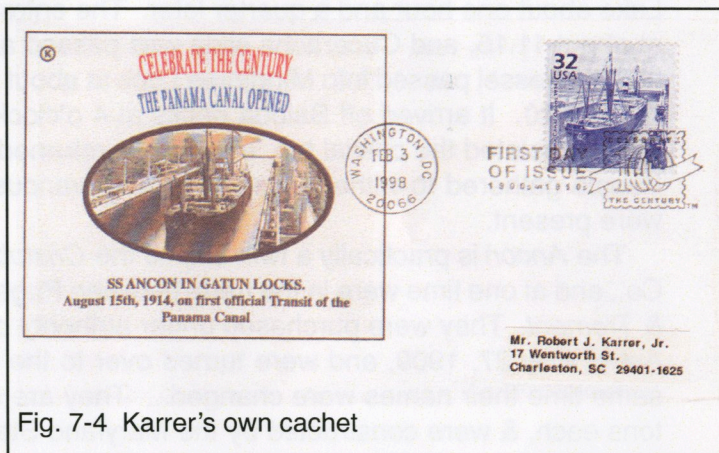


Fig. 7-4 Karrer’s own cachet

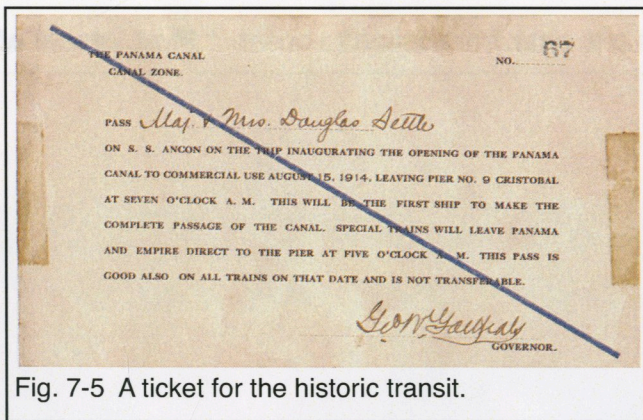


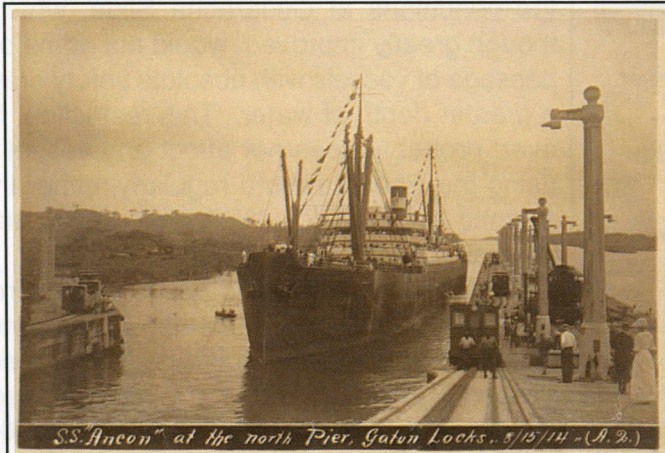
Fig. 7-5 A ticket for the historic transit.

The last issue in Vol. VII of our PCR has a nice article (at last) on *Ancon’s* transit, and I quote: **“CANAL OPENED TO TRAFFIC Message of Congratulation from the Secretary of War** / The following cable message has been received. To Col. George W. Goethals, Culebra, Canal Zone / On behalf of the Government and the people of the United States I express to you and through you to all concerned in the achievement, the intense gratification and pride experienced today. By the successful passage of vessels through the Canal the dream of the centuries has become a reality. Its stupendous undertaking has been finally accomplished and a perpetual memorial to the genius and enterprise of our

people has been created. The fully earned and deserved congratulations of a grateful people go out to you and your collaborators. Lindley M. Garrison/ Secretary of War.”

This was followed up by a major article on the actual transit, which “for the record’ needs to be given here in full. **“Official Trip of the “Ancon”** / Commercial traffic between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by way of the Panama Canal was inaugurated on Sat, August 15, by the Government steamship *Ancon* which made the trip from entrance to entrance in approximately nine hours, well within the previously estimated time for

the passage of a ship through the Canal. The complete trip from the ship's berth at dock No. 9, Cristobal, to the end of the dredged channel, five miles out in the Bay of Panama, was made in approximately nine hours and 40 minutes. There were no unscheduled delays, and the handling of the vessel in the locks and through the channel sections characterized the entire operation as one of the smoothest up to that time.



SS Ancon at the north Pier, Gatun Locks. 5/15/14 - (A. B.)

Fig. 7-6 The Colonel observes the Ancon at Gatun.

The *Ancon* carried, as guests of the Secretary of War, about 200 people, the list including President Porras and his cabinet and other Panamanian Government officials, the members of the diplomatic corps and resident consuls-general, officers of the Tenth Infantry & Coast Artillery Corps, officials of the Panama Canal, and a few others. A special train was run, leaving Panama at 5 a.m. on Sat, conveying guests from the Pacific end direct to the dock at Cristobal. The vessel left its berth at about 7.10 a.m., arrived at the Atlantic entrance at 7.30, and at Gatun Locks at 8 o'clock. It entered the lower lock at Gatun at the same hour & passed out of the upper lock on the water of Gatun

Lake about one hour and a quarter later. The entrance to the Culebra Cut section at Gamboa was reached at about 11.15, and Cucaracha slide was passed at 12.20 p.m. Pedro Miguel Lock was reached at 12.56, and the vessel passed into Miraflores Lock at about 1.56, and passed out of the lower lock into the sea channel at 3.20. It arrived off Balboa docks at 4 o'clock, and reached the end of the dredged channel at 4.30. This completed the official trip, and *Ancon* returned to Balboa, anchoring in the channel at about 5.10 p.m. People gathered to witness the passage at various points along the route, & at Balboa as many as 2000 were present.

The *Ancon* is practically a twin ship to the *Cristobal*. Both were formerly owned by the Boston Steamship Co., and at one time were in the trade between Puget Sound and the Orient under the names of the *Shawmut* & *Tremont*. They were purchased under authority of Congress contained in the Sundry Civil Appropriations Act of May 27, 1909, and were turned over to the United States Government on January 1, 1909. At the same time their names were changed... They are steel twin screw steamers at 9,606 gross and 6,195 net tons each, & were constructed by the Maryland Steel Co. The two ships were originally purchased for use as cement carrying ships and were in that service under the management of the Panama Railroad Co., during the period of lock construction. The *Ancon* on its first trip through the Canal carried a quantity of cargo for delivery at Balboa. It will return to the Atlantic Side on Sunday, August 23, and will sail on its voyage to New York on Monday August 24."

Another page contained an item on the first warship to pass from ocean to ocean: "**First Vessel of War Through the Canal / The Peruvian torpedo-destroyer *Teniente Rodríguez* arrived at Colon on Sunday, August 16, and was passed through the Canal on Tuesday, August 18, making it the first vessel of war to use the waterway. The destroyer has been on a trip up the Amazon River as far as Iquitos, stopping on the return trip at Pará, Trinidad, and Curaçao. It is a vessel of 460 tons, built in France about two years ago for the Peruvian Government, and it is manned by a crew of 54."**

Figure 7-7 depicts the tiny ship at Gatun Locks on her initial transit. This diminutive lassie has long since passed out of service for her derelict hull is reported to be beached by the river at Iquitos, Perú as recently as 2005. What a story she can tell... one day I'd like to chat with a Peruvian Naval Attaché in DC. It'd be interesting to learn of her subsequent history such as when she returned to her final home on the Amazon.



Fig. 7-7 First ship of war to pass through the Canal.

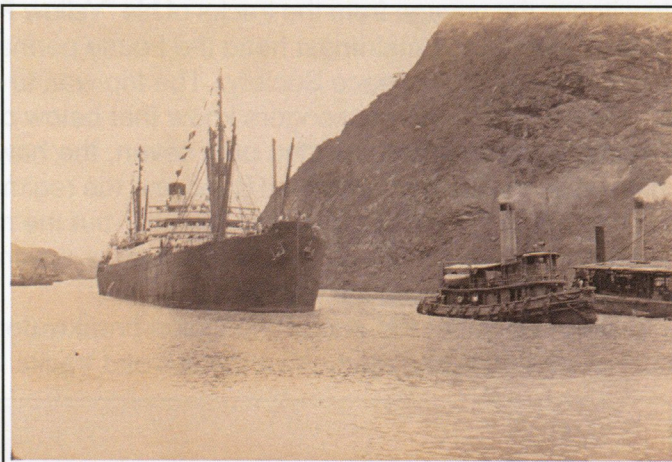


Fig. 7-8 SS Ancon southbound in the Cut.

To perhaps best capture the real feel of the events of August 15th let's see what Joseph Bucklin Bishop and his son Farnham say in the book "Goethals, Genius of the Panama Canal" as they quote John Barrett (Director General of the Pan American Union) who was a passenger on *Ancon* in writing to COL Goethals: "Congratulations do not mean much to you. But if I were to make any particular comment upon what impressed me most about the opening of the Canal, it would be the ease and system with which everything worked - as if the Canal had been completed and in operation for many years." The Bishops then go on to erroneously say "Yes, it is just as well there were no passengers on the *Cristobal*." (likely referring to the glitches her transit made quite evident)

Considering the mad rush to get one of the Governor's invitations why they'd say this seems rather odd – maybe they just meant NO VIP passengers from downtown or the world's nations were on *Cristobal's* transit. I guess we'll never know the real meaning of this statement, and from the perspective of our Muse of History it means very little indeed.

In preparing these articles I've come to admire Storrs Lee and his opus "The Strength to Move a Mountain" so much that I want to reproduce some of it; interestingly in doing the reading I can see he borrowed liberally from the PCR, which is just fine. However, so as to not cough up a mere repetition of the PCR's stolid/solid/almost perfunctory reporting, etc. I'll skip through his work and try to give you-all a good taste/ flavor of the day in his most interesting way. So, let's get on with it, recalling that Storrs Lee began his description of the *Cristobal's* transit by describing Goethals appearing to "be arranging a family picnic while the countryside about him was going up in flames (of WWI). But the Isthmus was not to be deprived of another fiesta. Actually this was to be only the "official" opening; the "formal" opening would come later." (on July 12, 1920 to be exact, after the fires of war were out and just before President Wilson stepped down from the job he had held since 1913).

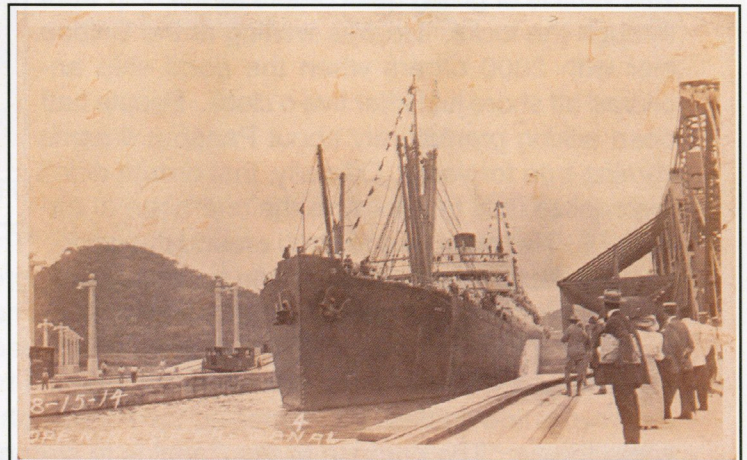


Fig. 7-9 Passing the emergency dams Pedro Miguel Locks.

".... All the other previous voyages across the isthmus were to be overlooked. The *Ancon* was to make

the first recognized run. Slicked up with a new coat of paint, her officers looking thoroughly uncomfortable in their starched whites, the venerable tramp ship lay ready at her *Cristobal* pier in the early morning. A special train from Panama City wheezed alongside just before seven o'clock, and some two hundred dignitaries filed in from the cars to the gangway. President Porras of the Republic of Panama was there, accompanied by his cabinet and other Panamanian officials.... and (even) a few Canal officials who had survived the shake-up in Zone government. The absence of top U.S. notables was shocking. For Isthmian affairs of far less import there had always been a Roosevelt, a Taft, or a sprinkling of Congressmen. Even Gov-

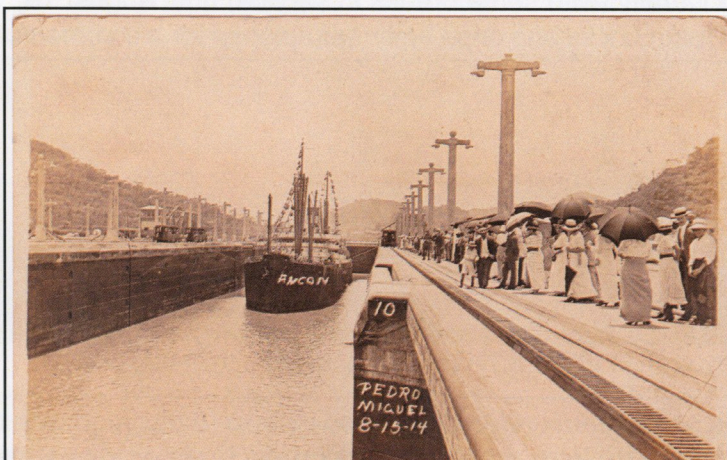


Fig. 7-10 SS Ancon southbound east chamber Pedro Miguel.

ernor Goethals declined to go aboard; he preferred to witness the voyage from the tracks of his "Yellow Peril."

At the forepeak of the *Ancon* waved the ensign of the RdeP, at the mainmast head the house pennant of the Panama Steamship fleet, on the jackstaff the flag of the American Peace Society. The trip was to symbolize the peaceful objectives of the Panama Canal. Only a few of the passengers knew that below decks were two huge pieces of artillery for the Pacific batteries. Exactly at ten minutes past seven, the hawsers were released and the *Ancon* pulled away from her pier, while the Panama National Band and the regimental band of the Tenth US Infantry joined in a strident rendition of the "The Star Spangled Banner," but the music was irreverently drowned by cheering thousands and the blasts of scores of ships in the harbor waiting for the *Ancon* to complete her voyage so that they too could make a dash to the Pacific.

In order to qualify for a complete voyage, the ship steamed out to the end of the Colón breakwater and then headed back... (at Gatun) Gov. Goethals waved her off and putt-putted down the railroad tracks in his "Peril" toward Pedro Miguel.... slowed for the entrance into Culebra Cut, where more thousands of spectators lustily cheered her passage... with Goethals anxiously standing by, she was eased through Miraflores Lock... and completed the official trip off the tip of Naos Breakwater. All along the route passengers caught occasional glimpses of the Governor flying down the tracks in his private vehicle or giving quiet orders as the ship went through the locks. He was waiting at the Balboa pier with 2000 others when the good ship anchored off shore just after five o'clock. People had been talking prematurely about Panama dreams coming true for years. Officially, that dream didn't materialize until four-thirty in the afternoon of August 15. The word was flashed around the world: "The Panama Canal is open to the commerce of the world. Henceforth ships may pass to and fro through the great waterway," announced the New York Times under a modest headline on page 14. International events had crowded into the background "the greatest marvel of the old and the new world." "This unostentatious dedicatory act may be considered a more appropriate celebration of a triumph of the arts of peace than if it had been associated with martial pomp and an array of destroyers and battleships," consoled the Philadelphia Record. Other newspapers echoed variations on the same theme: "The purpose of the Canal is to strengthen the bonds of peaceful commerce, but today commerce stands paralyzed and peace has flown... The practical completion of this great achievement wins little attention from a world intent upon the war news from Belgium and Alsace... Americans should find a solemn pride in the thought that they have added much to a world from which other nations are taking so much away."



Fig. 7-11 SS *Ancon* entering Miraflores Lake southbound.

Well then, so much for the historic voyage by our erstwhile lowly cement carrier. But, *Ancon's* years of service had begun in 1909, and she was used literally (with some breaks in service) until August 15, 1939, when she was taken out of water storage near Gatun Locks and once again refurbished for a commemorative



Fig. 7-12 1939 commemorative 25th anniversary voyage of the SS *Ancon* passing through Gatun Locks.

Panama Canal transit to mark the Silver Jubilee of the great undertaking. And in those thirty years she came to provide we collectors with a nice group of souvenirs from printed menus on each of her trips stateside, tickets issued to passengers, to examples of mail carried aboard and handled by her diligent mail clerks.

During WWI she was engaged in military service, initially engaged in hauling nitrates from Chile back to the US for use in making explosives. However, the brief Navy career of this first *USS Ancon* lasted just four months. She was acquired by the Navy from the Army at New Orleans five days after The Armistice ended WWI. She was outfitted as a troop transport and commissioned on 28 March 1919, LCDR Milan L. Pittman, USNRF, in command. Assigned to the Atlantic Fleet's Cruiser and Transport Force, she made two round-trip voyages from the US to France to bring American servicemen back home. Following her second voyage, she was decommissioned at New York City on 25 July 1919 and was returned to the War Dept. Specifications: Length 489.5"; Beam 58'; Draft 30'; Speed 13 kts.; Complement 261; Armament three 6-pounders. (NavSource on Line)



Fig. 7-13 *Ancon's* 1939 commemorative 25th Anniversary trip, Miraflores Locks; a colorized image by ICCer Clive Fennessy (FEN 47).

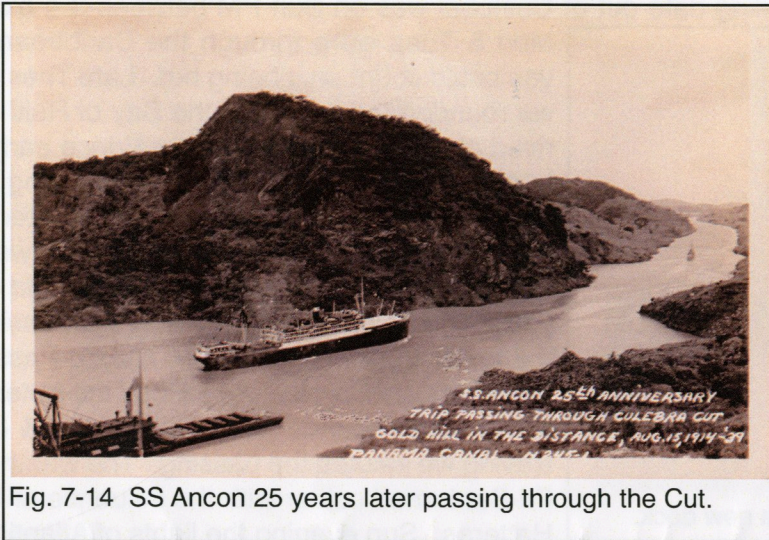


Fig. 7-14 SS *Ancon* 25 years later passing through the Cut.

Most significantly she was modernized and a whole new deck for passengers was added as her former role as a cement or nitrate carrier was now passé. In Fig.7-17 we see her new self in the 1920s. A nice relic is the example of a "Cabin Passage" ticket which also gave Mr. Kinson his table assignment (Fig.7-18). While the exact voyage is not known, the ticket itself was printed at the Mt Hope printing plant in October 1920.

How did all of this come to pass? The *Ancon* and *Cristobal* were returned to the PRR after the war and it was decided to make them central to the operation of the PRR Steamship Line on its main run between New York-Cristobal with a stop at Port au Prince, Haiti. First to be modernized was *Cristobal* in 1920 (Fig. 7-16), and when she re-entered service, *Ancon* had her turn after she too was withdrawn from service in April

So, in the rest of this elongated ICCJ let me share some of the relics that collectors strive to add to our collections, competing often fervently on e-Bay when something new shows up for example. But, to be sure, most of these items are not particularly expensive despite their scarcity. Since the last ICCJ came out, for example, we've seen price records set for the *Cristobal* Transit Medals, with a low 3-digit one selling for over \$500, while higher numbers often go for well over a C –Note... it's tempting to haul out mine in its original box just to see how much such a prize would get! So, let's just take a look at some of these souvenirs that we fanáticos compete for so fervently.

After WWI the *Ancon* had several "lives."



Fig 7-15 *USS Ancon* (1467) outfitted as a troop transport.

1923; initially she was laid up in Gatun Lake. Part of the work took place at the Balboa Shops, including scaling & repainting her hull, and then she steamed (still under coal) for New York where the reconditioning (including conversion to fuel oil) was completed for about \$525,000. Among the improvements was installation of an extra deck as seen in the picture at Fig 7-17. This increased her passenger capacity to about 250, up from the previous rating of 78.

In a memoir on 1930s Panama, George Chevalier noted that the new "cabins were set up for four people in two sets of bunk beds. No toilet commode; only a wash basin/sink with running water. Thunder Jugs were provided & kept under the bunks, but that we felt was too undignified and so we'd get up in the night, don slippers & bathrobe to head out into the night down the deck to the public bathrooms. On stormy & windy nights this was an adventure walking the pitching & rolling deck. Each cabin had an oscillating electric fan as the only means of artificial cooling. Sailing date out of Cristobal was on Sun PM between 3-4 o'clock.



Fig. 7-16 SS Cristobal's extensive upgrade in Balboa Dry Dock 1920.



Fig 7-17 SS Ancon after retrofit in 1923 with a new deck.

Mon & Tues were through the Caribbean and you could count on it being hot. Late Tues night we rounded the cape into the Bay of Haiti & arrived at the one pier in Port au Prince early AM to spend the day sight-seeing or shopping. Departure was late afternoon; sometime after midnight we'd round the cape into ocean waters, and the increased motion of the ship would wake you to that fact. Dawn Thur saw the passing of the lower Bahamas in the Windward Passage, and it was also the day we passed the sister ship going south-bound. With ship's horn & much waving we saluted the passing. The weather on Fri-Sat turned colder with the influence of Cape Hatteras. Sun evening the lights of Atlantic City & Ashbury Park could be seen off the port side if your parents had allowed you to stay up at that hour. Finally, we anchored in the lower bay of NYC in the last part of the night. A very slow fog-shrouded trip thru the Narrows toward the main harbor & pier began early with the biting cold that penetrated our southern bones. Pilot, Immigration & Public Health had all come aboard to check us & do their jobs. We knew it was over when we rose & went on deck to see the deck chairs were all folded up & stacked out of the way, giving the deck an unnatural wide look. While suitcases were in use the main way to haul clothes was by large steamer trunk; it stood on end in the middle of your cabin & swung open to multiple drawers on one side and full length hanging of suits & dresses on the other side. These you packed in advance; Canal or PRR people came to your home & picked them up the day before sailing. Upon boarding the ship there was your trunk sitting in the middle of the cabin as if to say "We're Off." I can't think of a nicer way to describe life aboard Ancon in the 1930s.

Anyway, the "new" Ancon arrived back in Cristobal on April 25, 1925, and after discharging her cargo was again laid up in Gatun Lake for a spell before going back into regular service into the 1930s. Figure 7-19 is a pair of covers handled at the Railway Mail Service office aboard ship, where the characteristic Killer 2 in

Fig 7-17 SS Ancon after retrofit in 1923 with a new deck.

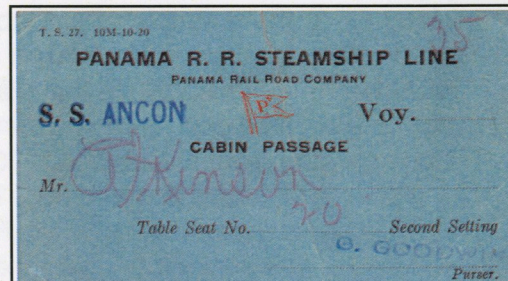


Fig. 7-18 Ancon cabin passage ticket.

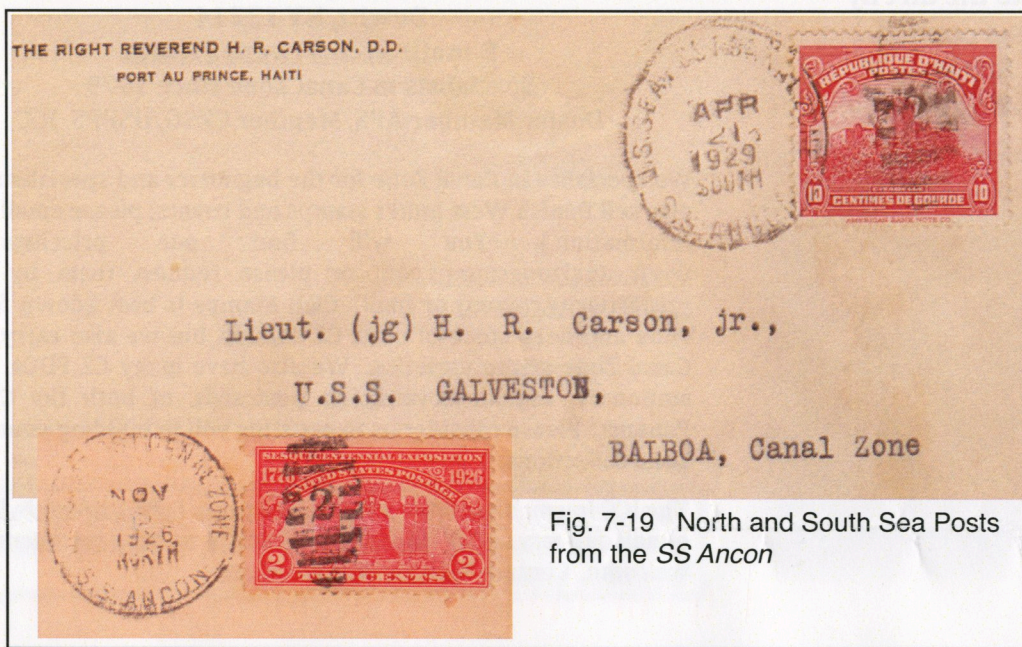


Fig. 7-19 North and South Sea Posts from the SS Ancon

the cancel from *Ancon* was utilized. Note the southbound cover originated in Haiti and was addressed to an officer aboard the *USS Galveston* that was assigned to the Panama defense squadron; the “South” in the center of the date stamp part of the device notes this. Usually, but definitely not always, it has been observed that US stamps were used on the northbound voyage (presumably since the USPO actually did the work... while southbound mail is

more often seen with Canal Zone stamps for the same reason. In reality though I think that passengers used whatever was handy & the mail clerks did not object. As to values, *Ancon* postmarks are somewhat scarcer as she was laid up more often than *Cristobal* but their values are usually assigned a similar figure of around \$10. The Passenger Ticket I suppose would fetch about \$20.

With the advent of the Great Depression in 1929, traffic through the Canal soon dropped off so *Ancon* spent part of the 1930s once again in limbo out on Lake Gatun. However, as the Canal’s 25th Anniversary neared it was decided to repeat her famous transit on August



Fig. 7-20 *Ancon & Cristobal* tied up at Gamboa circa 1940 awaiting disposal.

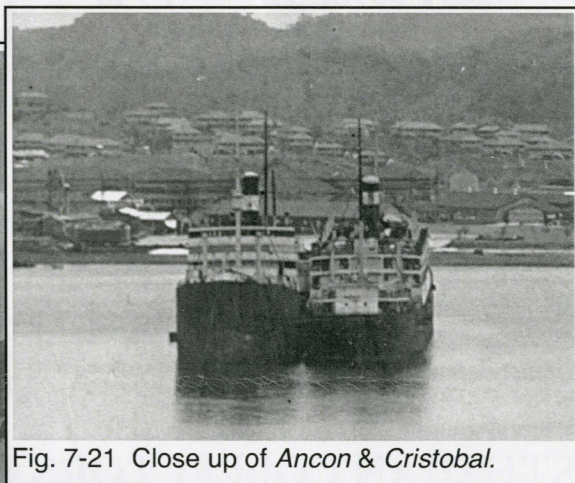


Fig. 7-21 Close up of *Ancon & Cristobal*.

15th, and so once again she was spruced up. And, as in 1914 there was a mad scramble for a ticket for her passage. The day was lovely & thou-

sands of folks got to watch her transit and the lucky few got a ride, much as occurred in 1914. The images at Figs. 7-12 to 7-14 depict her transit & arrival at Balboa. After this, just as in 1914, a world war broke out, and with the arrival of the new Panama Line ships the old relics were eventually laid aside. Figures 7-20 & 21 show the sister ships from the Good Olde Days laid up alongside the canal at Gamboa in this circa 1940 photo. Soon after that the *Cristobal* was sold to Sociedad La Florida and renamed the *Philippa*. She was broken up in 1951 as the *Esmeralda*. Soon after that the *Ancon* was consigned to the scrap heap of history, leaving us with only these “recuerdos” to remind us of their key role in Canal history. As the famous motto says: “Sic Transit Gloria”... and with that we bid a fond adieu to our old friend the *S.S. Ancon*, and her many sister ships