

Article & photos intended for *NRHS NEWS* by Kevin Feeney National Director.

West Jersey Chapter Celebrates 80th Anniversary with Delaware River Cruise

On August 31, 2024, I joined some 30 members and guests for cruise up and down the Delaware River on board the *North Wind*. This is Treworgy 57 schooner that was built in 1995. The cruise left from Gloucester City, NJ and directly across the river was an intermodal port facility with the *Santa Viola*, a 275 meter-long container ship. Just south of that facility was



the location of the former Pennsy's ore docks [Piers 122 and 124].

The cruise left at 11AM and soon passed under the Walt Whitman Bridge that was opened in 1957. I was on the port [left] side of the boat so I saw the sights on the Philly's side going north and those on the South Jersey side going south. Next was Pier 84 that is the largest cocoa import facility in the US. Amazingly, the cocoa is in burlap bags and still unloaded by stevedores. The *SS United States*, built in 1952 and last sailed in 1969, has been docked at Pier 82 since 1996.



The organization that owns the ship has been in a rent dispute with the owner of the pier for a while and was facing eviction on September 12th. However, a last minute agreement was reached on August 30, 2024 with Okaloosa County, FL that will buy the ship and then sink it off Destin-Fort Walton Beach creating the world's largest artificial reef.

The boat passed Philadelphia's Penn's Landing where the access to the river is being redeveloped. Docked there are Admiral Dewey's flagship, the cruiser *Olympia* and a four-masted baroque now called the *Moshulu*, which is the world oldest and largest square-rigged sailing ship afloat. For many years, the PRR and RDG operated ferry from here to Camden NJ. The RDG service ended on April 30, 1938, while the PRR ferries continued till March 31, 1952. We



passed under the Benjamin Franklin Bridge that was called the Delaware River Bridge when built in 1926; it was renamed in 1955 while the Walt Whitman Bridge was being built. As built, there were tracks for Public Service streetcars from Camden in the main roadway and space for rapid transit tracks on both outer edges. Elevators were built inside both cable anchorages to the street level to provide passenger access to streetcars but none of the streetcar facilities were ever used. The Bridge Line subway operated on the two outer tracks from Camden to Center City from 1936 until the start of the PATCO High Speedline in 1969.

We continued up river. Much of the shoreline above the BFB has been redeveloped with luxury apartments and condominiums. Above these was the Reading Railroad's former Port Richmond. It was said to be largest, privately-owned, railroad tidewater terminal in the world and sadly virtually none of it remains. On July 31st, 2024, the end of the so called "Graffiti Pier"



[historically Pier 18] fell into the river. The part that fell was originally part of the kick-back track for the adjacent McMyler side car coal dumpster. At the north end of Port Richmond are the remains of the car floats from where the Reading moved freight cars to South Jersey.



By 1145 AM, we arrived at the Delair Railroad Bridge, which for most of us on board was the



highlight of the trip. It was built by the PRR as a swing bridge in 1895 and in 1960 was converted to a center lift bridge that was then the longest double-tracked one in the world. Today, the bridge is used by Conrail Shared Assets to/from the former P-RSL Pavonia freight yard in Camden and for New Jersey Transit service between Philly and Atlantic City . Behind it is the Betsy Ross [highway] Bridge that opened in 1976 and was the first such bridge in the US named for a woman. We stayed there for about 35 minutes during which we saw two NJT trains and a long freight of mostly tank cars that had two NS locomotives at the front and one on the rear. As we left, the Delair Bridge tooted its horn and opened up a bit as a special treat for us!



With the boat heading south, the port side now faced South Jersey. The land along the river there is much less underdeveloped than on the PA side. At Petty Island just above Camden, we saw



the ramp structure from where Crowley Marine once loaded huge triple-deck barges for RO/RO service to Puerto Rico. After passing under the BFB again, we came to the Camden waterfront

where both the PRR and RDG once had massive rail facilities and ferry docks. No sign of that remains today. Docked there is BB-62, the USS New Jersey, that was recently overhauled in the same drydock in the Philadelphia Navy Yard where it was built in 1942. The New Jersey is 108'



wide [the Panama canal is 110'] and is six inches longer than the other Iowa Class battleships. The workers who built it mainly lived in NJ and were ferried across the river to work daily from near we boarded the *North Wind*. The boat moved close to the Philly shoreline so we could get a better view of the *SS United States* and the Cocoa pier.



The last facilities passed were where Del Monte imports bananas and the Holt intermodal pier. We returned to Gloucester City at 2PM so unlike the *SS Minnow*, this was just a three-hour cruise. The participants seems to thoroughly enjoy the cruise. The weather was good. There was no rain; it wasn't hot but it was a bit cloudy. Among those on board were Lynn Burshtin



who managed the NRHS office for many years when it was in Philadelphia and her husband Michael who held managerial positions at Septa and Amtrak. Both are members of the West Jersey chapter.

The West Jersey Chapter grew out of a local model railroad club. That club received its charter from the NRHS on April 16, 1944, making West Jersey the 18th chapter. The Chapter will continue to celebrate its 80th anniversary with a luncheon on Saturday September 28, 2024. Those interested in learning more about the chapter and its activities should visit its website at <https://www.westjersey-nrhs.org>.