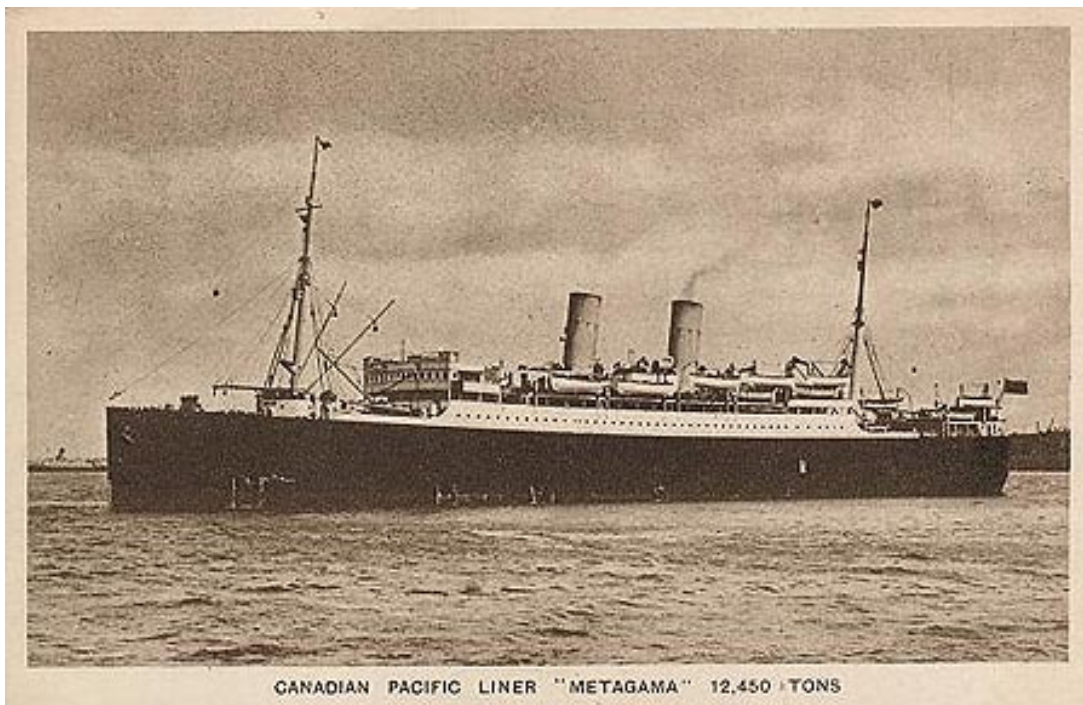


Ships

Metagama

[Home](#)[Archives](#)

Metagama

Remembering The Metagama

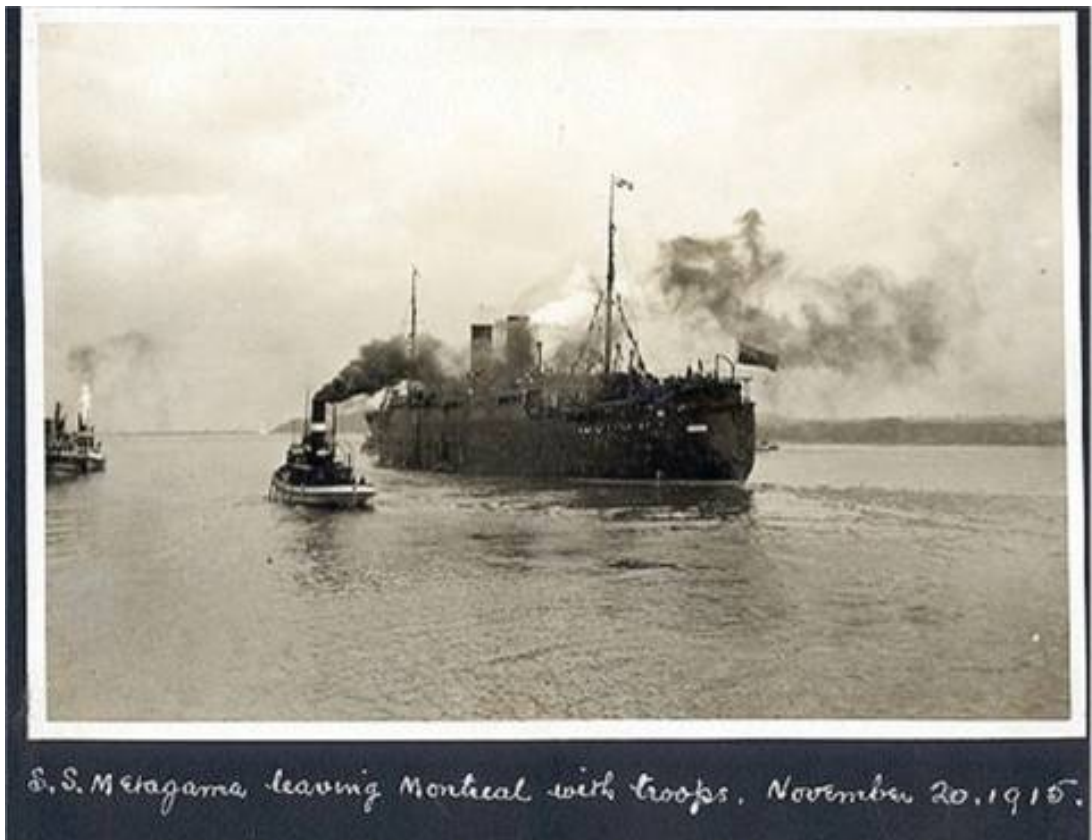
By James Donahue

The steamship Metagama was a typical commercial seagoing vessel in her day. She was built by Barclay, Curie & Co. of Glasgow and launched in April, 1915, just in time to see duty as a troopship during World War I. England and Germany had been at war for nearly a year and the Canadians were already supplying troops for the war effort.

The steamer was large for its day, at just over 500 feet. She offered accommodations for 520 first-class and 1,200 third class passengers. While designed to carry both passengers and freight for her owners, the Canadian Pacific Railway Co., the Metagama may have been pressed almost immediately into service as a troop carrier.

Among the photographs we found of the Metagama was one dated Nov. 20, 1915 as she was steaming from Montreal with troops packing her decks. Since she was Canadian owned, the steamer probably belonged to the Canadian Merchant Marine of more than 100 ships. Her exact role was shrouded in wartime secrecy so it is difficult to know just who or what government controlled her. She flew the flag of England when at sea.

After the war the vessel maintained regular transatlantic passenger duties, mostly between Liverpool and St. John, New Brunswick. Between 1915 and the day the Metagama was taken out of service 16 years later, she made 151 ocean crossings.



Source: A. A. Chesterfield Fonds, Queen's University Archives

During those years the Metagama was generally a good-luck ship. She avoided hostile fire and attack from German U-boats during the war. While in commercial service, however, she was involved in two serious mishaps . . . both collisions with other ships.

On May 26, 1923, the steamer collided with the Baron Vernon, a steamer for the Hogarth Line in England, while navigating the Clyde River.

The second collision, this time with the Italian steamer Clara Camus in dense fog about seven miles off Cape Race, was much more serious. A story in the Newfoundland Post and Telegraph of June 20, 1924, said the Italian vessel rammed the Metagama amidships on the starboard side, cutting a hole fifteen feet long and three feet wide. The bow of the Camus was badly battered. Miraculously nobody was hurt.

During the confusion, three of the Metagama's crew members went over the side in a life boat to determine the extend of damage. But the boat got caught in the current and drifted off in the fog. The U.S. Coast Guard cutter Tampa had to search for them. Strangely, the boat was found

drifting, but the three sailors were missing. It was presumed they were lost at sea.

The Matagama did not sink, but she was leaking badly and was listing hard to port by the time she arrived in port. She came in under tow. The Clara Camus also limped into port, but under her own steam.

At the time of the accident the Metagama was carrying 695 passengers. They were taken off by the steamship Montreal and then taken to Montreal, which was their destination on the Metagama.

The Camus was carrying grain from Montreal to Havre, France.

The Metagama was only 15 years old, and considered a young and seaworthy ship when it went out of service in 1931. The cause was the Great Depression which hit the shipping industry hard. She was laid up in anchorage of Southend for three years where she lay rusting and falling into disrepair.

In April, 1934, the Metagama was sold for scrap.

The Mind of James Donahue

Great And Lost Ships Of The World