

Great Western Steamer First North Atlantic Liner

1838 was a watershed year in naval history. A race to establish and prove value of steam as a means of propulsion on North Atlantic would be decided. Major competition was between the *British Queen* of British and American Steam Ship Company and the *Great Western* of newly formed Great Western Steam Ship Company. The *British Queen* was behind in construction and *Great Western* was near final sea trials. British and American Steam Ship Company chartered the Steamer *Sirius* for this first two voyages to New York. It will be shown in the Introduction that the *Great Western* performed much better on their first efforts. This exhibit uses philatelic material to show successful participation of the *Great Western* and her contribution to establishing steam service on the North Atlantic.

Treatment will follow plan shown below. Chapters of plan will be introduced by **BOLD** titles in upper left corner of first page, with following pages having a subdued title. Upper right corners will identify voyages and contain information about item(s) on that page. Material in each chapter follows sequence of voyages in that chapter. Information in cover description in this color addresses specific information important to that item.

Story line information is contained in boxes like this one.

Signifcate items are backed with Maroon backing.

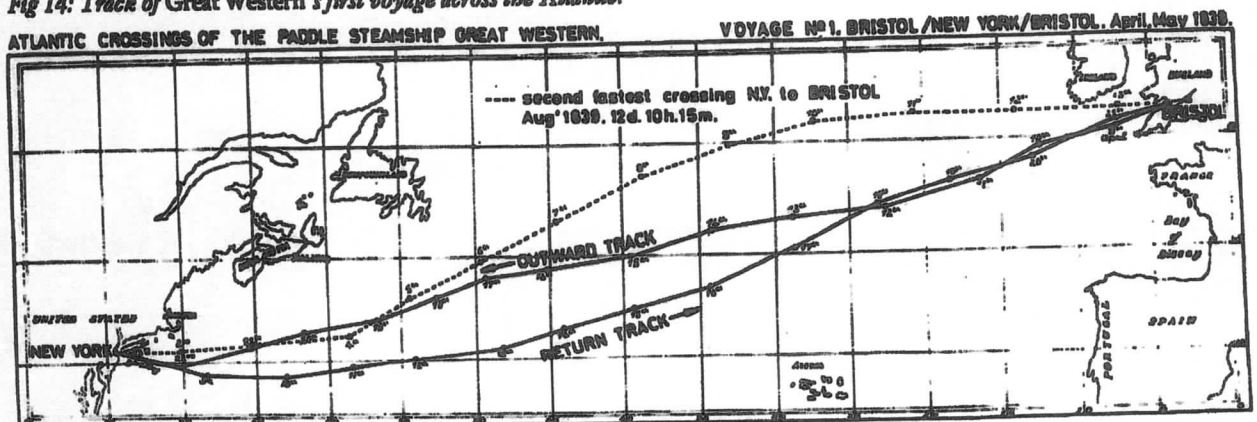
Exhibit Plan

Introduction

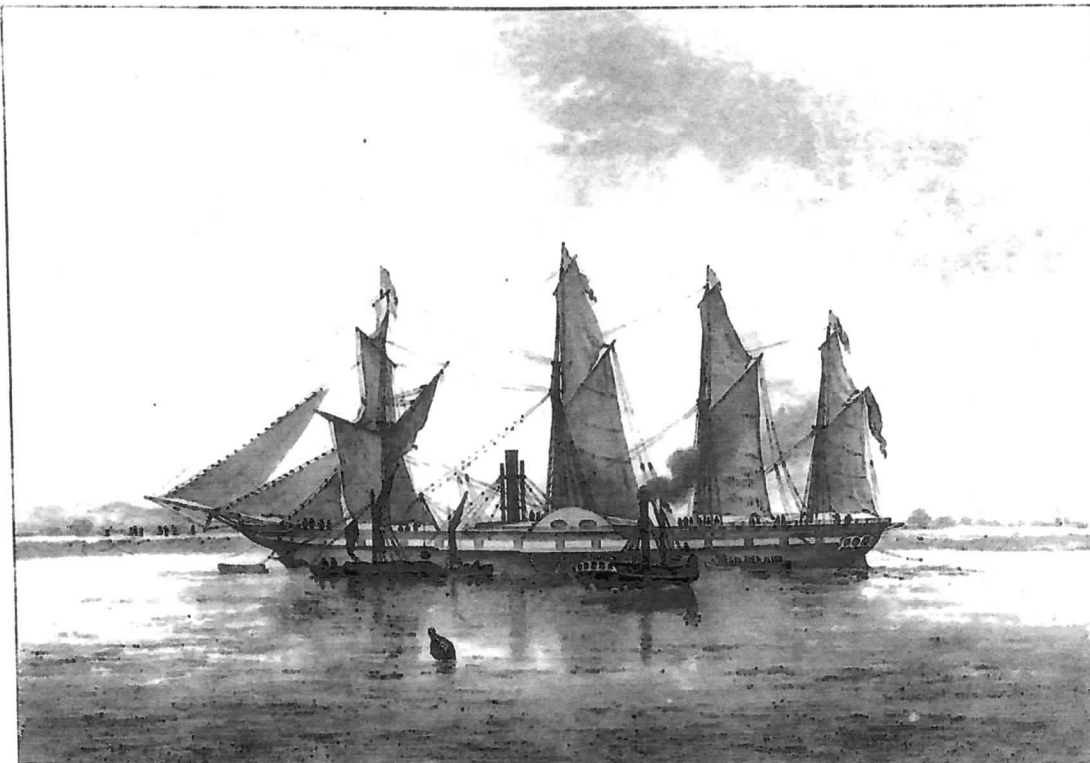
- Great Western - 1838
- Great Western - 1839
- Great Western - 1840
- Great Western - 1841
- Great Western - 1842
- Great Western - 1843
- Great Western - 1844
- Great Western - 1845
- Great Western - 1846
- Great Western - Conclusion

Figure below shows general route followed by *Great Western* when home port was Bristol. Leaving New York, packets would turn north-east and follow the Gulf Stream. This gave them about 2 miles of additional speed going east but returning west they faced strong easterly winds, thus additional days in westerly crossings. Steamers faced those same winds but this caused only a couple of additional days in their westerly crossings

Fig 14: Track of Great Western's first voyage across the Atlantic.



INTRODUCTION



THE GREAT WESTERN.

Designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Built by E. & F. Potts, Bristol.

(Picture courtesy of National Maritime Museum Greenwich)

THE GREAT WESTERN designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel was the first steamer built especially for North Atlantic routes. The wooden paddle steamer weighted 1,340 tons and measured 212 feet long and 35.5 feet at the beam. The British Post Office did not offer the company a mail contract. Mail carried by the *Great Western* carries the designation 'Ship Letters' in the United States and 'Packet Letters' in England. On April 7, 1838, a heavy gale delayed her maiden voyage until the following day. On this initial westerly voyage she carried no letters and only 7 of 50 scheduled passengers. She arrived in New York at 5 PM on April 23, 1838 and departed on May 7, 1838 with 68 passengers and approximately 20,000 letters. She arrived back at Bristol May 22, 1838.

The *Great Western* made 45 round trips on the North Atlantic mail route between 1838 to 1846. The initial home port of the *Great Western* was Bristol, but shallow water required her to berth at Kingsford. Her last departure from Bristol was February 11, 1843. She made her remaining transatlantic sailings from Liverpool which offered deeper mooring.

THE GREAT RACE: history has referred to the first voyage of the *Great Western* and the *Sirius* as a race to complete a voyage under steam. Due to conditions under which each sailed, it could hardly be called a race. The *Sirius* started from Cork, Ireland 220 miles closer and also 4 days before the start of the *Great Western*. Arrivals were separated only by a few hours proving the *Great Western* completed the crossing in shorter time.