

***The History of the Ferryboat Mary Murray:
The Staten Island Ferry That Became a NJ Turnpike Landmark***

By David Moskowitz, Ph.D.

“And my machine she’s a dud, all stuck in the mud somewhere in the swamps of Jersey.”¹

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The Mary Murray ferry was launched in 1937 on Staten Island, NY and would end her storied career seventy-three years later beached and rotting away in East Brunswick, NJ. For thirty-seven years, she plied the waters between Manhattan and Staten Island, NY as part of the Staten Island Ferry system. She was funded by the New Deal during the Depression and was the first New York City ferry named after a woman. Her namesake was Mary Murray, a patriot-heroine during the Revolutionary War. The Mary Murray was purchased at an auction in 1976 by George Searle, a Merchant Mariner with his own storied past who towed the ferry up the Raritan River to NJ with plans to convert it into a floating restaurant. It would remain there for the next thirty-four years until ultimately being scrapped, visible from the NJ Turnpike just north of Exit 9. Despite never achieving a second useful life, the Mary Murray would become a NJ cultural landmark and arguably NJ’s most famous ferry.

¹ Bruce Springsteen, “Rosalita (Come Out Tonight),” B side, track 2 on *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, Columbia Records, 1973.



Mary Murray on her first day of service, February 28, 1938. Reprinted with permission of the Mariners' Museum.

At 3:45 pm on June 3, 1937, Charlotte Murray “smacked a champagne bottle on the nose” of the *Mary Murray* ferry, launching her into history.² The new ferry was named after her great, great grandmother, a patriot-heroine during the Revolutionary War.³ The *Mary Murray* would ply the waters between Staten Island and Manhattan for the next thirty-seven years, an unsung workhorse of the Staten Island Ferry system. She was sold at auction in 1976 to George Searle, who, like the ferry, had his own storied past and had spent time on the water as a Merchant Mariner.⁴ Their history would become inextricably entwined as Searle had the ferry towed up the Raritan River to East Brunswick, NJ, just north of Exit 9 on the NJ Turnpike. His big dreams to

² “500 at Launching of \$912,000 Ferry Boat”, *New York Daily News*, June 4, 1937.

³ “New Ferryboat in Service”, *The New York Times*, February 28, 1938.

⁴ “Farewell Mary Murray—she was “good girl”, *Tonawanda News* (North Tonawanda, New York), July 22, 1976.

convert her to a floating restaurant never materialized and she sat grounded for twenty-five years in the same spot at the edge of a swamp. The *Mary Murray* ultimately ended up at the scrap yard, but before that, she had become a NJ landmark, viewed and wondered about by countless drivers on the NJ Turnpike.

The *Mary Murray* ferry was born of the Great Depression and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program.⁵ Her \$912,000.00 (\$16,740,020.57 in 2020 dollars) price tag was funded by federal grants and loans authorized by the Second Congressional Emergency Appropriations Act.⁶ Ferries weren't originally considered for federal funding but lobbying by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia provided an impetus for a change and the *Mary Murray* and her two sister ships, the *Gold Star Mother* and the *Miss New York* were commissioned in 1935.⁷ The funding was allowed only after the United States Attorney General Homer Stille Cummings "construed a ferryboat as a building in order to make the Public Works Administration (PWA) loan possible."⁸ The well-known naval architect Eads Johnson was retained to design the three ferries.⁹

The ferries were the first of the New York fleet to be given feminine names and the *Mary Murray* was the only ship named after an actual woman.¹⁰ She would retain that honor for the next fifty years until 1986 when the ferry *Alice Austen* was launched, in recognition of the pioneering

⁵ Frank da Cruz, "Staten Island ferries built with New Deal funding," accessed May 10, 2020, <http://kermitproject.org/newdeal/siferry/>.

⁶ "Ferry Contract Awarded," *New York Times*, December 15, 1935.

⁷ United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations House of Representatives Seventy-Fifth Congress Third Session on the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1938 and Public Works Administration Appropriation Act of 1938*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1938.

⁸ "Mayor Dedicates a New Ferryboat," *New York Times*, May 8, 1937.

⁹ Squire Edmund, "The Staten Island Ferry Enters the 21st Century," *Steamboat Bill*, Winter 2005.

¹⁰ "New Ferries Really 'She's' – Three Get Feminine Names," *The Times Union* (Brooklyn, New York), March 26, 1937.

Victorian and early 20th century Staten Island photographer.¹¹ The *Mary Murray* ferry was named after Mary Lindley Murray, who is credited with cunningly detaining British commander William Howe and his generals with cake and wine long enough for General George Washington's Continental troops to escape to northern Manhattan Island after the ill-fated battle of Kips Bay, New York, on September 15, 1776.¹² Her portrait hung in the main cabin of the ferry.¹³ The portrait seems to have been lost to history. Around 2010, it was discovered unceremoniously stored in a warehouse but is no longer there.¹⁴

Although her exploits are sometimes considered apocryphal, they were described by James Thatcher, a well-respected surgeon and confidant of General George Washington who was at the battle. In his diary, published many years later, he writes in detail about Murray treating the British Commander General William Howe and his generals to cake and wine, delaying them several hours as the Americans slipped away undetected:

Mrs. Murray treated them with cake and wine, and they were induced to tarry two hours or more, Governor Tryon frequently joking her about her American friends. By this happy incident General Putnam, by continuing his march, escaped a rencounter with a greatly superior force, which must have proved fatal to his whole party. One half hour, it is said, would have been sufficient for the enemy to have secured the road at the turn, and entirely cut off General Putnam's retreat. It has since become almost a common saying among our officers, that Mrs. Murray saved this part of the American army.¹⁵

Like most historical legends, the story is probably a mix of fact and fiction and as the renowned historian, David McCullough noted in 1776 "She would be portrayed as a veritable Circe, charming the gallant Britons with her feminine wiles. Possibly she did invite the officers to tea,

¹¹ "Alice Austen," Alice Austen House, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://aliceausten.org/alice-austen/>.

¹² Elizabeth Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution Volume II* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co. 1900).

¹³ *Images of America Staten Island Ferry*, Staten Island Museum (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014).

¹⁴ Personal communication with Patricia Salmon and Jim Desimone.

¹⁵ James Thatcher, *A military journal during the American revolutionary war, from 1775 to 1783; describing interesting events and transactions from this period; with numerous historical facts and anecdotes, from the original manuscript. To which is added an appendix, containing biographical sketches of several general officers* (Boston: Richardson & Lord, 1823).

and she may have been extremely charming, but she was also a woman in her fifties and the mother of twelve children.”¹⁶

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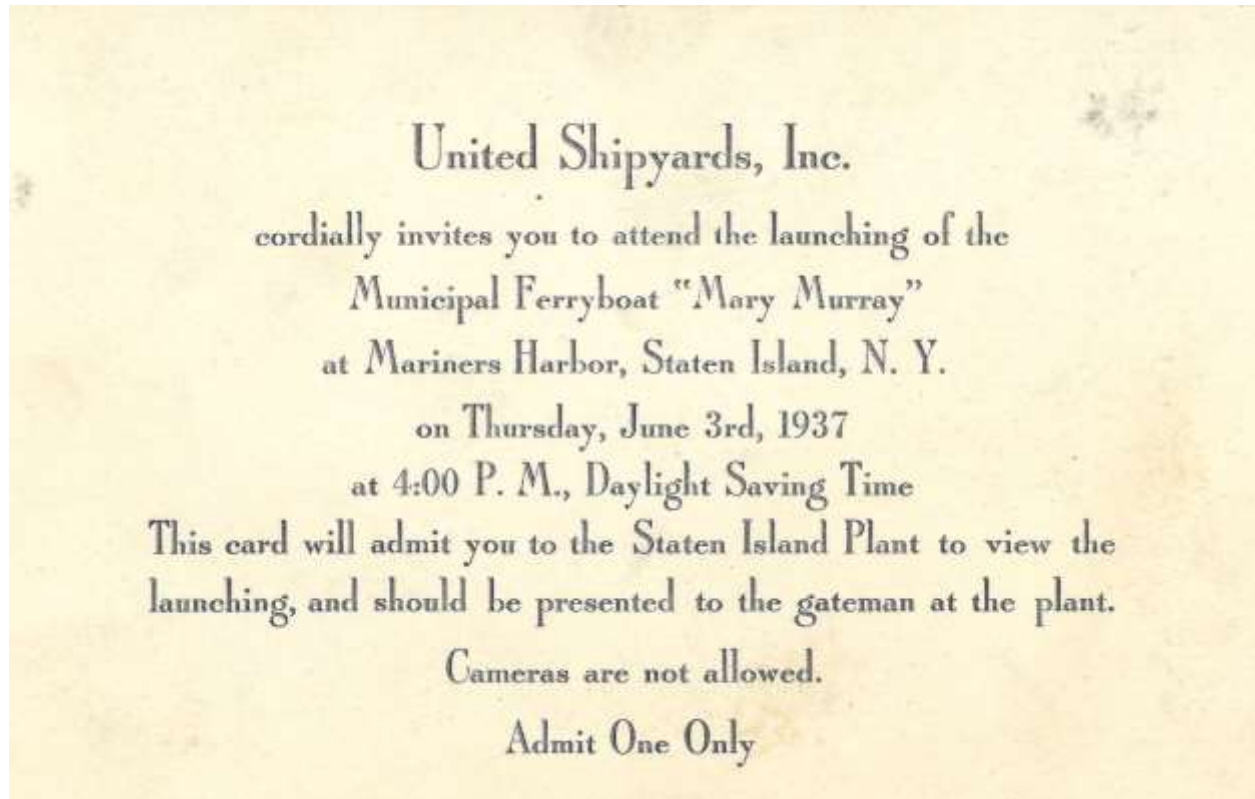


MRS. ROBERT MURRAY ENTERTAINING BRITISH OFFICERS WHILE PUTNAM ESCAPES. (SEE PAGE 466.)

Mary Murray entertaining the British officers. From the cover of “New York in the Revolution Second Paper,” *Scribner's Monthly*, February 1876.

¹⁶ David McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2005).

When Charlotte Murray christened the *Mary Murray* it was only forty-five percent complete and just a shell of what it would become. The launching was by invitation only and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, dignitaries, and more than 500 people were in attendance to celebrate the new ferry.



Original invitation to the *Mary Murray* launching. Reprinted with permission of the Staten Island Museum Archives.

Following the launching, a grand gala was held that evening at the Murray Hill Hotel.¹⁷ While the dignitaries retreated to the gala thrown by the Daughters of the American Revolution to celebrate the ship's namesake, the *Mary Murray* was towed to a nearby dock at the United Shipyards, Inc. Mariners Harbor shipyard on Staten Island, New York to be completed.

Like many New Deal projects designed to quickly spur employment, the *Mary Murray* was built remarkably fast. Bids for the ferry were submitted on December 6, 1935 to the New York

¹⁷ "500 at Launching of \$912,000 Ferry Boat," *New York Daily News*, June 4, 1937.

City Department of Plant and Structures and the contract was awarded to United Shipyards, Inc. on February 1, 1936.¹⁸ The contract, like all PWA loans, had a mandatory timeframe and was awarded with a stipulated in-service date of only 360 days later.¹⁹ When the *Mary Murray* was launched on June 3, 1937 she was only about forty-five percent completed.²⁰ The launching was scheduled for 4 pm but was moved up fifteen minutes to take advantage of the high tide in the Kill



The *Mary Murray* ferry under construction, August 18, 1937. Reprinted with permission of the Staten Island Museum Archives.

¹⁸ "Ferryboats Make Jobs," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1936.

¹⁹ "3 New Streamlined Ferryboats to Go on the Staten Island Run," *New York Times*, October 11, 1935.

²⁰ "New City Ferryboat Goes Down The Ways; The Mary Murray is Second of Three Streamlined Craft--Mayor Attends Ceremony," *New York Times*, June 4, 1937.

Van Kull as the ferry was towed to the shipyard to complete its construction.²¹ Thirty-nine years later George Searle would have benefited from this knowledge as the tides hampered his effort to tow the ferry to NJ. On February 28, 1938 she was put into service at 4 pm, her first run between Manhattan and Staten Island, a 5.2 mile, twenty minute trip she would make for the next thirty-seven years.²² Construction of the *Mary Murray* and her two sister ferries would readily achieve the goal of the PWA, employing 1,500 men for a combined 3,150,000 manhours of work.²³



The *Mary Murray* ferry under construction, October 22, 1937. Reprinted with permission of the Staten Island Museum Archives.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "New Ferryboat in Service," *New York Times*, February 28, 1938.

²³ "Ferryboats Make Jobs," *New York Times*, January 12, 1936.



The *Mary Murray* ferry shortly after being put into service, developed from the original 1938 negative taken by Percy Loomis Speer. Courtesy of the author.

The *Mary Murray* was designed by the well-known naval architect and engineer Eads Johnson to be generally similar to the ferry *Knickerbocker*²⁴ but “semi-streamlined” with the art deco flair that was the rage of the 1930s. Johnson was a pioneer in ferry design and ferry boat propulsion systems and like George Searle, his life was entwined with boats. During World War II, he served as special assistant to the Secretary of the Navy and during the LaGuardia administration, as New York City deputy commissioner in charge of ferry operations. He would

²⁴ “Specifications for a steel steam ferryboat,” The City of New York Department of Plant and Structures, October 1935. Coll. 82, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.



Original Eads Johnson specifications for the *Mary Murray* class ferryboats. Reprinted courtesy of the Mystic Seaport Museum.

become the leading authority of ferry boat design, an author of many articles on shipbuilding, and the publisher of his register of American shipping titled “Johnson’s Steam Vessels and Motor Ships.”²⁵ Owing to his expertise, Johnson would author the chapter on “Ferryboats” in the *Historical Transactions 1893-1945 of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers*. In the *Transactions* he described a ferryboat as:

A ferryboat, of inconsequential stature in the realm of vessels, meets in its service the most objectionable maneuver of coming to a dead stop head-on or alongside a great many times a day compared to the infrequency of stops or landings of any other vessel in the business of transporting passengers, vehicles or cargo. Few realize this feature of service and the necessity of providing for it in its design and construction but it is a hazard and one which must be taken seriously.²⁶

In his seminal work on New York Harbor ferryboats, Brian Cudahy defines a “ferryboat” like the *Mary Murray* and her sister ships as having “a quite specialized and precise meaning. It will be understood to mean a double-ended and mechanically-powered vessel that hauls passengers

²⁵ “Eads Johnson Was Naval Architect, 87,” *The Newport Mercury*, August 20, 1965; “Biography of Eads Johnson,” Mystic Seaport Museum Collections and Research, accessed May 24, 2020, <https://research.mysticseaport.org/coll/spcoll024/>.

²⁶ Eads Johnson, “Ferryboats,” in *Historical Transaction 1893-1943* (The Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers: New York, 1945) 165-196.

and/or vehicles on short trips over and back across rivers and bays. “Double-ended” may cause some head-scratching by those unfamiliar with transportation idiom; it refers to a vehicle that can operate equally well in either direction and doesn’t really have a front and a back but two fronts, one of which becomes the back when the other is functioning as the front.”²⁷ Ferryboat designs are also often very specialized, based upon their intended use to carry passengers and/or vehicles, to maximize both, and to provide drive on/drive off facilities where vehicle service is provided. They can be either single or double-ended and all aspects of the design are affected by this. As NJ maritime expert Rich Galiano writes:

The most specialized ferry design is the double-ended ferry. A double-ended ferry has rudder, propeller, loading ramps, and wheelhouse at both ends, so that the vessel may be driven in either direction with equal ease. This avoids having to back out of the ferry slip, since there is no backwards! Of course, a design like this is going to sacrifice a lot in speed and seaworthiness, and so would really only be suited to cross-river services and the like.²⁸

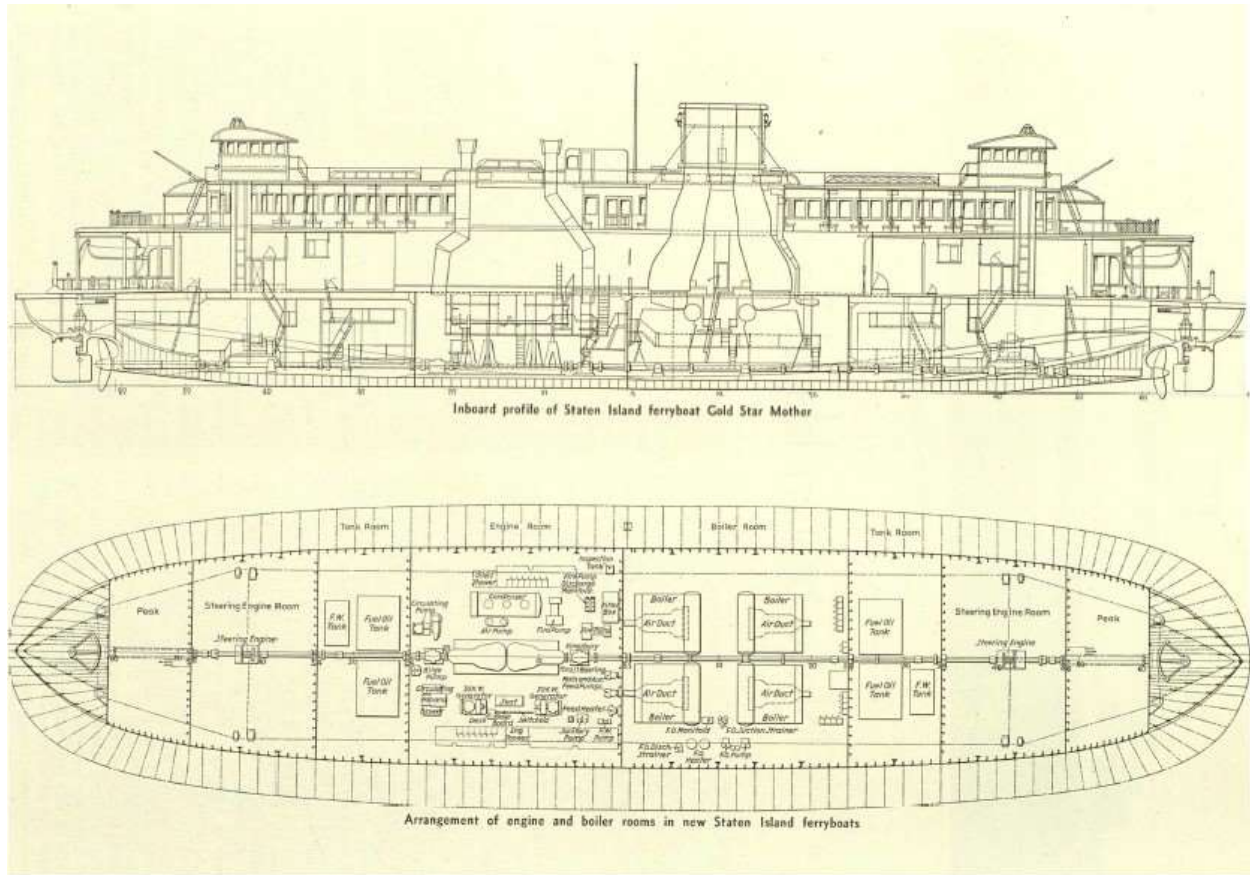
The *Mary Murray* and her sister ships were double-ended, allowing the ferries to dock without turning around, saving precious time between runs. George Hilton, the well-known ferryboat historian, described the mechanism allowing the ferries to accomplish this docking maneuver and echoing the design concerns of Eads Johnson:

Each of the Miss New York class has a pair of fore-and-aft compound engines placed in tandem on a single shaft running the length of the ferry. This is an unusual arrangement, but it serves the boats’ needs very well...A single engine of the triple expansion type, which would be an obvious choice for such service, has the disadvantage of stopping occasionally on dead center...In a double-ended ferry, which must reverse very quickly in berthing, the delay while the engine is brought off dead center might be enough to send her into a piling or into the ferry apron with considerable force.²⁹

²⁷ Brian Cudahy, *Over & Back: The History of Ferryboats in New York Harbor* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

²⁸ Rich Galiano, “Ferry,” NJ Scuba Diving 2018, accessed May 2, 2020, https://njscuba.net/artifacts/ship_ferry.php.

²⁹ George Hilton, *The Staten Island Ferry* (Berkeley, California: Howell-North Books, 1964).



Schematic of the *Mary Murray* class ferries from *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, January 1, 1938.

The *Mary Murray* was large, with a hull 252 feet long, 47 feet wide and 18 feet deep.³⁰ But her decks made her even larger, nearly as long as a football field at 267 feet in length and 66 feet across at her widest point.³¹ The *Mary Murray* had many new design elements that altered her look substantially from earlier New York City ferries, including the first use of oil instead of coal that allowed for only one external smokestack (although there were two housed in the single stack) and

³⁰ Brian Cudahy, *Over & Back: The History of Ferryboats in New York Harbor* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

³¹ by C.W. Short and R. Stanley Brown, *United States Public Works Administration, Public Buildings: a survey of architecture of projects constructed by federal and other governmental bodies between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the assistance of the Public Works Administration* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), accessed April 12, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/publicbuildingss00unitrich/page/426/mode/2up>.

the extensive use of aluminum to soften the lines of the ships. Her design, along with her two sister ships, was described as “streamlined” compared to previous New York City ferries, although Mayor LaGuardia noted at the launching of the *Gold Star Mother* that “You can’t really expect to streamline a big fat thing like a ferry boat.”³² A 1935 *New York Times* article described the ferry as “All corners will be rounded, as will the roofs of the two pilot houses. The windows will be more oval than square.”³³ And remarkably, another *New York Times* article seventy two years later, as the ferry rusted away, noted “But even from afar, a glimmer of the boat’s old glory showed through...Its faded orange paint job now drips with rust...But the columns and arches recall the vessel’s Art Deco design...”³⁴ The extensive use of aluminum, a first for New York City ferries, also contributed to the art deco and streamlined look. The extensive use of aluminum not only provided new design opportunities but also lightened the ship. It was also more corrosion resistant and fireproof than structural elements previously used, and more fuel efficient. Aluminum was incorporated into the shade deck plating and deck beams and for the pilot house structures. A 1937 Alcoa Aluminum advertisement in *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review* noted fuel cost savings of 7.8 percent by reduced weight from the aluminum. Approximately 70,000 pounds of aluminum was used on the ferry, reducing the overall weight by 86,000 pounds, or approximately two percent of load displacement.³⁵

³² Brian Cudahy, *Over & Back*.

³³ “3 New Streamlined ferryboats To Go on the Staten Island Run,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1935.

³⁴ Richard Jones, “From Ferrying Thousands Daily to Rusting Away by the Turnpike,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2007.

³⁵ “This investment in lightness pays over 7%!,” *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, July 1, 1939.

THIS INVESTMENT
IN LIGHTNESS
Pays over 7%!

...and also makes New York City's
new ferries fireproof, more stable,
less costly to maintain.

The investment is for Aluminum construction on the ferries *Gold Star Mather*, *Mary Murray*, and *Miss New York*, owned by the City of New York Department of Docks. In fuel cost alone, weight-saving by the use of Aluminum returns 7.8%* on the extra investment.

Another economy from Aluminum shows in the maintenance cost for these vessels. The alloys used are resistant to corrosion, hence require less painting and less repair.

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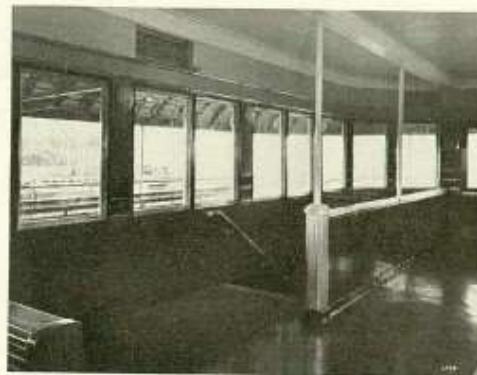
*Estimated on the accepted principle that fuel consumption is proportional to displacement.



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The *Mary Murray* and her sister ships were designed with “two decks, with the orthodox arrangement of a pair of cabins flanking the vehicle gangways and a large cabin on the upper deck, surrounded by a full promenade around the boat...and two gangways for vehicles.”³⁶ The original design was for thirty vehicles and nearly 3,000 passengers and crew³⁷ but they would ultimately carry somewhat less with space for twenty-four cars and 2,328 passengers.³⁸ Their weight was 2126 gross tonnes and they were propelled by double compound, direct-drive 4,000 horsepower oil-fired steam engines.³⁹ The engines provided a speed of more than 19 miles per hour in time trials, but at this speed an excessive swell was created that “was particularly difficult for passing tugs with barges on tow lines” and by necessity they would be operated more slowly for the typical twenty-minute passage.⁴⁰

A detailed description of the ship design was provided in a 1935 article in *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, the leading maritime journal of the time:

On the main deck, two carriage ways are provided, 10 feet 5 inches in width and 13 feet 11 inches in height. In the way of these carriage ways, the deck is covered with a 1/2-inch pattern plate to provide a non-skid surface for vehicles...Between the two carriageways and the guards are seating accommodations for 613 passengers with washroom and ladies restroom and smoking room...Aluminum frame windows furnished by the General Bronze Corporation, Astoria, Long Island, NY, provide light and air to this passenger space.

The upper deck is devoted entirely to foot passengers with an open promenade space running around the vessel. This latter space has a seating capacity of 464, while the upper cabin accommodates approximately 608 passengers. All interior decks for passengers are covered with a magnesite cork composition covered with

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “New Ferries Really ‘She’s’—Three Get Feminine Names,” *Brooklyn Times Union*, March 28, 1937; C.W. Short and R. Stanley Brown, *United States Public Works Administration, Public Buildings: a survey of architecture of projects constructed by federal and other governmental bodies between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the assistance of the Public Works Administration* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), accessed April 12, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/publicbuildingss00unitrich/page/426/mode/2up>.

³⁸ “Past Staten Island Ferries,” The Staten Island Ferry, accessed March 14, 2020, <https://www.siferry.com/pastvessels2.html>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ George Hilton, *The Staten Island Ferry* (Berkeley, California: Howell-North Books, 1964).

battleship linoleum....Extending over the promenade space and the upper cabin is a light shade deck fabricated of riveted aluminum alloy plates.⁴¹

Aluminum was not the only “modern” material used for the ferry. The lower deck was coated with Stonoleum manufactured by the Continental Asbestos and Refining Corporation, New York. A 1937 advertisement in *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review* noted “Stonoleum ¾ - inch thick was applied on the lower quarter decks of the New York City ferryboats *Gold Star Mother*, *Mary Murray* and *Miss New York*.”⁴² Although the formulation was proprietary, Stonoleum was described as “a flooring material said to feel like rubber and wear like stone, can be laid over old concrete, cement, wood, or composition, without adhesives or separate bonding agents. A unique colloidal composition gives it resistance to direct impact and load, also to continuous vibration, abrasion, and other effects of traffic.”⁴³ The description continued, “Furthermore, Stonoleum is fire resistant; it will not burn, flash or support combustion;”⁴⁴ quite possibly by the addition of asbestos. Despite all the modern design elements, the *Mary Murray* “lacked a telephone and radio, so when the captain needed to communicate with the engine room, he used a speaking tube, standard on naval and other vessels of the time. Cowbells and a small gong also served as means of communication.”⁴⁵

Although the new design elements likely pleased the passengers and most of the crew, the new engines had a serious drawback:

The Miss New York class are popular with the deck officers, but not with the crew below deck. Partly owing to their short stacks, and partly to a cramped placing of some of the machinery, their engine rooms and boiler rooms run extremely hot. Heat of 140° was

⁴¹ “New Staten Island Ferries,” *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, January 1, 1938.

⁴² “Stonoleum Flooring Advertisement,” *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, April 1, 1939.

⁴³ “Products and Process, Self-Bonding Floor Material,” *Chemical and Engineering News*, 1956, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://dokumen.tips/documents/products-and-processes-589aaf35d22c5.html>.

⁴⁴ “Stonoleum Flooring Advertisement,” *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, April 1, 1939.

⁴⁵ Staten Island Museum, *Images of America: Staten Island Ferry* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014).

reported at the outset, but their ventilation was improved to make the temperatures bearable.⁴⁶

Perhaps the most intriguing new design element of the *Mary Murray* and her sister ships was the addition of the first smoking compartment for women.⁴⁷ The new women's smoking rooms were deemed important enough to be the sub-headline in a 1935 *New York Times* article about the new ferries which read, "Women to Get Smoking Rooms of Their Own for First Time." The article noted "On the new ferryboats the city will officially recognize for the first time the existence of women smokers. A special smoking room for women will be set aside."⁴⁸ The addition of a women's smoking compartment would likely have been cheered by Mary Lindsey Murray, perhaps not for the smoking but for the women's rights it provided. The Murray family were Quakers, and the Quakers of colonial America were quite progressive in ways, prohibiting slave ownership in 1776 and petitioning Congress to abolish it entirely in 1790.⁴⁹ Quaker views toward women at the time were also remarkably progressive, and by the 19th century many Quakers were active in the movement for women's rights and would become leaders in the suffrage movement.⁵⁰ An article in *The Brooklyn Citizen* on October 11, 1935 noted:

The fact that the three new ferryboats to be constructed for our Battery-Staten Island service will be semi-stream lined may be of importance from a scientific viewpoint but there is greater significance to the announcement about the boats which will be built through the aid of a \$3,000,000 PWA grant. It is that there will be a smoking compartment for women on each of the ferries. This recognition that women smoke, a fact that everyone knows but that officials hesitate to acknowledge, is the first time the city has taken this step. Recognition of women as the equal of men not only as voters but as entitled to social rights is hereby further extended.⁵¹

⁴⁶ George Hilton, *The Staten Island Ferry* (Berkeley, California: Howell-North Books, 1964).

⁴⁷ Edmund Squire, "The Staten Island Ferry Enters the 21st Century," *Steamboat Bill*, Fall 2005.

⁴⁸ "3 New Streamlined ferryboats To Go on the Staten Island Run," *New York Times*, October 11, 1935.

⁴⁹ "Petition from the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery February 3, 1790," Appealing for Abolition US Capital Visitors Center, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/artifact/petition-pennsylvania-society-abolition-slavery-february-3-1790>.

⁵⁰ Christopher Densmore, "Radical Quaker Women and the Early Women's Rights Movement," accessed April 22, 2020, https://web.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/quakersandslavery/commentary/themes/radical_quaker_women.pdf

⁵¹ "Miscellaneous," *Brooklyn Citizen*, October 11, 1935.

The *Mary Murray* would officially remain in service until 1974, but her last decade was largely as a stand-in for the newer ferries when they needed repairs.⁵² Nonetheless, she would become one of the oldest surviving ferries to remain in official service, with forty-five years from her christening in 1937 to being taken out of documentation in 1982.⁵³ Like all the New York City ferries, she was a workhorse, traversing back and forth multiple times a day between New York City and Staten Island, past the Statue of Liberty, and carrying countless passengers and cars. A 1975 newspaper account of her sister ship, the *Miss New York*, noted she made 166,000 crossings in her lifetime, and the *Mary Murray* outlasted her.⁵⁴ Her two sister ships would find an inglorious end, the *Miss New York* as a floating restaurant before sinking⁵⁵ and the *Gold Star Mother* as a floating New York City Methadone Clinic before being scrapped.⁵⁶ For her entire career, the cost to ride the *Mary Murray* was only five cents where it would remain until August 4, 1975 when it would rise to a quarter.⁵⁷ During her life, the *Mary Murray* would sport three different color schemes; first maroon, then ferry orange with blue letters in the early 1960s when all the ferries were repainted to make them more visible in fog and inclement weather, and then finally at some point later, ferry orange with white letters.⁵⁸

⁵² Squire Edmund, "The Staten Island Ferry Enters the 21st Century" *Steamboat Bill*, Winter 2005.

⁵³ "Ferryboat John F. Kennedy," SubChat.com, accessed April 5, 2020, <http://www.subchat.com/readflat.asp?Id=1016214&p=1#1016268>,

⁵⁴ "Miss New York (Boat) is sold for \$50,000," *New York Times*, August 7, 1975.

⁵⁵ Theodore Scull, *The Staten Island Ferry* (New York: Quadrant Press: 1982); Jeff Vandam, "Ferries of a Certain Age," *New York Times*, April 16, 2006.

⁵⁶ "Retired City Ferry Used as Methadone Clinic," *New York Times*, June 16, 1971.

⁵⁷ "5-Cent Staten Island Fare Sails Into History," *New York Times*, August 4, 1975.

⁵⁸ Personal communication with John Landers, April 20, 2020.

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Mary Murray advertisement from *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review*, November 1, 1938.



The *Mary Murray* passing by the Statue of Liberty, likely circa 1940. Reprinted courtesy of the Steamship Historical Society of America.



The *Mary Murray* loaded with passengers, undated but likely circa early 1960s. Reprinted courtesy of the Steamship Historical Society of America.



The *Mary Murray* with passengers and cars heading to dock a few years before being taken out of service, October 1971. Reprinted courtesy of the Steamship Historical Society of America.



The *Mary Murray* passing lower Manhattan with the red paint color scheme. Date unknown but likely 1950's. Reprinted courtesy of the Steamship Historical Society of America.



The *Mary Murray* at dock with the red paint color scheme circa 1957. Reprinted with permission of The John Landers - Beth Klein Collection.



The *Mary Murray* at the repair shop with the orange color and white letter paint scheme circa 1976. Reprinted courtesy of the Steamship Historical Society of America.



The *Mary Murray* with the orange color and blue letter paint scheme circa 1966. Reprinted with permission of The John Landers - Beth Klein Collection.

After being taken out of service, the *Mary Murray* was auctioned in July 1976. Theodore Costa, who was her last captain, commented at the auction “I’d like to see it has a future ahead of it and not just a scrap yard” and “Now, I’m here to see she has a friend. It’s not just a machine.”⁵⁹ His hope was shared by George Searle, who submitted one of nine bids and had plans to convert the *Mary Murray* to a floating restaurant.⁶⁰ Searle would become the friend Captain Costa envisioned, although in the end, the salvage yard would become her final destination. When the bids were unsealed, Searle and another bidder had submitted tying high bids for \$25,000. An article about the auction noted that “Because of the tie, a final decision on who gets the boat will be up to

⁵⁹ “Farewell Mary Murray—she was ‘good girl’,” *Tonawanda News* (North Tonawanda, New York), July 22, 1976.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Robert I. Cohen, commissioner of purchases...Many times when we have a tie bid, they draw straws (said Clara Levine, chief of the city's Bureau of Administration).”⁶¹ Searle was ultimately chosen as the winner although history seems to have forgotten if it was because he chose the longer straw.

George Searle was the perfect champion for the *Mary Murray* and like the ferry, his life was also entwined with the water. A NJ native born in Elizabeth in 1928, he lived in Carteret before eventually moving to East Brunswick in 1973. He served in the United States Merchant Marines in World War II and was the national president of the American Merchant Marine Veterans for five years. He formed the first Merchant Marine and Armed Guard Council in the U.S. Navy League and was a tireless advocate for merchant marine veterans.⁶² Searle was in fact instrumental in gaining veteran status and rights for Merchant Mariners who served in World War II from 1945 to 1946. In an effort to secure benefits for Merchant Mariners serving in the last sixteen months of the war, Searle regularly travelled to Washington, D.C. to lobby legislators for passage of the Merchant Marines Fairness Act. It would stumble in Congress but set the foundation for President William Clinton signing into law the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-368).⁶³

For his efforts, in 2007, George Searle was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Science from the US Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York during the annual commencement ceremonies. Senator John McCain, the United States Naval Academy graduate,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “George R. Searle Obituary,” *Home News Tribune*, March 18, 2009.

⁶³ House of Representatives 111th Congress, “*Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act Of 2009*” Report 111-99, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 7, 2009, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-111hrpt99/html/CRPT-111hrpt99.htm>.

naval aviator and Vietnam War Prisoner of War, offered the commencement address and awarded the honorary degree.⁶⁴

George Searle had big plans for the *Mary Murray*. But from the outset, problems arose. Because of the draft of the ferry, it could only be moved during high tides and it took several days to tow it from Staten Island, NY up the Raritan River to East Brunswick, NJ.⁶⁵ It was initially moored in the middle of a side tributary of the River Raritan near his marina off Schoolhouse Lane. A few years later, Searle moved it to the riverbank after he was sued by the state in 1981 for environmental concerns. The *Mary Murray* was finally taken out of documentation in 1982, forty-



An aerial view of the *Mary Murray* beached in East Brunswick, NJ. Undated but likely circa 2008. https://njscuba.net/artifacts/ship_ferry.php. Accessed March 22, 2020.

five years after she was launched, but she remained beached at his marina.⁶⁶ In 1999, after further environmental complaints, Mr. Searle reached a deal with the state to allow another seven years of annual permits to keep the *Mary Murray* in place. In 2006,

⁶⁴ “Sen. John McCain’s Address at U.S. Merchant Marine Academy to Be Webcast Live on TV Worldwide’s Maritime TV for ‘Tell America’ Campaign,” June 14, 2007, accessed May 1, 2020, http://www.tvworldwide.com/press_release/070614.pdf.

⁶⁵ Patti Sapone, “Old Ferry Headed For Scrap Heap After Decades of Delayed Plans and Decay,” *Star Ledger*, April 15, 2008.

⁶⁶ Brian Cudahy, *Over & Back*.

the state declined any further extensions and Searle and his family started dismantling the ship.⁶⁷

Even as the ferry aged and decayed, Searle continued for many years to champion its cause. He proposed numerous ways that the vessel could be repurposed: from a floating restaurant, to a museum and finally as an artificial reef.⁶⁸ Searle also approached East Brunswick officials about moving the boat to Dallenbach's Pond, off Dunham's Corner Road about three miles away. Dallenbach's was a popular local swim club and the pond was the remnants of the old Dallenbach sand mine. According to local officials quoted in a 1994 story in the *Sentinel*, "The idea sunk when it became clear that there was no way to transport the ferry to the pond."⁶⁹ In a 2008



The Mary Murray ferry beached in East Brunswick, NJ with a rich patina of rust over her orange paint. August 14, 2007 on <https://www.flickrriver.com/photos/jag9889/1923014329/> Accessed on April 4, 2020.

interview, with the ferry now in serious disrepair, Searle explained, "I was going to put a restaurant on the Hudson River. I was young and dumb at the time. I found out you could build on land for 20 times less than on a boat."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Richard Jones, "From Ferrying Thousands Daily to Rusting Away by the Turnpike," *New York Times*, March 5, 2007.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jessica Smith, "Mary Murray was part of Staten Island Ferry system," *Sentinel* (East Brunswick, NJ), March 27, 2008.

⁷⁰ Patti Sapone, "Old Ferry Headed For Scrap Heap After Decades of Delayed Plans and Decay," *Star Ledger*, April 15, 2008.

In 2009, George Searle, merchant mariner, champion of their rights, Korean War veteran, Honorary Doctor, and last owner of the *Mary Murray* ferry passed away.⁷¹ Not long before, the ferry was being dismantled and sold for scrap.⁷²



An aerial view of the *Mary Murray*, largely dismantled. Undated but likely circa 2010.
<https://ltsquad.com/2014/05/06/the-mary-murray/>. Accessed April 16, 2020.

⁷¹ "Owner of beached Staten Island ferryboat Mary Murray dies". *Staten Island Advance*. March 20, 2009.

⁷² "Ferryboat Mary Murray to leave its riverside home," *Staten Island Advance*, March 20, 2008.

But George Searle with his larger than life dream for the old ferry had catapulted the *Mary Murray* into NJ history. She would become a curiosity, an icon, and a magnet for explorers willing to challenge the no trespassing signs and fences erected by George Searle to protect his boat.⁷³



Associated Press file photo, "Ferry owner George Searle."⁷⁴

⁷³ Lex Pelger and Sam Herzlinger, "The Wreck of the Mary Murray," *Tide and Current Taxi*, September 1, 2007, accessed May 3, 2020; <http://www.tideandcurrenttaxi.org/?p=1078>; "East Brunswick, NJ: Mary Murray Ferry Derelict (Gone)," *RoadsideAmerica.com*, July 5, 2008, accessed May 2, 2020; <https://www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/18447>; "The Mary Murray," *LTV Squad*, May 6, 2014, accessed March 12, 2020. <https://ltsquad.com/2014/05/06/the-mary-murray/>.

⁷⁴ "Owner of Beached Staten Island Ferryboat Mary Murray Dies," *Staten Island Advance*, March 20, 2009.



Photograph of the *Mary Murray* in disrepair by the author, circa 1990. Courtesy of the author.



Photograph of the *Mary Murray* in disrepair by the author, circa 1990. Courtesy of the author.



Photograph of the *Mary Murray* in disrepair by the author, circa 1990. Courtesy of the author.

In a 1983 television interview from the Pilot's House on top of the ferry, with the wind tussling his hair through the broken windows, Searle seemed to have no regrets, telling the reporter "I'm sure somebody who's out there is going to come along and really do a job with me here. And if not, that's okay, I'll just pull right in a little and we'll use her as a shop and maybe we'll end up with a pizza parlor. I don't know, it's just maybe not as elaborate as I really want it but it's okay with me. It's a great thing in fact, maybe I'll just move on it and spend the rest of my life up in the pilot house, you know. So either way, it's okay with me."⁷⁵ Despite the ferry never achieving financial success for Searle, it did take on a life of its own as a NJ cultural landmark. Featured in numerous newspaper articles, books, artwork and the internet, spanning the *New York Times* and

⁷⁵ *NJ Nightly News* episode from 07/15/1983, accessed May 8, 2020, https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_259-cj87kw5s.

*Wall Street Journal*⁷⁶ to *Weird NJ*⁷⁷, *NJ Curiosities*⁷⁸, and *The Staten Island Ferry: A History*⁷⁹ the *Mary Murray* would arguably become NJ's most famous ferry.



“The Staten Island Ferry,” by Paul McGehee (1977).

The *Mary Murray* is shown here in 1952 on a grey day's run from Staten Island back to Manhattan, steaming past the Statue of Liberty.

Reprinted with permission of the artist: paulmcgeheeart.com.

⁷⁶ Anne Kadet, “Big Dreams for Ferry, Interrupted,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2011.

⁷⁷ “Nautical Jersey! NJ’s Rich Maritime Heritage,” *Weird N.J.* #14, 2000.

⁷⁸ Peter Genovese, “Ferry to Nowhere East Brunswick,” in *NJ Curiosities: Quirky Characters, Roadside Oddities & Other Offbeat Stuff* (Guilford, Connecticut: The Globe Pequot Press), 2003.

⁷⁹ Patricia Salmon, “*The Staten Island Ferry: A History*,” 2008.



**Mary Murray paintings by Philip Cook
(Top – Mary Murray #1 1989, Bottom – Mary Murray #2 1991).
Reprinted with permission of the artist.**

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