



The PADDLEWHEELER

PUBLISHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR MEMBERS OF THE STEAMBOAT SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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Farewell to a Successful 2015 and Welcome to 2016

By: Ted Sykes

President & COO

American Queen Steamboat Company

As we finish out the year there is much to be proud of at American Queen Steamboat Company (AQSC).

Topping the list are our crew and employees. Every week we get letters and commentary written on the Quality Surveys from satisfied guests telling us how much they've enjoyed the friendliness, hospitality and service of our crew. On a recent sailing, the crew scored a 9.83 out of 10 for friendliness! Looking back across the year, on the salient measures of quality: value for money, will you recommend us to a friend and will you sail with us again - we routinely achieve above 90%. Our recently introduced STEAM Service System should help us keep the hospitality culture alive and thriving as we go forward. Its entire focus is to "catch people doing well" and to promote a positive service culture among our team.

In the World Ocean & Cruise News just published on November 30, AQSC was ranked number one of the Specialty Cruise Lines in the Value for Money category. That is special recognition when you consider that with our all-American crew we are regularly priced above our international competition.

Speaking of awards, AQSC again garnered top awards for our Shore Excursion program (operated in conjunction with Shore Excursions of America). The Vicksburg battlefield premium shore excursion came in second in the worldwide Seatrade ranking. (A tour of the Pope's summer retreat took top honors). We moved up two notches to #6 in Condé Nast Traveler's Best River Cruise Lines, pulling ahead of AMA Waterways and Avalon. We were the only U.S. based company to make the rankings. The National Tour Association gave us their Gold Award, up from Silver last year and Bronze the year before. We picked up a Best Onboard Dining recognition from Travel Age West. Our Marketing folks keep the latest awards updated on the

front page of our web site, www.aqsc.com. Check them out. We're pleased our employees and crew have garnered such an out-sized number of awards given our relatively small size and young age. We continue to promote Dining, Entertainment and Shore Excursions as the attributes that make us a much better value for money than our competition, both domestic and international.

Our Deck and Engineering team have kept us operating on time and on schedule throughout the year. We are pleased to have their safe and professional marine operation of both vessels throughout the year.

Guest demand kept the *American Queen* on the Lower Mississippi longer as we trimmed time on the Upper Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Full sailings (19 back-to-back!) on the *American Empress* allowed us to extend the season on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Our product development team added content with Mark Twain history, the bourbon cruise, Civil War sailings and the recently added Holiday Markets cruises - that were well received and enticed more passengers to book with us. The guest lecturers for our 2016 Bourbon cruise and for the newly launched Presidents and Politics cruise are described later in this issue.

We have received a lot of positive press coverage throughout the year including the Travel section of USA Today, the home page of Fox News, the Daily Telegraph (London, UK), the Sunday Times (also UK), as well as local papers, many of which went national when they were picked up for syndication by the Associated Press.

As we reflect on 2015, it is our passengers for whom we are most grateful. We appreciate how enthusiastically you have embraced our reintroduction of cruising on America's rivers with an all American product! We take seriously the trust you have placed in us for your choice of a vacation. We commit to doing our best to meet and exceed your expectations. We wish each of you and your families a wonderful new year!

Exclusive Promotion for Steamboat Society of America® Members on 2016 Cruises: \$150 Onboard Credit*

Our guest loyalty program, the Steamboat Society of America®, was created to recognize our past guests and offer the opportunity to enjoy exclusive benefits and incentives for cruising frequently with us. As a small thank you for being a loyal past guest, we would like to extend a special offer to you for a **\$150 onboard credit per stateroom** (\$75 per person) for 2016 travel aboard the *American Queen*® or the *American Empress*®. The best part of this special offer is that it can be combined with other consumer promotions that American Queen Steamboat Company® may be offering at the time you call to book.

If you have been thinking about booking another magnificent river cruise with us in 2016, now is the time to do so and reap the rewards of being our valued past guest.

Redeeming this offer is easy, just contact our reservations department at 1-888-749-5280 and **mention this exclusive promotional code 2016Q1PW**. It's that simple! Certain date restrictions do apply, so please ensure that you ask our reservations specialists for full details when booking your voyage.

This special offer will expire on March 31, 2016. Call today! 

*Offer expires 3/31/2016 and is only valid on new, individual bookings. Onboard credit of \$150 will be issued per stateroom (\$75 per person, per voyage) only on the following *American Queen* 2016 voyage dates: 3/06, 3/13, 3/20, 3/27, 7/03, 7/10, 7/17, 7/24, 7/31, 8/07, 8/21, 8/28; and only on the following *American Empress* 2016 voyage dates: 4/02, 4/09, 4/16, 4/23, 4/30, 11/05, 11/12, 11/19. Onboard credit has no cash value, cannot be applied to gratuities or taxes and is non-transferrable. Promo Code 2016Q1PW must be mentioned at time of booking to receive the onboard credit.



Ruth Richebacher, Director of Product Development & Guest Experience for Shore Excursions of America, received the following note from a couple that cruised on the *American Empress* in September. We are grateful to have affiliates and crew, such as Ruth, and hope that each guest has a similar experience as the one described below. Thank you to Jerry and Shirley Smith for sharing your experience and these kind words.

Dear Ruth,

What a pleasure it was talking with you by phone last week. It brought back so many wonderful memories of our cruise aboard the American Empress this past September 11th.

Once we met, you always warmly greeted us by name and with a friendly smile throughout the cruise.

We especially appreciated your helpfulness as we left the Empress to board the bus for the Spokane Airport. When we were disembarking at Clarkson and needed to find our luggage and board the correct airport bus, you noticed we were having problems. You came over and said "Can I help?" You found our larger suitcase in the lineup, and led us right to the door of our airport bus. Turns out it was your bus as well. With Jerry's walker and our three suitcases safely aboard, the trip to Spokane was a delight. When our bus arrived at the airport, you helped us get our suitcases inside the terminal and up to the ticket counter. We were overwhelmed, and so grateful. What you did was clearly above and beyond.

It was just that kind of hospitality and thoughtfulness that cemented our decision to invite our three children and their spouses to join us as our guests in a repeat trip down the Snake and Columbia Rivers this coming June 18th. Only this time it will be from east to west... and we'll be celebrating three wedding anniversaries. What a memorable family get-together that will be!

We also wanted to let the folks at Riverboat Excursions of America and the American Queen Steamboat Company know how special you were.

With sincere thanks and best wishes for a successful career in the travel industry,

Jerry and Shirley Smith 



An iconic destination of Natchez is Stanton Hall - a magnificent, Antebellum Classical Revival Mansion built on an entire city block.

Natchez, Mississippi to Celebrate Tricentennial

The charming southern river town of Natchez, Mississippi will spend 2016 celebrating its 300th year. American Queen Steamboat Company is honored to be an official sponsor of this joyous occasion and to play a role in the tricentennial celebration. Below is an excerpt from the tricentennial website, inviting all to be a part of it:

"On August 3, 1716, the French completed construction of a wooden palisade fort high on the bluff overlooking the eastern shore of the Mississippi River in the area occupied by the American Indian tribe known as the "Natchez." From this date modern Natchez marks its 300th anniversary in 2016.

Throughout the year, the citizens of Natchez will be able to showcase the 300-year evolution of this "Jewel of the Mississippi." You are invited to join Natchez as it commemorates its past, celebrates its present, and creates its future in 2016 and beyond!

Since the American Queen and her guests visit Natchez on each cruise on the Southern Mississippi, and given the historic kinship of the steamboat and city, American Queen Steamboat Company is proud to support the City of Natchez and this commemorative event by being a Silver Sponsor of the Natchez Tricentennial celebration. As our guests disembark in Natchez, they are given a glimpse of the grand homes, music and historic importance of this iconic river town.

American Queen guests are always treated as special visitors to the city and as such, it is a pleasure and honor to consider Natchez part of the American Queen experience."

Exclusive Special Guests Revealed for Two Themed Cruises on Ohio River

American Queen Steamboat Company has a several exciting themed cruises planned for 2016. We have an exclusive sneak peak into two of the themed cruises that will take place on the Ohio River: Bourbon and Presidents and Politics.

Bourbon Cruise



The Bourbon cruise was a smashing hit in 2015, and we are excited to bring it back, with even more surprises. Our team has arranged for tastings, treats and special guests to inform and entertain our guests all week. We are thrilled to announce that **Bill Samuels Jr.**, son of Maker's Mark founder, Bill Samuels Sr., will be joining us onboard for an exclusive Maker's Mark presentation and tasting. The

Bourbon Cruise will take place July 10-18 and sail from St. Louis to Cincinnati.

Presidents and Politics Cruise

What better venue than the beautiful, uniquely American vessel, the *American Queen*, as the setting to immerse yourself in the history of a national institution – the American presidency? Special entertainment, speakers and events have been meticulously arranged to provide plenty of opportunities for guests who wish to take part in this exclusive themed cruise.

Guest lecturer **Dr. Michael Nelson**, Fulmer Professor of Political Science at Rhodes College, Senior Fellow of the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia and Fellow at Southern Methodist University's Center for Presidential History, will be joining our guests onboard. During his presentations, Dr. Nelson will speak on the individual touch that each President has had on the executive office, and how it has evolved to its current state.

Joining the entertainment line up onboard will be **George Buss**. For the past 25 years, George has performed a critically acclaimed interpretation of Abraham Lincoln across the U.S. His presentation has led him to be featured on C-Span, the Illinois Channel and numerous publications, including Smithsonian.

Renowned political comedian and satirist, **Mark Russell**, will also step onboard the *American Queen* as entertainment, presenting humorous commentary on the most recent political news. He spent 30 years as the host of the "Mark Russell Comedy Specials," on public television and has spoken at numerous colleges, conventions and theaters throughout the country.

Our guests will undoubtedly enjoy these special entertainers and will have numerous opportunities to be immersed in the history and current issues of the American Presidency. The Presidents and Politics cruise will sail July 17 - 25, 2016 from Cincinnati to St. Louis.



George Buss



Mark Russell



Recap of the New Years Cruise - American Queen

Can you imagine a more festive and remarkable experience to have ended 2015, but onboard the most elegant, iconic riverboat in the world? Guests onboard the *American Queen* during the New Years cruise not only had the chance to experience the wonder of the river, but also a special celebration to ring in 2016.

The vessel was still adorned in Christmas decorations, but added gold, silver, and white elements enhanced the excitement of the new year. Many crewmembers wore glimmering hats reading "Happy New Year!"

Special guest and entertainer, Lynn Roberts joined the cruise to provide a spectacular performance, reminiscing on big band and swing music eras. As a big



band singer with icons such as the Dorsey Brothers, Harry James and Doc Severinson, she has performed all over the world and is one of the last of her era. Lynn

makes an appearance onboard a few times a year, usually for the Big Band Swing themed cruise. Her performance was a special treat for everyone, and added to the excitement and anticipation of the approaching new year.



Captain Brent Willits jams in the Engine Room Bar on a one-of-a-kind "Paddlecaster."

To kick off New Year's Eve, guests had the opportunity to be entertained by the Steamboat Syncopators, the *American Queen* entertainment staff, and later, a special performance by Captain Willits and Captain Duncan, who performed "Johnny B. Goode" in a ZZ Top fashion. For those who decided to greet 2016 at midnight, a balloon drop and festive party was planned for all in the Grand Saloon.

New Year's Day was a steamboating day, filled with fun and educational activities and also opportunities for guests to take a moment to enjoy watching the wonder and glory of the Mississippi River. 🌅

2016 Lay-Up *A Time For Repairs and Improvements*

Have you ever wondered what takes place on the *American Empress* and *American Queen* when they are in the off-season? Each year, both vessels are scheduled a "lay-up" period — a time for cleaning, repairs, and updates throughout both vessels.

The *American Queen* will be docked for five weeks this winter, in Gretna, Louisiana, while the *American Empress* will be docked for four months in Troutdale, Oregon. Much of the engineering and deck crew will stay onboard to carry out the lay-up tasks, along with several contractors.

Some of the tasks take place annually, such as some mechanical updates and certifications, to ensure the vessels are up-to-date, run efficiently, and are in line with standards. Most noticeable to guests are usually cosmetic changes, such as new paint, carpet, and upholstery in the public areas.

Each year, the management teams onboard, along with the management team from American Queen Steamboat Company organize a schedule, budget and list of priority items to accomplish during lay-up. It is always amazing to see what can be accomplished in such a short amount of time.

While it may seem like the vessels are resting in the off-season, they are actually undergoing rapid change and are quite bustling. Our crew works tireless hours to get the vessels in pristine working condition for another cruising season. This is a unique, and busy time of year for many of our crew members, and one that always brings excitement and progress throughout both vessels. 🌅

River Cruising Through Wine Country

The *American Empress* offers a large selection of the finest local wines produced in the Pacific Northwest.

By: Terry Lunder

Hotel Manager, *American Empress*

The *American Empress*' second season has come to an end and what a great season it was. We are appreciative to see so many guests onboard and for the chance to welcome them to our onboard family. It is strange though to sit onboard after the last guest has left and while work is being prepared for our off season -- it is too quiet. A vessel is all about voices and smiles, activities and life, so while we are giving our farewells to 2015, we are excited about the 2016 season beginning April 3 when the *American Empress* will be, once again, filled with life!

You are in wine country! The Oregon and Washington wine industry is booming with quality wine being produced all along the river. We are excited to introduce them in several different ways. Guests can experience the best wines onboard, as local producers introduce a wine with a tasting or a pairing event each cruise. Represented are the wine regions of Walla Walla Valley (also origin of the famous onion), Red Mountain, Yakima Valley, Colombia Gorge, Colombia Valley and Willamette Valley.

This year we have continued researching and have found some truly special wineries for our guests. The magnitude of the local industry can be found in these simple facts: Washington has about 240 wineries and Oregon has just under 700. We are proud to have partnered with several local wine producers to enhance our onboard complimentary program. Guests may taste Anelare, Maryhill, Eola Hills, Browne, Canoe Ridge, Sageland, Washington Hills, Windy Bay, Waterbrook, Wild Meadows, Duckpond, Dessert Wind, Archery Summit or Double Canyon.



To further the experience, local wines are complimentary during dinner, giving guests an opportunity to try seven red and seven white local wines during a cruise – an extensive list of options before even looking at our full wine list. In addition to some of our partners' wines, guests can further expand the wine horizon with additional wines from Covey Run, Mercer Canyons, Skyfall, Songbird, and 1805 wineries.

Not to forget, our shore excursion to the wine country in Richland, WA is always popular among our guests, where one truly can experience the booming wine industry by visiting several local wineries.

Allow our experts in the bars help you on your local beverage tour. We hope our guests can experience these fun and educational beverage programs onboard the *American Empress*.

Turkey Gumbo, as served on the *American Queen*

Have turkey leftovers from the holidays or a party? This southern classic is a great dish to prepare with any remaining turkey! Gumbo is a stew originating from Louisiana that consists of meat or shellfish, a flavored stock and vegetables (usually celery, bell peppers and onions.) In honor of many cruises in the south this time of year, we chose this dish to offer our readers. Enjoy!

Ingredients:

2 cups cooked turkey, diced, white or dark
 6 cups turkey stock, may substitute chicken or vegetable stock
 1 medium onion, diced
 2 ribs of celery, diced
 1/2 each red and green bell pepper, diced
 1/4 cup diced tomato
 1 cup cut okra, frozen is fine
 2 cloves garlic, crushed
 1 cup Andouille sausage, sliced
(may substitute smoked kielbasa or turkey sausage)
 1/3 cup All-Purpose flour
 1/3 cup vegetable or canola oil
 1 bay leaf
 1 tablespoon blackened seasoning, to taste
 Dash each, Tabasco and Worcestershire sauce
 3 cups cooked white rice, prepared as directed
 1 teaspoon chopped parsley
 1 teaspoon gumbo file, optional



Directions:

In a heavy bottomed soup pot or dutch oven, heat oil over medium heat. Whisk in flour carefully blending well then stir almost continuously for 20-25 minutes or until the roux has become a nice chocolate brown with a nutty aroma. Add sausage and stir, let the sausage cook for a minute or two to slightly brown the edges. Add onions, celery, peppers, okra, tomato, and spices. Stir until combined. Cook until onions begin to soften. Slowly add stock while stirring. Add enough to reach the desired consistency and bring to a simmer. Adjust heat. Cook for 15-20 minutes or longer, skim surface of excess grease, as needed. Add turkey and mix well, heat thoroughly. Add Tabasco or your favorite other hot sauce and Worcestershire. Adjust seasoning. Serve with rice. Garnish with parsley. If desired sprinkle with file powder just before eating at the table.

Serves 6.

MEET AMERICAN EMPRESS RIVERLORIAN, MARY SWARD CHARLTON

From an early age, Mary Sward Charlton has had a passion for steamboats and the river. She grew up in the steamboat town of Cincinnati, where she first fell in love with the *Delta Queen*. As a college graduation present, Mary received a cruise on the vessel. It would be 40 years before she had the chance to ride again, and, upon her return, she became great friends with the crew and inquired about jobs available. There were only two positions open at the time: deckhand and bartender. Mary enrolled in bartending school at the age of 50 and



soon landed herself the dream job aboard the *Delta Queen*.

She occasionally filled in on the *American Queen* and, when John Waggoner purchased the vessel, immediately applied for a position.

Mary is now a Riverlorian aboard the *American Empress* and calls it “the best job in the world!” She talks with guests, answers any questions they might have and offers talks on various topics related to the area of river they are traveling, history or geology.

When not onboard, Mary enjoys reading, gardening and spending time with her 18 month old granddaughter. She

will spend the winter months at home mostly studying, reading and revising her presentations.

The crew on the *American Empress* is like a family, she says, keeping up with each other even when off the vessel. Mary appreciates the number of diverse and unique individuals that she works with on a daily basis. It is the crew, the river, the scenery and the very nature of her job that make Mary claim hers is “the best job in the world!”



MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

ACTIVATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY

Take advantage of all the benefits that await you by registering your membership today. There are 3 ways to register:

1: ONLINE: www.AQSC.com/SSOA **2: CALL:** (888) 749-5280 **3: ONBOARD**

As a member of the American Queen Steamboat Company's *Steamboat Society of America*®, you now have the opportunity to enjoy exclusive benefits and incentives for cruising frequently with us. In addition to our Classic membership, earned after completion of your first cruise on the *American Queen*® or *American Empress*®, we offer four levels of elite membership. These Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald and Diamond levels bring additional benefits and are reached after cruising the designated number of times with us.

All **Classic** members will receive the following after one cruise:

- ★ *The Paddlewheeler* quarterly newsletter
- ★ Advance information on new itineraries
- ★ Exclusive invitations to cruises, select pre-cruise events, and promotions
- ★ Designation pin for *Steamboat Society of America*® mailed after activation and upon reaching each level milestone
- ★ Private cocktail party hosted by the Captain and vessel officers onboard
- ★ Friends and family can come aboard for a tour and breakfast or lunch aboard *American Queen* or *American Empress* while in port when member is a cruise guest. Not available in ports of embarkation/disembarkation.
- ★ Member access for breakfast or lunch when *American Queen* or *American Empress* are in port near hometown. Not available in ports of embarkation/disembarkation.



RUBY

(After 5 cruises)

All Classic benefits, plus:

"Members only" luggage tags
Membership status name badge
Dedicated reservations line providing special service for members
Receive a \$50 onboard credit per member
Priority check-in and vessel boarding
Complimentary laundry service*



SAPPHIRE

(After 10 cruises)

All Ruby benefits, plus:

Preferred reserved dining room seating
Additional \$50 onboard credit per member (\$100 total)
Welcome back signed card from the Captain plus a set of *American Queen* or *American Empress* notecards



EMERALD

(After 20 cruises)

All Sapphire benefits, plus:

One cabin category upgrade at time of booking
10% discount in onboard gift shop



DIAMOND

(After 30 cruises)

All Emerald benefits, plus:

Additional \$50 onboard credit per member (\$150 total)
Two cabin category upgrade at time of booking

Members on their 10th, 20th and 30th cruises will receive a deluxe official wall certificate and onboard Captain's presentation of framed painting signed by Michael Blaser.

For questions or more information about the Steamboat Society of America, please visit our website at www.aqsc.com/ssoa, email ssoa@aqsc.com or call us at (888) 749-5280.

Only sailings operated by the American Queen Steamboat Company (since April, 2012) count toward membership level. Membership benefits are non-transferable, combinable with other applicable promotional offers and must be applied to future cruise travel. Additional rules and conditions apply. Vessel access and onboard visits by members: capacity controlled on a daily basis, not available in ports of embarkation/disembarkation, reservations and government guest security information is required, guests must be accompanied by members and is limited to four times per calendar year. *Complimentary laundry service is limited to one in-room laundry bag per 7-day cruise.; no dry cleaning services available. AQSC reserves the right to change SSOA program rules, benefits, terms and/or conditions at any time without notice. 100115

WELCOME ABOARD.



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 AMERICAN QUEEN®
STEAMBOAT COMPANY

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