deal and stuck to it for 56 years now."

Company sentiment and emotional attachment was reserved for its two passenger ships, the *America* and *United States*. U.S. Lines President John Franklin kept the ships in perfect condition and provided passengers with the comfort and service associated with a transatlantic passage. Even when the passenger ships were losing money in the early 1960s, he did everything possible to keep them afloat by increasing port turnaround time, remodeling the interiors to provide more comfort in Tourist Class and sending the ships on cruises. Nothing helped overcome the stiff competition from the new jet airplanes and reluctantly the *America* was sold in 1964. The *United States* should have been laid up also, but the emotional attachment was too great to make such a drastic move. [9] By 1968 Franklin was no longer at the helm and the company became the target of a hostile takeover by the conglomerate Walter Kidde & Co. The new owner had no hesitation in disposing of the flagship. The *United States* sailed out of New York on October 25, 1969, and in mid-ocean Captain Tucker received a wire advising him that once the ship returned to New York on November 7, she would depart two days later for Newport News and an early annual overhaul. It was to be the last voyage.

The ship was laid up in Newport News and the crew reduced to a two-man rotation that included Tucker and Chief Engineer John Logue. At sea, officers often worked ninety-hour weeks; now as caretakers, they performed maintenance duties and make-work projects. "We kept the lights going as long as we had bulbs, including the stack lights. It was a lot of make-work projects such as a silverware search," he said. Other duties included unloading the ship's stores. The frozen foods were transferred to a freighter but the smoke shop cigarettes and cigars were tax-free and required special disposal. "All of the tax-free cigars and tobacco products from the smoke-shops were loaded into a container, put aboard a Lancer Class freighter and dumped overboard somewhere in the Pacific," Tucker said. As officers on the bridge, they once had the privilege of ordering anything they wanted to eat while on watch.[10] They now prepared their own lunch with canned goods from the pantry. "We had a lot of very expensive canned smoked oysters and lobster; we warmed them on the hot plate, added crackers and ate lunch." Water came from a single garden hose. Shipyard workers took advantage of the bathroom facilities. "Johnny Logue and I had to clean them out. I often thought to myself, if the Duke of Windsor could see me now!" Tucker said.

The retirement of the *United States* did not help relieve U.S. Lines' financial burdens and by 1980 the company was purchased by Malcolm McLean. He was a tough, risk-taking trucker from Maxton, N.C., with a grammar-school education, who knew nothing about ships and had little interest in them. That changed when he grew impatient with the slow process of transferring freight, piece by piece from cargo ships to his trucks. McLean cooked up his scheme for carrying loaded trailers aboard cargo ships. He eventually became very rich by creating, buying and selling the world's largest container-ship companies. Tucker explained McLean's plans to save U.S. Lines. "He had an idea that he would build these giant container ships in a Korean shipyard, provide cheap freight rates with fuel-efficient but slow ships, sailing on around-the-world routes." Tucker would become master of the new *American New Jersey*. "It did not work out." The ships were built with parts from all over the world so when something broke down it was hard to pin down responsibility for repairs. Competitors such as the Evergreen Line responded with lower rates and faster ships. With losses piling up and creditors demanding payment, the once rock-solid U.S. Lines filed for bankruptcy on November 24, 1986. "We just guessed wrong," McLean explained lamely.[11]

Tucker's last command was the *American Puritan*. When he docked the ship in Oakland, the Marine Superintendent called to tell him it was over—no more U.S. Lines. "By then I was sixty, had led a full life; however after 37 years it was time to retire."

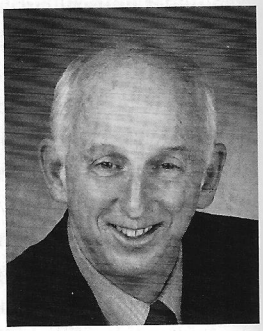
In retirement, the Tuckers traveled, visiting friends and sailing the North Atlantic on board the Cunard liners, *Queen Elizabeth 2* and *Queen Mary 2*. At first, he found retirement difficult. "I missed the ships, I missed the crew".

In the past year, Penny Tucker's health has declined and the captain's travels are limited to local errands and trips to the hospital. After many good years at sea it is his time to stay home and care for his wife. He accepts this new limitation. "Fair is fair, now my wife gets the attention and she needs it and deserves it."

Notes

1 *The New Yorker,* May 31, 1952, trial by Raydist
2 *Recollections of My Life* by John Franklin p. 75,76
3 *The Washington Post,* May 16,1952
4 *The New York Times,* June 24, 1952
5 New York *Herald Tribune,* Sunday June 29 1952
6 *Recollections of My Life* by John Franklin p.77
7 *The New York Times,* July 7, 1952
8 *The Evening Star,* July 6, 1952
9 *The Rise & Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping in the Twentieth Century,* Rene De La Pedraja, p. 230
10 "The SS *United States* A glimpse of a bygone era," *Port Folio Magazine,* by Richard O'Leary
11 *The Rise & Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping in the Twentieth Century,* Rene De La Pedraja, p 280

About the author



Larry Driscoll is a retired school administrator turned maritime author with a special interest in the ships of United States Lines. His last book was SS *America,* USS *West Point,* SS *Australis,* The Many Lives of a Great Ship. *This article is from his forthcoming new book on the history of the United States Lines and its ships. He is most interested in talking to former crew members, company employees and passengers. He can be reached at elaurens1@yahoo.com.*