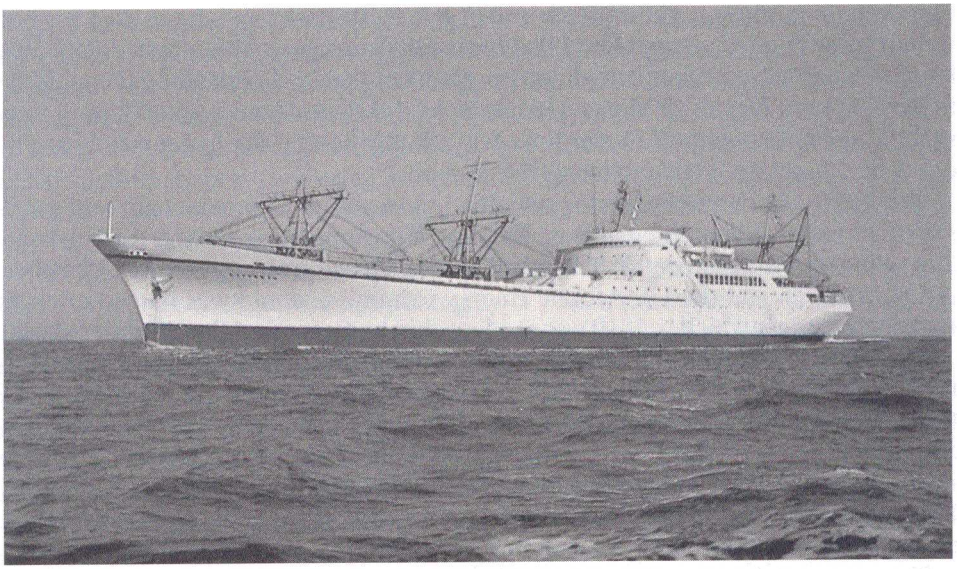

Title 90

In June 1964, the **NS Savannah**, the first nuclear powered merchant ship, sailed on her transatlantic maiden voyage from New York to Bremerhaven, and I was able to join her in the Straits of Dover. On this historic voyage she was accompanied by the dreams of marine engineers that a new age of ship propulsion had dawned through the ideal energy source of atomic fission, but atomophobia prevented her from visiting any foreign ports. She had a displacement of 21 850 ton, a cruising speed of 21 knots, accommodation for 60 passengers and needed refuelling only every 3 1/2 years. *Courtesy NS Savannah.*

My first Scoop: Nuclear Ship Maiden Voyage Title 90

The American nuclear ship *NS Savannah* left New York on 6 June 1964 for her transatlantic maiden voyage, and I had received a message to this effect. A few days later, through the excellent telephone operators of the *Daily Telegraph*, I could talk to her Captain, David McMichael, while in Mid-Atlantic, and I asked him to stop in the English Channel off Dover for a few minutes so that I could come aboard to cover her successful maiden voyage. He agreed.

She was the first, and has so far remained the only, nuclear passenger and cargo ship to cross the Atlantic, capable of carrying 60 passengers and 10000 tons of cargo as a full load, displacement 21850 tons. She was a joint project of the US Maritime Administration and the US Atomic Energy Commission and was named after an earlier *Savannah,* which in 1819 was the first ship to cross the Atlantic under steam.

When I saw the slim outlines of the nuclear ship approaching, coming out of the mists of the English Channel, I was in a small motor boat with a photographer from the newspaper, but I had no idea if she would stop for us at the arranged rendezvous 3 miles off the coast of Dover. She did, and we went on board to be most hospitably received as the first European representatives of the Press. She was bound for Bremerhaven in Germany, then the central port for all supplies to the American troops stationed in Germany.

She was most luxuriously equipped for a merchant vessel, being an example of the peaceful uses of atomic energy and the American bid for naval supremacy in the Nuclear Age. I had the free run of the ship, interviewed the Chief Engineer, obtained full technical data of the pressurised water reactor, all safety precautions to prevent atomic radiation and could that day radio my story back to London which appeared in the paper the next day, 17 June, under the headline "Across the Atlantic on 1¼ lb of enriched uranium".

She was a proud ship and everyone on board, including myself, thought that nuclear propulsion would be the future power supply of all ships. In Bremerhaven we were received by the world's press which I had scooped by one day. That the *Savannah* could not call at any other port and was broken up on her return to the USA was entirely due to political pressure from environmentalists who feared radiation and atomic pollution. For me it was the first sign of the shape of things to come, of anti-science and anti-technology sentiments and succesful reactionary action. No Scientific Temper.

I must add a personal postscript: The London *Daily Express* newspaper on 17 June had the following note: "The *Savannah* developed a fault in the English Channel and had to halt three miles off Dover while a specialist technician [SIC!] went on board. She came no nearer for fear of radiation and later made for Bremerhaven."

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To... Atomophobia - Atomic Mega Show in Geneva. Title 91

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Atomic Mega Show in Geneva Title 91

It was less than two months later, in August 1964, that I had another opportunity to indulge in atomic optimism, namely, at the third United Nations Conference on the "Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy". There was no anti-science or anti-technological sentiment in Geneva, where the First of these Mammoth Conferences (15 volumes of proceedings) had taken place in 1955, followed three years later with the Second (2300 scientific papers producing 34 volumes). The First led to a removal of secrecy about Atomic Fission and the second openly discussed for the first time Atomic Fusion research in the Soviet Union, in Europe and in the USA.

The Third Conference was called "Big Reactors—Big Business" by the assembled world press even before its opening by U Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. They alone were capable of organising such an international monster assembly of 3000 industrial, Government and academic scientists and engineers. With money no object, hotel suites and whole floors had been booked months ahead by the representatives from 71 countries, all anxious to benefit from this mega show of "Atoms for Peace". Huge exhibition halls showed models of all kinds of atomic reactors and their components, for the first time, ready 'for sale'!

All possible uses of atomic energy were either displayed as exhibits or fully discussed at various seminars or exhaustively advertised at the many press conferences given by industrial and governmental sponsors. Equally spoilt by the ultra-rich purchasers of atomic electricity stations were the science correspondents from all well-known newspapers with invitations to parties, lunches and dinners at Geneva's best and most expensive restaurants. The atom was certainly then the 'best friend' of the press.

It was not difficult to report about these atomic halcyon days for the *Daily Telegraph*. Being an extremely conservative, almost chauvinistic newspaper, my obvious priority was to file about the 77-strong British delegation, led by Sir William Penney. All my stories were promptly published the next day. 'Costs of A-Power Plant falling, says Penney', 'Britain hopes to double nuclear Production—Penney's forecast for 1970', 'Reactors: A Choice for Britain' were the headlines for my major articles.

My minor contributions from Geneva, so my records show, were 'U.S. Reactor Race with Russia' and 'Nasser wants Nuclear Power Plant—Invitation for Tenders'. But for me the most interesting uses for nuclear energy were not atomic electricity stations, but other engineering uses.

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