

The City of Sparta

Paramahansa Yogananda left Calcutta on Aug. 2, 1920, as a passenger on the City of Sparta, the first passenger ship to sail to the United States from India after World War I.¹ The freighter carried 61 passengers and a cargo of mostly jute and tea.² Paramahansa Yogananda and the other passengers disembarked on Pier 3 in East Boston on Sunday, Sept. 19, 1920.³ (This area is now Piers Park, in East Boston.)

About the Ship

The City of Sparta was built in 1896 in Belfast, Ireland, by Workman, Clark & Company Ltd. It was a long and narrow ship: approximately 430 feet long and 50 feet wide (70 feet longer than a full football field with end zones and less than one third the width of a football field). The displacement was 5,415 gross tons (541,500 cubic feet). It was made of steel and had one funnel and two masts. Its service speed was 12 knots.⁴

The City of Sparta's last passenger voyage was in July 1923. After that, it was used only to transport cargo. And in 1931 it was scrapped in Port Glasgow, Scotland, because of the worldwide economic downturn that was seriously impacting steamship companies at that time.⁴

About the Funnel Colors

The City of Sparta was built for George Smith and Sons and it was part of their City Line fleet. The funnel colors of the fleet were dark buff with a black top.⁶

In January 1902, Ellerman Lines Ltd acquired the City Line fleet and changed the name to the Ellerman City Line.⁵ The fleet "adopted the Ellerman funnel colour of buff with a white band and black top."⁷ It is likely that these would have been the funnel colors of the City of Sparta during Paramahansa's voyage to Boston.

On Oct. 25, 1920, the City of Sparta was transferred to Ellerman & Bucknall Steamship Co. Ltd.'s American & Indian Line.⁴ The funnel colors of the Ellerman & Bucknall Steamship Co. Ltd. were black with white diamonds encircling the top.⁸

¹ “Self-Realization News: ‘City of Sparta’ Model Built for SRF 80th Anniversary”, page 74, Self-Realization Magazine, Fall 2000 (Self-Realization Fellowship).

² An article on page 7 of the Boston Globe, “Leyland Liner City of Sparta Arrives Here from Far East,” dated September 20, 1920, discusses the ship’s arrival. An image of this article is reproduced below. The article mistakenly says the ship is part of the Leyland Line. According to Ellerman Lines, Remembering a Great British Shipping Company, by Ian Collard, The History Press, Brimscombe Port, Stroud, Gloucestershire, England, 2014, page 106, the City of Sparta was part of the Ellerman Lines in 1920.

³ The departure date of August 2, 1920 from Calcutta and the arrival date of September 19, 1920 in Boston are confirmed in the City of Sparta’s “List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States Immigration Officer at Port of Arrival” which is in the National Archives.

⁴ North Atlantic Seaway, vol.4 by N.R.P. Bonsor, Brookside Publications, Jersey, Channel Islands, 1979, pages 1472 and 1473.

⁵ Ellerman Lines, Remembering a Great British Shipping Company, by Ian Collard, The History Press, Brimscombe Port, Stroud, Gloucestershire, England, 2014, pages 17 and 106.

⁶ The Ships List, Goerge Smith & Sons / City Line Fleet; Funnel Colors 1870-1901.
[<https://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/ellerman4.shtml>] (date accessed: 12/9/2023)

⁷ “Records of Ellerman City Line Ltd, 1901-1970s, ship owners, Glasgow, Scotland, 1771-1976,” University of Glasgow Archive Services, reference “GB 248 UGD 131/1” accessed on the Archives Hub Website
[<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/e946538d-e849-36cf-b076-183f21511c42>] (date accessed: 12/9/2023)

⁸ Shipping Wonders of the World, House Flags and Funnels: funnel image for “Ellerman and Bucknall Steamship Co., Ltd.”
[<https://www.shippingwondersoftheworld.com/funnels.html>] (date accessed: 12/9/2023)