

S.S. Admiral

Iconic St. Louis Landmark



Growing up in and for most us, residing in St. Louis there are several enduring landmarks that make our town the place we know and love. Among many others, those places include the Arch, Forest Park-Zoo, Bevo Mill, and The Admiral. Inspired by an email containing Admiral photos sent by Mick Rea, this article was constructed to share some facts and rekindle those memories.

Throughout the 1920s, Streckfus Steamers Company operated the “J.S. Deluxe,” a luxury



river
boat
that
was
run



on the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Paul, Minnesota. It brought exquisite service and fine musical entertainment to the area. Some claim it introduced jazz to St. Louis.

In 1933 Streckfus Steamers decided to build a new flagship. The boat was designed by Maizie Krebs for Captain Joe Streckfus, the “JS of JS Deluxe! The young Miss Krebs was a fashion illustrator for St. Louis department store; Famous-Barr. Neither she nor Joe Streckfus originally took the not yet named Admiral’s lavish art-deco design seriously. She designed another, more traditional, river vessel for Streckfus, the S.S. President, in 1934.



“Miss Krebs wandered into steamboat designing through her work as an advertising illustrator. One day she heard Captain Joseph Streckfus remark that his line was contemplating construction of a new

boat of radical design. Miss Krebs went home and designed the President. She asked permission to submit her sketches, and Captain Joe consented, merely to humor her. Her plans turned out to be just what he wanted.



In 1936, when the Admiral first was conceived, Streckfus called her in. She planned and supervised the construction of all exterior and interior details. The job took several years, but Miss Krebs said she was happier while working on the boat than at any other time in her career. She does her best work between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m. That explains what she calls her worst habit—sleeping late.”

The hull used for the Admiral came from an older cargo vessel named Albatross. Albatross, built in 1907 for the Louisiana & Mississippi Valley Transfer Co., was a massive beast, capable of hauling 16-rail cars across the river at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Albatross was sold to Streckfus Steamers in 1937.



From 1938-1940 Steamers Service Company built the Admiral mostly from Mazie Krebs' original design. It was to be a ship with five decks, two of which were air-conditioned, an unheard-of luxury in that time. Launched in June, 1940; it was the largest inland passenger steamer of its time. The *Admiral* featured Streamlined Art Deco styling around her exterior and throughout. At 373 feet in length, she had room for 4,400 passengers.

Her steel hull was divided into 74 compartments, as many as 11 of which could be flooded with the boat still remaining afloat. S.S. Admiral's cost of re-construction was slightly over \$1,000,000.

The Admiral's Hay-day

The Admiral was moored on the Mississippi River, just north of the St. Louis Arch. She had departed on her first excursion cruise from the St. Louis waterfront in June 1940. The Admiral was operated approximately 40-years as a Mississippi River cruiser. The Admiral would disembark at 1:00PM and 8:00PM for twice a day summertime cruises. Daytime crowds were filled with parents with kids catching views of St Louis from the upper deck. Featuring top dance bands of their day: Bob Kuban, Steve Shankman's Progress and Younger Brothers drew huge crowds in the 70's. Not surprisingly with the Admiral having large dance floors on two of its five levels, decades, evening cruises attracted young adults from all over the St Louis area.



LIDO DECK STEAMER ADMIRAL PORT OF ST. LOUIS



"BLUE SALON"
WORLD'S LARGEST
FLOATING BALLROOM
STEAMER ADMIRAL

For decades she was a familiar sight and sound, and with her steam calliope on the river.

From the arcade level, one could play pinball machine and watch as giant striped piston arms named "Popeye" and "Olive Oyl" back and forth propelling the side mounted paddle wheels. In the winter of 1973 - 1974 she was converted from a steam powered paddle wheeler to diesel-props, with a total of 2700 hp (three engines, one in each paddle box and one at the stern). Admiral's rear paddle wheel was only for show!



42.—THE ADMIRAL EXCURSION BOAT ON THE MISSISSIPPI, ST. LOUIS, MO.

Post Cruising years

In 1979, partially prompted by hull corrosion and being declared by the US coast Guard as "unseaworthy," Streckfus Steamers sold the *Admiral* in 1981 to John Connelly of Pittsburgh. Connelly had a business history with riverboats. He bought the *Admiral* in 1981 for \$600,000. His plan called for dismantling the *Admiral* and using the hull as a stationery docking barge. Amid outrage from St. Louisans, city officials and civic leaders organized a consortium



and bought the boat back for \$1.6 million. In addition to making a \$1 million dollar profit Connelly got to keep the relatively new diesel engines.



Initial estimates called for the *Admiral* to be revamped at a cost of \$5 million to \$6 million. Construction disputes, legal fights, a crowd of consultants and lawyers helped shoot up that price tag. A group of 53 limited partners each paid \$100,000 for a share of what had been expected to be a booming venture.

By November 1987, just six months after that gala opening and operating as a , the *Admiral's* business went bust. Blame was levied on many fronts, including a \$4.50 entry fee and two giant pink fire towers -- for public safety -- that obscured the view of the boat.

Connelly re-entered the picture, took over as operator and reopened the *Admiral* for another year. It closed for good as an entertainment center in November 1988.



By 1990, he'd bought it back -- paying no more than \$10 million -- and soon moved to transform the *Admiral* into the *President Casino* on the *Admiral*. Another \$36 million-plus was spent.



It took a statewide vote in November 1992 to allow riverboat gambling in Missouri, before the *Admiral* could be resurrected once more. After some years as a floating but stationary attraction, it was

converted to casino use in 1993. A rather monstrous pink transitional dock was constructed, crudely mimicking the ship's art-deco lines while blocking most of it from view. Little if any of the original interior remained, eventually being replaced by fairly standard casino fair...mirrors, flashing lights, plush carpets, and slot machines

The boat was abuzz with business again -- until a state Supreme Court ruling in January 1994 effectively tossed out that 1992 vote. A smaller, more conservative bloc of statewide voters in April 1994 rejected riverboat gaming, in effect shutting the Admiral down again. In November 1994, a third statewide vote was finally the charm. Gambling was legal again.

S.S. Admiral Partners bought the boat and completed a \$30 million-plus renovation preparing it to be a permanently moored floating casino. The engines had been removed in 1979 along with stripping the interior of much of its art deco trim and fittings.

Since the early 1990s it has operated from moorings near Eads Bridge as the President Casinos. It boasted 1,230 slot machines, 59 gaming tables, 18 restrooms, and one restaurant. In the late 1980s, the boat was operated by Six Flags, which decided to shut the venture down due to high costs.

After its conversion, the *Admiral* operated as the President Casino Laclede's Landing, and was eventually moved from its dock near the Arch to a new location just north of Eads Bridge. The President Casino Company declared bankruptcy in 2002. In 2006, the *Admiral* was acquired by Pinnacle Entertainment. Pinnacle sought to sell the vessel, citing excessive maintenance needs and declining business for the casino. Perhaps prompted by a requisite 2010 Coast Guard inspection, Pinnacle ended all casino operations and closed the ship down in June 2010. The ship was sold to St. Louis Marine and Materials.

Accident

At approximately 7:50 pm on 4 April 1998, a tow of the M/V Anne Holly, comprising 12 loaded and 2 empty barges, which was traveling northbound on the Mississippi River through the St. Louis Harbor, struck the Missouri-side pier of the center span of the Eads Bridge. Eight barges broke away from the tow and drifted back through the Missouri span. Three of these barges drifted toward the Admiral. The drifting barges struck the Admiral, causing 8 of its 10 mooring lines to break. At the time, operating as a casino, the Admiral had nearly 3000-people on board.

The Admiral then rotated clockwise downriver, away from the Missouri riverbank. The captain of the Anne Holly disengaged his vessel from the six remaining barges in the tow and placed the Anne Holly's bow against the Admiral's bow to hold it against the bank. About the time the Anne Holly began pushing against the Admiral, the Admiral's next-to-last mooring line broke. The Anne Holly and the single mooring wire that remained attached to the Admiral's stern anchor held the Admiral near the Missouri bank. No deaths resulted from the accident; 50 people were examined for minor injuries. Of those examined, 16 were sent to local hospitals for further treatment. Damages were estimated at \$11 million.

The quick response of the tow captain and emergency services prevented what may have been one of the most deadly marine disasters in history. The Mississippi River was over flood stage at the time of the accident and the ship would not have cleared the I-64 (Poplar Street) bridge

just downstream. Again there were over 3000 people on board the Admiral (President Casino) at the time of the accident. If the Admiral would have capsized when striking the bridge there would have been many people either trapped inside the flooding ship or in the frigid and turbulent Mississippi river in the dark of night.

21st century history

In June 2005, it was reported that Columbia Sussex Corp. wanted to buy the President Casino on the Admiral and replace it with a new vessel.

In August 2008, Pinnacle Entertainment, the owner, considered moving the boat north to the area near the Chain of Rocks Bridge. After the state gaming commission refused to approve the deal, Pinnacle surrendered its gambling license and sold the Admiral to St. Louis Marine in 2010.

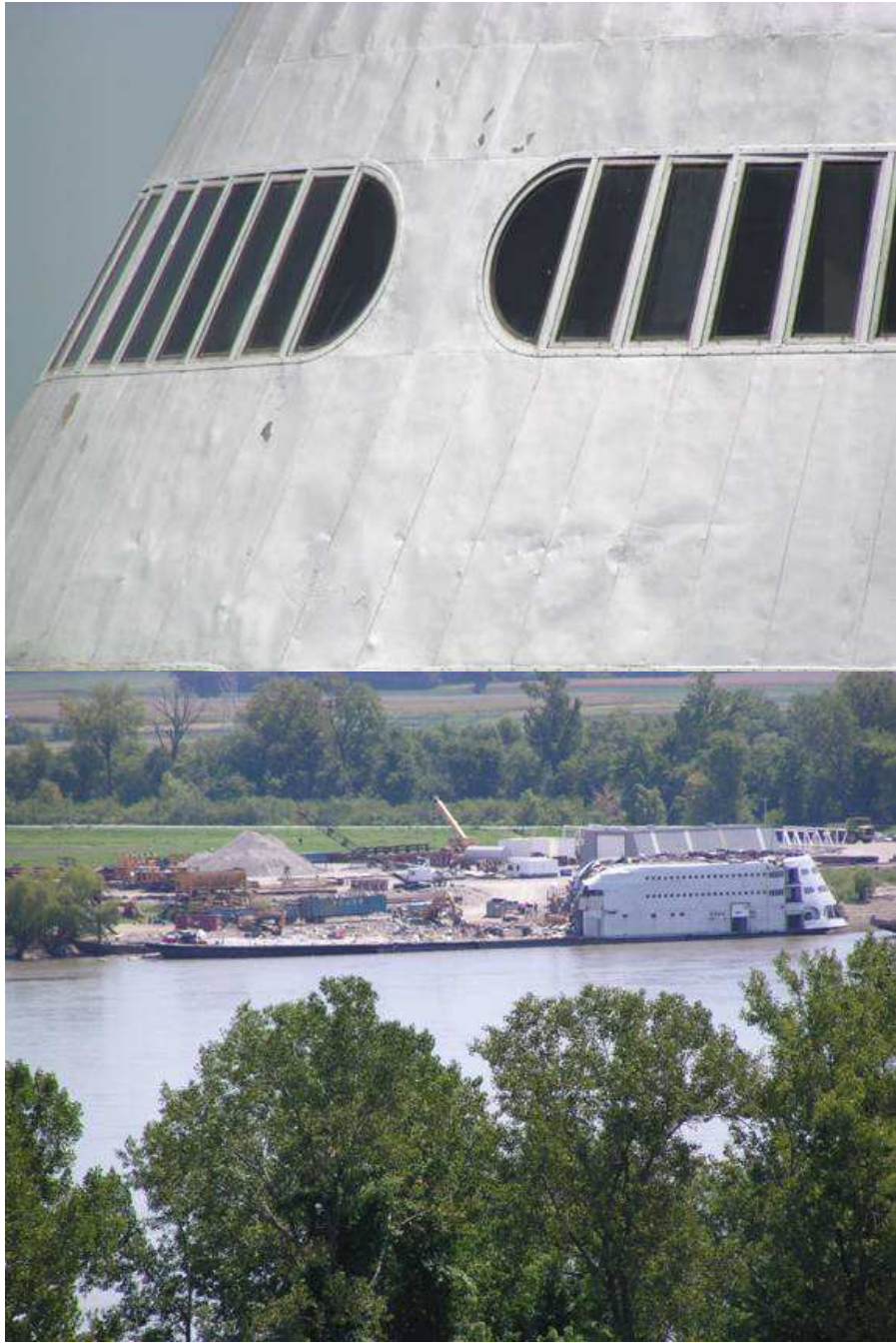
In November 2010, the entire boat was offered as an eBay auction item with a suggested price of \$1.5 million. Unable to find a buyer to operate the vessel, St. Louis Marine held an auction on November 21st to sell the interior fixtures, fittings and contents. Scrappers began working to remove interior machinery and systems. Use of a torch caused a small fire on January 21, 2010 while cutting through a grease-coated kitchen exhaust duct.

Early spring 2011 the top deck was removed. Dismantlement was delayed because in 2011 high waters on the Mississippi river made it impossible to transport it downstream under the Eads Bridge. With the water dropping, St. Louis Marine announced plans on July 17, 2011 to move the Admiral south to Luhr Brother's ship yard in Columbia, Illinois where the hull was eventually dismantled and sold for scrap.



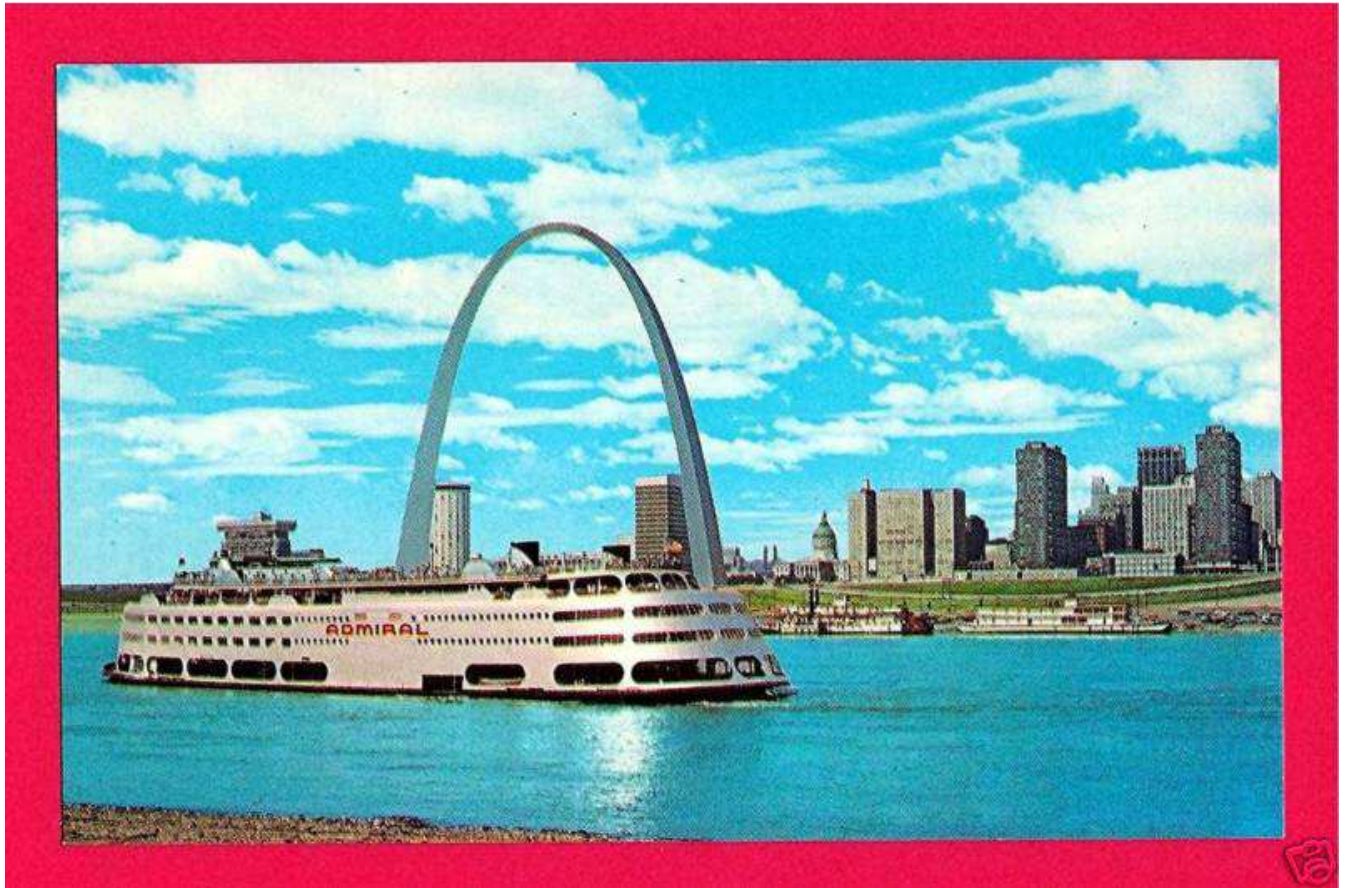












"Reference links"

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/admiral.htm>

Video of Admiral's final departure from the riverfront:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmJ4ozZPO24>