

M2158

SELECTED RECORDS RELATING TO
MARCUS GARVEY,
THE BLACK STAR LINE,
AND THE
BLACK CROSS NAVIGATION AND TRADING COMPANY

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INTRODUCTION

On the three rolls of this microfilm publication, M2158, are reproduced selected records relating to Marcus Garvey, the Black Star Line, and the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company. These records are part of Records of the United States Shipping Board, Record Group (RG) 32; Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, RG 41; and General Records of the Department of Justice, RG 60.

BACKGROUND

Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr., a son of former slaves, was born in Jamaica on August 17, 1887. After ending his formal schooling at age 14, he eventually became a master printer, published his first newspaper, travelled through Central America, and attended political meetings. In 1914, after reading Booker T. Washington's biography, *Up From Slavery*, Garvey concluded that it was necessary to unify black people across the globe to achieve economic and political power. He then founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), with the motto "One God, One Aim, One Destiny," and had the immediate goal of establishing an industrial training school in Jamaica.

After immigrating to the United States, he established the first U.S. branch of the UNIA in New York in 1917. He toured the country giving speeches urging black people to unite, be proud, and believe themselves equal to all others. UNIA members had uniforms, rituals, official songs, and pledged allegiance to a red, black, and green flag which Garvey designed as a symbol of a black nation in the making. To further this movement, he established the *Negro World* newspaper, and promoted black business development by creating the Negro Factories Corporation.

Garvey then organized the Black Star Line, a steamship company intended to become the linchpin in a global black economy by fostering commercial trade among black businesses in North America, the Caribbean, and Africa by transporting produce, raw materials, manufactured goods, and passengers on vessels manned by all-black crews. Incorporated in Delaware on June 23, 1919, shares were sold for \$5 at UNIA meetings, by traveling agents, mailed circulars, and through advertisements in the *Negro World*. The company bought three vessels: the S.S. *Yarmouth* (renamed S.S. *Frederick Douglass*), a former World War I coal boat in poor condition; the S.S. *Shadyside*, a Hudson river excursion boat that sank after its first summer of operations; and the steam yacht *Kanawha* (renamed the S.S. *Antonio Maceo*), which suffered a boiler explosion on its maiden voyage. Garvey suspended company operations in early 1922. The company's losses were estimated at \$1.25 million, but despite its failure, the Black Star Line was a powerful symbol. Thousands watched the launch of the *Yarmouth* in New York as well as its arrival in Cuba and Central America, since it was the first ship owned and operated by black men.

Subsequently, Garvey and his UNIA followers formed a new company, the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, which purchased two vessels, the S.S. *G. W. Goethels*, (renamed the S.S. *Booker T. Washington*), which took UNIA officials on an organizing

tour to various ports in the Caribbean in 1925; and the S.S. *West Irmo*, which took material shipments to Liberia in 1924 in support of black American colonization there.

The Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation (Federal Bureau of Investigation after 1935) investigated Garvey with a view to eventually deporting him as an undesirable alien. He was indicted on mail fraud charges arising from mail solicitations for the sale of Black Star Line stock that depicted a vessel (the S.S. *Orion*) that the company did not yet own, labeled by its intended future name, the S.S. *Phyllis Wheatley*. In June 1923, he was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison. He was deported to Jamaica after his prison sentence was commuted by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927. He died June 10, 1940, in London, England.

RECORDS DESCRIPTION

UNITED STATES SHIPPING BOARD (RG 32)

The United States Shipping Board was established as an emergency agency by the Shipping Act of September 7, 1916 (39 Stat. 729). It regulated commercial maritime carriers and trade practices, marine insurance, transfers of ship registry, and the rates charged in interstate waterborne commerce. It also investigated the adequacy of port and water transportation facilities, determined the necessity for steamship lines and the characteristics of vessels on those lines, subsidized private ship construction, and developed a naval auxiliary and merchant marine. It was abolished by Executive Order 6166 (June 10, 1933), effective March 2, 1934, with its functions initially absorbed by U.S. Shipping Board Bureau in the Department of Commerce (1933–36).

The Board's Subject-Classified General Files (National Archives Identifier 574373)¹ are arranged in four subseries: (1) pre-Sept. 1917, Files 1–550; (2) Sept. 1917–Feb. 1920, Files 1000–108019; (3) Mar. 1920–Oct. 1936, subject-numeric system; and (4) oversized exhibits for 1920–36. The following specific files are reproduced in this microfilm publication: 553-1410 (Ships–Collisions–S. S. *Westpool* and S.S. *Yarmouth*); 605-1-653 (Black Star Line, Incorporated, and Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, Inc.); 1091-1250 (S.S. *Orion*), and 1091-4805 (S.S. *West Irmo*). Records in these files are usually arranged in reverse chronological order.

BUREAU OF MARINE INSPECTION AND NAVIGATION (RG 41)

The Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation (BMIN), named by an act of May 27, 1936 (49 Stat. 1380), was the culmination of a long history of creation, consolidation, and merging of numerous Federal agencies having jurisdiction over various maritime concerns.

The Bureau of Navigation was created by an act of July 5, 1884 (23 Stat. 118), and placed within the Department of the Treasury in order to consolidate responsibility for

¹ Online Public Access (OPA) is available for research online at www.archives.gov. This series is also identified as Entry (Series) 7, Subject-Classified General Files, 1916–36, in Forrest R. Holdcamper, Preliminary Inventory 97, *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the United States Shipping Board* (National Archives, 1956).

administration of the navigation laws into a distinct service. (Administration of laws relating to lighthouses, lifesaving, collection of revenue, and inspection of steam vessels remained outside the Bureau's jurisdiction.) In accord with the Appropriation Act of June 30, 1932 (47 Stat. 415), the Bureau of Navigation was consolidated in August 1932 with the Steamboat Inspection Service under the title Bureau of Navigation and Steamboat Inspection, and was then renamed the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation by an act of May 27, 1936 (49 Stat. 1380). It was abolished by Reorganization Plan No. III of 1946, effective July 16, 1946, with the Bureau of Customs and U.S. Coast Guard absorbing its duties.

The issuance of vessel documents (certificates of enrollment, registration, or license) for U.S. flag vessels was one of this agency's responsibilities, and beginning in 1919, it changed its filing system so that all documents issued to a vessel were filed together by official vessel number, and then chronologically. These Consolidated Merchant Vessel Documentation files (National Archives 591827) have thus traditionally been referred to as "Official Number Files" due to their numerical arrangement. This microfilm publication reproduces vessel documents from Official Number Files 161123, *Kanawha*, July 28, 1899–July 27, 1920, and 215106, *General G. W. Goethals*, May 24, 1927–Apr. 17, 1933.

The Bureau of Navigation also had Correspondence Files, 1884–1935 (National Archives Identifier 2133206), which are arranged numerically. This microfilm publication reproduces files numbered 82156–N, relating to the *Kanawha*, July 21–Dec. 5, 1921, and 171094–N, relating to a *Kanawha* seaman, July 9–Sept. 24, 1919, who claimed he was owed back pay.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (RG 60)

The Department of Justice was established by an act of June 22, 1870 (16 Stat. 162), to enforce and investigate violations of Federal laws, provide legal advice to the President and heads of Executive agencies, represent the Federal Government in court, supervise U.S. attorneys and marshals, and other duties. Its Straight Numerical Files, 1904–74 (National Archives Identifier 583895),² were general correspondence files that included both letters received and letters sent. Within each file, the items are arranged chronologically by date placed in the file, and are often numbered. File 198940 is reproduced in this microfilm publication.

RELATED RECORDS

Additional records relating to Marcus Garvey and his companies will likely be found in other record groups, including Records of U.S. District Courts, RG 21; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, RG 65; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85; and Records of the Bureau of Prisons, RG 129.

² This series is identified as Entry (Series) 112, Straight Numerical Files, 1904–37, in Marion Johnson, Preliminary Inventory 194, *Preliminary Inventory of the General Records of the Department of Justice* (National Archives, 1981).

Roll List

ROLL CONTENTS

1 UNITED STATES SHIPPING BOARD (RG 32)

SUBJECT CLASSIFIED GENERAL FILES

FILE NO. SUBJECT, FILE SEGMENT, AND DATE SPAN

553-1410 Ships--Collisions--S.S. *Westpool* and S.S. *Yarmouth*
June 1921--Sept. 1931

605-1-653 Black Star Line, Incorporated; Black Cross Navigation and
Trading Company, Inc.
Part 1, June 1921--Mar. 1927
Part 2, Mar. 1927--May 1939

1091-1250 S.S. *Orion*
Part 1, June 1917--Oct. 1920
Part 2, Oct. 1920--Jan. 1923

2 Part 3, Feb. 1923--Sept. 1933

1091-4805 S.S. *West Irmo*
Part 1, June 1919--Oct. 1924
Part 2, Oct. 1924--Apr. 1939
Part 3, May 1929--Apr. 1934*

BUREAU OF MARINE INSPECTION AND NAVIGATION (RG 41)

CONSOLIDATED MERCHANT VESSEL DOCUMENTATION (also known as OFFICIAL NUMBER FILES)

215106, *General G. W. Goethals*, May 24, 1927--Apr. 17, 1933
161123, *Kanawha*, July 28, 1899--July 27, 1920

CORRESPONDENCE FILES

82156--N, relating to the *Kanawha*, July 21--Dec. 5, 1921
171094--N, relating to a *Kanawha* seaman who claimed he was owed
back pay, July 9--Sept. 24, 1919

3 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (RG 60)

* File cover sheet indicates Dec. 31, 1939, but the latest correspondence noted during review of the microfilm is dated Apr. 13, 1934.

STRAIGHT NUMERICAL FILES

FILE NO. FILE SEGMENT, AND DATE SPAN

198940 Section 1, Items 1–293, Aug. 1919 – July 1923
Section 2, Items 294–369, July 1923
Section 3, Items 370–end, July 1923–July 1939, and Nov.
1970–Jan. 1971