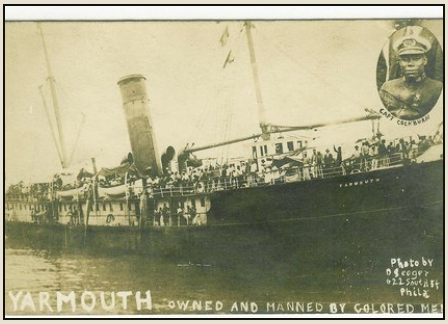
THE FLEET · 1919 TO 1925

Four real ships, and one that never was

What each ship was, what the line paid, and what happened to it. Dollar figures are what the companies reported or what the courts recorded.



"Yarmouth, owned and manned by colored men." Postcard, c. 1920, photo by D. Seeger, Philadelphia; inset: Capt. Cockburn. Via Wikimedia Commons.

$5	151,430	$209,456	$1.25M	0
a share, priced within reach of a working family	shares issued, July 1919 to August 1921	reported loss by 30 June 1921	estimated deficit, both shipping lines	passengers ever carried to Africa

SS Yarmouth

BUILT 1887, SCOTLAND · 1,452 TONS · BOUGHT 17 SEPT 1919

A 32-year-old Nova Scotia steamer. The line paid $171,500; the captain and four others later admitted taking a kickback. Company literature called her the *Frederick Douglass*, but she sailed as *Yarmouth*. On 23 November 1919, some 16,000 people saw her off from the 135th Street pier. She made three voyages to the Caribbean, then was blown into another steamer off Brooklyn on 30 September 1920.

SOLD AT AUCTION
$1,625

SS Shadyside

BUILT 1873, NEW JERSEY · PADDLE WHEELER · BOUGHT 22 MAR 1920

An old Hudson River excursion boat, bought for $35,000 to take on the white-owned excursion lines. Her $1.05 fare lost out to 60-cent trips to Bear Mountain with music and dancing. After one summer and a $10,952 loss she was laid up at Fort Lee.

SANK IN A SNOWSTORM
1921

SS Kanawha

BUILT 1899, NEW YORK · STEAM YACHT · BOUGHT 23 APR 1920

A rich man's yacht, bought for $60,000 and advertised as the *Antonio Maceo*, after the Cuban general of African descent. She sailed 25 March 1921 with 40 passengers and broke down again and again: a valve, the fan engine, salt water in the boilers. Garvey charged the white officers with sabotage.

ABANDONED, ANTILLA, CUBA
AUG 1921

SS Phyllis Wheatley

REALLY THE ORION, EX-PRINZ OSKAR, BUILT 1902

Named for the poet Phillis Wheatley and advertised for months to sail to Africa. The price was $225,000; only $12,500 ever reached the Shipping Board. The line took $8,900 from people who booked passage. The ads for this ship were at the center of the 1922 mail-fraud case.

NEVER OWNED
NEVER SAILED

SS General G. W. Goethals

BUILT 1911, GERMANY · 4,418 TONS · BOUGHT 1924

Bought by the new Black Cross Navigation & Trading Co. while Garvey was out on bail, for a reported $100,000. Christened *Booker T. Washington* by Amy Jacques Garvey on 18 January 1925; 4,000 people paid $1 each to go aboard. She sailed with her old name still painted on her side.

SEIZED FOR DEBT
MAY 1925

Where the sources disagree

- **Incorporation:** the brochure says 26 June 1919; Watson and the federal indictment say 27 June.
- **The Goethals:** Watson says bought August 1924; other accounts say October.
- **The Kanawha:** some accounts describe a boiler explosion on an August 1920 voyage. Watson and Du Bois don't mention it.
- **$630,000:** Du Bois's total for the first three ships, "if the Black Star's own figures and Mr. Garvey's statements of losses are true."

MAIN SOURCE: MILTON H. WATSON, "BLACK STAR LINE," STEAMBOAT BILL (STEAMSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA), PP. 264–72: PRICES, DATES, TONNAGE, SHARES (P. 267), DEFICIT (P. 272). ALSO W. E. B. DU BOIS, "THE BLACK STAR LINE," THE CRISIS, SEPT 1922. POSTCARD: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, "SS YARMOUTH, C1920.JPG." BLACK STAR ARCHIVE × RADICAL IMAGINATION.