



Sun Ship Historical Society's Ship's History Page

Site: www.sunship.org

Pub: 2026.04.08

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Subj: M.S. *Donald M^cKay*

Hull No: 175

SSHS No: 500_175

Hope you enjoy this 'Ship's History Page'. As always, if you have any additional information, suggestions or corrections, please let me know.

Note 1: While due diligence has been applied in the research of this information, responsibility for any errors is the ultimate responsibility of the end-user.

Note 2: Information has been obtained from various sources to enhance the history of Sun Ship and where possible, sources have been identified.

Note 3: Text added by SSHS to the review will be bordered with paratheses

Note 4: A series of three 'periods', before or after transcribed text indicates that not all the text was transcribed to the review.

Note 5: Dates are configured YYYY.MM.DD

"Any work of history is necessarily a joint venture"
Author Unknown

Thank You,
Dave Kavanagh
SSHS
davekav@verizon.net

1. Ship's Record:

Sun Ship Data & Others^{8/1}

Contract Date: 1938.05.10
Keel Laying Date: 1938.07.25
Shipway: CY: No. 3 Shipway
Launch Date: 1939.04.22
Delivery: 1939.06.27
L-B-D: 435.0'x63.0'x40'6"
DWT: 8,682
Ship Type: C2-Cargo
Propulsion: 1-Sun Doxford Diesel Eng.
Propulsion Boilers(s): N/A
Propeller(s): Single Propeller
HP: 6,000
Speed-Knots: 15-1/2
Accommodations: 9-12 Passengers
Military Compliment: 21-Officers,
232-Enlisted
Sponsor: Master Donald McKay V
Owner(s): U.S. Maritime Comm.

Shipway Designations:

SY: South Yard 9 thru 12
CY: Central Yard 1 thru 8
NY: North Yard 13 thru 20
4Y: No.4 Yard 21 thru 28

Maritime Commission Data^[1]

Contract Design: C2 Cargo
Maritime Comm Hull: 18
S.S. Hull No: 175
ID Number: 2238599
Contract Price: \$2,070,292⁸
Sale Price w/Extras: \$2,509,939
First Ship Operator: Moore-McCormick

Ship's Ownership/Operator Transition⁹

1939: 'Donald McKay' (Moore-McCormack)
1941: 'Polaris' (U.S. Navy)
1946: 'Donald McKay' (U.S. Govt.)
1948: 'Polaris' (U.S. Navy)
1957: 'Polaris' (U.S. Govt.)

Disposition: BU 1974.12.07
Levin Metals Corp

2. N/A

3. Historical Data:

Sources:

- 1-Navsource.org/archives
- 2-National Archives
- 3-Dictionary of American Fighting Ships
- 4-Moore-McCormack-Cargo Liners-Timeline
- 5-Wikipedia
- 6-Independence Seaport Museum
- 7-Hagley Museum and Library
- 8-SSHS
- 9- Miramar Ship Index
- 10-United States Maritime Commission

4. Notes:

4.1 Quote from Robert Haig, VP Sun Ship:
History of Shipbuilding

*Address by Robert Haig, Vice President of Sun
Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company, before
The Delaware County Historical Society
Thursday Evening, May 4th, 1939*

“Quite recently the Maritime Commission in Washington decided to perpetuate the name of that great shipbuilder Donald McKay who was born in Nova Scotia in 1810; came to this country and in Massachusetts became interested in shipbuilding, eventually building ships that were, without question, heralded as the greatest design of ships of the time, being superior to any other type of ship that sailed the seas. They only carried about 2000 or 3000 tons but carried it well.

The (new) boat selected to carry that great name was built at the Sun Shipbuilding & Drydock Company here in Chester, costing two and a half million dollars, about twenty times what Donald McKay got for a ship. The Government searched for a descendant of that great shipbuilder and found a boy of about seven years of age, the fifth generation. His name was also Donald McKay. We brought him on for the launching and this little chap was the sponsor for that big ship. The government does not allow us to make gifts or be charitable to sponsors, but we gave Donald a model of the (new ship) Donald MC Kay and we all had a wonderful party, the head of the Maritime Commission taking photos.”

5. Photos:

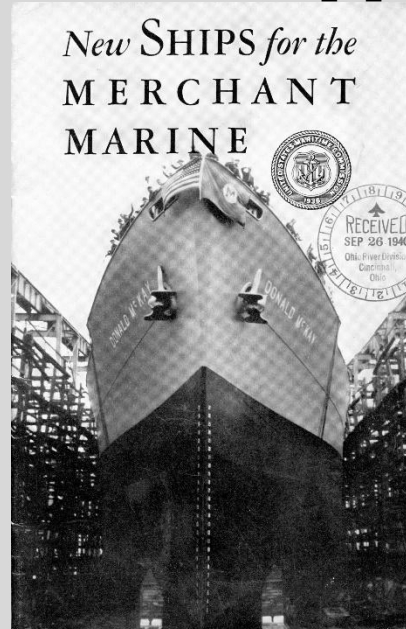
5.1 Photograph showing Sponsor, Master Donald McKay V, great-great-grandson of Donald McKay, posing with his mother in preparation for christening the 'DONALD M^CKAY' on No. 3 Shipway.

Note: Donald McKay (1810-1880) was a famous naval architect, designer, and builder of American Clipper Ships.

Photo ID: 175_74319284a⁷



5.2: Cover page of United States Maritime Commission 24-page brochure titled 'New Ships for the Merchant Marine' showing the launch of 'DONALD M^CKAY' on Sun Ship's CY #3 Shipway on 1939.04.22. Photo ID: 206_06_001⁸



5.3 Photo taken of Sun Ship's CY 'Outfitting Basin' showing the 'DONALD MCKAY' H-175 at 1-Pier with 100 Ton lifting capacity 'Hammerhead Crane' and the Atlantic Tug 'Van DYKE 3'.
Photo ID: 74319244⁷



5.4: Photo taken of Sun Ship's CY 'Outfitting Basin' showing L/R: 'MORMACWREN' H-177 at 2-Pier North, 'MORMACHAWK' H-176 at 2-Pier South and 'DONALD MCKAY' H-175 at 3-Pier North
Photo ID: 74319247⁷



5.5: First cargo ship on the Maritime Commission Program to enter service. Here the M/S 'DONALD MCKAY' C-2 Cargo Vessel operated by Moore & McCormack is photographed in mid-ocean from its sister ship M/S 'MORMACDOVE'. Hull and propulsion equipment built at the Sun Yard.
Photo ID: 500_175_04⁸



5.6: Photograph taken at the DCHS/SSHS exhibit on 2008.01.05. L/R: Dave Kavanagh, Daughter of Donald McKay V, and Donald McKay V. We were very fortunate to have Donald McKay V, and his daughter at the Sun Ship Exhibit.
Photo ID: 707_03_0485a⁸ (Marge Johnson-DCHS)



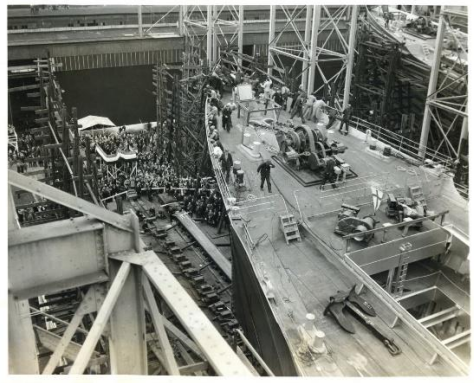
5.7: Dave Boone, Delaware River Historian-Marine Artist and SSHS Board member since 2007, donated his painting of the "M.S. Donald McKay" to SSHS in late 2025, for which we are very grateful.
#326_75_15⁸ (David Boone)



5.8: "The "DONALD MC KAY" first of the United States Maritime Commission's new C-2 cargo boats slides down the way at Chester, PA., today, April 22nd, after being christened by 7-year-old Donald McKay, V, descendant of the famed clipper ship designer for whom the craft was named".

(Text from photo acquired by SSHS)

Photo ID: 500_175_05-2r⁸



5.9: "The Statue of Liberty salutes the bearer of an illustrious name, the "DONALD MC KAY" first of Six 459-foot freight and passenger motor ships... The "DONALD MC KAY, and her sister ships are but the start of a well-planned program of merchantile expansion which will recapture the golden era of American seapower symbolized by those tall clipper ships designed by the man for whom she is named"

(Text from photo acquired by SSHS)

Photo ID: 500_175_05-1r⁸

