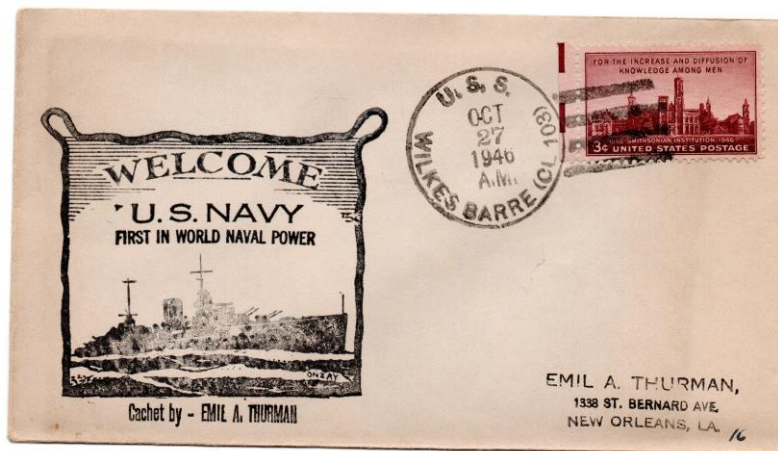


USS Local
A Presentation to the Philatelic Society of Lancaster County
By Zoom on July 13, 2022
By Ron Breznay



This presentation is about covers from U.S. Navy ships that are named after places in my area. I was born in Wilkes-Barre, which is in northeastern Pennsylvania, about 20 miles south of Scranton. I lived in one suburb or another of Wilkes-Barre all my life except for four years in the Army and six years in Los Angeles.

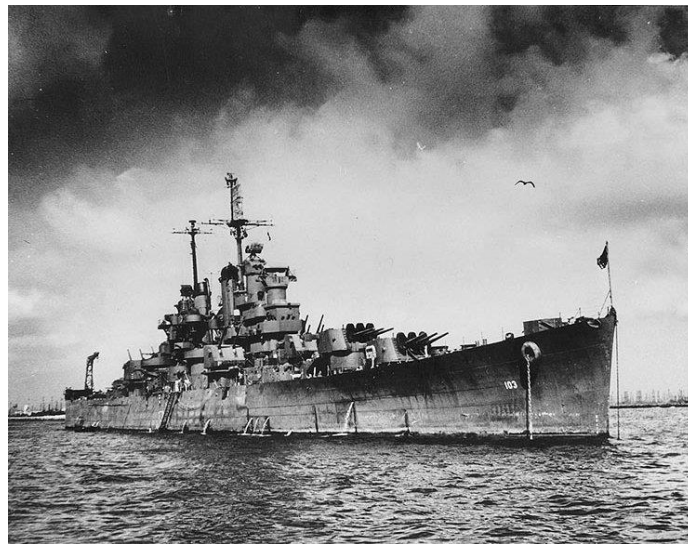


I became interested in these naval covers after I did an eBay search for Wilkes-Barre items for my hometown collection and came across a *USS Wilkes-Barre* cover. I then started adding *USS Pennsylvania* covers and became inspired to look into just how many ships are named after local places and try to find covers from them.

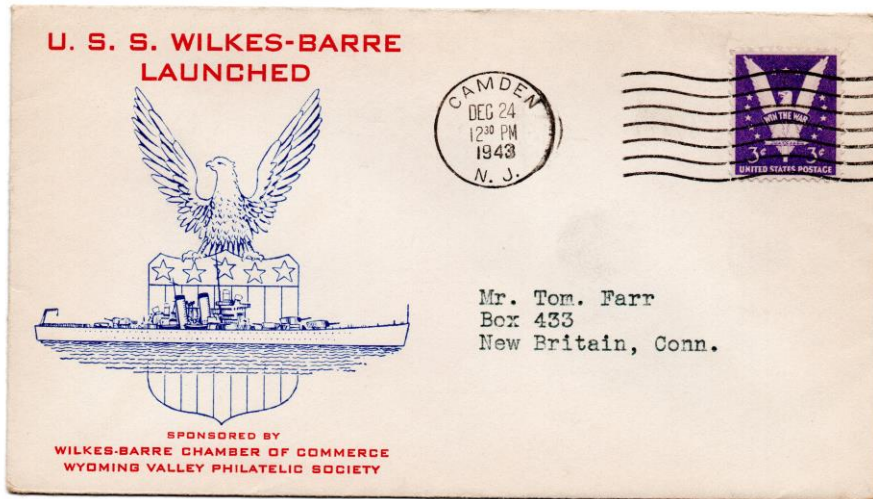
I started my naval cover collection a little over three years ago with this first *USS Wilkes-Barre* cover. This gave me a focus for my collection rather than collecting at random, or worse, trying to collect everything.



There were two ships named the *USS Wilkes-Barre*, which were both light cruisers. CL-90 was named the *USS Wilkes-Barre* when the keel was laid in 1941, but before launch, she was renamed in honor of the *USS Astoria* (CA-34), which was sunk in 1942.



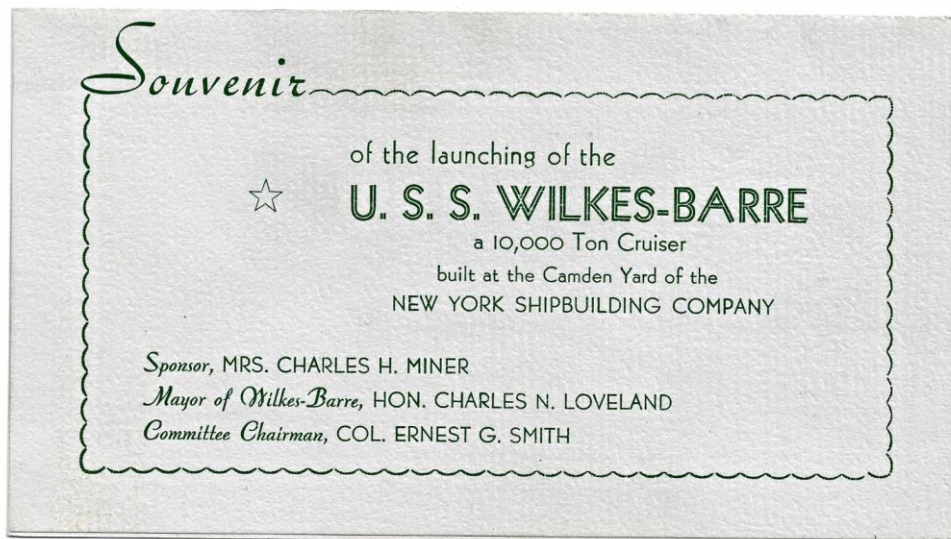
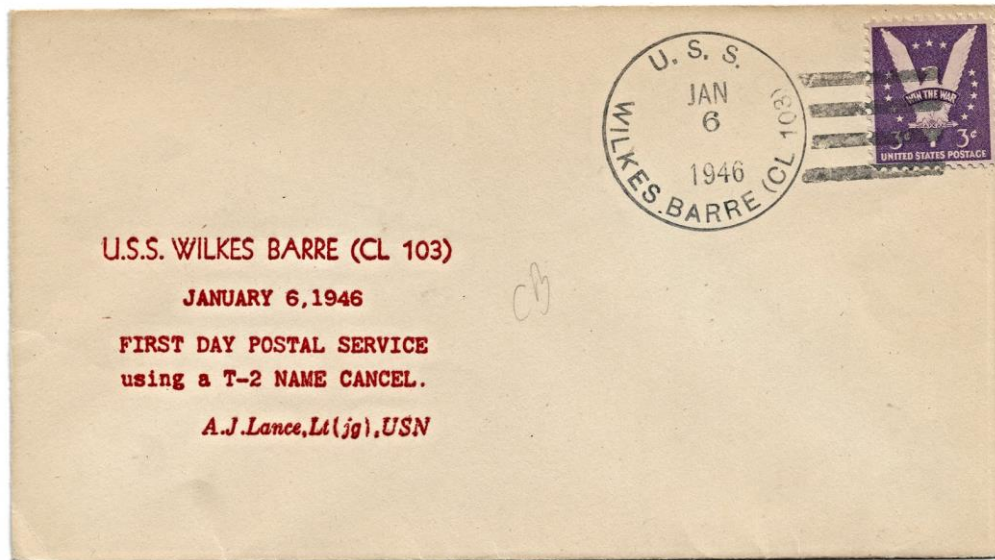
The *USS Wilkes-Barre* that actually sailed was light cruiser number 103. The keel was laid on December 14, 1942, at the New York Shipbuilding Corporation shipyard in Camden, NJ.



She was launched on December 24, 1943.



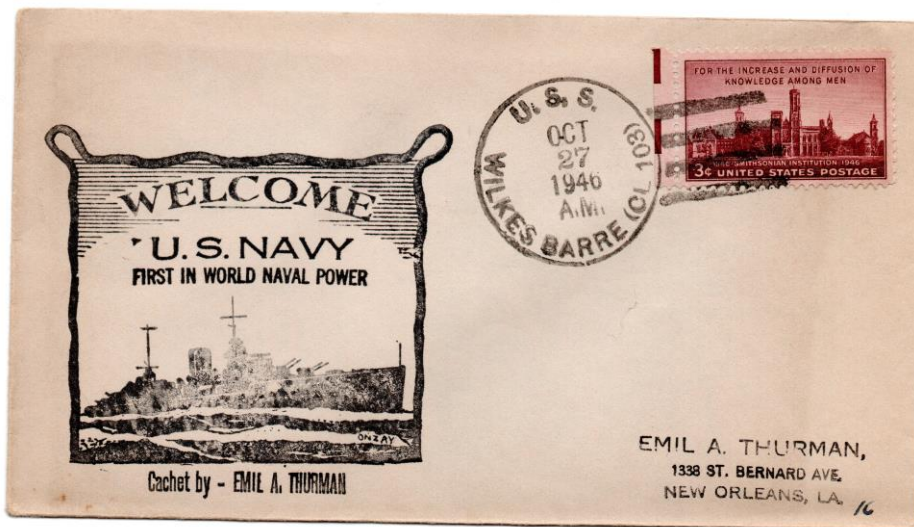
The champagne bottle was smashed on the hull by Grace Shoemaker Miner, the wife of Dr. Charles H. Miner of Wilkes-Barre. The ship was commissioned at the Philadelphia Navy Yard on July 1, 1944, and went on to fight in the Pacific.



The first day of postal service on the ship was January 6, 1946, as shown on this cover, which is not mine (image courtesy of Luis A. Vera).



After the war, she participated in the occupation of Japan and returned to the U.S. in January 1946.



The ship was in New Orleans on October 27, 1946, to celebrate Navy Day, which honors the birth of the U.S. Navy and takes place in various port cities on October 27.



The *Wilkes-Barre* was decommissioned in 1947, remained in mothballs, and was struck from the Naval Register in 1971. She was sunk during explosives tests in 1972. This cover marks the 50th anniversary of her commissioning.



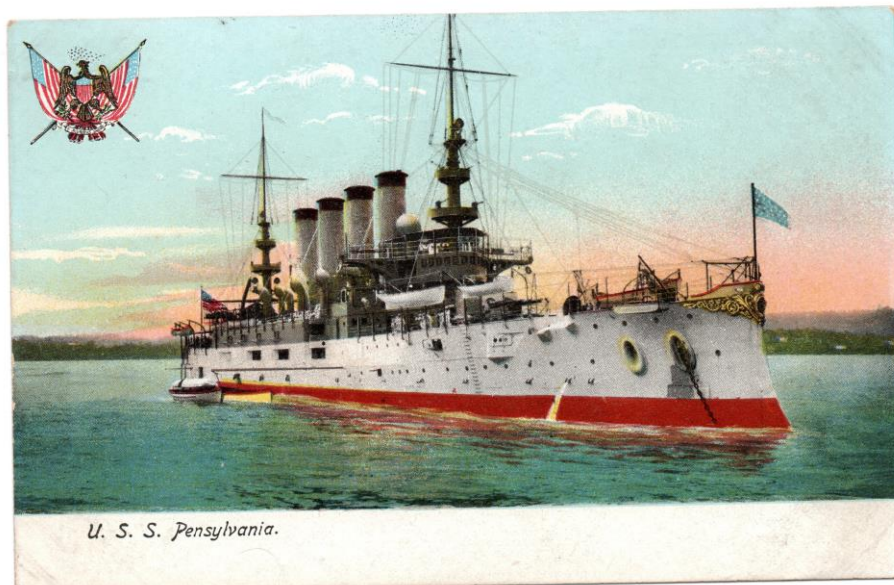
In 1971, a memorial to the *USS Wilkes-Barre* was installed on the courthouse lawn in Wilkes-Barre. The memorial consists of the ship's anchors and bell. There are other artifacts from the ship in the Luzerne County Historical Society Museum, including a flag from the ship, a telegraph machine, an operations manual, and a Japanese machine gun that was captured by the crew.

I then started looking for covers from ships named after Pennsylvania. I found five ships named after the state, two more with variations of the state's name, and three with the state's nickname, which is the Keystone State.



The first ship named the *USS Pennsylvania* was a ship of the line launched in 1837. There are no covers from this ship as on-board post offices were not authorized until 1908. This ship was destroyed during the Civil War to prevent her from falling into Confederate hands.

The next *USS Pennsylvania* was a screw steamer that was laid down as *Keywaden* in 1863 but never launched. She was renamed *Pennsylvania* while she lay in the ways before being broken up in 1884.



The first philatelically significant *USS Pennsylvania* was an armored cruiser (ACR-4), the lead ship of the *Pennsylvania*-class cruisers, which was launched in 1903, sponsored by Coral Quay, daughter of U.S. Senator Matthew S. Quay of Pennsylvania.



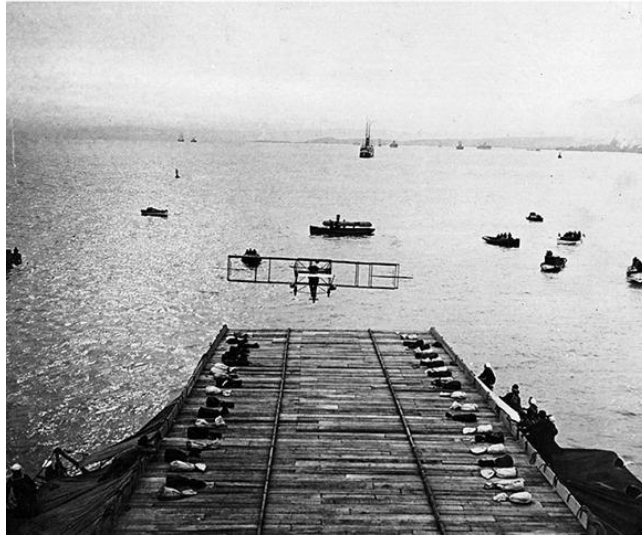
This is a New Year's postcard postmarked on a date in December in the 1910s, but some of the numbers in the postmark are unclear.

THE FIRST FLIGHT OF AN AIRPLANE LANDING ON A SHIP

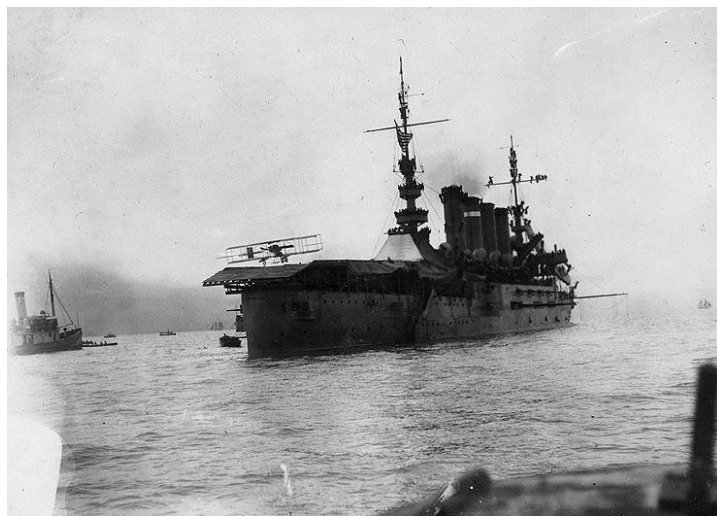


This ship ushered in the era of naval aviation and aircraft carriers. On January 18, 1911, a biplane flown by Eugene Ely from the Tanforan airfield in San Bruno, California, landed on a platform constructed on the afterdeck of the *USS Pennsylvania*. This was the first successful aircraft landing on a ship.

Photo # NH 82737 Eugene Ely about to land on USS Pennsylvania, 18 January 1911



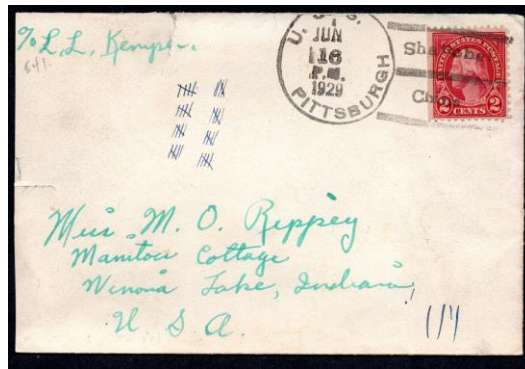
This photo shows the plane approaching the flight deck.



and this one shows the successful landing



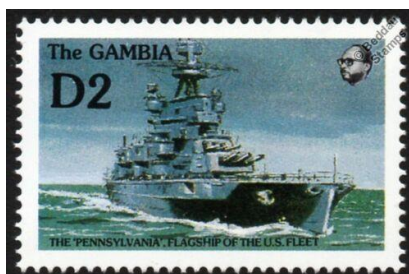
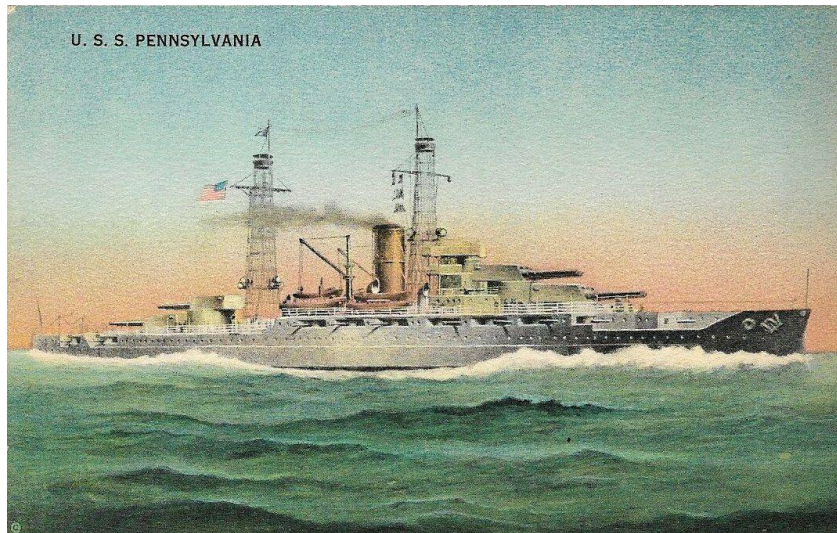
The event was commemorated on this cover.



In 1912, the ship was renamed the *USS Pittsburgh* to free up the Pennsylvania name for a battleship.



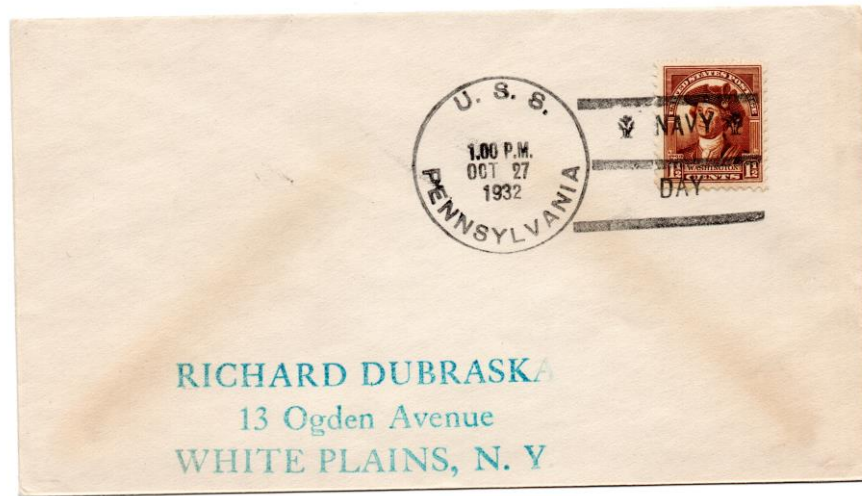
The *USS Pennsylvania* was depicted on three stamps, which show the aircraft landing. The stamp from Marshall Islands shows the plane approaching, as does the stamp from Paraguay. The one from Antigua & Barbuda shows the plane lined up for landing.



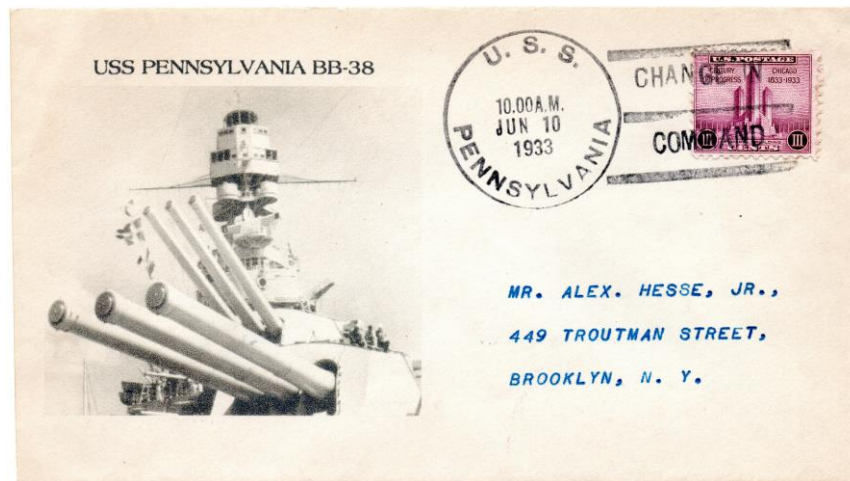
The battleship named the *USS Pennsylvania* (BB-38) was the lead ship of the *Pennsylvania*-class of battleships. She was launched in March 1915 but was not sent to Europe during WWI because the fuel she used, which was oil rather than coal, was not readily available in Europe. Instead, she took part in training exercises off the east coast of the U.S. This ship was depicted on a stamp from the Gambia.



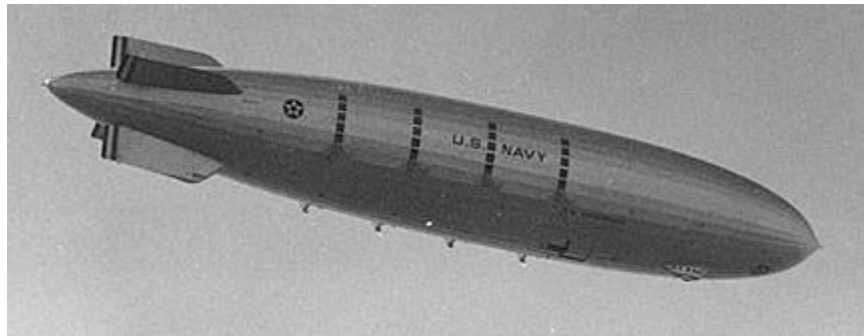
This postcard was sent from the *Pennsylvania* on October 5, 1919. It looks like the sender wrote, “Still living.” Apparently, the ship was in Brest, France, as that is the picture on the postcard.



The *USS Pennsylvania* participated in Navy Day in 1932.



In 1933, there was a change of command as noted in the cancellation.



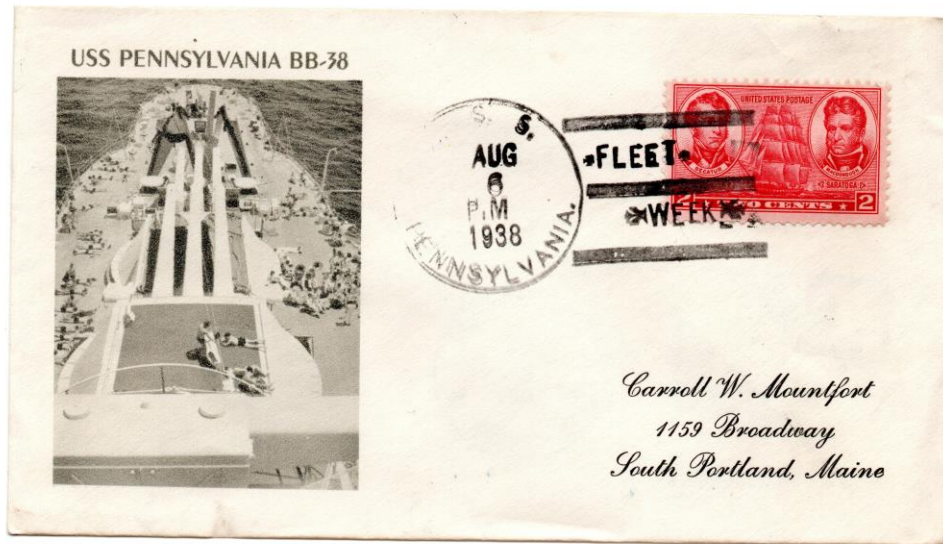
The *USS Macon* (ZRS-5) was a rigid airship launched in 1933.



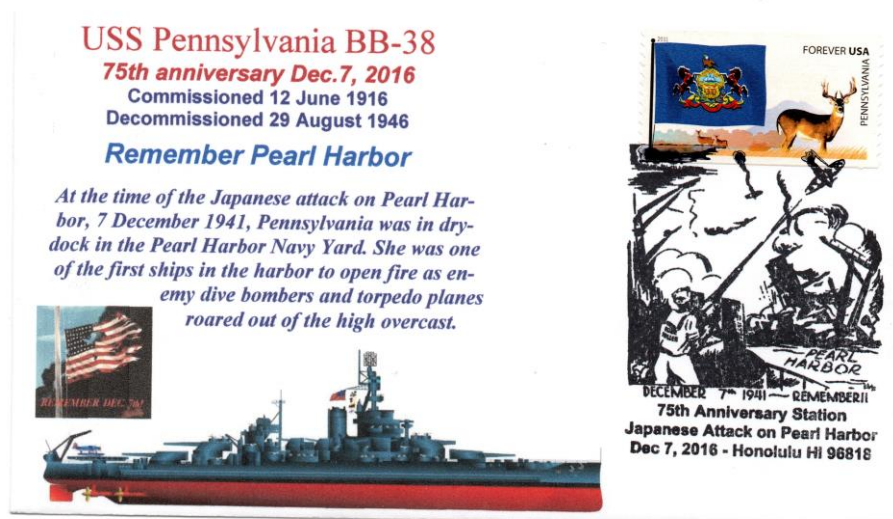
The *Macon* was sighted by the *USS Pennsylvania* off the coast of California in January 1935. On Feb. 12, the *Macon* ran into a storm off Point Sur, California, and crashed into the sea.



The *Pennsylvania* sailed to the scene and participated in rescue operations. Only two crew members of the *Macon* were lost thanks to the warm water and the availability of life jackets and inflatable rafts. Those who did not survive were one man who jumped ship while still too high above the ocean surface to survive the fall, and the other drowned while swimming back into the wreckage to retrieve personal belongings.



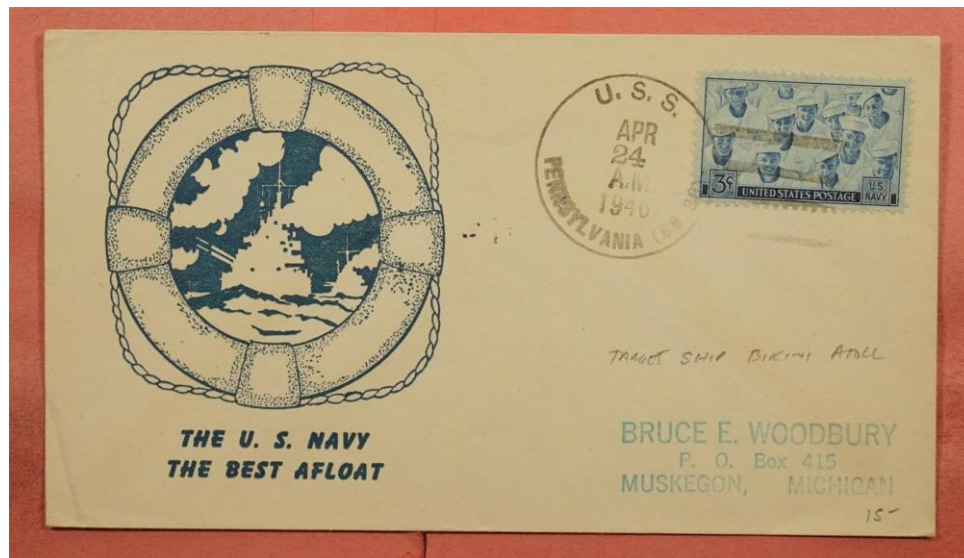
Fleet Week is a U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard tradition in which active military ships recently deployed in overseas operations dock in a variety of major U.S. cities for one week. Once the ships dock, the crews can enter the city and visit its tourist attractions. At certain hours, the public can take guided tours of the ships. The *USS Pennsylvania* participated in Fleet Week in 1938.



The ship was in dry-dock at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack, as remembered on this anniversary cover. The crew took to their battle stations and engaged the enemy with anti-aircraft fire. The ship was hit by strafing and by bombs, and 15 men were killed. The ship was not badly damaged and was able to sail to San Francisco for repairs. Then she returned to action in the Pacific.



The *Pennsylvania* was assigned to the target fleet for the Operation Crossroads nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll in 1946.



The ship left Puget Sound on February 24. This cover was mailed on her final voyage. The ship arrived at Bikini Atoll on May 31. She survived two tests but was badly contaminated in the second test. The ship was studied for about a year and a half and then scuttled off Bikini Atoll in 1948.



Two of the 14-inch guns from the *Pennsylvania* that were on the ship during the Pearl Harbor attack were removed during a 1945 overhaul, and these guns are now on display at the Pennsylvania Military Museum in Boalsburg.



This is the plaque on the gun display.



One bell from the ship is at the Pennsylvania Military Museum.



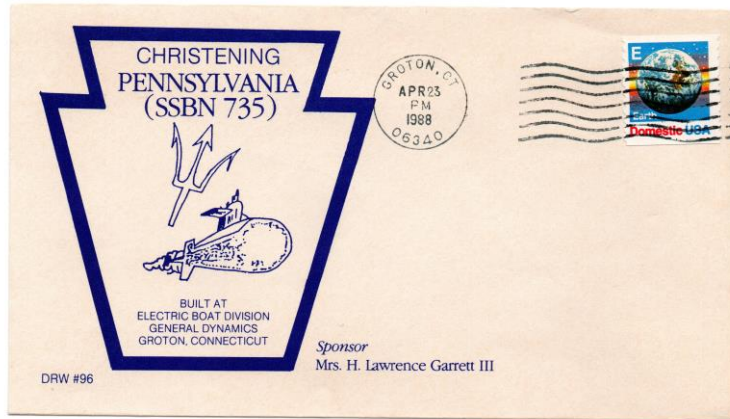
Another bell from the ship is in front of ROTC headquarters at Penn State University in State College.



The latest of the ships named after Pennsylvania is an *Ohio*-class ballistic missile nuclear submarine (SSBN-735).



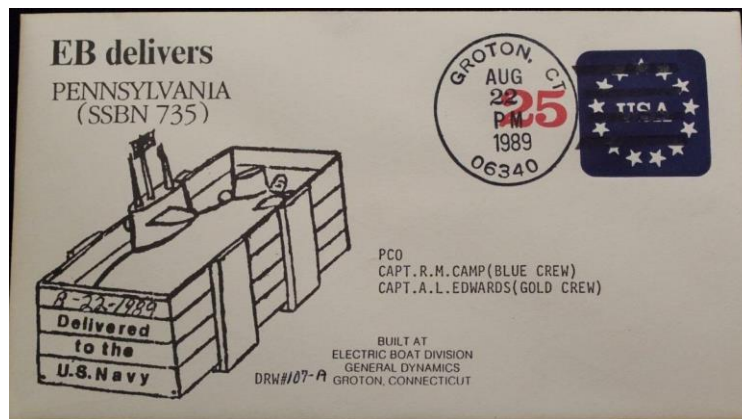
The *Ohio*-class subs are the largest U.S. submarines ever built.



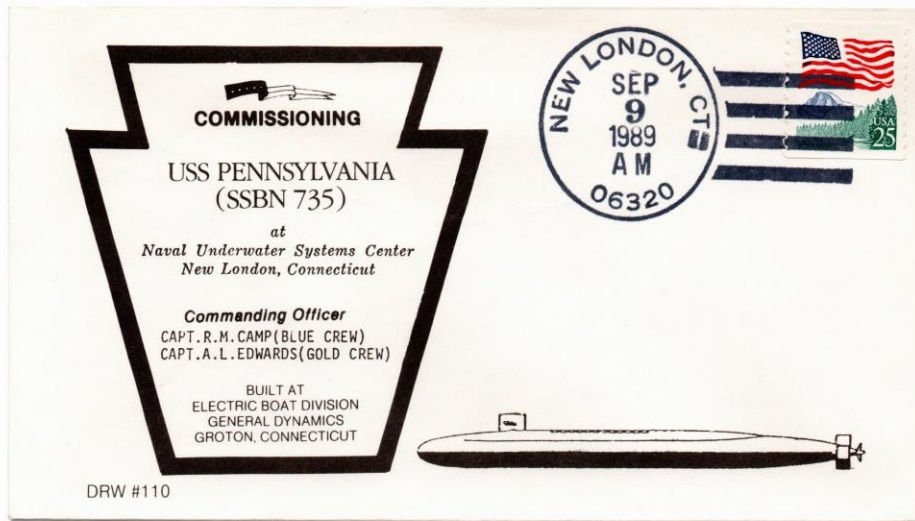
I have several covers tracing the history of the sub. The boat was christened on April 23, 1988, at Groton, Connecticut, in a ceremony sponsored by Mrs. Henry Lawrence Garrett III. Garrett was Secretary of the Navy under President George H.W. Bush.



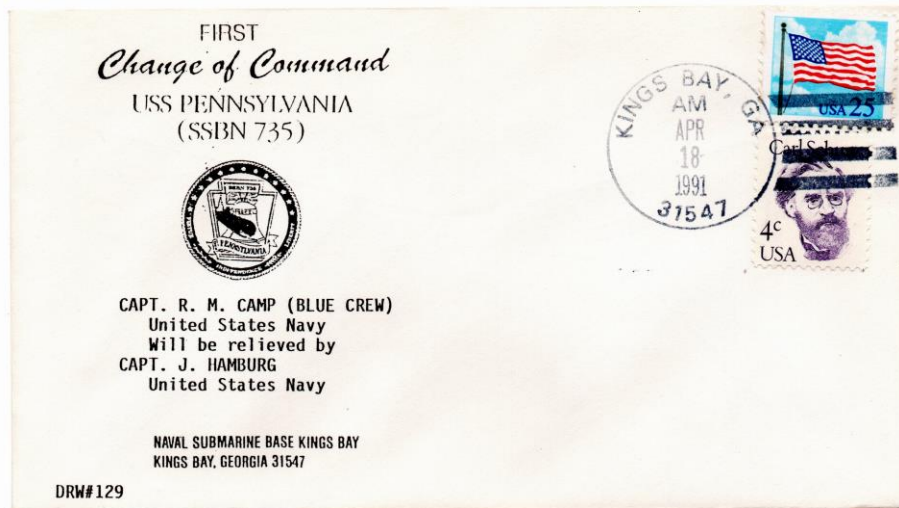
After launch, the ship underwent sea trials...



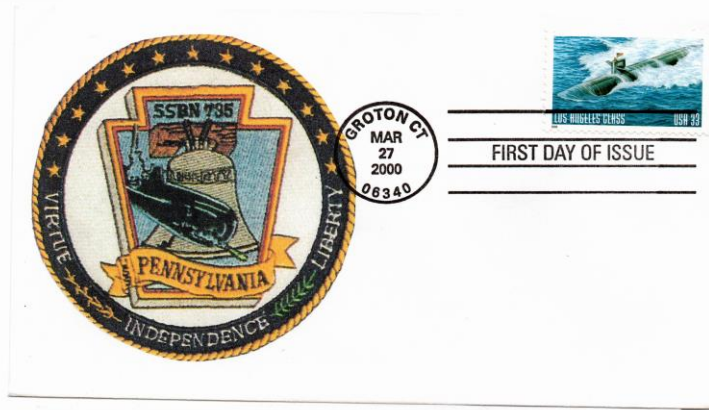
...was delivered to the Navy on August 22, 1989...



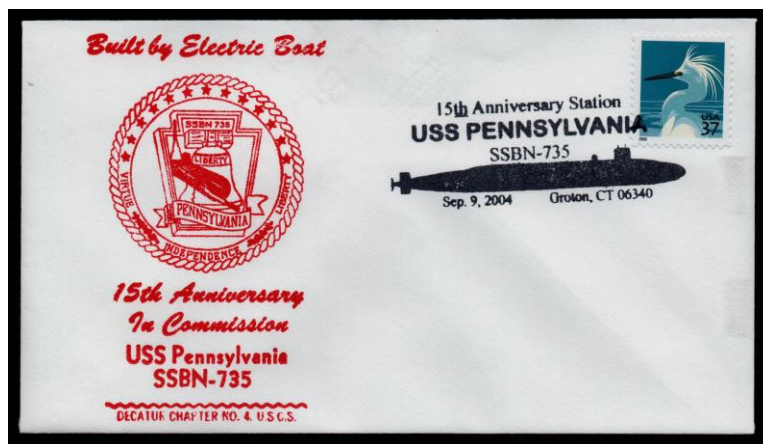
...and was commissioned on September 9, 1989, with Captain Richard M. Camp commanding the Blue Crew, and Captain Lee Edwards commanding the Gold Crew. Each missile-firing nuclear submarine has two full crews, named Blue and Gold. While one crew takes the sub out to sea, the other remains at the home port.



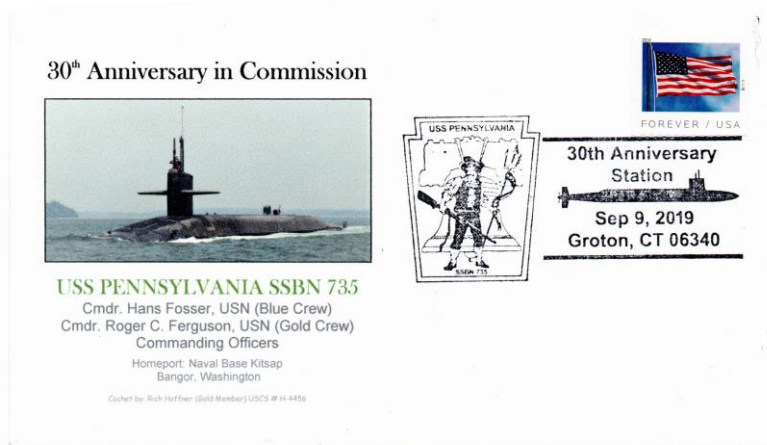
The boat underwent its first change of command on April 18, 1991, with Captain J. Hamburg taking over command of the Blue Crew.



The sub is currently in service. The stamp on this cover doesn't match as the *Pennsylvania* is an *Ohio*-class sub, not a *Los Angeles*-class.



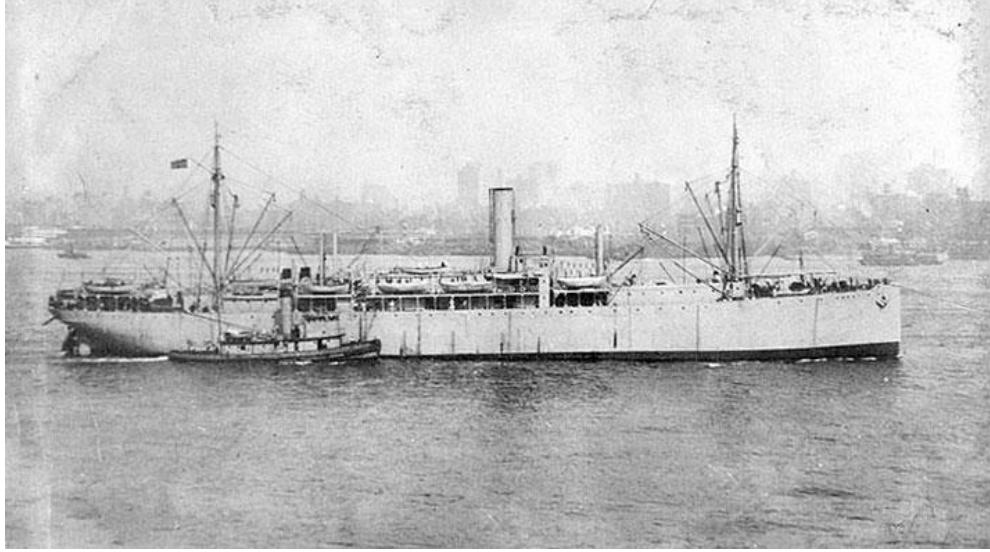
The boat celebrated the 15th anniversary of its commissioning in September 2004.



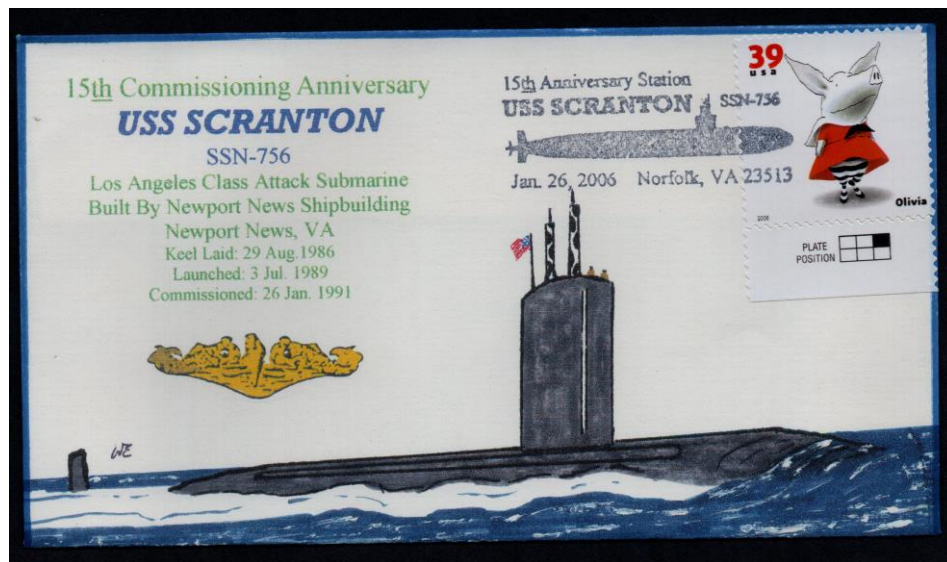
And her 30th anniversary in September 2019.



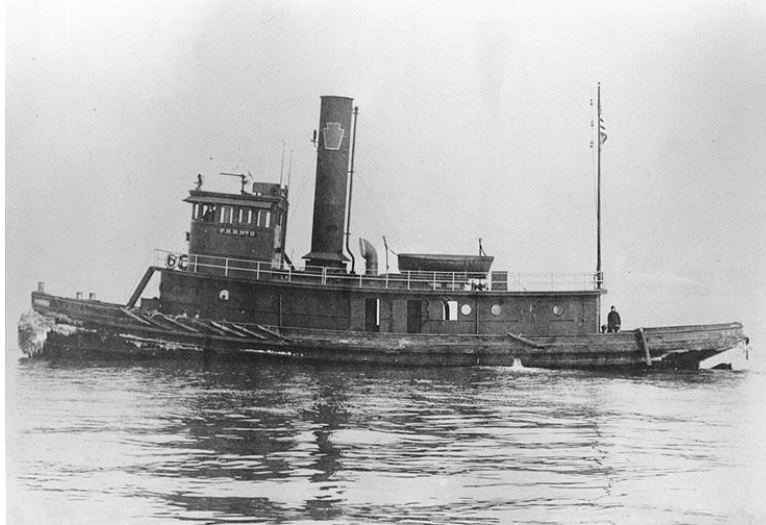
I haven't found any covers postmarked aboard the submarine, but this is an image of the postmark I found online.



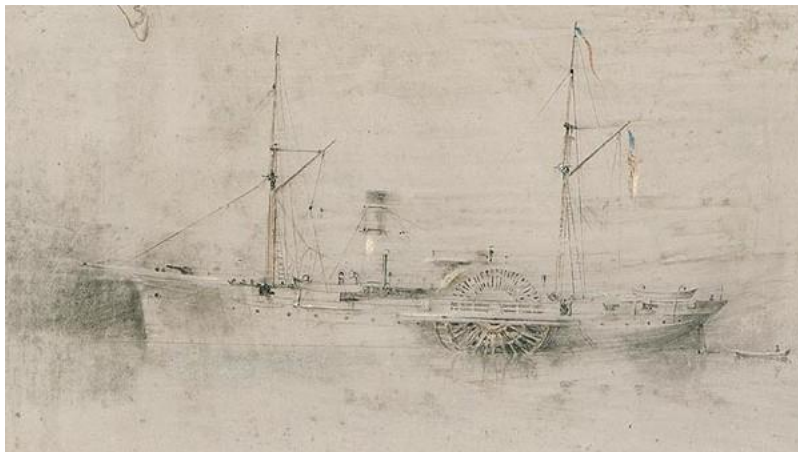
I found two ships with variations of the Pennsylvania name. The *SS Pennsylvania* was a cargo ship built in 1913 for the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company. During World War I, she was requisitioned by the U.S. Navy and commissioned as *USS Pennsylvania* (ID-3511) in September 1918, and renamed two months later to *USS Scranton*, which is a city near Wilkes-Barre. After her naval service, her original name of *Pennsylvanian* was restored. I haven't found any covers from this ship.



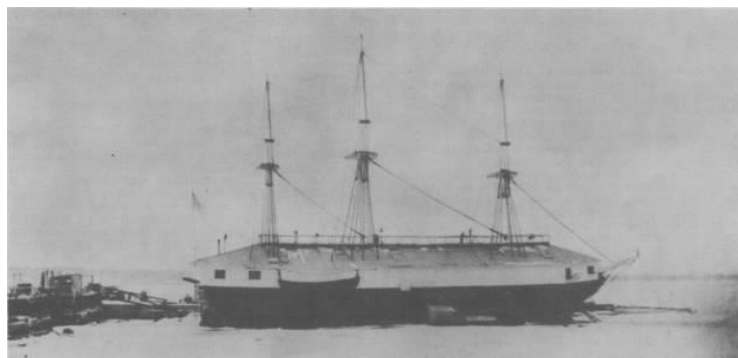
Speaking of the *USS Scranton*, this is a later ship with the same name, a submarine with the hull number SSN-756. The cover commemorates her 15th anniversary of commissioning on January 26, 2006. This is a *Los Angeles*-class attack submarine that is still in service.



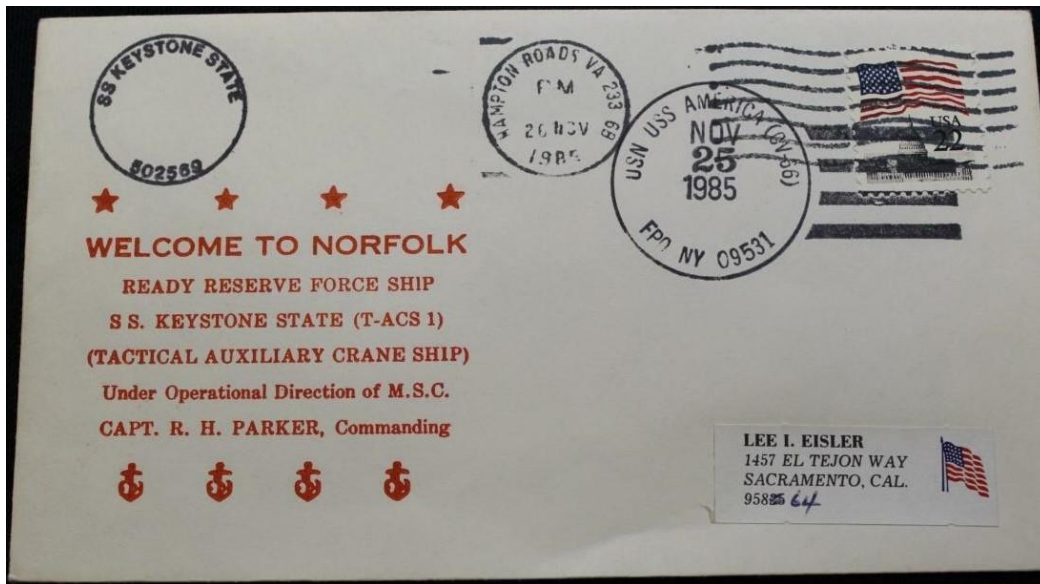
The *USS Pennsylvania R.R. No. 9* (SP-679) was built for the Pennsylvania Railroad and was commissioned as a U.S. Navy armed tug and minesweeper from 1917 to 1919. After that, it was returned to the railroad. I haven't found any covers from this ship.



There were also three ships named after Pennsylvania's nickname. The first *USS Keystone State* was a wooden side wheel steamer used by the U.S. Navy during the Civil War.



The second *USS Keystone State* was the former sloop-of-war *St. Louis*, which was renamed *Keystone State* on November 30, 1904. Both of these ships were in service before on-board post offices were authorized.



Another ship, the *SS Keystone State* (T-ACS-1) is a tactical auxiliary crane ship launched in 1965 and currently in service.

Now for a little geography lesson. Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is located in the Wyoming Valley, which is in a range of the Appalachians that also includes the Poconos. The Susquehanna River flows through the valley. The area is part of Luzerne County. I found ships named after all of these places.

The name “Wyoming” comes from a people known as the Wyomink, who were the earliest settlers in this region. Artifacts on display at the Luzerne County Historical Society Museum show that the Wyomink had lived in this area from 8000 to 1000 B.C. The state of Wyoming was named after the Wyoming Valley.

I found four ships named the *USS Wyoming*. The first one was named after the Wyoming Valley while the other three were named after the state. However, since the state was named after the valley, I still consider that a local connection.



The first *USS Wyoming* was a steam sloop launched in 1859. This was the ship that was named after the Wyoming Valley. She operated off the California coast during the Civil War on the Union side. She also fought off the coast of Japan, including the Battle of the Straits of

Shimonoseki in 1863, winning the first-ever U.S. naval victory over Japan. In 1868, the ship sailed for the Atlantic and saw service at the North Atlantic Station, European Station, and the Naval Academy. There were no ship postmarks from this vessel as post offices on U.S. Navy ships were not authorized at the time.



Shown at left is a letter sent from the *Wyoming* in 1879 while she was at the European Station. This letter was sent from Cadiz, Spain, to Nice, France. I do not have this cover, but I found it on eBay, with an opening bid of \$175. I found three more similar letters from the same seller, and they all had three-figure opening bids.

The ship was decommissioned in October 1882 and spent the next decade as a practice ship for midshipmen from the U.S. Naval Academy.

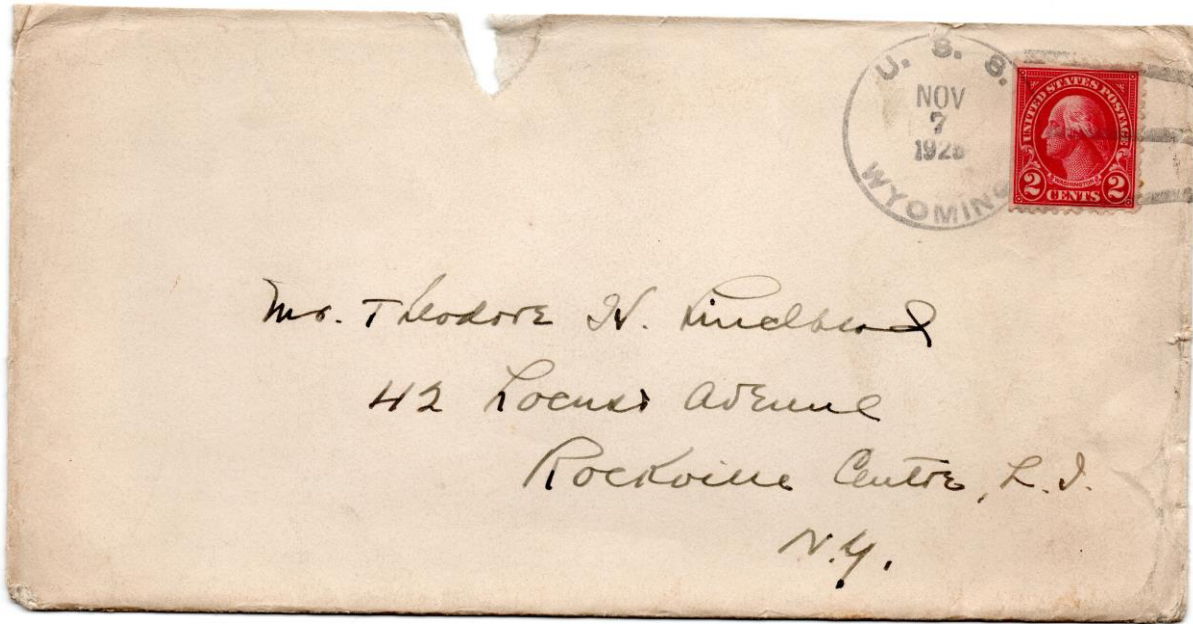


The next *USS Wyoming* was a small warship known as a monitor (BM-10), commissioned in December 1902. She was renamed *Cheyenne* in January 1909 to clear the name *Wyoming* for the projected Battleship No. 32. I haven't found any covers from this ship, and I don't know if it even had an onboard post office.

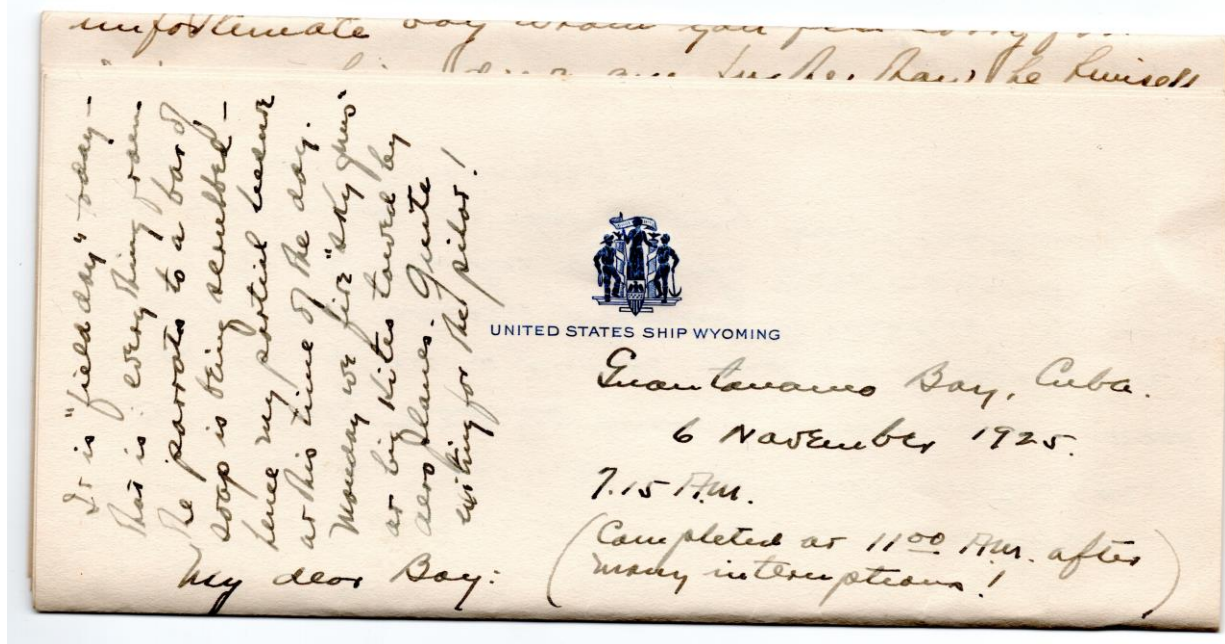
Photo # NH 73825 USS Wyoming passing through the Gaillard Cut, Panama Canal, 26 July 1919



The battleship *USS Wyoming* (BB-32) was a dreadnaught battleship commissioned in September 1912, which saw service in the Atlantic and the Pacific.



This cover was mailed from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on November 7, 1925, from Lieutenant Lindblad to his son.



Inside is a six-page letter on "United States Ship Wyoming" letterhead. The lieutenant noted that "It is 'field day'—that is everything from the parrots to a bar of soap is being scrubbed."

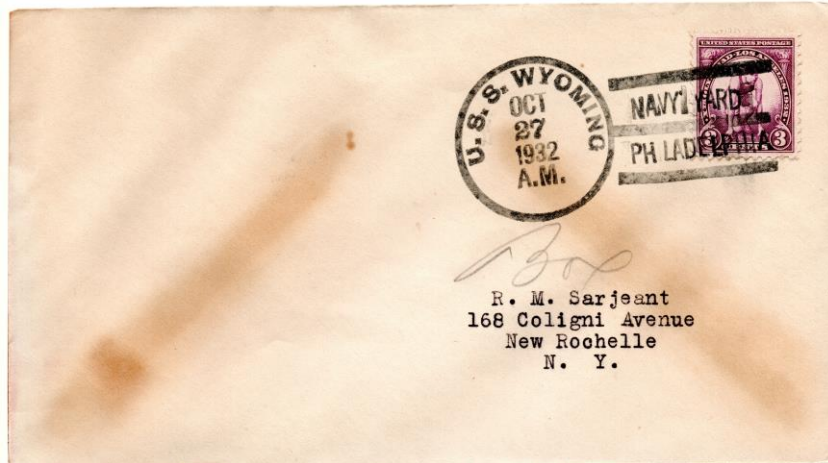


The *Wyoming* was demilitarized in 1931 and converted to a training ship.

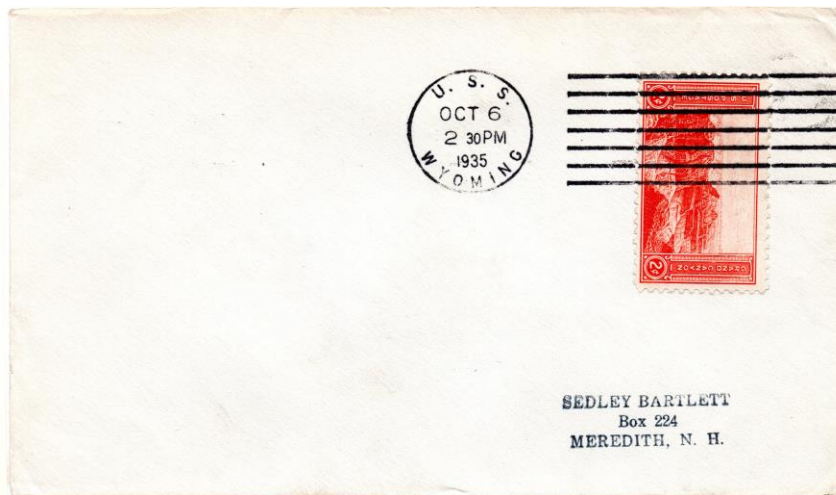
Photo # NH 90498 USS Wyoming (AG-17), circa 1935



During the demilitarization process, the ship's anti-torpedo bulges, side armor, and half of the main battery guns were removed. As a training ship, her designation was AG-17.



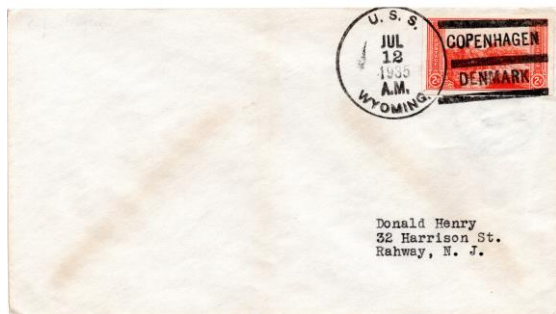
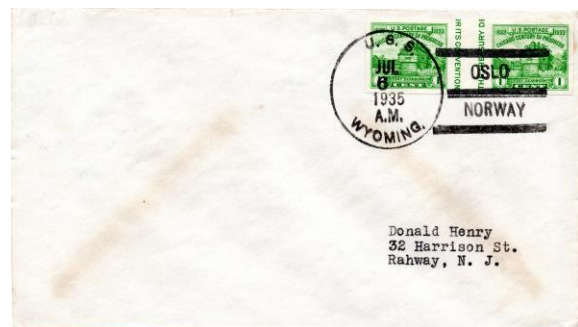
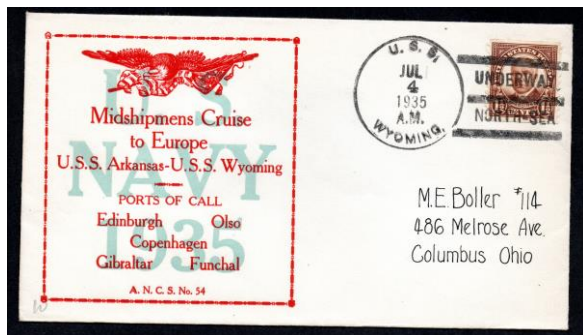
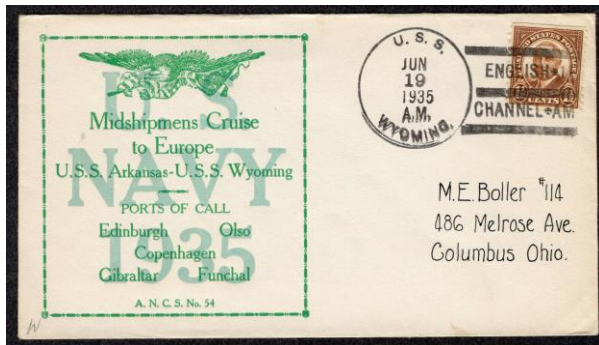
This cover is from Navy Day in 1932 and has a handstamp cancel.



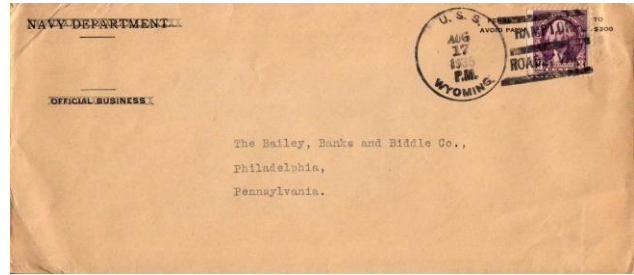
This one from 1935 has a machine cancel.



One of the ship's missions as a training vessel was the annual summer cruise. This trip to Europe gave midshipmen from the Naval Academy at Annapolis training and experience in commanding the crew of a Navy ship.



I have a dozen covers tracing the *USS Wyoming's* 1935 summer cruise, which I will go through quickly. She left Annapolis on June 7 and was in the mid-Atlantic on Flag Day. She entered the English Channel on June 19 and reached Edinburgh on June 22. The crew celebrated the Fourth of July in the North Sea before reaching Oslo on July 6, and they went on to Copenhagen on July 12. It took a couple of weeks to get down to Gibraltar.

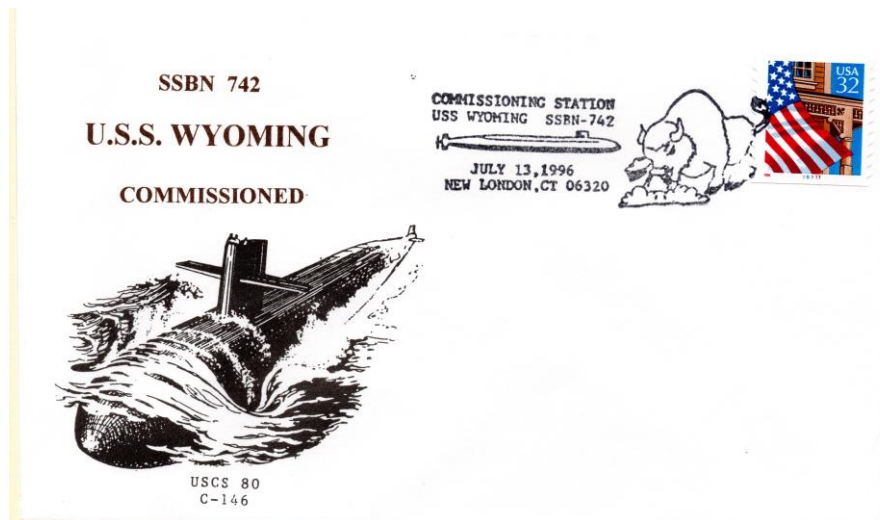


The ship then went on to Funchal on Madeira Islands, reaching that port on August 1. On the way home, she stopped in Hampton Roads, Virginia, and Lynnhaven Roads, Virginia. The ship was back in Annapolis on August 27—a voyage of nearly 12 weeks.

The *Wyoming* continued operating as a training ship in the Atlantic during World War II, was decommissioned in August 1947, and was scrapped at the end of the year.



The fourth *USS Wyoming* (SSBN-742) is an *Ohio*-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine.



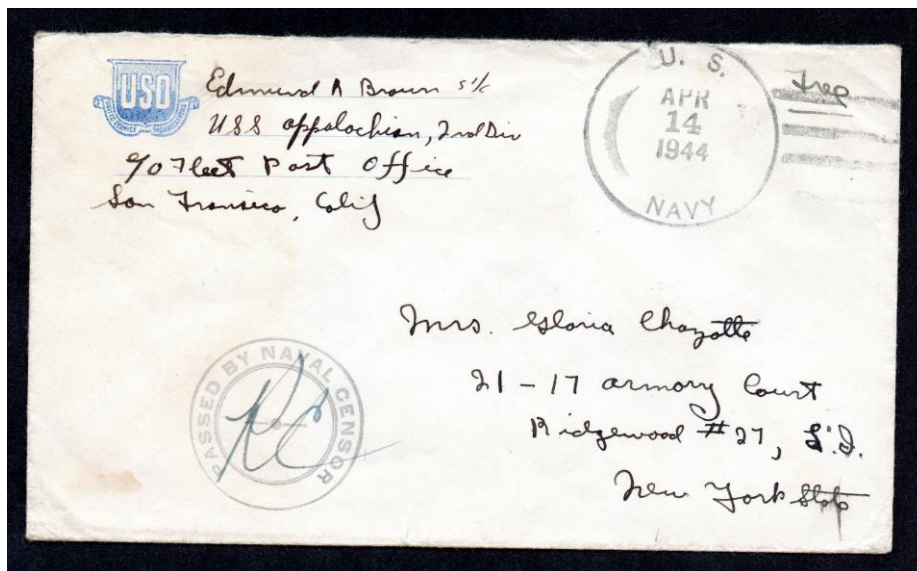
The *USS Wyoming* was commissioned in July 1996. The sub is still in active service and was assigned to the Atlantic Fleet, homeported at Kings Bay, Georgia.



The boat was honored on a stamp issued by the Marshall Islands in 2000.



The *USS Appalachian* (AGC-1), an amphibious force command ship, was named after the mountains that form the Wyoming Valley. The ship was launched on January 29, 1943.



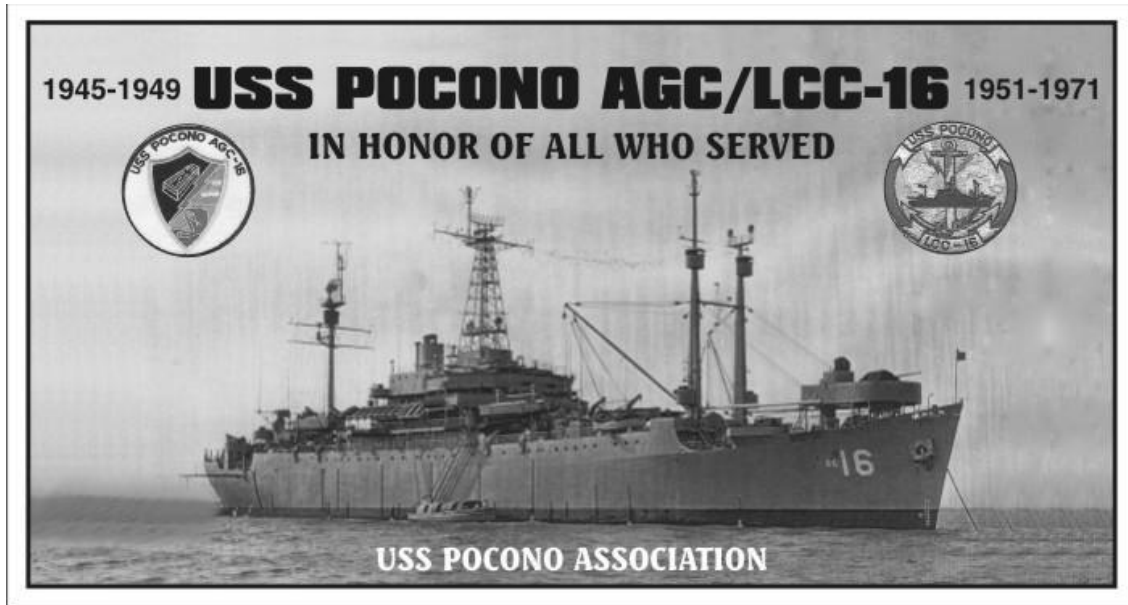
This cover is from 1944 and had to pass through a naval censor.



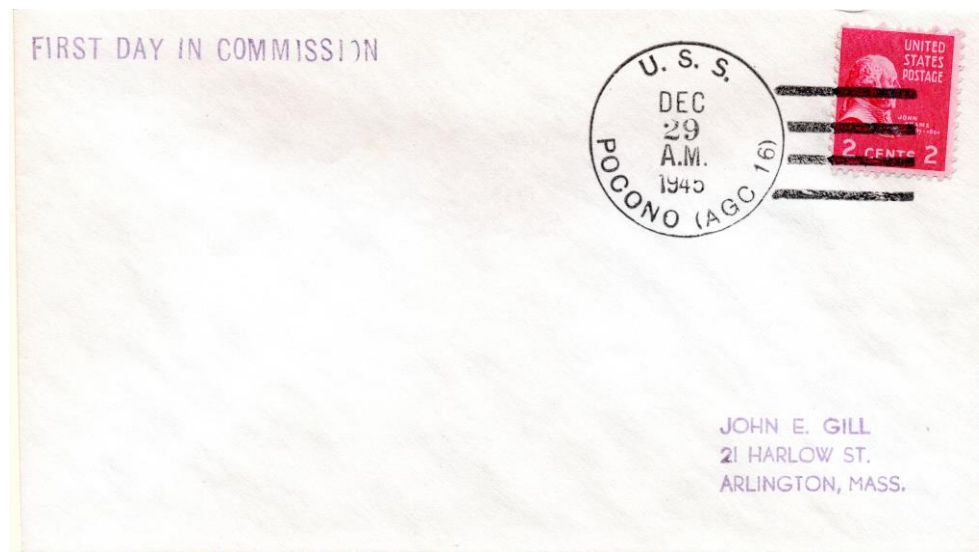
She joined the *USS Pennsylvania* at Bikini Atoll in 1946, but as a support ship, not a target ship. This cover was mailed on July 1, 1946...



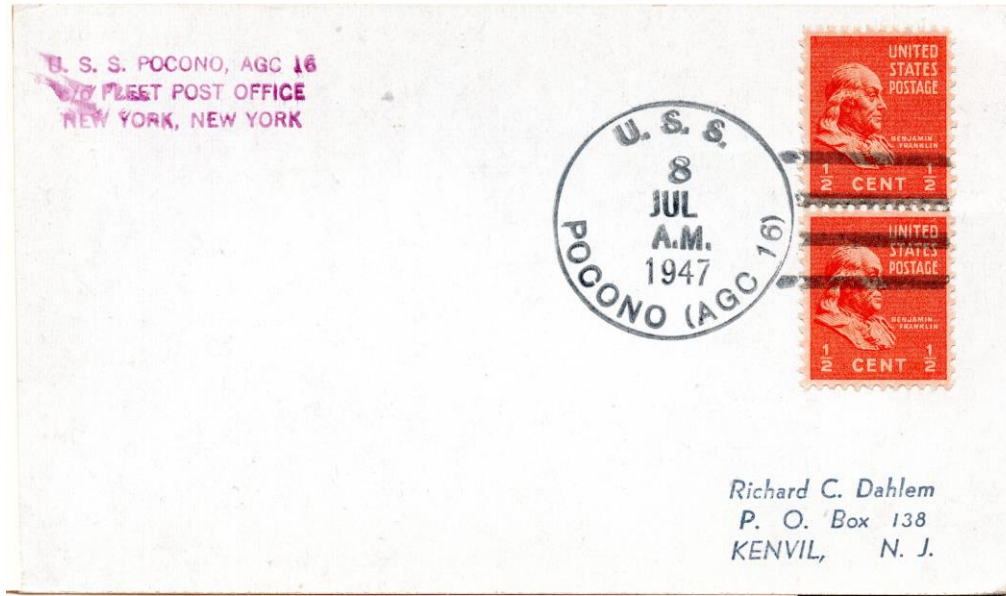
...possibly when the ship was sailing for Bikini Atoll. The ship was decommissioned in 1947 and sold for scrap in 1960.



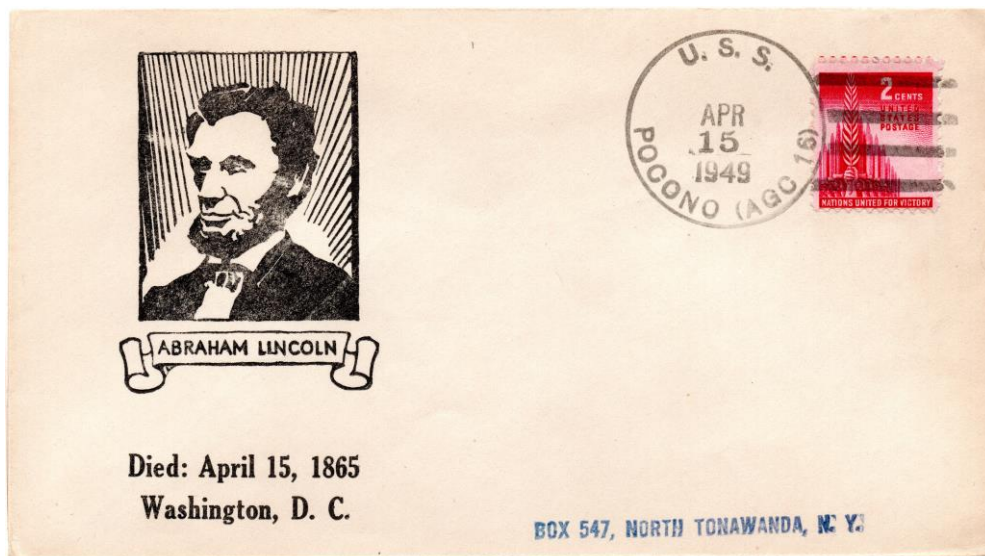
The *USS Pocono* (AGC/LCC-16), named after the nearby Poconos, was an *Adirondack*-class amphibious force command ship.



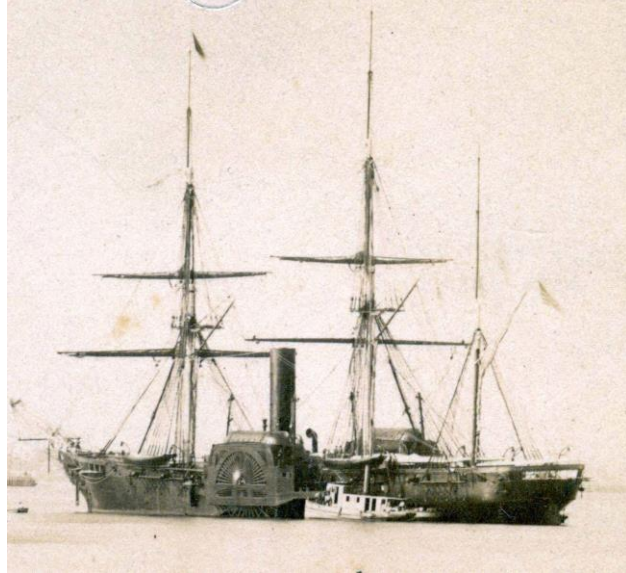
She was commissioned on December 29, 1945, and operated off the Atlantic coast.



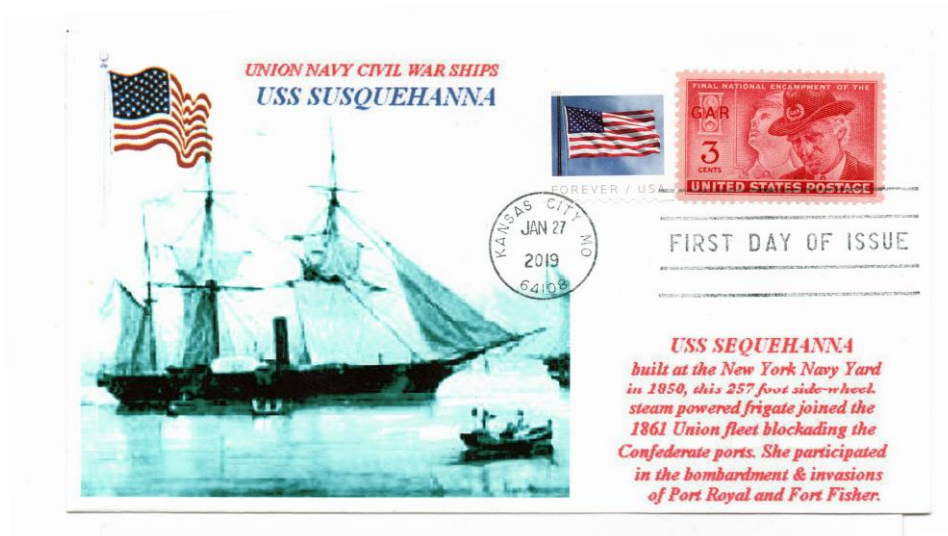
Early in 1948, she was the flagship of Admiral W.H.P. Blandy, Commander of the Atlantic Fleet.



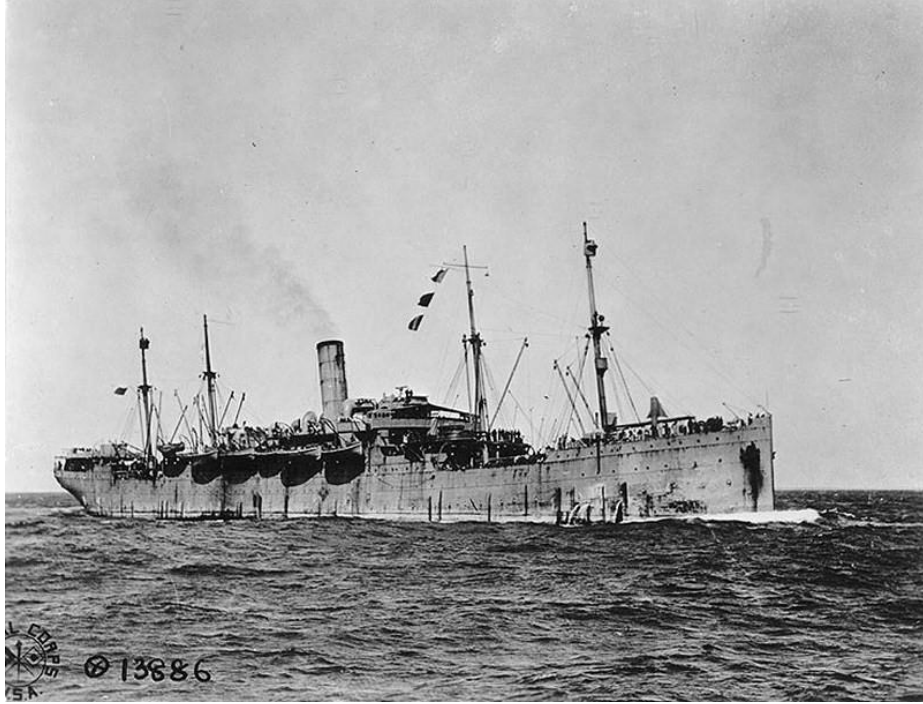
The ship was decommissioned at Norfolk in June 1949, recommissioned in 1951, and scrapped at the end of 1981.



Four ships were named the *Susquehanna*, after the river that flows through Wyoming Valley. The first was a side-wheel steamer launched in 1850 that fought in the Civil War. She was assigned to the Atlantic Blockading Squadron in 1861 at Hampton Roads, Virginia.



This cover commemorates the ship.



The second *Susquehanna* (ID-3016 aka TT-3016) was a German passenger steamship that was seized at Baltimore upon the outbreak of World War I and used as a troop transport. Covers from this ship are rare with fewer than 25 known.



The third *Susquehanna* was a gasoline tanker (AOG-5) that was launched in 1942 and served in the Pacific during World War II.



The fourth was *USNS Susquehanna* (T-AO-185), which was a Falcon-class transport tanker. She was launched in 1972 as the civilian ship *Falcon Countess* and later leased by the US Navy and renamed. The ship had no postal facilities. This cover was mailed in 1977. She was taken out of service in 1983 and returned to her owners in 1984.



Launched in 1944, the *USS Luzerne County* (LST-902) was a landing ship that served in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Wyoming Valley is in Luzerne County.



This photo shows her at Vung Tau, Vietnam, where, coincidentally, a member of the Wyoming Valley Stamp Club was stationed. The ship earned two battle stars for the Korean War, one award of the Meritorious Unit Commendation, and 12 battle stars for Vietnam service.





She was decommissioned in 1970. The bell from the ship is at Marine Corps Logistics Base in Barstow, California.



There were a number of Victory Ships named after American cities. One of these is the SS *Pittston Victory*. Pittston is at the northern end of Wyoming Valley. There are also Victory Ships named after Plymouth, Kingston, and Luzerne, which are the names of towns in the valley, though they may not all be the local towns. The *Plymouth* was probably named after the Massachusetts city, and there are several Kingstons in the U.S.

The Victory ship was a class of cargo ship produced in large numbers during World War II. They were a more modern design compared to the earlier Liberty ships.

Another category for my collection would be ships named after local personages, but I couldn't find any locals who had ships named after them.



This photo shows many of the places mentioned in this presentation. This is a shot of the Wyoming Valley, which is in Pennsylvania, aka the Keystone State. You can see the Susquehanna River and a portion of the Appalachian Mountains. On the right is the city of Wilkes-Barre, and in the upper right is the courthouse of Luzerne County.



While doing research, I came across some insignia for Navy postal clerks. This is the insignia for a mail clerk who is a Petty Officer First Class (E6).



By the way, I was a mail clerk for about two years when I was in the Army. Here I am carrying the day's mail for the battalion from the Second Armored Division mail truck. Talk about an assignment that was right up my alley.

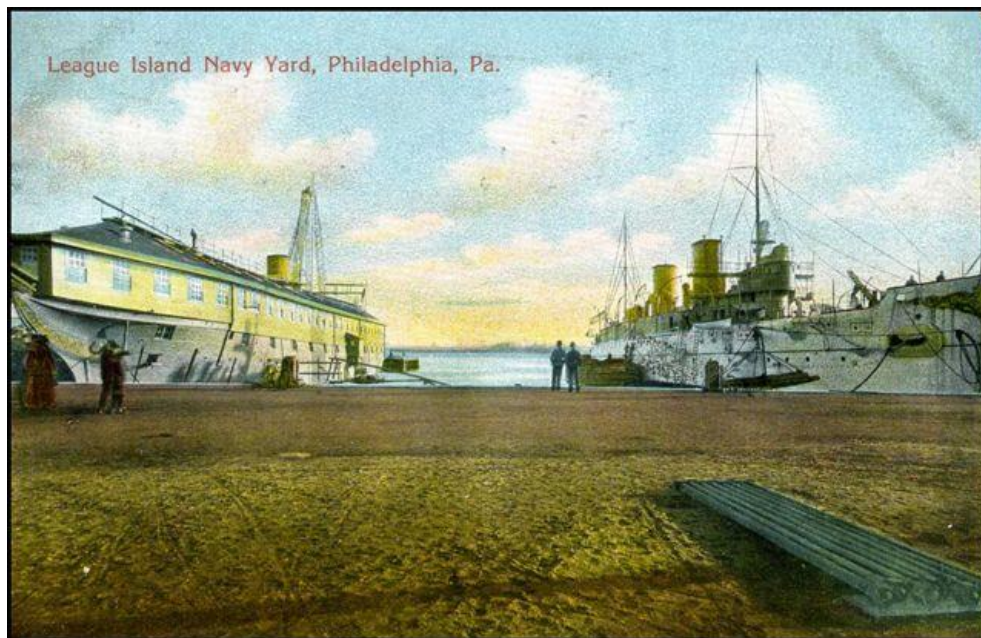
It would be easy for you to start your own "USS Local" collection. Besides having covers from ships named after Pennsylvania, the Susquehanna River, and the Appalachians, you can Google local places with "USS" before the name to find the ships, and then search eBay and other sources for the covers.



For instance, this is one of the ships named *USS Lancaster*, which is a screw sloop that was launched in 1858.



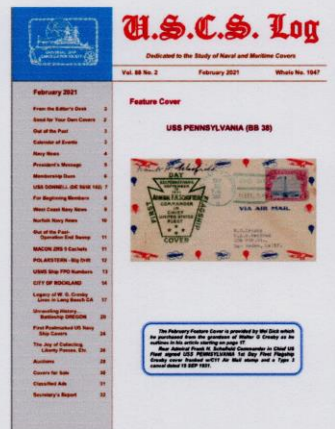
This is a cover from the ship. The marking on the left is not a postmark as post offices were not authorized on ships at this time.



This postcard shows the *Lancaster* as a receiving ship at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. She is on the left and the *USS Wyoming* is on the right. The postcard is postmarked May 18, 1909, but I don't have an image of the address side.



<https://uscs.org/>



FREE OFFER FROM THE UNIVERSAL SHIP CANCELLATION SOCIETY

Interested in US Naval, Marine, Coast Guard, and Maritime Postal History? How about foreign navies and merchant vessels? Or topics like Antarctic expeditions, space launch recovery missions, sunken ships, ocean liners, or the like? All of that and more is the domain of the Universal Ship Cancellation Society, which boasts an award-winning monthly journal (the *Log*) and a museum, website, facebook presence, chat room, sales circuit, and publications. We would like for you to get to know us, so if at all interested, please send your email address to USCS Secretary Steve Shay at shaymur@flash.net. We will send you the next three monthly issues of the *Log* by email – free, with no obligation.

If you are interested, you can join the Universal Ship Cancellation Society, which is a group that collects naval covers. They have a monthly journal, a ton of information on their website, and sales and auctions of naval covers.

Thank you. Any questions?

USS Local: A Follow-Up

It turns out there were questions, so I thought I would address them in this follow-up.

Useful Links

You can find more information about U.S. Navy ships and naval covers at these websites:

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs.html>
<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/OnlineLibrary/photos/shusn-no/usnsh-no.htm>
https://www.nvr.navy.mil/QUICKFIND/SHIPSDETAIL_HULL_2.HTML
<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc.html>
<https://www.csp.navy.mil/>
<https://navsource.org/>
<https://uscs.org/resources/naval-cover-museum/>

Establishment of Shipboard Post Offices

On June 27, 1908, Navy General Order 74 established post offices on board Navy ships. *USS Rhode Island*, *Illinois*, and *Prairie* were the first ships to open mail service, on August 15, 1908.

Submarines had on-board post offices before World War II. Sometime after the war, those post offices were removed and all subsequent covers were cancelled at shore stations, civilian post offices, or surface ships.

Eugene Ely's Naval Aviation Firsts

Eugene Ely performed the first take-off from a ship on November 14, 1910. He took off in a Curtiss Pusher from a temporary, 83-foot platform erected over the bow of the light cruiser *USS Birmingham* as she lay anchored off Old Point Comfort, Hampton Roads, Virginia. Ely landed about two and a half miles away on Willoughby Spit.

A couple of months later, Ely performed the first landing on a ship. At 10:48 on January 18, 1911, he flew the same Curtiss Pusher from Selfridge Field, south of San Francisco, and headed for the *USS Pennsylvania* while she lay at anchor off Hunters Point in San Francisco Bay. Demonstrating the first recorded use of a tailhook system, the plane made a smooth landing at 11:01 from astern onto a specially built 130-by-32-foot platform. At 11:58, the plane took off and returned to Selfridge Field.

Thus, Eugene Ely successfully completed the earliest demonstrations of the adaptability of aircraft to shipboard operations.

A downward-curved flight deck, such as the one on the *Pennsylvania*, helps a plane get into the air by giving it more lift. This is used when the ship is not equipped with a catapult.

The State of Wyoming and Wyoming Valley

The state of Wyoming was named after the Wyoming Valley in northeastern Pennsylvania. U.S. Representative James M. Ashley of Ohio proposed the name “Wyoming Territory” in 1865. Ashley was born in Pennsylvania and was familiar with the Wyoming Valley.

Perhaps Ashley was inspired by Thomas Campbell’s poem “Gertrude of Wyoming,” which is about the Battle of Wyoming, also known as the Wyoming Massacre. That battle took place in the Wyoming Valley on July 3, 1778. The poem made Wyoming a popular name for places in the United States.