

# The Inman Steamship Company Limited: Innovation and Competition on the North Atlantic, 1850-1886

## William Henry Flayhart III

*De 1850 à 1886, la compagnie de navires à vapeur de Liverpool, New York et Philadelphie (Inman Line) fut l'une des entreprises maritimes les plus importantes de l'Atlantique Nord. Elle demeure à ce jour l'une des plus célèbres des grandes lignes de navires à vapeur du XIX siècle. Les principales voies desservies liaient Liverpool à Philadelphie et New York. La contribution la plus révolutionnaire de l Inman Line aux échanges de l'Atlantique Nord fut le transport régulier de passagers immigrants à bord de navires de première classe. Auparavant, les immigrants désireux de traverser l'Atlantique étaient forcés de réserver leur place sur des voiliers. L Inman mit en vogue le concept du transport d'immigrants sur navires à vapeur et transforma l'industrie.*

In the 1860s and 1870s the Liverpool, New York & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company, universally known by its nickname, the "Inman Line," was one of the premier maritime enterprises on the North Atlantic. It remains one of the most famous and celebrated of all the great nineteenth century steamship lines carrying on the trade between Europe and America. While the primary routes served were from Liverpool to Philadelphia and New York, feeder services were developed from the Continent, such as the port of Antwerp, which resulted in a wider casting of the net for cargo and passengers.

The origin of the Inman Line lies with William Inman of Leicester, England, who was born on 6 April 1825.<sup>1</sup> Inman was the fourth son of Charles Inman, a partner in the freight distribution firm of Pickford and Company, and his wife, Jane Clay Inman. The elder Inman retired from Pickfords and moved to Liverpool where William Inman grew up and was educated. He attended the Collegiate Institute at Liverpool and the Liverpool Royal Institution. Upon leaving school William Inman served as a clerk to Nathan Cairns, then moved on to Cater & Company and, finally, to one of the leading Liverpool ship-broking firms, Richardson Brothers & Company. Richardson Brothers (Liverpool) were joint owners with Richardson Watson & Company of Philadelphia and New York, of a regular line of sailing packets trading between Philadelphia and Liverpool.

Mr. Thomas Richardson, the senior partner of Richardson, Watson & Co., New York and Philadelphia, and Richardson, Spence & Co., Liverpool, was

<sup>1</sup> Arthur J. Maginnis, *The Atlantic Ferry, Its Ships, Men, and Working* (London, 1900), 205.

a brother of the senior member of Richardson Brothers & Co., and managed the shipping department. Mr. Thomas Richardson strongly urged the policy of carrying steerage passengers by steamers, and as a matter of fact the first steerage passengers carried by the [Inman] Company were by his direction booked from Philadelphia to Liverpool.<sup>2</sup>

At Richardson Brothers, Liverpool, young Inman found his place and rose to become a partner in the firm at the age of 24, in January 1849. Under the patronage of Thomas Richardson, Inman had proven adept at managing the Richardson Brothers' fleet of American sailing packets. In association with Thomas Richardson, it was said that Inman was one of the earliest ship managers to have a keen appreciation of the immigrant trade in steamships and the profits to be derived from it.

In 1850 Inman watched with considerable interest the outfitting and preparation of the new iron screw steamship *City of Glasgow*, (1609 tons), built by Tod & McGregor of Glasgow and widely regarded as the first modern ocean liner in terms of design, construction, and propulsion. The person primarily responsible for the use of iron in the construction of the *City of Glasgow* and for the use of screw propulsion was Mr. David Tod, who was one of the outstanding and farseeing geniuses among Clyde shipbuilders in the 1840s and 1850s. The engines were two-g geared, one engine running at a slow rate while the screw, connected by spur wheels, ran at a faster rate, and capable of 380 horsepower. Furthermore the liner was designed from the keel up to carry both "cabin class" passengers and "steerage," while her contemporaries were fitted out only to accommodate the more expensive passenger traffic. In terms of design, propulsion and intended passenger distribution she radically different from the wooden paddle-wheelers which dominated the first class trade. The *City of Glasgow* sailed from Scotland on 15 April 1850 with 52 first class passengers, 58 second class, and "room" for 400 steerage when required. There was nearly a full passenger compliment in her high priced cabins and should have pleased the owners greatly since she also carried a fairly substantial general cargo. The *City of Glasgow* proved herself during four round voyages, but could not generate sufficient support on the Clyde for a sister-ship. Her disappointed builders sought an alternative employment for their vessel. The people who stepped in and took advantage of the situation were Thomas Richardson and William Inman, who were convinced of the advantages of the vessel over her paddle-wheel competition.

The line created by Thomas Richardson and William Inman was the Liverpool & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company. The new line took title to the *City of Glasgow* and announced that a sistership, the "*City of Philadelphia*," was building. The *City of Glasgow* left Liverpool on her first voyage for her new owners on 11 December 1850.<sup>3</sup> The liner was under the command of the famous Captain B. R. Matthews who had been master of the *Great Western*. According to Inman tradition Mr. and Mrs. William Inman were passengers on the first crossing to Philadelphia, although whether the reason was solicitousness for the new immigrant passengers may be questioned. Because of foul weather the crossing time was much slower than expected and twenty-two days elapsed before the ship docked in Philadelphia. The

<sup>2</sup> Inman and International, *History of the Inman Line* (New York, 1887), 1. This is a company history published shortly after the acquisition of Inman by Inman and International (1886), containing descriptions of the Inman, Red Star, and American Lines and their vessels and sailing schedules for 1888.

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, "Inman, William (1825-1881)," X, 457. This contends that the *City of Glasgow* sailed with 400 steerage on board on December 17, 1850. Inman and International, *History of the Inman Line* (1887), 4, concurs in the date, but leaves the number indefinite. N.R.P. Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway* (London, 1975), I, 220, states that no steerage passengers were carried until 1852. Bonsor often is correct in these matters.

homeward crossing was a much more acceptable thirteen days and sixteen hours, which compared very favourably with the best run of the Cunarders on the shorter route to Boston.

The Liverpool & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company elected to maintain the "City of X" designation of Tod & McGregor. Virtually all the ships operated by the line would be named for cities. The name of the new sistership, *City of Philadelphia*, was altered before launching and she went down the ways as the *City of Manchester*, (2109 tons). Maiden westward passages appear to have been agonizingly slow for Inman vessels. The *City of Manchester* took forty days getting to Philadelphia in July 1851, but romped across in March 1852 in well under two weeks, delivering her mails to America on the same day as the Cunard *Niagara* which sailed for Boston only twelve hours after her.

The bold decision was made between 1850 and 1852 to enter the immigrant trade using steamships, which heretofore had been the exclusive market of sailing vessels. Mid-nineteenth century class prejudice dictated that genuine first class passengers would never be willing to book passage on a vessel, no matter how luxurious she might be, if there were smelly, vermin-ridden immigrants stuffed below decks. It also was thought that the income to be derived from immigrants would not equal the cost and problems in handling them on the fastest vessels. William Inman felt differently and offered steerage tickets at six guineas. He also merged cabin accommodations into a single class and charged thirteen to twenty guineas according to the nature of the cabin. The response more than justified his expectations. Soon Inman liners were crossing with hundreds of steerage passengers on a regular basis, which made a substantial contribution to the balance sheet for each voyage.

Unfortunately for the reputation of the line, the *City of Glasgow* sailed from Liverpool on 1 March 1854, with a total of 480 passenger and crew and steamed into maritime oblivion. This was one of the first great North Atlantic steamship disasters and horrified the public which may have been placing excessive confidence in the new steamships. To add to William Inman's problems the maiden voyage of the new *City of Philadelphia*, (2168 tons), was delayed from May until August, and when she finally sailed from Liverpool on 30 August 1854 it was only to go ashore near Cape Race ten days later and become a total loss. All on board were rescued, but the reputation of the line for safety and dependability suffered. This left the *City of Manchester* to maintain the Liverpool-Philadelphia service alone.

The outbreak of the Crimean War in the spring of 1854 saw the British and French governments seeking to charter every vessel they could find to transport troops and supplies to the Black Sea. Tempting offers were made by the French government for the *City of Manchester* but William Inman's two partners, the Richardson brothers, were Quaker and would not consent. In the end the problem was solved by buying out the brothers who created a new firm, Richardson, Spence & Company.

James Spence, one of the founding partners, was born in the North of Ireland in 1829 but immigrated to Philadelphia where he went to live with an uncle, a Mr. Clarke, who was one of the partners in the Quaker shipping firm of Richardson, Watson and Company. The Philadelphia firm owned a line of packets which sailed between the Delaware and the Mersey. In Liverpool the British agent of the packet line was Richardson Brothers, managed by another Richardson brother, with whom William Inman would be associated. James Spence and William Inman knew each other well as business associates and friends even if their principal cities of commerce were on opposite sides of the North Atlantic. James Spence returned to England from the United States in 1854 and became one of the founding partners in Richardson, Spence & Company which would remain closely associated with Thomas Richardson and Company of Philadelphia and New York. The new firm would succeed quite

well and exercise a major influence in the trade and commerce of Liverpool.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1870s Richardson, Spence & Company would become the Liverpool agents of the American Steamship Company (American Line) and the International Navigation Company (Red Star Line) when those concerns began operations.

The removal of the Richardson brothers from the ownership of the Liverpool and Philadelphia Steam Ship Company permitted William Inman to accept the French charter offer.<sup>5</sup> He also acquired another vessel, *Kangaroo* (1854, 1874 tons), to replace losses but she was chartered to the British government at a satisfactory figure. While this provided regular employment for some time, it interrupted the regular service of the line. The *Kangaroo's* interesting name came from the fact that she was one of a quintet of vessels ordered by the Australasian Pacific Mail Steam Packet Company to run between Panama and Australia. The service was still borne and the ships, bearing distinctive names, were available for alternative employment.

William Inman made plans to generate wartime profits and, in anticipation of future peacetime service, commissioned two new steamers in 1855. These were the *City of Baltimore* (2368 tons), and the *City of Washington*, (2381 tons). Both liners were chartered straight from Tod & McGregor's Yard to the French transport service and sailed for the Mediterranean. They operated from France to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea for approximately a year. When the hostilities finally concluded in the Crimea the chartered Inman liners slowly made their way home to the Mersey early in 1856. All these liners required post-trooping reconditioning before taking their places in a renewed trans-Atlantic service. The maiden voyage of the *City of Baltimore* on 23 April 1856, marked the return of Inman Line to the North Atlantic after an absence of sixteen months. In the interval the American-flag Collins Line had held sway, but this situation would not endure.

The *City of Baltimore* completed two round-trip voyages before the *Kangaroo*, newly released by the British government, was ready to join her on 30 July 1856. The *City of Manchester*, released by the French government, finished her outfitting and rejoined the fleet two weeks later in mid-August, and the *City of Washington*, also fresh from French service, finally was available to her owners early in November. When she made her maiden sailing on 5 November 1856, from Liverpool to Philadelphia, the Liverpool & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company reached a zenith. The line had enough ships to maintain sailings every two weeks with an all important additional vessel in reserve to insure the regularity of the service.

One factor that the Liverpool & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company had to deal with was that absence from the North Atlantic trade for any reason cost it dearly in customers. Freight and passengers had to be moved across the North Atlantic whether or not a foreign war in distant lands was being fought. The chartering of the Inman liners to the British and French governments forced shippers to use other vessels and even substantial customer loyalty to and satisfaction with the Inman Line would not instantly bring them back. Evidence of this basic economic fact of life was provided by the financial returns from the *City of Baltimore's* first three voyages. The liner lost William Inman the enormous sum of £3,000 on her first voyage, £2,000 on the second, and barely broke even on the cost of operating the vessel on her third voyage to Philadelphia. When the line reviewed its position in mid-October it was acknowledged that their ships still were not covering all expenses. After six years of serving the Philadelphia market exclusively the decision was made to seek additional employment for the company's vessels.

The completion of the Erie Canal and the development of trade to the Great Lakes and

<sup>4</sup> Maginnis, *The Atlantic Ferry*, 209-210.

<sup>5</sup> Inman and International, *History of the Inman Line*, 1.

the west incredibly enhanced the economic position of New York City. In view of the critical need to maximize earning potential it was announced that the *City of Washington* would inaugurate a new service from Liverpool to New York on 31 December 1856. The simple economic and historical facts were that because of the great success of the Erie Canal and subsequent canal projects, plus the growth of railroads, New York had outstripped Philadelphia as the largest city in the United States and the most important commercial centre in the United States. The Liverpool & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company joined the growing number of lines serving the New York market. Initially the announcement was made that the liners would alternate between New York and Philadelphia in their sailings. Almost immediately it was realized that this type of fractured service would meet no legitimate goal of the line since neither market would be receiving sufficient emphasis. Delaware Bay could be treacherous upon occasions and *Kangaroo* was caught in the ice below Philadelphia for sometime during the winter of 1856. Furthermore, the channel leading to Philadelphia frequently silted to the point where steamships had to sail quite light in order to negotiate the channel and clear the Mifflin Bar, even at high water. These difficulties discouraged the development of the commerce of Philadelphia in the 1850s.

Great profits were to be made from New York but only if a company was prepared to make a major statement by having regular sailings to that port. The precipitous decline of the Collins Line, and the grievous loss they suffered when their *Pacific*, (1850, 2707 tons), sailed from Liverpool on 23 January 1856, and went missing with the loss of between 186 and 286 persons, helped William Inman to make up his mind. The disintegration of the Collins Line schedule during 1856 was self-evident and the introduction of their new *Adriatic*, (1857, 4145 tons), while the largest and finest wooden paddle-wheeler ever built for the North Atlantic service, was not enough to retrieve the situation. When the Collins Line ceased operations on 18 February 1858, Inman already had staked out a share of the market.

By March 1857 the Liverpool & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company added "New York" to its title and became the Liverpool, New York & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company. The ice conditions in Delaware Bay were mentioned as causing disturbing and expensive delays in the trade, but the most significant reason was the lure of the New York market. No sooner had full scale operations begun on the Liverpool-New York route than the eruption of the Sepoy Mutiny in India once again saw vessels of the Inman fleet taken up by the British government for trooping duties. The *City of Manchester*, fresh from the Mediterranean and Black Seas, was chartered to the British government for the voyage around Africa and across the Indian Ocean to the sub-continent. She sailed from Liverpool for Calcutta on 24 August 1857, with a portion of the Dragoon Guards embarked. A number of the steamers bound for India had to pull sailing vessels laden with horses or additional troops, but this does not appear to be the case with the *City of Manchester*. Nevertheless, the voyage to India took far longer than expected and William Inman must have thought he would never get his ship back. She would be gone nearly two years and not return to the North Atlantic service until 2 April 1859. To fill the gap Inman inspected and bought the *Vigo*, (1953 tons). The *Vigo* was a solid medium-sized ship originally ordered from John Laird, Birkenhead, for the Canadian Steam Navigation Company in 1855, but sold on the stocks to the Vapores Correos Espanoles Transatlanticos and launched as the *Vigo*. Subsequently in 1856 she was sold to the Cie Franco-Américaine from whom Inman bought the vessel. She could carry 120 passengers and was capable of ten knots so she could fit into the sailing schedule of the Inman fleet.

William Inman always remained open to new opportunities for passengers and cargo. When the short-lived Belgian-flag service (1855-1857) from Antwerp to Southampton and New York by the Société Belge des Bateaux à Vapeur Transatlantiques ceased, Inman sought to fill the gap. He had no desire to start a direct Belgian-American steamship line, but this did

not mean that he could not purchase a smaller cross-channel steamer (*Bosphorus*, 531 tons) and establish a feeder service from Antwerp to Liverpool with through tickets issued on Inman liners for those wishing to cross to America. This directly enhanced the immigrant trade from the Continent of the Inman Line by overcoming some of Liverpool's geographical isolation. The Antwerp-Liverpool feeder service of the Inman Line appears to have been successful from its inception in 1857 until 1873 when the International Navigation Company commenced its direct line from Belgium to the United States and abruptly garnered all the trade.

Seeking both to gain more traffic and to ward off competition William Inman sent the *City of Manchester* to Belfast when she sailed on 2 April 1859, for the purpose of making a trans-Atlantic crossing more convenient for Scottish passengers. From Belfast the *City of Manchester* steamed down the Irish Sea and made a premier call at Queenstown (now Cobh) for passengers and mails. Inman's idea was to undermine the new Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (1858), soon to be known as Atlantic Royal Mail Steam Navigation Company (1859), but always much more familiarly as the "Galway Line," which offered service between Ireland and America. The completion of a railroad in 1851 from Dublin to the magnificent natural harbor of Galway Bay on the west coast of Ireland underlined the potential for a steamship service to North America from that point. Geographically, Galway was at least 300 miles closer to New York than Liverpool, and, in the 1850s over a day could be saved on a trans-Atlantic crossing. The Galway Line would struggle for passengers and cargo from 1858-1861 and again from 1863-1864, but even with a mail subsidy the difficulties in building an adequate freight revenue simply were too great so far from the industrial areas of the British Isles. The line also tried to start its service before sufficient ships had been delivered by the builders, and those vessels which were on hand tended to be too weak to withstand the brutal conditions experienced on the North Atlantic. An incredible number of sixteen separate steamers were employed by the Galway Line for the fifty-one advertised sailings which they actually attempted.<sup>6</sup>

When William Inman began having his ships call at Queenstown in 1859 he began a tradition which would last for more than half a century for mail boats sailing from Liverpool, and on many occasions, those from Southampton as well.<sup>7</sup> So sensible was the decision to call at Queenstown that Cunard followed suit in November 1859, and a steady stream of cabin passengers, mails and immigrants soon would be leaving Ireland by this route.

When possible Inman was more than willing to remove competition by purchasing a faltering rival. The Glasgow & New York Steam Ship Company (1851-1859) had struggled to maintain a Glasgow-New York service in the face of keen competition from the Anchor Line. In 1859 William Inman bought the Glasgow & New York Steam Ship Company, at least in part to gain control of their two ships, *Edinburgh* (1855, 2197 tons), and *Glasgow* (1851, 1962 tons). Both vessels had proven quite satisfactory and, while it was announced that they would continue to maintain the Glasgow-New York sailings, the opportunity to have a weekly sailing from Liverpool to New York was so great that in 1860 the two ships moved south to the Mersey.

A seven ship fleet meant the Wednesday sailing was very secure since five vessels were adequate to maintain the weekly departure and Inman had one or two ships in reserve at any given moment. Inman ships are associated with "City of X" names but at this time the majority of the fleet did not have names beginning in that manner. True, there was a *City of*

<sup>6</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, III, 504.

<sup>7</sup> Queenstown would remain a port of call for some trans-Atlantic liners as late as 1970 when Holland-America had the *Nieuw Amsterdam* call there on several North Atlantic crossings which began in Rotterdam and included stops at Southampton, Cobh, Halifax and New York. The author fondly remembers one such crossing.

*Manchester*, *City of Washington*, and a *City of Baltimore* in the fleet, but the line also had acquired an *Edinburgh*, *Glasgow*, *Vigo*, and *Kangaroo*. Late in 1860 William Inman purchased the Cunard liner *Etna* (1854, 2215 tons) to add to his holdings. Unlike other ship owners, Inman seldom felt any compulsion to rename vessels in order to bring them into line with the fleet and they usually retained their original names. *Etna*, for instance, would not be renamed *City of Bristol* until after a major reconditioning in 1871.

The delivery in 1861 of the new *City of New York*, (2360 tons), by Tod & McGregor symbolized the concentration of Inman Line activities in the Liverpool-New York trade. The new liner had accommodations for 158 cabin passengers and 700 in third class or steerage. The maiden voyage of the new liner began on 11 September from Liverpool and involved the now customary call at Queenstown before setting out across the Atlantic for a warm reception in her namesake city. The American Civil War saw the withdrawal of virtually all American-flag tonnage from the North Atlantic and an enormous boom in cargoes and passengers for those in a position to take advantage of the situation. In 1862 William Inman bet on a prolonged struggle and withdrew the *City of Manchester* in order that she could go to Glasgow for a new set of boilers and a general overhaul of her engines. The *City of Manchester* was an outstanding product of the Tod & McGregor Yard and had undertaken ninety-six crossings of the Atlantic since her commissioning eleven years before. When she re-emerged from the builders yard she was in an excellent position to provide highly dependable and profitable service at the right time. So strong was demand that Inman began an extra service from Liverpool to New York with the *Kangaroo* in association with various purchased vessels: *City of Cork* (1863, 1,547 tons); *City of Limerick* (1855, 1529 tons).

The Inman Line fleet was reinforced by a sister ship to the *City of New York*, the *City of London*, (1863, 2,560 tons). The major difference between the two vessels was in their machinery. The *City of New York* had two-cylinder horizontal trunk engines, whereas the *City of London* had four-cylinder inverted engines. Besides the fact that war freight to the United States more than justified fleet expansion, disasters always loomed over the horizon. The *City of New York* was steaming fast toward Queenstown on a homeward crossing from New York when she struck the submerged seamount known as Daunt's Rock and became a total loss. The accident occurred early on the morning of 29 March 1864, and the potential for human tragedy was great, but all passengers and crew were saved. Inman surveyed the ship market as quickly as possible for a replacement and Smith & Rodger, Glasgow, Scotland, had a 213 8 ton vessel building which appeared to meet the bill. She bore the name *Hellespont*, but was purchased by Inman and launched as the *City of Dublin* in February 1864. As prepared for Inman service the liner was outfitted with around 100 cabin class berths and accommodation for nearly a thousand steerage passengers. She made her maiden voyage from Liverpool to New York on 10 December 1864, the fitting out taking a little longer than expected. William Inman was moving through his second decade of operation with what might be regarded as the best balanced fleet on the North Atlantic.

With the profits from the movement of war supplies to the Union in the American Civil War, Inman ordered two additional units for the fleet. The *City of Boston*, (2278 tons), made her maiden sailing for the Inman Line on 8 February 1864, with accommodations for 100 in cabin class and 950 in steerage. This was followed on 7 June by a new *City of New York (II)*, (2278 tons), which originally had been laid down for the well-established British ship-broking firm of Richardson, Spence & Company as the "Delaware" for a Liverpool-Philadelphia service. These additions made it possible for the Inman Line to despatch ships from Liverpool for New York on both Wednesdays and Saturdays which represented a very substantial number of sailings indeed. The newer and larger ships, as a rule, took the premier Wednesday sailings which saw them arriving in New York ten days

later (on a weekend), and the older vessels maintained the Saturday sailings which meant a mid-week arrival at New York. Rarely did the Inman Line miss a sailing because there were enough vessels preparing for a departure on either side of the Atlantic that almost any eventuality could be dealt with, and dependability spelled success. The older units of the fleet were re-boilered and re-engined as convenient. The *City of Washington* had major modifications including updating of accommodations and propulsion system in 1863-1864 after one hundred and twenty-six crossings of the North Atlantic.

One of the old faithfuls of the line, *Glasgow* met with disaster on 31 July 1865, shortly after sailing from New York. The storage of volatile cargoes always represented one of the greatest challenges facing shippers, particularly when spontaneous combustion could occur, or a smoldering fire go undetected. The *Glasgow* sailed from New York with a substantial amount of cotton on board. A bale may well have been on fire when stowed because the heat from the fire manifested itself about 250 miles off Sandy Hook and all efforts to extinguish the conflagration failed. It was necessary to order "abandon ship" when the fire reached the engine room four and a half hours after the it was discovered. A barque, *Rosamond*, stood by the blazing *Glasgow* and was able to take off all the passengers, crew, and passengers' baggage. A second thrilling transfer at sea from the sailing ship to the inward bound National Line's *Erin* saw the passengers back in New York approximately five days after their departure.

William Inman had another new liner building by Tod & McGregor. She was launched 13 December 1865, as the *City of Paris*, (2556 tons), and made her maiden sailing on 21 March 1866 from Liverpool to New York via Queenstown. The first Inman *City of Paris* was a highly successful vessel for the line. She made the fastest run in terms of elapsed time from Queenstown to New York in November 1867 when she covered a short 2700-mile passage in eight days, four hours and one minute at an average speed of 13.77 knots. This was the quickest North Atlantic crossing in terms of time, but the Cunard paddle-wheeler *Scotia*, (1862, 3871 tons), had thrashed her way across at 14.54 knots in 1864 which was a significantly higher speed. Owners could debate which mattered most on a record passage, elapsed time or speed, but there was no universally agreed upon formula in the 1860s, nor for some time thereafter. The *City of Paris* performed very well. Her two-cylinder horizontal trunk engines consistently produced crossing speeds of over 13 knots which made her the fastest unit in the fleet for a brief time. The general improvement in the speed of the fleet enabled the line to think in terms of five instead of six steamers for the each of the two principal weekly sailings.

The conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865 brought a temporary decline in freight bound for America as the wartime demand slackened. In the immediate post-war period of 1866-1868 a recession checked the expansion of the American economy and forced severe retrenchment on the North Atlantic steamship lines. William Inman and other Liverpool shipping magnates recognized that the Liverpool-New York trade could not possibly support the forty to fifty passenger liners operating on the route owned by the "Big Four," (Inman, Cunard, National, and Guion), let alone lesser concerns. Inman reduced sailings from weekly to every other week and laid up or sought alternative employment for excess tonnage. In this Inman showed a great deal of originality. The *City of Cork* and *Etna* were transferred for several voyages from Antwerp to New York in the fall of 1867. The service was suspended in 1868, but resumed for six additional voyages in 1869 when the *City of Dublin* and the *City of Limerick* did the honours. The possibilities of the New Orleans trade, at the mouth of the Mississippi, proved enticing to Inman and the *City of Limerick* made the long voyage out to the Gulf of Mexico during 1867 in search of employment. The experiment was not repeated.

Inman, having established a very substantial fleet by the late 1860s, appears to have

been looking for a "record breaker" to cap the achievement. If so when in 1867 he took delivery from Tod & McGregor of the *City of Antwerp*, (2391 tons), he was to be disappointed. Of all the ships constructed for the line by their traditional shipbuilder, this vessel was the least satisfactory. She certainly was inferior to the *City of Paris*, although only 165 tons smaller, because she would never be anything more than a twelve-knot boat when a record passage required speeds closer to fourteen knots. Another new vessel was the *City of Brooklyn*, (1869, 2911 tons) which was the largest ship in the fleet at the time, but which also proved to be a disappointing performer in terms of speed. Nevertheless the *City of Antwerp* and the *City of Brooklyn* would be solid dependable units of the Inman fleet for nine and sixteen years respectively. They helped Inman to make the step up to carrying the Royal Mails.

Before 1867 primary responsibility for the transportation of ocean mails had laid with the Admiralty. This was a carry over from the days of the naval packets which carried dispatches and mails to important areas of British military and naval concern. Many of the packet services had been a direct outgrowth of the need for regular communication with overseas military operations during the wars of the eighteenth century. The growth of commerce and trade in the nineteenth century saw the development of a large scale division of the British government just to handle the movement of all forms of written communication, the General Post Office (GPO). Late in 1867 responsibility for the ocean mails was transferred from the Admiralty to the Postmaster-General, although the GPO always would consult quite closely with the Admiralty on any matters that might concern or be of interest to them. This changeover brought with it a successful bid by the Inman Line to carry the Canadian mails from Queenstown to Halifax on a fortnightly basis. In this instance Inman won out over Cunard which had held the contract since 1840, although Inman was to receive the reduced payment of only £375 a voyage. The first Inman liner to take a Royal Mail sailing was the *Etna* which sailed on 4 January 1868. Inman also had to establish a feeder service from Halifax to St. John's, Newfoundland, and the line purchased the *City of Durham* (1865, 697 tons), and *City of Halifax* (1868, 724 tons) for the purpose of collecting and delivering the Newfoundland mails.

Negotiations with the Postmaster-General also brought Inman a share of the Royal Mails to be carried from Liverpool to New York which was an enormously important financial assist. Throughout the next twenty years the GPO would experiment with various means of payment for die mails trying to strike a balance between the best service possible and what could be afforded. From 1840 to 1868 the customary method was to let a contract to carry the mails based upon a fixed subsidy designed to underwrite the cost of the vessels. The contract fee had to take into account the fact that the ships had to sail on a regular basis whether or not passengers and cargo warranted. In 1868 the Postmaster-General felt that the steamship lines on the North Atlantic had developed sufficiently that the general subsidy could be dispensed with in favour of one based on the weight of the mails carried (payment for actual service rendered). On other routes, such as to India, the West Indies and Australasia, the traditional fixed subsidy was maintained since it was not thought that passengers and freight could provide dependable enough revenue.

The Inman Line won the right to carry the mails on the Wednesday sailing to New York with compensation based on one shilling per ounce for letters, five pence per pound for books, and three pence per pound for newspapers. The Inman vessels earned the right to fly the "Royal Mail" ensign and to advertise themselves as "Royal Mail Ships." The result was neither as successful as the GPO hoped nor as profitable as the lines had expected. The result was that in 1869 the old fixed-subsidy formula was reintroduced. Bids were called for from the leading British steamship lines and it is difficult not to feel that some discussion occurred

among the owners over who would bid on what. In the end William Inman offered the GPO his fleet of vessels described as being not less than 2000 gross tons, and capable of a speed of not less than twelve knots on trials with a cargo of 800 tons including coal. The contract was to carry the mails starting July 1869 from Liverpool to New York via Queenstown upon payment of a subsidy of £35,000 a year, due in quarterly installments. The ships offered by Inman included *City of Paris*, *City of Antwerp*, *City of London*, *City of Boston*, *City of Baltimore*, *City of New York*, *City of Washington*, *City of Brooklyn*, and a new ship, *City of Brussels*. The Inman Line, because of the speed of the new vessels and the desire of the GPO for three sailings a week, agreed to shift its mid-week departure from Wednesday to Thursday. While Inman handled the Thursday sailing, Cunard would supply ships for the Tuesday and Saturday departures. The penalty for failing to make a scheduled mail sailing was £300.<sup>8</sup>

To the delight of William Inman, the *City of Brussels*, (3081 tons), his third new ship from Tod & McGregor since 1867, proved to be the "record breaker" he was after. This liner was the first iron-hulled, propeller-driven, record breaker never to be beaten by a paddle-wheeler. The *City of Brussels* was a long slim liner with a hull running 390 feet but a beam of only 40 feet. She had accommodations for 200 cabin class and 600 steerage passengers when she left Liverpool on her maiden voyage, 14 October 1869. One of her claims to fame was that she was the first liner to be built with steam steering gear, an incalculable assistance in navigating a large ship. On her second homeward crossing she steamed from Sandy Hook to Queenstown over a course of approximately 2771 miles in seven 7 days, twenty hours and thirty minutes at an average speed of 14.70 knots thereby beating the Cunard *Scotia*, last of the record holding paddle-wheelers. The publicity value to the Inman Line was quite substantial and William Inman was well satisfied with the new ship.

The *City of Brussels* had the honour in 1869 of carrying His Royal Highness Prince Arthur, later Duke of Connaught, from Cork to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in six days and twenty-one hours. The Prince who was 19 at the time, went to church in Queenstown on a Sunday, embarked on the ship in the afternoon, and arrived at Halifax in time to attend morning service on the following Sunday. This was widely publicized as a remarkable achievement. The visit of Prince Arthur, third son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, to Canada had significant political importance since his trip was an early example of many royal visits designed to reinforce the ties between Britain and the Dominions overseas. In 1911 the Duke of Connaught would cap his long association with Canada by becoming Governor-General.

The renewal of economic prosperity after 1870 saw the Inman Line in an excellent position to benefit from the increase in passengers and freight. The fleet totalled an impressive 38,811 tons with most of the sixteen larger vessels being of fairly recent construction. The two feeder ships accounted for 1421 tons of the total. The results showed in the figures for passenger movement from Liverpool and Queenstown to New York. The American records show the Inman Line with sixty-eight crossings (only two less than Cunard), and if Inman carried only 3635 cabin class passengers to Cunard's 7638, they transported the enormous number of 40,465 steerage to Cunard's 16,871. The Inman Line's grand total for 1870 of 44,100 passengers landed in New York far surpassed National's 35,936, Guion's 28,569 and Cunard's 24,509. In terms of numbers the Liverpool, New York & Philadelphia Steam Ship Line was the largest maritime operation on the North Atlantic.

Rationalization of the Inman fleet saw the sale of the *Edinburgh* and the *Kangaroo* in 1870, the *City of Manchester* and *City of Cork* in 1871, the *City of Dublin* in 1873, and the *City of Baltimore* in 1874. When combined with the loss of the *City of Boston* (1870) and

<sup>8</sup> Postmaster-General to William Inman, Contract of 9th March 1869. United States Mails. Liverpool via Queenstown to New York. Historical Records Office, (St. Martins-le-Grand, London), Post 51/46.

the *City of Washington* (1873), the Inman Line certainly had experienced great changes by 1875.

Three problems were to plague William Inman in the immediate future. The sea provided one when the *City of Boston* sailed from New York with 177 passengers and crew on 25 January 1870, and, while reported off Halifax three days later, was never heard from again. This was the fifth major disaster which Inman had suffered and the loss remains unexplained, a tragedy of the North Atlantic. Inman resolved his temporary ship shortage by chartering the *Nemesis*, (2717 tons), for three round-trip voyages in 1871. She was used in the Saturday service.

The second of the challenges with which William Inman had to cope was the invention and perfection of the compound engine in 1869. The new engine reduced fuel consumption by 50 per cent and made it necessary to re-engine almost the entire fleet. The third challenge was the creation by Thomas Henry Ismay of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company Limited in 1871 and the entry into competition of one of the greatest single maritime concerns the North Atlantic would ever experience, the White Star Line. Of the three challenges, White Star would be the most severe and within five years would force the Liverpool, New York & Philadelphia Steam Ship Company into a major reorganization, and within fifteen years threaten the very survival of the Inman Line.

Ismay had the incredible good fortune to have the financial backing with which to order an entire fleet for the North Atlantic just at the moment that a major new technological advance made all the ships owned by his rivals obsolete. The financial resources of "Uncle" Gustavus C. Schwabe were dedicated to encouraging the development of his nephew's, Gustav Wilhelm Wolff, shipyard in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The agreement struck between Schwabe and Ismay was that the "uncle" would provide financial backing and leadership, if the "nephew" could build the ships needed by the new line. Ismay also would develop a close personal working relationship with Sir Edward Harland. The result would be the growth and development of two enormously important British economic institutions - the White Star Line and the Harland & Wolff Shipyard. Sir Edward Harland and Gustav Wilhelm Wolff through Harland & Wolff would have a remarkably free hand in the creation of White Star ships.

The first of the White Star quartette was the *Oceanic*, (3707 tons), which left Liverpool on her maiden voyage on 2 March 1871. She experienced engine trouble and, after an unscheduled call at Holyhead, was forced to return to Liverpool for repairs. These were made and the "maiden voyage" began again on 16 March with a satisfactory but undistinguished run to New York. Ismay, who was intensely proud of his new flagship, commented, "never was more beauty or greater strength and stability wrought in iron since the metal was introduced into shipbuilding."<sup>9</sup> The *Oceanic* received a superb press wherever she called and an estimated 50,000 individuals saw her in New York. She was a public relations success even though her propulsion system took some time to settle down. Her compound engines cut the amount of coal needed for a trans-Atlantic crossing almost in half. In comparison with the *City of Brussels* whose boilers operated at 30 pounds per square inch (psi), and whose daily coal consumption ran 110 tons, the *Oceanic*, operated at 65 psi and required only 60 tons of coal a day. The economy of operation and the increased freight carrying potential was mind boggling to contemporaries.

Furthermore, Ismay exercised great care to make his ships as comfortable and

<sup>9</sup> Sir George C. V. Holmes, *Ancient and Modern Ships*, Part II, "The Era of Steam, Iron and Steel" (London, 1906), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Roy Anderson, *White Star* (Prescott, 1964), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *White Star*, 45.

luxurious as possible. The accommodations for cabin class passengers were moved from the stern section, where they originally were placed in sailing vessels and paddlewheel steamers in order to keep the better paying clientele away from the sound and vibrations of the paddlewheels, to the centre of the ship for exactly the same reason, that the middle was away from the propellers in a screw driven vessel. The first class dining saloon also was placed amidships in order to enhance the pleasure of eating while at sea. In connection with the White Star Line it has been written that:

Innovations in the passenger accommodation were more original and lasting. The customary narrow deckhouses and high bulwarks were replaced by an iron promenade deck with open railings. Cabins were nearly double the usual size and almost everyone had a porthole. The portholes themselves were much larger than any previously known on the North Atlantic. The saloon extended the entire width of the ship. The effect of these changes was an impression of lightness and airiness. Minor improvements were electric bells in the cabins and separate chairs for passengers in the dining saloon.<sup>12</sup>

The first White Star quartette of *Oceanic*, *Atlantic*, (1871, 3707 tons), *Baltic*, (1871, 3707 tons), and *Republic*, (1872, 3707 tons), siphoned some of the cream of the North Atlantic passenger trade away from their competitors and sent everyone to their builders for new tonnage. This also forced Ismay to do exactly the same thing and the race for North Atlantic preeminence was fought out in the yards of the shipbuilders.

William Inman already had a most impressive liner on order, *City of Montreal* (4451 tons), nearly 50 per cent larger than any previous unit in the fleet. The *City of Montreal* would be a worthy addition to the Inman fleet when she took her maiden sailing on 8 February 1872, but she never would be the equal of the White Star liners for speed, and her accommodations were far surpassed by the new competitor. The Inman fleet was reduced by the loss of the veteran *City of Washington* which was wrecked near Cape Sable, 7 July 1873. The explanation given was that her compass had become defective and resulted in the liner steaming off course. There was no loss of life.

Inman was desperate to upgrade his fleet wherever possible; the two-year old *City of Brussels* was taken out of service and her upper deck area including the wooden deckhouse and high bulwarks ripped out in order to fit an iron deck in an arrangement similar to the new White Star liners. This increased her tonnage from 3081 to 3747 but did nothing for her earning power except in terms of making her more competitive as a first class unit. These measures were not considered enough, of and by themselves, and William Inman also saw fit to order two large new liners.

Tod & McGregor was in financial difficulties at the time and Inman was forced to place the order for one of his two new vessels elsewhere. The first of the new liners was the *City of Chester*, (4556 tons), which was ordered from Caird & Company, Greenock, and made her maiden sailing on 10 July 1873. The second of the two vessels, which came from the Tod & McGregor yard and was not ready for her maiden voyage until 4 September, was the *City of Richmond*, (4607 tons). Both liners had accommodations for 125 first class, 80 second class and 1310 steerage passengers.

Just at the time that the new Inman liners were ready a major shipping depression began and became steadily worse. To make matters even more critical the establishment of

<sup>12</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, H, 733.

the Red Star Line's Antwerp-New York service robbed the Inman Line of still another source of revenue. In 1871 the Canadian mail contract had been transferred to the Allan Line and it no longer was necessary for Inman to maintain a St. John's-Halifax feeder service. The two relatively new vessels, the *City of Durham* and *City of Halifax* of the Canadian feeder service were brought across the Atlantic to Liverpool and, assigned to an Antwerp-Liverpool service. This lasted two years when it was withdrawn (1873) in the face of the direct service by the Red Star Line.

The North Atlantic was a harsh task master and on 1 April 1873, White Star experienced the worst shipping disaster to date on the North Atlantic. The *Atlantic* sailed from Liverpool on 20 March 1873, with 811 passengers and 141 crew into a howling North Atlantic gale. Eleven days later the liner was 460 miles from Sandy Hook and had used 840 out of 967 tons of fuel. Captain James Williams decided to take his ship to Halifax for coal. He retired to his cabin for a brief period of rest leaving explicit orders to be called before his ship neared the shore. The call to the bridge was over-ridden by a junior officer in a gross countermanding of the master's orders and the *Atlantic* ran onto Meagher's Rock twenty miles south of Halifax in the dead of the night. The doomed liner was lifted by the mountainous seas and slammed on the rocks five times, breaking into two pieces. The stern section soon sank from view and the death toll in the violent seas was 585. The White Star Line was severely criticized for sending a ship to sea with inadequate coal and had to go through three major, public hearings before being exonerated. The adverse publicity was horrendous.

The financial stress of building a major new vessel every year for the past four years and the promise of future challenges forced William Inman to form a public company in 1875 with himself at its head in an effort to provide the extra capital that was so badly needed.<sup>13</sup> The competition to have the fastest ship in service on the North Atlantic was financially murderous. When the new White Star *Adriatic*, (3,888 tons) made a record passage in May 1872, it was two years before the Inman Line could launch an appropriate challenger.

The *City of Berlin*, (5,491 tons), which entered service on 29 April 1875, illustrates the acute nature of the competition. She sailed on her maiden voyage only to be followed in three days by the new Cunard *Scythia*, (4557 tons), on 1 May and three weeks later by the new White Star *Germanic*, (5008 tons), on 20 May. The *City of Berlin* took four voyages to settle in but at last steamed across from Queenstown to New York in September 1875 with a record passage of seven days, eighteen hours and two minutes over a 2829 mile passage. This meant an average speed of 15.21 knots and was highly satisfactory. In a rare development she completed the capture of the record by racing home along a 2820 mile course in seven days, fifteen hours and twenty-eight minutes at 15.37 knots. Inman would make much of this achievement, but it was a costly victory in what would be a long war.

In February 1876 the *Germanic* romped home with the "Blue Riband" and her sistership, the *Britannic*, (1874, 5,004 tons), captured the Westbound title in the following November. The White Star Line ships soon usurped their Inman rivals as the proud possessors of both titles for the fastest Atlantic crossings. (The records are shown in the table on page 42.)

The horrendous trading conditions which followed the boom period 1870-1872 absolutely demanded the severest possible retrenchment if the lines were to survive. Opportunities were taken to upgrade any tonnage which might be made more profitable and the *City of Montreal's* unsatisfactory machinery was replaced by more dependable inverted compound engines and a boiler arrangement that called for a second funnel. The single

TABLE RECORD PASSAGES OF THE INMAN LINE  
AND WHITE STAR LINE STEAMERS 1869-1877<sup>14</sup>

<i>Westbound Record Passages</i>				
Time:				
Vessel	Date	Line	Days/Hrs/Min	Speed
<i>Adriatic</i>	May 1872	White Star	7. 23. 17	14.53
<i>City of Berlin</i>	Sep. 1875	Inman	7. 18. 2	15.21
<i>Britannic</i>	Nov. 1876	White Star	7. 13. 11	15.43
<i>Germanic</i>	Apr. 1877	White Star	7. 11. 37	15.76
<i>Eastbound Record Passages</i>				
<i>City of Brussels</i>	Dec. 1869	Inman	7. 22. 0	14.66
<i>Baltic</i>	Jan. 1873	White Star	7. 20. 99	15.09
<i>City of Berlin</i>	Oct. 1875	Inman	7. 15. 28	15.37
<i>Germanic</i>	Feb. 1876	White Star	7. 15. 17	15.79
<i>Britannic</i>	Dec. 1876	White Star	7. 12. 41	15.94

expansion engines of the *City of Brussels* were replaced with compound machinery and the result was highly gratifying in terms of almost halving coal consumption and increasing cargo capacity by several hundred tons. Inman's retrenchment included the complete abandonment of the extra sailings on Saturdays, and the reduction of the mail sailings to three Thursdays a month.

The Inman Line, vanquished by the record passages of the White Star *Britannic* and *Germanic*, was not to have a record breaker for another ten years. By the spring of 1876 the shipping depression had become so severe that the Inman and White Star lines, in spite of their bitter rivalry, were forced to come to a working agreement on their sailings before they bankrupted each other.<sup>15</sup> This agreement, which markedly reduced the sailings of the two lines, left Inman with some free tonnage. As a result, the *City of Limerick* and the *City of Bristol* were chartered to the American Steamship Company for a few voyages. In fact, the *City of Limerick* was to spend the better part of the period from 1876-1879 under charter to the American Line. The close connections of both the Inman Line and the American Line with the Liverpool firm of Richardson, Spence and Company which meant that chartering arrangements could be readily handled.

The years 1879-1883 saw a major rationalization of the Inman fleet. In 1879 the Line owned an even dozen liners of which only six could be regularly employed with profit, and the

<sup>14</sup> Bonsov, *North Atlantic Seaway*, V, 1872, 1877.

<sup>15</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, I, 231.

time had come to sell or scrap the older units. By 1883 Inman had disposed of much of the older and more-expensive-to-operate-tonnage. (This activity is shown in the table below.) The

INMAN STEAMSHIP COMPANY LIMITED  
FLEET 1879- 1884

Vessel	Built	Acquired	Tonnage	Disposal
<i>City of Bristol*</i>	1855	1860	2,215	Sold 1880
<i>City of Limerick</i>	1855	1863	2,536	Sold 1880
<i>City of London</i>	1863	1863	2,560	Sold 1879
<i>City of New York</i>	1865	1865	2,642	Sold 1883
<i>City of Paris</i>	1866	1866	2,556	Sold 1883
<i>City of Antwerp</i>	1867	1867	2,391	Sold 1879
<i>City of Brooklyn</i>	1869	1869	2,911	Sold 1870
<i>City of Brussels</i>	1869	1869	3,747	Sunk by collision in the Mersey, 7 January 1883, ten lives lost.
<i>City of Montreal</i>	1872	1872	4,451	In fleet 1884
<i>City of Chester</i>	1873	1873	4,566	In fleet 1884
<i>City of Richmond</i>	1873	1873	4,607	In fleet 1884
<i>City of Berlin</i>	1875	1875	5,491	In fleet 1884
<i>City of Rome</i>	1881	1881	8,415	Rejected, returned to builders.
<i>Baltic</i>	1873	1883	3,707	Chartered
<i>City of Chicago</i>	1883	1883	5,202	In fleet 1884

\*Purchased and operated as the *Etna*, rechristened *City of Bristol* in 1871.

seven liners he retained were ageing. The commissioning in 1879 of the record-breaker *Arizona*, (5,147 tons), by the American-owned, British-flag Guion Line forcefully brought home the need for a new vessel if the Inman Steamship Company was even to hold its own. Before a decision was reached on the design of the new liner, in 1880 the first steel passenger liner made her maiden North Atlantic sailing. The *Buenos Ayrean*, (4,005 tons), was commissioned for the Allan Line and provided an excellent working example of the advantages of steel over iron in ship construction. A ship produced of steel was not only stronger, but could provide a far greater cargo and passenger capacity than a similar vessel built of iron. Hence, Inman decided to take the plunge and ordered a steel liner of some 8,000 tons from the Barrow Shipbuilding Company.

The builders were almost immediately struck with the problem of how to obtain the steel needed to construct the large liner that Inman had ordered. The relatively new metal was in short supply, much too short supply for Barrow's to fulfill the contract in anything like a reasonable time. As a result, the question was put to the Inman management as to whether

they wanted an iron vessel within a short period of time, or preferred to wait several years for the proposed steel liner. Knowing that they could not wait several years while their opposition steamed away with the Company's trade, the Inman Line grudgingly agreed to the construction of an iron steamship. The work proceeded rapidly and on 14 June 1881, the new liner was launched as the *City of Rome*. In evaluating the appearance of the new liner, the opinion among ship lovers "has been almost unanimous that she was the most stately and well-proportioned steamship ever built."<sup>16</sup> Certainly the *City of Rome* underway must have been a glory to behold. The clipper-bowed liner possessed the lines of a thoroughbred racer and her super-structure was crowned with three stately slender funnels and four evenly spaced pole masts. When commissioned with a tonnage of 8,415 tons, a length of 560 feet, and a beam of 52 feet, the *City of Rome* was the largest liner in the world in active service. (I. K. Brunei's masterpiece, the *Great Eastern* (1860, 18,915 tons) was by then a hulk, and no vessel would surpass her size until she was scrapped in 1888, nor until the turn of the century.)

Unfortunately beauty was not enough for the new *City of Rome*. On her maiden voyage, 13-22 October 1881, she plowed from Queenstown to New York, taking over two days longer than the *Arizona* which she had been built to beat! This was a disastrous performance for a liner upon which the Inman Steamship Company had staked everything. When the *City of Rome* took a day longer than the *Arizona* to steam home, the disaster became a catastrophe. The new liner promptly underwent a major six-month overhaul and then took four more voyages for the Inman Line. In the middle of August 1882 the beautiful *City of Rome* was thrown back in disgust on her builders by the Inman Line. The facts that the liner had lost one-third of her intended cargo space (3800 tons was reduced to 2200 tons) through the use of iron instead of steel in her construction, and that a new record passage by the *Arizona* was so speedy that the *City of Rome* could not hope to beat it were probably the primary reasons for the rejection of the new liner. The best trans-Atlantic crossings of the *City of Rome* were 7 days 17 hours 10 minutes westbound, and 7 days 15 hours 20 minutes eastbound, while the *Alaska* of the Guion Line in June 1882 secured the record with a crossing of 6 days 22 hours, almost a day faster!<sup>17</sup>

On 3 July 1881, the management of the Inman Steamship Company was weakened. The founder, William Inman, died prematurely at the age of 56. Fortunately for Inman he died just a few days after the launching of the *City of Rome* and, therefore, the great shipping man never lived to know of the vessel's shortcomings. The rejection of the *City of Rome* after five voyages may be regarded as a somewhat hasty action on the part of the new management of the Inman Line. Greater consideration might well have been given the liner if William Inman had been alive. The *City of Rome* would probably have been an asset to the aging Inman fleet even if she was not a record-breaker, but the liner was never to be given the chance. The *City of Rome* was turned over to the Anchor Line by her builders as the owners of the Anchor Line had a substantial interest in the Barrow Shipbuilding Company through its affiliates.<sup>18</sup> The Anchor Line operated the *City of Rome* until she was finally scrapped in 1902.

The Inman Line carried a sizeable portion of the Liverpool-New York passenger trade in the mid-1880s. "During 1886 they landed 5,705 cabin and 25,659 steerage passengers at New York in the course of 52 voyages, almost the same as the White Star total and appreciably higher than the Guion Line's."<sup>19</sup> The problem was that the Inman liners were all

<sup>16</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, I, 233.

<sup>17</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, I, 234.

<sup>18</sup> R. S. McLellan, *Anchor Line 1856-1956* (Glasgow, 1956), 4142.

<sup>19</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, I, 234-235.

middle-aged as ships went and far too old for a Company supposedly running a first-class service. Their crossing times were far eclipsed by their competitors and the liners were becoming increasingly expensive to maintain in operation. The situation was not helped when the *City of Brussels* struck by another vessel near the mouth of the Mersey and sank on 7 January 1883. The withdrawal of the *City of New York* already had been planned and the Inman fleet was reduced to the *City of Berlin*, *City of Richmond*, *City of Chester*, *City of Montreal*, and *City of Paris*. The *City of Montreal* was not an asset at the moment since she was out of service for new engines. The line had to turn to chartered tonnage in order to maintain the Royal Mail sailings. Vessels were taken up wherever they could be found. The Allan *Peruvian* and *Sardinian*, the Cunard *Batavia*, the National Line *Egypt* and *Spain*, and the White Star *Baltic* made a total of nine round-trip voyages for the Inman Line.

Inman made the announcement that a 6000-ton liner had been bought on the stocks for them and would soon be entering service. The vessel which was under construction at Charles Connel & Company, Glasgow, as the "Vancouver" for the Dominion Line, was launched as the *City of Chicago* on 23 May 1883. When the *City of Chicago*, (5202 tons), made her maiden sailing from Liverpool to New York on 18 September 1883, she was strikingly different from any other liner in the Inman fleet in that she did not have the traditional clipper-bow of all the other Inman liners. There was no question that the services of the new liner were desperately needed. As *City of Chicago* entered service, the veteran *City of Paris* was on her last voyage for the company and the *City of Montreal* was never considered suitable for much besides being the "relief boat" even after her reconditioning. She made only a few sailings after March 1885.

The hour of decision had come to die Inman Steamship Company and the Line had its back to the wall financially. The five remaining ships averaged more than eleven years old and were capable of only nine day crossings when the Cunard and White Star competition was regularly crossing in a little more than seven days. This meant, for instance, that the Royal Mails leaving Liverpool on the Tuesday Inman liner often arrived in New York on the same day as the White Star Thursday liner. A stockholder's meeting was called in Liverpool on 18 October 1886, to discuss the courses of action open to the Company. Debts and obligations of the Line exceeded the value of the fleet by nearly £100,000 and were mounting steadily. Secured creditors were owed no less than £174,500 and unsecured creditors another £91,000. Since the book value of the fleet was less than £168,000, debts exceeded assets by £97,500. Attempts to obtain new funds through a mortgage debenture issue had failed yet new ships had to be built if the Line was to survive.<sup>20</sup>

The critical financial straits of the Inman Steamship Company were common knowledge and became of particular interest to Clement A. Griscom and the International Navigation Company through Richardson, Spence & Company, their Liverpool business associates. The Griscom shipping interests, including Peter Wright & Sons of Philadelphia, had purchased some of the debts of the Inman Line and, therefore, were primary creditors. Since the Inman Line nicely fitted into the expanding operations of the International Navigation Company, Griscom entered into negotiations for the purchase of the Line. These talks had proceeded quite far and the major stockholders of the Inman Steamship Company knew of the American move when the stockholders' meeting was called. On 18 October 1886, it was decided that the Company should go into voluntary liquidation and thus pave the way for purchase by certain parties.

A degree of secrecy was evidently necessary as Thomas H. Ismay of the White Star

Line was interested in keeping the Inman Line in operation under British management. In later years Ismay

told a story that when the Inman Line was in difficulties he wrote to a well-known gentleman in the same trade, offering to find half the money necessary to keep the line going, if his correspondent would find the other half. The offer was declined. "And now (1899)," Ismay said, "we have an American railway company come into the trade, with millions at its back, running under a well-known British flag, and setting us all to work building whether we want to or not. Would not it have been better to have kept the weak Line going?"<sup>21</sup>

Within two weeks of the stockholders' meeting a new and powerful name appeared among the trans-Atlantic steamship lines' advertisements. The Inman and International Steamship Company Limited replaced the name Inman Steamship Company, and the trans-Atlantic passenger lines were confronted with a rejuvenated giant where an imminent demise had been expected. An active role in the management of the new concern would be undertaken by Richardson, Spence and Company, of Liverpool, the general agents in Europe for the International Navigation Company and the American Line which had been bought by Griscom in 1884. The Inman owners received a sum of £250,000 for their five liners and the use of the Company name from which was deducted the large amount already owed the American purchasers. Certain discussions appear to have taken place over whether the new company name should be the "International, Inman and American Line" but the final choice was Inman and International.<sup>22</sup> This was a wise choice for the longer name was too bulky for advertisement purposes. Furthermore, since the Inman Line was a subsidized British mail line there was no need to offend or upset the British government by stressing that American investors had just purchased one of the premier British-flag North Atlantic Lines. The situation vis-a-vis the British government and the new Inman owners was to deteriorate soon enough anyway.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, *White Star*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway*, I, 235.