

S. S. Maine



Exhibited is a medallion in silver, *in toto* 47mm in diameter, mounted in circular silver ring with brooch mounting on the obverse and neatly secured by 3 silver pins into rim edge.

This is the only known example of the medallion in silver. Its provenance is unknown though it is thought to have belonged to a member of the organising committee of the *American Ladies Hospital Ship Fund*.

Ex Willem Joubert Collection.

DESCRIPTION OF THE S.S.MAINE MEDALLION

The following is the published description of the S.S.Maine medallion from the Africana Museum and the Transvaal Museum Catalogue (1958):

23. S.S.MAINE, 1899

DESCRIPTION: Circular. 44mm. Exists in white metal.

Obverse: Within the circle the ship named "Maine" at sea. Above "S.S. Maine" and below "Bernard N. Baker Esq./1899"

Legend: Around: "Lent to British Govt. for use in the Transvaal War by Pres. of Atlantic Transport Coy", then small ornament

Reverse: Within a circle on a cross a lifebelt marked "S.S. Maine", together with cross Stars and Stripes and Union Jack.

Above: "For the / American Ladies / Hospital Ship Fund",

Below: "Chairman Lady R. Churchill / Hon. Sec. Mrs. A. Blow / Hon. Tres. Mrs. Ronalds"

Legend: Around: "Fitted as Hospital Ship by Messrs. Fletcher Son & Fearnall Ltd. London", and then ornament.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the turn of the nineteenth century, in the United States of America, the mood was ambivalent towards the British and the war which was being waged in South Africa against the two small pastoral republics, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic. Their challenging the global might of the British Empire evoked many analogies in the minds of Americans between their own struggle for independence and that of the Boers.

War between the Boers republics and the British Empire was declared on 11 October 1899. On the 25 October 1899, **Lady Randolph Churchill** (née Jennie Jerome)(1854-1921), herself an American, met with a small group of American women living in London and organized "The American Ladies Hospital Ship Fund" [sic "The American Hospital Ship Maine Fund"], "a large and influential general committee was formed", she taking the chair, Mrs Cornelia Wadsworth Adair (1837-1921) deputizing, **Mrs. A.A. Blow** (née Goodell) acting as secretary and **Mrs. Mary Francis ("Fanny") Ronalds** (-1911), treasurer.

Mrs. A.A.Blow, the American wife of the general manager of the South African mining-company, Sheba General Mining Co., of Barberton, first had the idea that Americans might provide a hospital ship for British wounded; and it was she that persuaded Lady Churchill to spear-head the project.

The committee energetically set about raising the \$150,000 estimated to be required. Though most of the funds were to come from Americans living in Britain, fund-raising was actively pursued in the United States and involved such luminaries as Theodore Roosevelt, Mrs William Backhouse Astor, the actress Lillie Langtry and the Earl of Yarmouth.

Lady Churchill's real coup though was when she "captivated an American millionaire, obtained a ship, equipped it as a hospital with a full staff of nurses and every comfort." The millionaire was **Bernard Nadel Baker of Baltimore** and the hospital ship was a refurbished cattle boat

renamed *S.S.Maine*. The staff salaries and maintenance of the vessel were funded in its entirety by the company, effectively amounting to a gift of between £3-4,000 per month.

S.S.Maine was designated a military ship with the help the Marquess of Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for War, and Lord Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty. Lieutenant-Colonel Hensman, a surgeon from the 2nd Life Guards and men from the St. John's Ambulance Brigade were drafted to the ship. Major Julian M Cabell was the senior U.S. Army surgeon on board.

Queen Victoria visited the ship and the Prince of Wales took a personal interest in the project, the Royal patronage helping resolve a few trivial but irritating societal issues that developed later.

S.S.Maine was refitted by **Messrs. Fletcher, Son & Fearnall Ltd. of Limehouse, London**. There were four large wards on board, named Whitelaw Reid (after the husband of a Helen Mills Reid who provided the American medical and nursing staff), Bernard Baker, Columbia & Britannia; one small isolation ward; and elaborately equipped operating theatre and an X-ray installation; with accommodation enough for 218 patients.

The ship sailed under the combined flags of the Union Jack on the mainmast and the Stars and Stripes run up the mizzen; the Red Cross Flag on the foremast and the Admiralty's transport flag at the helm.

With a staff of American doctors, five female and eleven male nurses, the first voyage left Southampton for South Africa 23 December 1899 with Lady Churchill on board. In a letter to a supporter, she reported on her voyage stating "I am very glad that I came as I think & hope that I have been instrumental in smoothing over things & preventing any friction between the American & British contingents. Besides the commanding officer, we have 5 (more?) commissioned officers on board."

S.S.Maine arrived at Durban, in the colony of Natal, shortly after the Battle of Spion Kop (23-25 January 1900) and returned to England on 23 April 1900. Reportedly, one of the first patients taken on board was Lady Churchill's youngest son, Jack.

Peculiarly, the second voyage which left Southampton on 3 May 1900 was staffed solely by male orderlies. This appears to have been a deliberate decision made by the ladies committee of the "The American Ladies Hospital Ship Fund"

Bernard Nadel Baker of Baltimore

Bernard Nadel Baker was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1854. The 1880 United States Census lists him as being a glass manufacturer, married to one Elisibth (b. 1858) and with one child Marguerite Elton Baker (October 1879 - July 16, 1967)

In 1898, he was President and owner of the Atlantic Transport Line, one of only two fleets then plying the transatlantic route, and was considered an international expert on maritime transportation. Before going into the shipping business, he had established a glass manufacturing and chemical company and later founded a coal-mining firm. He went on to head up the Atlantic & Pacific Transport Company;

was member of the U. S. Shipping Board during World War I; and became president of the Baltimore Trust and Guarantee Company. In 1904, Johns Hopkins University established the Bernard N. Baker Chair in Chemistry in recognition of "Mr. Baker's leadership and (financial) generosity". His daughter became a famous newspaper correspondent and adventuress, Marguerite Elton Baker Harrison.

Biographical elements of each one of the ladies who constituted the driving force behind the American Ladies Hospital Ship Fund, namely Lady Randolph Churchill, Mrs. Cornelia Wadsworth Adair, Mrs. A.A. Blow and Mrs. Fanny Ronalds will be of interest to students of the social history of that time. In the interest of brevity, they are not included here.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Ralph G Martin in his authoritative work "Lady Randolph Churchill: A Biography" concludes Volume II Chapter 15 with the following paragraph: "Now as the ship docked in Southampton, she stood on deck radiant in a white straw hat with a blue ribbon on which were embossed the British and American flags. On her blue serge dress, she wore the Maine badge over her left breast, and on her red cravat was a Red Cross pin".

One can but speculate as to whether "Item 429: S.S.Maine in silver", and described above, sold by City Coins of Cape Town (Auction 55 December 2005), was that Maine badge.

REFERENCES:

1. Smith, Anna H. Commemorative Medals of the Z.A.R: Catalogue of An Exhibition of the Collections in the Africana Museum and the Transvaal Museum augmented by Special Loans, 17 November-11 December 1958. Publ: African Museum, Johannesburg, 1958.
2. Letter Jennie Jerome Churchill to Helen Mills Reid, Holograph letter "Atlantic Sat 8.39 January 8, 1900". Manuscripts & Archives, Library of Congress.
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3. Churchill, W.S. My Early Life.
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5. Preamble to description of Bernard N. Baker Chair in Chemistry, Johns Hopkins University. Ferdinand Hamburger Jr. Archives, Johns Hopkins University.
6. Martin, RG. Lady Randolph Churchill: A Biography. Two Volumes. Cassell & Co. 1972
7. Kahn, R.J. "Women and Men at Sea: Gender Debate aboard the Hospital Ship Maine during the Boer War, 1899-1900". Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences. 2001; 56 (2): 111-139
8. The Sammy Marks Papers, Manuscripts & Archives, The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town Libraries
9. South African Archives Repository, Cape Town
10. Family Archival Records, Church of the Latter Day Saints, Utah

10 March 2006

❖ I am in receipt of the following e-mail dated 2007/02/16 Claire Knight, Archives Assistant, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, who unsuccessfully searched the photographic archive for evidence of this brooch : " although there were quite a few photographs of Lady Randolph aboard the Maine, none revealed the medal you have".

❖ I am in receipt of the following e-mail dated 2007/04/16 from Jonathan Kinghorn who wrote:

RE: S.S. Maine Medallion, Bernard Nadel Baker of Baltimore, Lady Randolph Churchill, Mrs. Cornelia Wadsworth Adair, Mrs. A.A. Blow, Mrs. Mary Francis ("Fanny") Ronalds ~ NEW 03/2006

Hi Robin,

I enjoyed reading the article above about the Maine medal. But I am not sure that this is "the only known example in silver." My example, identical to the one illustrated, and identically mounted, appears to be silver also. I inherited it indirectly from my great grandfather, who was Engineering Superintendant for the Atlantic Transport Line at the time.

Sadly I have no idea when, where, or how he obtained it. Until I saw your file, I had assumed that my grandmother, who was a keen amateur silversmith in the 1950s, had mounted it as a brooch. Now I know otherwise.

I been developing a website about the A.T.L. and its ships, and have posted images of my medal on my page for the Maine:

<http://www.atlantictransportline.us/content/07Maine.htm>

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