

# “WOMEN AND CHILDREN LAST!”

THE TRAGIC LOSS OF THE COLLINS LINE'S PIONEERING TRANSATLANTIC STEAMSHIP ARCTIC  
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There was little doubt that by the second quarter of the 19th Century transatlantic maritime trade was in the throes of transition. The crossing of the Atlantic was being revolutionized by the development of long-range steamships. However, the change from sail to steam was gradual since the owners of shipping companies were of the initial belief that steamships could not carry enough coal to traverse the ocean. In 1838 all that changed.

The massive British paddle-wheel steamer *SS Great Western*, designed by the

genius Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and the American *SS Sirius* made almost simultaneous crossings. Steaming from Bristol to New York City, *Great Western* made the crossing in just 14 days and twelve hours. With sailing ships, crossing the Atlantic could often take five weeks or longer. Obviously, with the increased speed in crossing then increased profits could also be achieved. The factors of moving goods and passengers across the Atlantic at much faster speeds and with greater safety combined with a jump in monetary rewards pointed the way towards the future and that future was the steamship.

It fell to Britain to begin transatlantic steamer service.

This happened on 4 July 1840 (the date of 4 July was curious considering



Edward Knight Collins would realize there was great profit to be made by beating the British at their own game of fast transatlantic mail service.



This Currier lithograph was titled *Loss of the USM Steam Ship Arctic Off Cape Race* and is a somewhat fanciful depiction of the destruction of the ship and its passengers.