

Jamaica Banana Producers Steamship Co. Ltd

By Geoff Walker



We all take for granted the Bananas we buy at the Supermarket or Fruit shop in the High Street, but have you ever cast a thought to how they are transported to arrive in such perfect condition on the shop shelf, ready for the consumer?

Jamaica was the first commercial producer of bananas in the Western Hemisphere and is one of the main Caribbean producers. The country's export trade was established in 1866, the bulk of which is transported by sea in purpose built Cooler/Reefer ships. In 1901, the first refrigerated banana ship, **Port Morant**, was equipped with CO2 machinery and carried 23,000 stems of bananas at a controlled temperature from Jamaica to the UK.

Bananas are usually packed in cartons ranging in weight from 11kg to 18kg, which are palletized and carried in temperature controlled holds of ships or refrigerated containers. Palletization, which is now the most common method, has two main advantages over break-bulk carriage. Firstly, it is more cost effective for handling and secondly, it helps reduce the potential for fruit damage by handling.



Cartons are punched with ventilation holes and handles to facilitate handling. A standard 18kg carton usually contains 16 to 20 clusters of bananas, which may be packed loose in a single transparent polythene bag or individually in separate polythene bags to suit individual customer (usually a Supermarket) requirements.

Jamaica Producers Steamship Company Ltd was established in 1932 as a private enterprise, backed by the national Banana producers of Jamaica. They purchased their own ships to transport their cargo. The company was formed in 1929 as the **Jamaica Direct Fruit Line** by the Jamaica Banana Producers Association of Kingston (an organization of independent growers). Four steamers were purchased to transport passengers and general cargo from London to Rotterdam and Jamaica and ship back bananas to Europe. Most banana boats had had varying levels of passenger capacity.

Following Jamaica gaining independence in 1962, the vessels were placed under the Jamaican Flag. However, the industry was nationalized by the Jamaican Government in 1977, which eventually caused the demise of the JBPS in 1980.

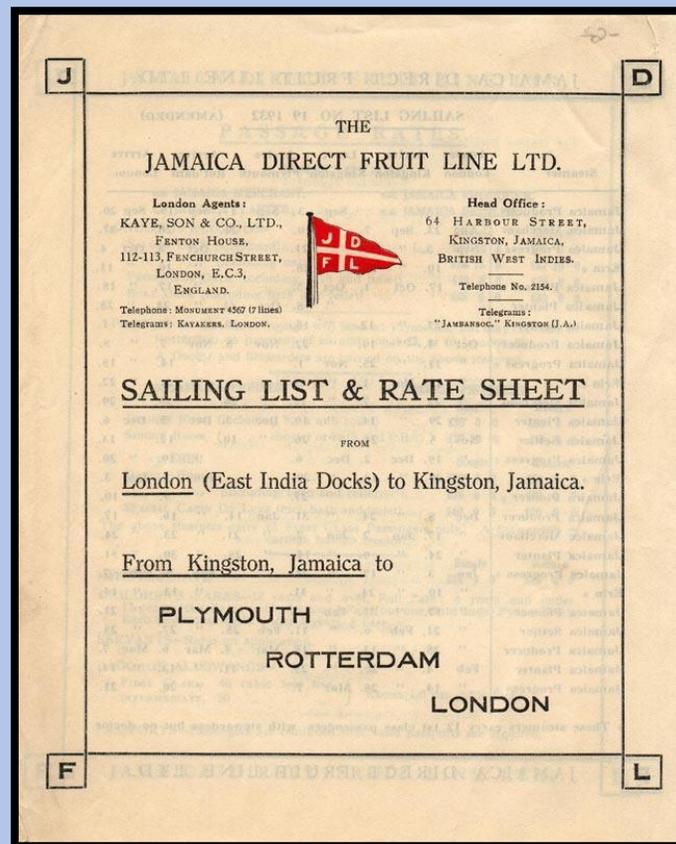


Palletized Bananas seen in a warehouse, ready to be exported on a Reefer ship. Stowage being directly into ship's cooler cargo hold.

Similar pallets are used for loading into refrigerated/cooler ISO containers, designed so their dimensions are suited for containerization, allowing for good through ventilation.

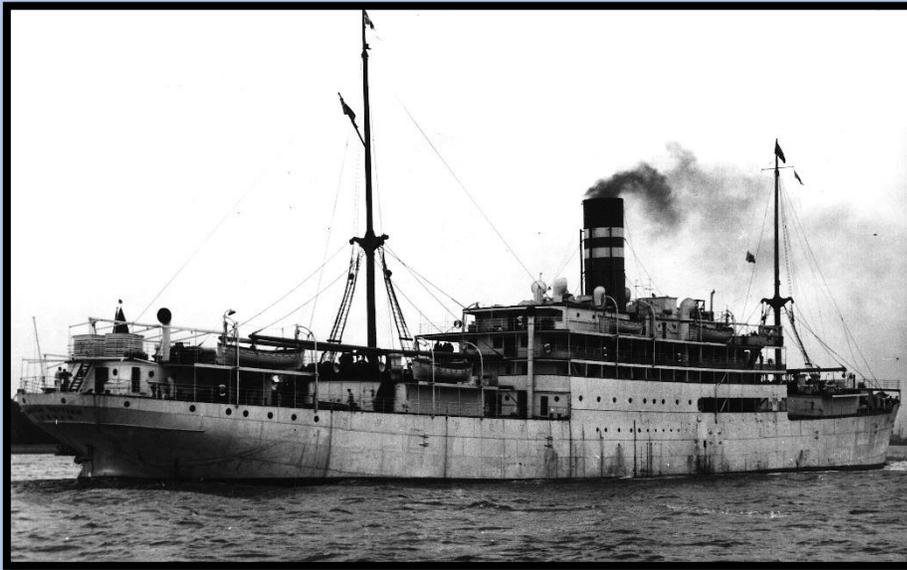
In the case JPSC, bananas were loaded in cartons, using a conveyor system to shift cargo from the hatch square into the cargo compartment wings. Some of their vessels were fitted with side doors to facilitate the

loading and discharge operations.



An early Jamaica Direct Fruit Line sailing advertisement.

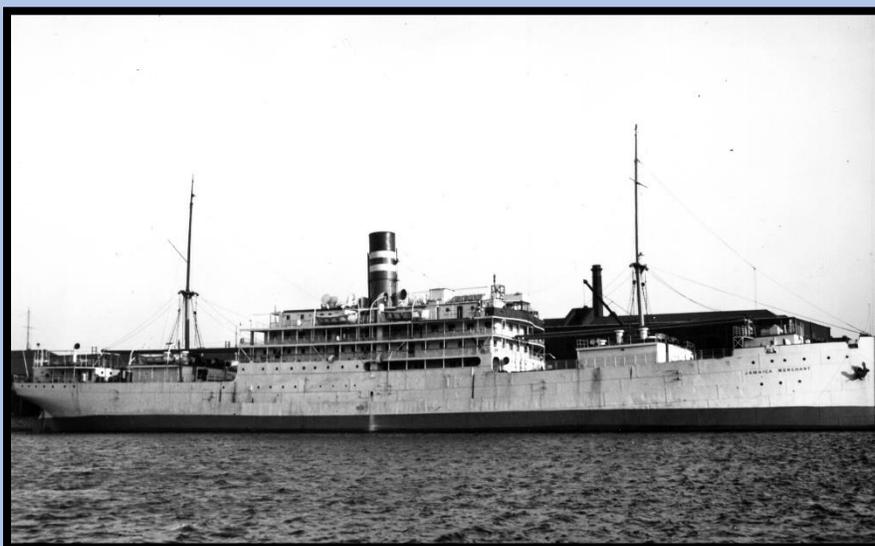
In 1935 the line bought new ships to replace their second-hand tonnage and changed their name to the **Jamaica Banana Producers Steamship Company**. The company flag, originally red with a white cross and the letters 'J D F L' in the quarters changed to green with a yellow cross and the new initials. Their ships sailed under the Jamaican Flag following that country's independence in 1962. The Jamaican Government took over the company in 1977 and it ceased independent operation in 1980.



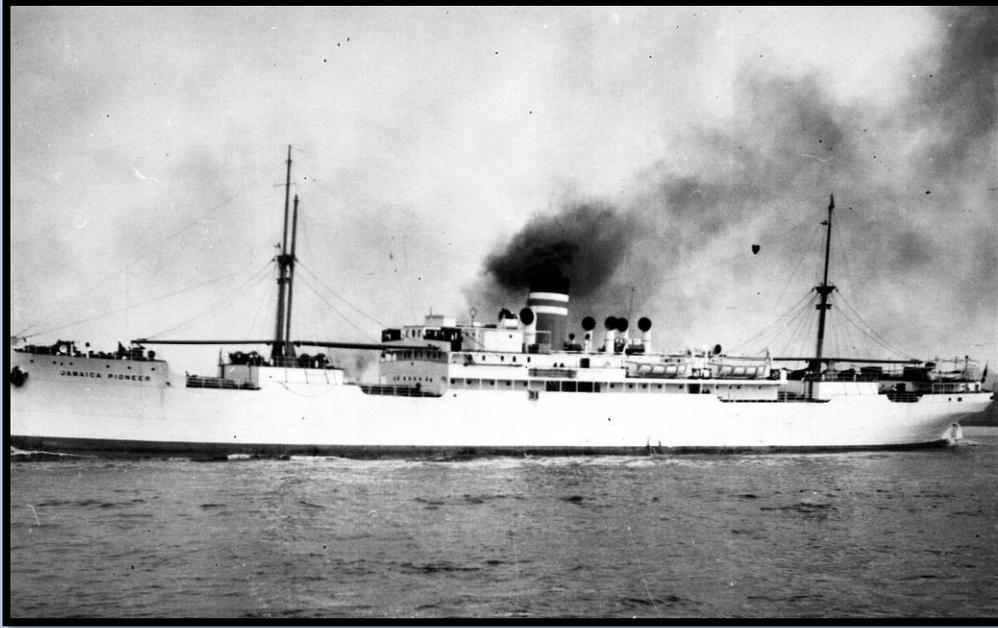
One of JBPSC's earliest acquisition was the **Highland Laddie** completed in 1909 for Nelson SN Co Ltd. Change of name to **SS Jamaica Settler** and owner to **Jamaica Direct Fruit Line Ltd.,** 1929. Built by Cammell Laird & Co Ltd

The Jamaica Settler - taken to Dalmuir on 26 October 1935 for breaking by W.H. Arnott Young & Co.

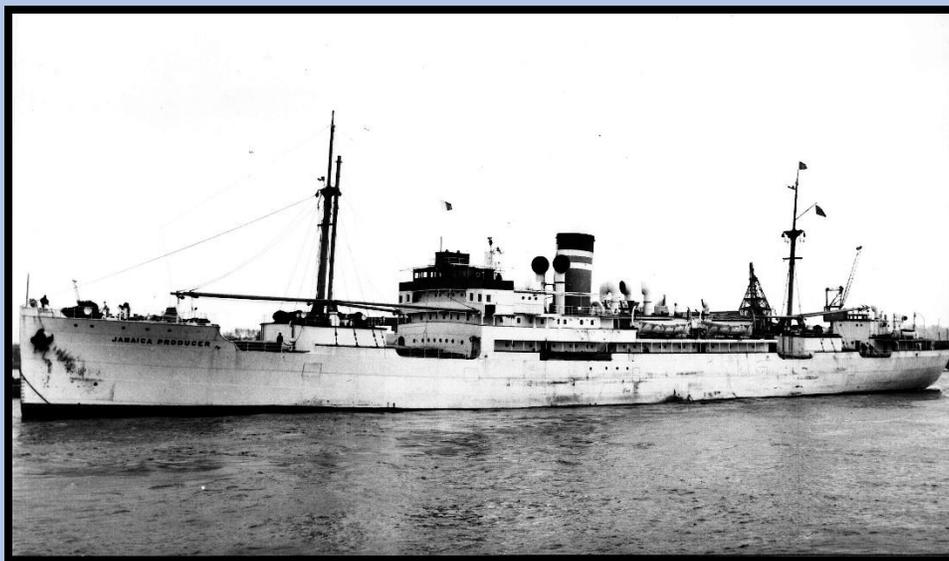
Another of JBPSC's early acquisition was the Highland Piper completed in 1911 for Nelson SN Co Ltd. Change of name to **SS Jamaica Merchant** and owner to Jamaica Direct Fruit Line Ltd., 1929.



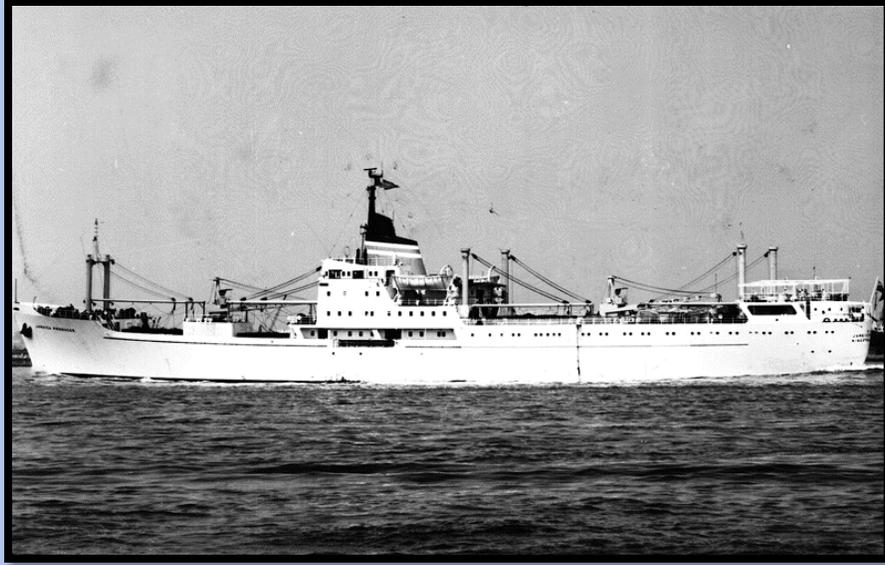
The **Jamaica Merchant**, built by Cammell Laird, Birkenhead, in 1911. Service speed of 13.5 knots, 3 decks and shelter deck. She was fitted with the latest radio direction finding equipment. She also had 4 refrigeration storage areas with capacity 250,000 cubic feet and was sent for demolition at Trieste in May 1937.



The **SS Jamaica Pioneer**, built in Glasgow by Lithgows Limited, in 1931 for JBPS. Fitted for fuel oil and also fitted with radio direction finding equipment. She had a service speed of 16.5 knots. Sadly, she was torpedoed and sunk on 25 August 1940, with loss of life, by German submarine U-100 at position 57° 05' N, 11° 02' W. She was en route from Jamaica to Avonmouth with a cargo of bananas.



Keel laid down as **Jamaica Perseverance**. Change of name to **Jamaica Producer** 1934. Built by Lithgows Ltd, Glasgow. Oil fired with a Service speed 16 knots, 4 decks and cruiser stern. Sent to Barrow 8 May 1962 for breaking by T.W. Ward.



Courtesy. James Richard Henderson

Sleek lines of the 1962 built **MV Jamaica Producer** with a service speed of 17 knots, built by Lithgows Ltd., Glasgow for Jamaica Banana Producers Steamship Co. Ltd. Changed name to **Miranda** and owner to **Bimberton Sg Corp 1981**. Converted to a livestock carrier of 5,870 GRT, name changed to **Cattle King** and owner to **Cattle Purcell Express Sg Corp of Liberia 1981**, change of name to **Cattle Purcell Express 1981**, change of name to **Cattle Express** and owner to **Cattle Express Sg Corp 1983**. Taken to Gadani Beach 23 April 1985 for demolition by Adam Steel.



JBPSC's steam turbine vessel **Jamaica Planter** built in 1959 by Lithgows Ltd at Glasgow produces a service speed of 17 knots. Changed name to **Fine Fruit** and owner to **Universal Seaways Co Pte Ltd 1974**. Taken to Kaohsiung 19 August 1976 for breaking by Lien Hong Iron & Steel Works.

These vessels formed part of a well- managed and maintained fleet, which became iconic in the Jamaica Banana Trade. The company had a policy of engaging British Officers and Jamaican crew. The ships had a Master plus a 4 Deck Officer compliment. All the vessels were registered in Kingston, Jamaica, and apart from operating a fast liner service between the Caribbean and UK, they provided a First Class, passenger service, each ship carrying up to 12 passengers. The company obtained a reputation for high-end service on board and the vessels were popular with passengers plying between the UK and West Indies, until their demise in 1980.

Typically, ships would load a variety of General Cargo at the Royal Docks in London, for a one port discharge in the West Indies. There would follow a 10day crossing to Kingston, which was normally the first port of call, followed by backloading of Bananas at Kingston, Montego Bay, Orchai Rios and Port Antonioin, before returning direct to London. In London, the vessels berthed at a specialized berth at the Royal Docks, fitted for the handling of Bananas.

END

References: Mr. James Richard Henderson (ex 3rd Officer MV Jamaica Producer),

JBPSCL Corporate Archives

The Allen Collection.

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