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06/22/2011 - Transatlantic Terminal Building in 1933
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Transatlantic Terminal Building in 1933



1933 : new Transatlantic Terminal BuildingA passenger terminal for welcoming cruise ships and their passengers. An escalation in the number of emigrants leaving from Cherbourg meant that a new **Transatlantic Terminal Building** was needed rapidly, as well as work to transform Cherbourg-Octeville's port into a deep water port.

The project was entrusted to the architect René Levavasseur and to a roads and bridges engineer, Marcel Chalos. They started work by carrying out studies around France and abroad to gain inspiration. The mission entrusted to them was not easy: to create a structure capable of welcoming passengers (notably those from the *Compagnie Générale des Transatlantiques*) in the best possible conditions; around 175,000 people who were to arrive in and leave from Cherbourg during some 900 stop-overs. Everything had to be thought through carefully to ensure that passengers, their luggage and mail bags were transited as quickly and comfortably as possible, without holding each other up.

The Cherbourg Transatlantic Terminal Building project

The first project for the **Cherbourg Transatlantic Terminal Building** was refused in 1924, judged as too expensive in view of the country's financial situation at the time, with France only just starting to recover from the First World War.



The architect found a new source of inspiration in 1925 at the *International Exposition Modern Industrial and Decorative Art* in Paris. The resulting project was presented in 1926 and corresponded well to the expectations of Cherbourg's Chamber of Commerce, a building respecting the Art déco style in its purest form. The project was voted on August 21st 1926 and would enable **two transatlantic liners** of 300 m to dock simultaneously on the Quai de France. This 'border' station included:

- 9 mobile gangways able to move along the 500-metre docking gallery and allow passengers and their luggage to be embarked and disembarked from any ship docked at the quay at all tide times;
- A Transatlantic Hall measuring 280 meters by 42 including in particular a customs room or *Salle Sous Douane* -, the boarding lounges or *Salle des Pas Perdus*, the offices of various maritime companies and services as well as shops for passengers;
- A *voie charetière*, a passage 280 metres long and 15 metres wide separating the Transatlantic hall from the Train hall;

- A Train hall measuring 240 metres by 40 with three platforms and four train lines directly connected to the Paris/Cherbourg line.

Cherbourg's magnificent **Transatlantic Passenger Terminal** covered an area of 2.5 hectares and allowed passengers to make the journey from Paris to New York without setting a foot outside! It was to be inaugurated in great splendour by the President of the French Republic Albert Lebrun on July 30th 1933 and hailed as the most beautiful in the world by the national and international press of the time.



The Train Hall

The transatlantic liners would really bring this glorious passenger terminal to life.



Mobile gangways One of the first transatlantic ships to dock at the Quai de France in December 1932 was the *De Grasse*, a ship belonging to the *Compagnie Générale des Transatlantiques*. The liner *Bremen* is however, considered as the first **transatlantic** to have chosen to dock at the Quai de France on a regular basis as from April 14th 1934. Not all the liners chose to use the Quai de France, some preferring the old method of dropping anchor in the harbour and using the tender service to ferry passengers back and forth.

A very rich history for this transatlantic passenger terminal



The passenger terminal was to welcome the most prestigious **transatlantic liners** of the time and some of the biggest stars. Its golden years were those leading up to the Second World War when the passenger terminal was occupied by German then American troops successively. This was to have a detrimental effect on the building which was partially demolished before being rebuilt and re-inaugurated in 1952. The port's activity declined somewhat in the 1960's in the face of competition from air travel. The building's destiny was to be saved in the 80's by an association in Cherbourg then by the creation of La Cité de la Mer.