

Abandoned Ships

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

Late last year, Vashon social media pages lit up as a large crane and barge entered Quartermaster Harbor. Everyone wanted to know why it was there. It quickly became apparent that the crane and barge were there to lift the abandoned and sunken tug *Murph*, which had been scuttled in October 2007 along the west shore of the Outer Harbor. As part of the cleanup of the Maury Aquatic Reserve, the State of Washington began to remove old abandoned docks and sunken boats in an effort to preserve the environment of the new reserve.

In the past, abandoned or sunken boats were just allowed to be where they were and to gradually become part of the ecosystem. A good example is seen in the 1909 Asahel Curtis photograph of the *Fleetwood* breaking apart when it was abandoned on the beach at Dockton. The *Fleetwood* was one of the first propeller driven boats on Puget Sound and one of the fastest. She made a once a day round trip from Olympia, to Steilacoom, to Tacoma and to Seattle and back with no stops between. She would typically burn about one chord of wood for every ten miles she traveled. The 80-mile round trip between Olympia and Seattle would consume about 16 chords of wood each day. At this rate, in a year, *Fleetwood* would burn about 5,500 chords of wood each year. In 1898 after serving on Puget Sound for 10 years, *Fleetwood* was stripped of all her salvageable materials and was abandoned on the beach at Dockton to rot.



Asahel Curtis 1909 courtesy of The University of Washington Digital Archive

The *Murph* was a U.S Navy Harbor Tug built in 1944 as the *Winginia* and served in Puget Sound and the Columbia River until 1980. After being placed in reserve until the end of 1985, she was sold for commercial service and renamed the *Murph* by her new owners. When the *Murph* was scuttled in October 2007 she sank in about 30 feet of water so that at low tide her mast and funnel were visible. Lighted buoys were deployed to mark the spot and her hull was checked to ensure no bunker oil was leaking into the Harbor. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources began to plan to removing the *Murph*, and she quickly became a popular dive site among recreational divers.



Murph 2014 courtesy of Global Diving and Salvage

The 2014 photo of the *Murph* being raised by a crane and placed on a barge for removal to a disposal yard is a good example of the way in which we deal with abandoned boats today versus the way we did over 100 years ago when the *Fleetwood* was abandoned. The cost of removing the *Murph* was well over \$300,000 while the cost of disposing of the *Fleetwood* was almost nothing. We have come to learn that protecting the environment can be a costly but necessary responsibility.

Bruce Haulman is an island historian

Terry Donnelly is an island photographer