

SCHOONER *EQUATOR*
Southwest corner of 10th Street and Craftsman Way
Everett
Snohomish County
Washington

HAER WA-206
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Schooner Equator

HAER No. WA-206

Location: Southwest corner of 10th Street and Craftsman Way, Everett, Snohomish County, Washington

Type of Craft: Two-masted schooner; later, tugboat

Official Registry No.: 135991

Principal Measurements:

Length:	78'-6"
Beam:	22.0'
Depth of hold:	8.0'
Gross tonnage:	72.21
Net tonnage:	68.61 ¹

(The listed dimensions are as originally built, but it should be noted that length and tonnage for this vessel changed over time.)

Propulsion: Sail (1888), steam (1897), oil (1922), diesel (1941)

Date of Construction: 1888

Designer and builder: Matthew Turner, Benicia, California

Original Owner: Wightman Brothers, San Francisco

Present Owner: Uncertain

Disposition: Public display as historic relic

Significance: The small schooner *Equator* was built by the prolific California shipwright Matthew Turner for use as a South Seas copra trader. A year after its launch in 1888, it survived the Pacific tropical cyclone that destroyed American and German warships and numerous merchantmen at Apia, Samoa. Shortly afterward, Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson chartered the schooner for the second of his three cruises among the islands of the South Pacific. As steamers took over island trade in the 1890s, the *Equator* was sold and converted to a steam tender for the Alaska salmon canneries. In 1915, it became a tugboat operating out of Seattle and was chartered briefly by the federal

¹ *Twenty-Seventh Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States . . . for the year ending June 30, 1895* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1895), 60; Roger A. Hambidge, "Schooner Equator," *Seaways Ships in Scale 2*, no. 3 (May/June 1991): 37.

government for coastal surveying in Alaska. It remained in operation until 1956, receiving new engines in 1922 and 1941. The many lives of the *Equator* demonstrate how well-built wooden hulls were often adapted to new purposes as economic forces changed the maritime trading environments of the West Coast and the Pacific in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Author: Michael R. Harrison, 2012

Project Information: This project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, administers the HAER program.

The project was prepared under the direction of Todd Croteau (HAER Maritime Program Coordinator), who created the large format photographs. Historian Michael R. Harrison wrote the historical report.

**Related
Documentation:**

For more information about shipbuilder Matthew Turner and another of the many vessels from his yard, see the following documentation:

Galilee, HAER CA-2271

DESCRIPTION

The *Equator* was a small ocean-going two-masted wood trading schooner. Its single deck supported a large cabin aft and a galley house abaft the foremast. Each mast supported short topmasts, and the rig comprised fore- and mainsails, main-topmast staysail, forestaysail, jib, jib topsail, and fore and main gaff topsails. The vessel originally had a plain gammon-knee head and a transom stern. Other details of its construction, such as the types of wood used, the scantlings, and the frame spacing, remain to be determined from the surviving portion of the hull.²

The *Equator* was significantly altered in 1897 for service as a fishing tender. Boilers and a steam engine were installed, the transom was rebuilt into a round counter stern, and a new deckhouse was added with pilot house and funnel atop. The masts and bowsprit were retained but cut down, only to be removed later, probably when the vessel became a tugboat in 1915. The *Equator's* charter by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1916 led to a substantial lengthening of the deck house and the addition of a top-of-house cabin, but these were removed at the end of the charter. The boat's funnel was shortened after the 1922 installation of an oil engine, but cosmetic changes resulting from a 1941 overhaul that included the installation of a new diesel engine are unknown.³

HISTORY

The schooner *Equator* was designed by shipwright Matthew Turner and built at his yard in Benicia, California, for Wightman Brothers, commission merchants, of San Francisco. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Turner was the most prolific builder of wood sailing vessels in the United States. The schooner, small at around 70 gross tons, was intended for the copra trade between the U.S. West Coast and the islands of the South Pacific. It entered this service in June 1888 under Capt. Edwin Dennis Reid and continued running to the South Seas through the end of 1895.⁴

The Samoan Islands were a center of the copra trade, and Germany, the United States, and Great Britain had competing economic and strategic interests in the islands at the time the *Equator* began calling there. German intervention in local Samoan affairs led to a diplomatic crisis in 1889, and by March seven warships from the three nations faced each other in the harbor of Apia on the island of Upolu. Hostilities were averted, however, by the arrival on

² Hambidge, "Schooner *Equator*," 34.

³ Raymond Aker's reconstructed lines and sail plan for *Equator* appear in Hambidge, "Schooner *Equator*." Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society photographs nos. 903-31 and 903-34 show the *Equator* as a fishing tender ca. 1905 and tugboat ca. 1915. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Central Library photographs theb0105 and theb0110 show the vessel adapted for wire-drag service in Alaska. The boat is pictured after the installation of a crude-oil engine in *Pacific Motor Boat*, June 1922, 12.

⁴ "Afloat and ashore," *Daily Alta California*, June 2, 1888, 1; John Lyman, "Pacific Coast-built Sailors, 1850-1950," *Marine Digest* (Apr. 5, 1941): 2.

March 15 of a tropical cyclone, which, lasting into the 16th, destroyed the American warships *Trenton* and *Vandalia* and the German warships *Eber* and *Adler*. USS *Nipsic* and SMS *Olga* were stranded but later recovered, while HMS *Calliope* alone just managed to put to sea before the hurricane-force winds trapped the other ships in the harbor. Fifty Americans and ninety-six Germans died, along with an unknown number of sailors from six anchored merchant vessels the storm also destroyed. The *Equator*, 100 miles north of Samoa en route to Apia, rode out the cyclone at sea, nearly wrecking on the island of Tutuila but surviving with only minor damage. On March 24, the schooner became the second vessel to enter Apia after the storm, after the *Calliope*, which had returned on the 20th. Rear Admiral Lewis Kimberly, commander of the American squadron, engaged Captain Reid to run to Tutuila, meet the passenger steamer *Alameda*, and send it to Apia to pick up the wounded. The *Equator* met the *Alameda*, transferred ten American cadets to the steamer, then sailed for San Francisco.⁵

The *Alameda* arrived in Honolulu on April 6 with survivors from Apia as well as the first reports of the storm. The ship also carried John Wightman, Jr., one of *Equator's* owners, who had been touring the South Pacific aboard the schooner and transferred to *Alameda* after the storm. Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson was then in Hawaii and was looking for a vessel in which to make a second cruise in the Pacific. He learned of the disaster and the *Equator's* role in it, arranged to meet with Wightman, and quickly settled a six-month charter of the schooner for \$5,000.⁶

Stevenson's party included his wife Fanny, her son Lloyd Osbourne, her son-in-law Joe Strong, and their cook Ah Fu. Writing to his friend Sidney Colvin, Stevenson noted how the *Equator*

will come along some time in the first part of June, lie outside the harbour here and signal to us. Within forty-eight hours we shall pack up our possessions, our barrel of sauer kraut, our barrel of salt onions, our bag of cocoanuts, our native garments, our tobacco, fish hooks, red combs, and Turkey red calicoes (all the latter for trading purposes), our hand organ, photograph and painting materials, and finally our magic lantern – all these

⁵ "Old ocean's fury," *Daily Alta California*, April 14, 1889, 1; "In the gale. The schooner *Equator* goes through the storm safely," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 14, 1889, 10; Archie Emerson Palmer, "Record of Political Events. Samoa," *Political Science Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (June 1889): 380; John Alexander Clinton Gray, "The Apia Hurricane of 1889," in *Amerika Samoa* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press), 87-91.

In *A Footnote to History*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "A tiny schooner, the *Equator*, Captain Edwin Reid, dear to myself from the memories of a six months' cruise, lived out upon the high seas the fury of that tempest which had piled with wrecks the harbour of Apia, found a refuge in Pango-Pango, and arrived at last in the desolated port with a welcome and lucrative cargo of pigs."

⁶ Lowell D. Holmes, *Treasured Islands: Cruising the South Seas with Robert Louis Stevenson* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Sheridan House, Inc., 2001), 127-28.

upon a large whaleboat, and go out to the *Equator*. Lloyd, also, takes a fiddle, a guitar, a native instrument something like a banjo, called a taropatch fiddle, and a lot of song books.⁷

The *Equator* sailed from San Francisco June 2, arrived off Honolulu nineteen days later, and departed with the Stevenson party for the Gilbert Islands on June 24. The vessel called at the islands of Butaritari, Marakei, Abaiang, and Abemama in turn, and Captain Reid left Stevenson and his family on Abemama for nearly two months, picking them up again in late October and carrying them via Butaritari to Apia, where the *Equator* left them for the last time. A month later Stevenson had purchased an estate outside Apia, which eventually became his home and final resting place. Events from the *Equator* cruise are described in Stevenson's 1896 book *In the South Seas* as well as in many letters, and it was during the party's stay on Abemama that he and Osbourne started writing *The Wrecker*, published in 1892.⁸

The *Equator* remained a Pacific trader until 1896, when it was sold to Joseph Hume, a member of the Hume family that owned significant salmon packing operations in Alaska. Hume's firm sent the schooner to the Gulf of Alaska in the summer of 1896, and it returned to San Francisco with 1,612 cases of salmon from Chiquik Bay at the end of July.⁹ The next year, Hume's company had the vessel converted to a steam cannery tender. Boilers, a 275-hp engine, and a propeller were installed at the Fulton Iron Works in San Francisco. The stern was also extensively rebuilt and an expanded deckhouse added.¹⁰

The *Equator* remained an Alaskan cannery tender until 1915, passing with other Hume properties into the ownership of the Pacific Packing and Navigation Company in 1901 and then about 1904 to the Northwest Fisheries Company of Seattle. The Cary-Davis Tug and Barge Company, also of Seattle, purchased the *Equator* in 1915 for use as a tug. Almost immediately, Cary-Davis chartered the boat to the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey for use in wire-drag surveys of southeastern Alaska in 1916 and 1917. The government paid a rate of

⁷ Sidney Colvin, ed., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol. 3: 1887-1891* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 144.

⁸ "Wharf and Wave," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 2, 1889, 12; "Arrival of the Equator," *Hawaiian Gazette*, June 25, 1889, 1; "Off to the South Seas," *Daily Alta California*, July 10, 1889, 6; Richard Dury, "Robert Louis Stevenson and the Cruise on the Equator," Robert Louis Stevenson Web site, <http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/equator-cruise>.

⁹ "Chehalis smashes another record," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 7, 1896, 25; "Ship Cedarbank again on fire," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 31, 1896, 8.

¹⁰ "Hurried cruise of the Oregon," *San Francisco Call*, Jan. 14, 1897, 7; "Interesting items on the water front," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar. 13, 1897, 14; "From an evangel to plain trader," *San Francisco Call*, Mar. 24, 1897, 7. The first source names R. D. Hume & Co. as *Equator's* owners; the second two name J. Hume Canning Co. and Joseph Hume, respectively.

\$925 per month for the 1916 charter. These surveys used a submerged wire to chart underwater hazards to navigation.¹¹ Author Frank G. Carpenter described the work:

Our boat was the steamer *Equator*, the tiny craft upon which Robert Louis Stevenson made his tour through the South Sea islands, and we had a second vessel, a little tug called the *Roosevelt*, to carry the other end of the wire. It takes two boats to operate the wire drag. They move along on each side of the channel and carry with them, far down under the water, so far that the deepest ship that sails the course could not be caught by it, a taut strand of telephone wire. This wire sweeps the channel. It is so balanced by weights and buoys that it moves through the water as the boats go onward until it catches some rock that reaches above the depth for which it is gauged.¹²

In 1918, returned to general towing service, the boat was under the command of Capt. John Jorgenson, and William Allison was its chief engineer. In 1922, Cary-Davis replaced the *Equator's* steam engine with a 200-hp Fairbanks-Morse "C-O" [crude oil] surface-ignition engine, which it was able to operate at a substantial savings in fuel costs.¹³

Little is known about *Equator's* service as a tug except for one serious accident. On the night of October 9, 1923, the *Equator* ran aground outside the Quillayute River bar on the Washington coast. The vessel was towing a log crib to sea at the time in company with the *Dolly C*, another Cary-Davis boat, which itself ran aground trying to assist the stranded *Equator*. *Equator's* hull was holed and filled up with sand, but the vessel was eventually refloated by filling the hold with empty oil drums. It was towed to Seattle for repairs.¹⁴

By 1940, the *Equator's* second engine was worn out, but its hull remained sound. After almost a year laid up, the vessel was thoroughly overhauled in 1941, work that included installation of a new 250-hp diesel engine. With this engine the boat remained in service

¹¹ Lyman, "Pacific Coast-built Sailors"; "Under charter to the United States . . .," *Power Boating* 15, no. 5 (May 1916): 42; *Annual Report of the Superintendent, United States Coast and Geodetic Survey to the Secretary of Commerce for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1916* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1916), 117; *Annual Report of the . . . Coast and Geodetic Survey . . . for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1917*, 183; *Annual Report of the . . . Coast and Geodetic Survey . . . for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1918*, 105.

¹² Frank G. Carpenter, "How Coast Survey is exploring Alaskan seas for pinnacle rocks," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Jan. 23, 1916, 69.

¹³ "Historic craft Tacoma visitor," *Tacoma Tribune*, June 5, 1918, 11; "Work Boat Owners Turn to Heavy Oil Engines," *Pacific Motor Boat* 14, no. 9 (June 1922): 14.

¹⁴ "Tug *Equator* sinks," *Hartford Courant*, Oct. 11, 1923, 2; Stevenson Society of America, *General Report for 1924 and 1925. Supplement 6 to Year Book of 1917* (Saranac Lake, N.Y.: Stevenson Society of America, Inc., 1925), 5; Gordon R. Newell, *The H. W. McCurdy Marine History of the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1966), 343.

until 1956, when it was finally abandoned along the jetty at the mouth of Snohomish River at Everett, Washington.¹⁵

In 1962, reporter Bill Lipsky wrote a column about the *Equator* in the *Everett Daily Herald*, sparking renewed interest in the vessel. "San Francisco marine historians visited the boneyard with an eye to salvaging the schooner for their waterfront museum," a UPI story later reported. In 1963, local dentist Eldon Schalka and the Everett Kiwanis Club took the lead and acquired possession of the abandoned hull. In summer 1966, Kiwanis-organized volunteers began cleaning the muck out of it, and in June 1967 the vessel was hauled up on the hard and stored at Dick Eitel's 14th Street Fishermen's Boat Shop. Schalka and Eitel helped establish a nonprofit group, *Equator, Inc.*, to restore the vessel, but they made little fund-raising progress. Although Schalka succeeded in getting the *Equator* placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, his group's plan to have the vessel restored and made a centerpiece of a Bicentennial park in Everett came to nothing. The hull was moved to the Port of Everett's new Marina Village in 1980 and later placed under a purpose-built protective shed near the 10th Street boat launch. After Schalka died in a plane crash in 1992, the nonprofit, renamed the *Equator Foundation*, disbanded. Its final members did not transfer ownership of the hull to the city or the Port of Everett, leaving the legal status of the hull uncertain. It remains under its protective shed on the Everett waterfront at the time of writing.¹⁶

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¹⁵ Lyman, "Pacific Coast-built Sailors," 2; Newell, *McCurdy Marine History*, 489; Lawrence E. O'Donnell and Jack C. O'Donnell, *The Evolution of a Vibrant Everett Waterfront: A Story of Sawdust, Salmon, and Speedboats* (Everett, Wash.: Port of Everett, 2010), 139.

¹⁶ Quote from Eldon Barrett, "Robert Louis Stevenson's ship, *Equator*, awash in mud, may be raised and restored," *Watertown (N.Y.) Daily Times*, Aug. 9, 1966, 4; Bill Lipsky, "Everett citizens want to save novelist's old schooner," *Tri-City (Wash.) Herald*, May 3, 1963, 12; Helen Follis, "The *Equator*: A Bit of History in Dry Dock," *The Pacific Northwest Forum* 1, no. 4 (fall 1976): 16-18; James P. Delgado and Candice Clifford, eds., *1990 Inventory of Large Preserved Historic Vessels* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Maritime Initiative, 1990), 102; Vanessa Ho, "Ex-747 pilot, dentist die in plane crash," *Seattle Times*, Oct 6, 1992; O'Donnell, *Evolution of a Vibrant Everett Waterfront*, 139; Lisa Mandt, email to author, May 25, 2012.

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FIGURE PAGES

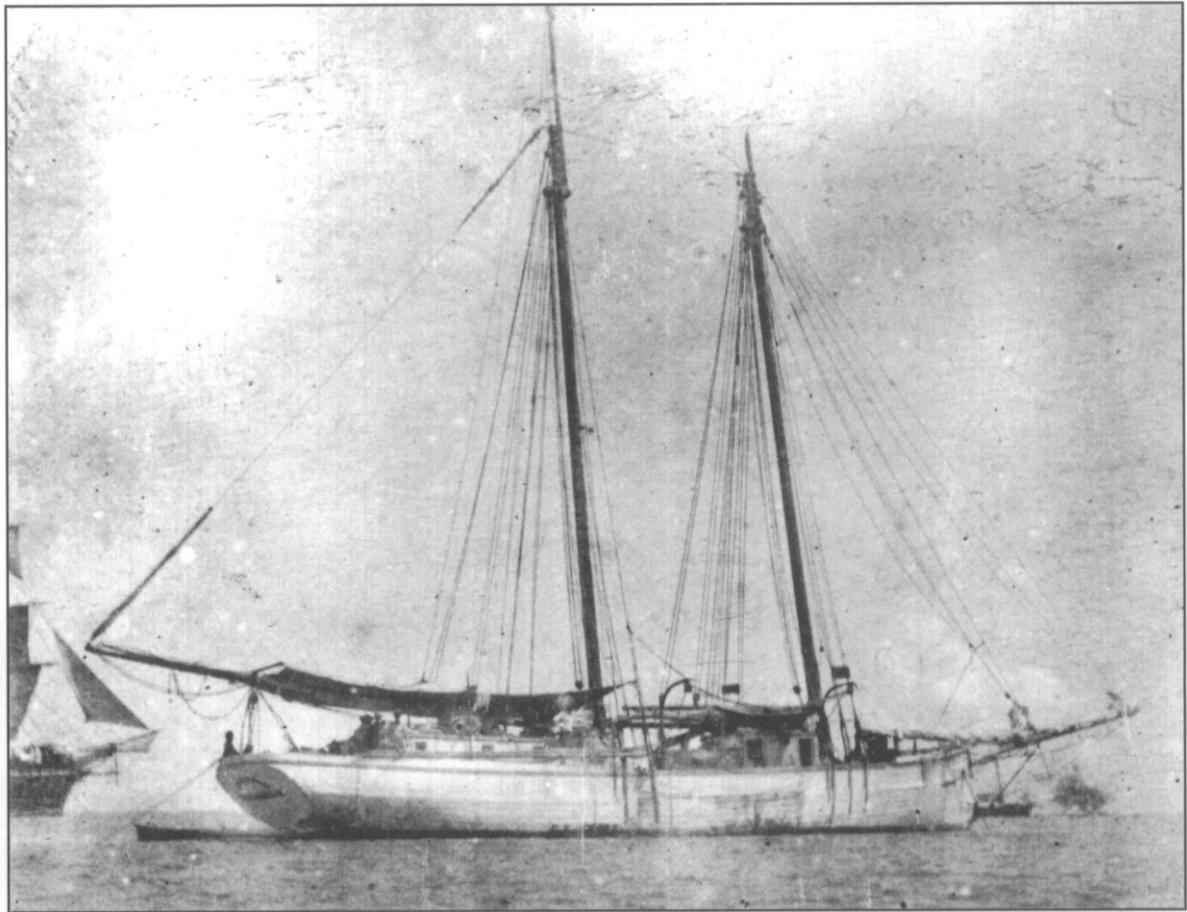


Figure 1. Schooner *Equator* at Apia, Samoa, December 1889. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park photo. Note the stump of the foretopmast, broken a week or so before sailing in heavy weather. "Rain, calms, squalls – bang – there's the foretopmast gone," Robert Louis Stevenson wrote. "Rain, calm, squalls, away with the staysail; more rain, more calm, more squalls; a prodigiously heavy sea all the time, and the *Equator* staggering and hovering like a swallow in a storm; and the cabin, a great square, crowded with wet human beings, and the rain avalanching on the deck, and the leaks dripping everywhere . . . [S]uch voyages are at the best a trial."¹⁷

¹⁷ Colvin, *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 163.

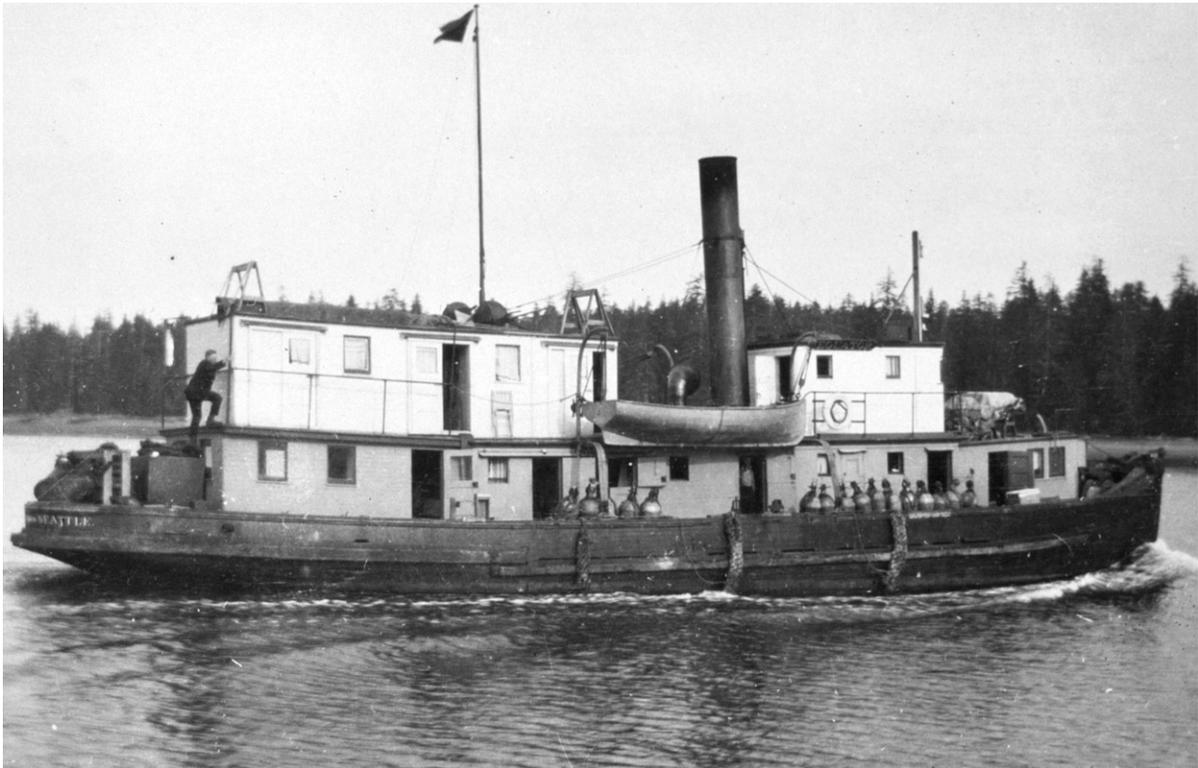


Figure 2. *Equator* as a wire-drag launch for the Coast Survey in Alaska, ca. 1916. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration photo.



Figure 3. *Equator* with the chartered Coast Survey launch *Roosevelt* during the southeastern Alaska wire-drag surveys, ca. 1916. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration photo.



EQUATOR—An old-time steam tug owned by the Carey-Davis Tow-boat Co. of Seattle. Her 275 h.p. steam plant was removed in March and a 200-h.p. Fairbanks-Morse "C-O" oil engine replaced it.

Figure 4. *Equator* after conversion from steam to oil-engine propulsion. From *Pacific Motor Boat* 14, no. 9 (June 1922), page 12.