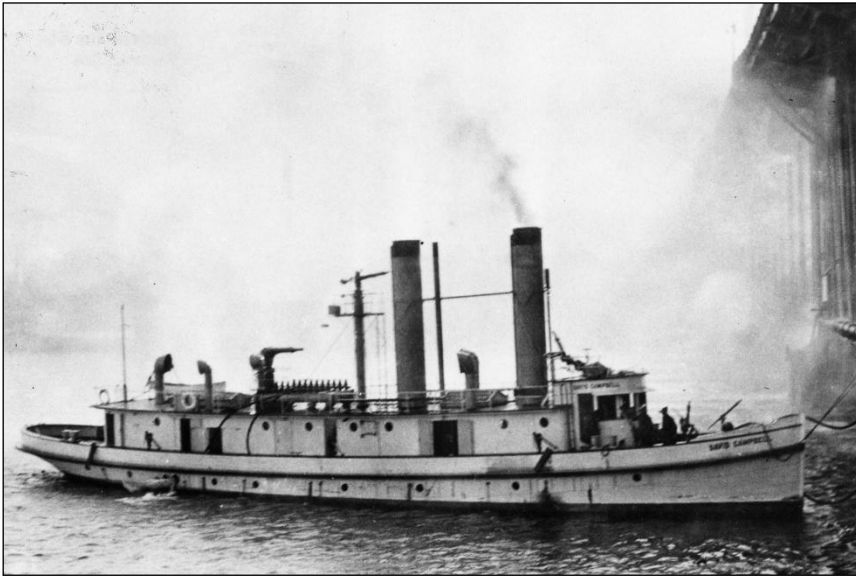


The Original Fireboat David Campbell

Compiled from www.AleutianExpress.com and Portland Fire Archives

The Fireboat David Campbell was christened on January 26, 1913 to supplement the Portland fireboat marine program that previously utilized the Fireboat George H. Williams to protect the waterways of Portland.



Named the “David Campbell” to honor Fire Chief David Campbell, who died in service on June 26, 1911, the fireboat would serve until 1927 when three new gasoline-powered fireboats would be commissioned, effectively rendering the steam powered George Williams and David Campbell obsolete.

The David Campbell was built by Smith and Watson Ironworks. The steel-hulled vessel would weigh in at 242 tons. At 125 feet in length and a beam of 25 feet, it

was a large craft, powered by steam. It was capable of pumping 12,000 gallons of water per minute.

The original David Campbell would be sold in 1927 and renamed “The Chief.” This opened the door for the one of the new fireboats to be named “David Campbell,” continuing to honor Chief Campbell’s legacy. The second David Campbell would go on to serve 93 ½ years before being retired from service on June 30, 2021. In its retirement, the David Campbell would be permanently loaned to the Columbia River Maritime Museum to go on a land-based display in Astoria, Oregon.

The Chief, as the first David Campbell was re-christened, was purchased by Foss Launch & Tug Company. A year later (1928), it was sold to Kanaga Ranching Company and redesigned by naval architect H.C. Hanson into a two-masted auxiliary sail/diesel powered cargo schooner. It would be renamed the “Aleutian Native.”

In 1932, the vessel would be purchased by the Petroleum Navigation Company and converted to an oil tanker. In 1935 it would begin service to Alaska. The name was changed to “Express” in 1939. The vessel was reported to be active in World War II and served during the “Battle of the Aleutians” (1942 to 1943) as an oil tanker and also for the evacuation of residents of some islands invaded by the Japanese.

In 1953, the Express was converted to an ocean-going towboat and became a combination towboat, tanker, and also a Bering Sea crabbing boat. As a crabbing boat, service began with Wakefield Trawlers Inc., operating out of Akutan, Alaska, using drag gear to land crabs. This work was documented in “Pacific Workboat Magazine” in an article issued in October 1954 and also in the “Seattle Times” in a January 1970 Sunday edition special article.

In 1956, ownership would again change, this time to the Upper Columbia River Towing Company. The job would now be towing log rafts from Oregon to California to feed the housing boom of the era.

1962 to 1969 would find another new owner, M/V Express Inc. This prompted a return to the Bering Sea for crabbing duties. Michael Lynch and Miles Rice would serve as operators during this stint.

In 1973, the Express was converted to a salmon processor and later into a tender/towboat operated by Tom and Mike Kent.

Today, the “Aleutian Express,” as she is now known, is owned and commanded by John Clutter. He has given the vessel a complete renovation and refitting, similar to the 1929 configuration. The interior and deck setting are more modern and other concepts from previous owners have been left in place. Among other things, it has useable roller furling sails, 12 volt LED lighting, and a smaller, more fuel-efficient generator. It can also sail silently, without power, when necessary. Silent running is beneficial for acoustical research of whales, seabird rookeries, and to minimize pollution in ecologically sensitive areas.

It’s current name, the “Aleutian Express,” combines the older and newer names to acknowledge the rich history of the boat while distinguishing its modern renovations and purpose. Moored in Port Orchard, Washington, the vessel is poised to enjoy another decade of service.

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www.PortlandFireHistory.com