



WESTERN CANADA
HERITAGE VESSEL
REGISTRY

Statement of Significance

Master

1922



MARITIME MUSEUM
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Master

Year built:	1922
Builder:	Arthur Moscrop: Beach Avenue Shipyard Ltd.
Build Location:	Vancouver, B.C.
Vessel Type:	Commercial Tugboat
WCHVR Category:	B.C. Heritage Vessel
Owner(s):	SS Master Society David Bradford, President

Précis:

Master is the sole remaining unaltered representative of the era of steam-driven tugboats on the BC coast. Her design reflects the “state of the art” in wooden tugboat building in the early 20th century. The design handsomely reflects her intended, if unglamorous purpose of towing barges or log rafts in BC coastal waters, duties she performed for over 40 years. **Master** is today believed to be the sole surviving wooden-hulled, steam-powered tugboat afloat in the world!



SS Master in False Creek, ca. 2000

Statement of Significance

Master is the sole remaining representative of the era of steam-driven tugboats on the BC coast, which once numbered in the hundreds. Her design and layout reflect the “state of the art” in wooden tugboat construction in the early 20th century. The design reflects the intended purpose of towing barges or log rafts along the coast or in the major rivers of BC, mundane but essential operations which are in general quite unique to the west coast of Canada. Considerable investigation amongst the global “tug-knowledgeable” community indicates that **Master** is today (2026) the sole surviving wooden-hulled, steam-powered tugboat afloat in the world!

It cannot be claimed that **Master** is of an innovative or unique design, but rather that she is an excellent example of the best design and construction techniques of wooden tugs of that era. **Master** reflects the age of steam on the BC coast and is the sole surviving example of that important period. She is fitted with a British navy surplus steam engine which reflects prudence in controlling the cost of construction. The use of steam to power virtually every piece of propulsion machinery and deck machinery on the tug, including the steering gear, is however quite unique. **Master** remains effectively in “as-built” configuration. She is estimated to comprise about 70% original material at present, having had some reconstruction and a new boiler in 1940, and then one major restoration in the 1960's. All her other machinery is original.

Master measures 85 feet length overall, 19.75' beam, 12.65' depth. She is single-screw, powered by a triple expansion steam engine. In common with most wooden vessels built in BC, she is constructed almost entirely of BC timbers, primarily Douglas Fir. Her construction is very robust with heavy sawn frames throughout. Some Purpleheart is used in high wear areas.

Master represents the coastal economy of the Province of BC which depended on transportation of materials and goods by tug & barge between virtually every community, logging camp and fish processing plant on the BC coast during the last century. Her story is in some respects quite unremarkable, working where needed on a regular and continuously reliable basis for forty years. On the other hand, that “worker” attribute reflects well on life on this coast, where durability and reliability were paramount.

Since being saved from an ignoble fate by The World Ship Society (later to become the SS Master Society), **Master** has been almost continuously in the public eye, attending boat shows and major maritime events as the unique representative of the steam era of BC coastal towing. As such she has become a rather iconic model for many paintings, including by notable artists such as John Horton, Harry Heine, and Christina Morrison. In 2019 **Master** was awarded the Beaver Medal by the Maritime Museum of BC “for Maritime Excellence” in the service of British Columbia.

The entire history and provenance of ***Master*** is preserved and is well-documented in the archival materials of the SS Master Society, including her entire ownership chronology and her complete suite of logbooks. Today ***Master*** is berthed in Steveston BC at the historic Britannia Heritage Shipyard.

Her condition today is less than ideal, as exposure to weather for many years has caused some structural deterioration, especially in the decks, bulwarks and deckhouse. Below waterline however she is watertight and quite sound. Her boiler is not operational, so repair work is required. Her deck machinery has just been refurbished and is in storage awaiting re-installation. Efforts to raise funds for an extensive “Centennial” restoration have not been successful, and so in anticipation that the tug may not survive more than a very few more years, a program of extensive digitization of ***Master*** has been conducted, culminating in a series of 3D and 2D arrangement and structural drawings plus a complete video “walk-through” of the tug, so that her remarkable story may not be lost.

Statement of Significance for:

Steam Tugboat *Master*

**Prepared and acknowledged by the
Western Canada Heritage Vessel Registry**

Lead Assessor: Robert G. Allan

Signature: _____

Date: Sept. 2, 2026

SOURCES:

- SS Master Society Website (www.SSMaster.org)
- Nauticapedia : <https://www.nauticapedia.ca/vessel.php?id=6318>



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