



NWSeaport

Maritime Heritage Center

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For Immediate Release

1904 Lightship No. 83 “Swiftsure” Receives New Beacon Light, Red Paint and Lettering Prior to Re-launching

Northwest Seaport’s Lightship No. 83 “Swiftsure” will be re-launched early next week after three months of major restoration work at Lake Union Drydock Company (LUDC). This yard period has seen its fair share of excitement, drama and surprises from the past.

Lightship No. 83 was built in Camden, New Jersey in 1904 and served on all five lightship stations. It was retired from active service in 1960 and became a museum ship under care of Save Our Ships in 1966.

Today, Swiftsure is nearing the completion of Phase II of Northwest Seaport’s Lightship Rehabilitation Project, a multi-year, \$1million project to replace the deck, rigging, remove hazardous materials, and restore the Swiftsure’s primary electrical systems. When finished, the ship will be re-opened to the public at Lake Union Park.

Over the past 90 days ship yard crews removed deteriorated wheelhouse, radio house and wooden weather deck. Deck beams were cleaned, primed and painted—ready to receive a new wooden deck. Below the waterline, hull was cleaned, inspected, patched and reinforced to ensure it will last decades to come. Entire hull was also painted with the Coast Guard Red paint.

One of the exciting discoveries occurred while removing the 1937 deck planking was sections of original 1904 planking still in place. Northwest Seaport’s Nautical Archaeologist-in-Residence, Saxon Bisbee, said, “We discovered 100-year old pitch and oakum still in just a few seams. This is a direct link back to Camden shipwrights.”

While pressure washing the hull, it was found that most of the 109-year old hull was in good shape, but crevice corrosion had made several small holes in hull plating. One hole was directly under a fuel tank still containing some fuel oil in it. “Fortunately, it happened exactly where it should—in drydock, where LUDC’s emergency procedures were implemented immediately” Northwest Seaport President, Shannon Fitzgerald, said.

Historic Ships Wharf – At Lake Union Park

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Emptying the tanks and patching the steel hull plating sent the project over \$80,000 over budget.

Inside the ship, a century of layered paint was removed from the steel deck beams, revealing the word “CARNEGIE” molded on each one. Northwest Seaport Nautical Archaeologist and Vessel Manager, Nathaniel Howe points to one saying “The mark of the Carnegie Steel Company really illustrates that this ship is truly a product of early industrial America—still here, still floating.”

“That the vessel has survived over 100 years is a tribute to the men who built her, said Hobie Stebbins III of LUDC.

The final days in drydock include replacing the lightship’s beacon light, painting on the white station lettering “SWIFTSURE,” and re-launching her into Lake Union where she will show off her gleaming red paint job. Tugs will return her back to the Historic Ships Wharf.

On Lightship No. 83 a shipyard crane is required to change one light bulb—the beacon light atop the high mast. This will be the crowning touch before the ship leaves the shipyard.

Otto Loggers, Executive Director said, “Relighting the lightship will be an inspiring symbol for our community, and we’re blessed have this life-saving National Historic Landmark in Seattle. We need to work together to ensure Swiftsure becomes the rich cultural resource we envision for her.”

A skilled master sign painter will paint the 6-foot tall white letters of SWIFTSURE on the ship’s sides in accordance with traditional Coast Guard specifications. Swiftsure is not the ship’s name, but rather the name of the nearest lightship station. The Swiftsure Bank is a shallow area located west of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, marking the approaches to Puget Sound and Seattle.

Loggers said, “Tuesday’s re-launching of Swiftsure, the beacon of Lake Union, also marks a re-launching of her history and bright future. Onlookers are encouraged to gather at Lake Union Park or in a boat.” Keep tuned to Northwest Seaport’s website and Facebook page for scheduling updates.

While at the Historic Ships Wharf, Swiftsure is hard to miss. Its new bright red hull, tall smoke stack, and brilliant beacon light grab the eye and spark the imagination. It is a quintessential steamship covered with big rivets, ventilation cowls, elegant woodwork, and literally all the ‘bells and whistles’ of the steam era.

The future re-opening Lightship No. 83 to visitors will launch the re-telling of life aboard a lightship and the hardship and danger faced in that service by the almost mythic characters who worked on these manned navigation markers—mariners who were a blend of lighthouse keeper, lifeguard, and steamship captain.

About Lightship No. 83 “Swiftsure”

Seattle’s Lightship No. 83 is among the oldest of its kind still in existence, and it is the only lightship

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still equipped with a steam engine. It was built in Camden, New Jersey in 1904—eight years before *Titanic*. Lightship No. 83 steamed around South America to enter West Coast service in 1905. During the next 55 years, the lightship served on all five West Coast lightship stations (San Francisco, Blunts Reef, Columbia River, Umatilla Reef, and Swiftsure Bank). The Swiftsure Bank, marking the approaches to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Seattle, is the station name painted on its side today.

While in its years of active service, Lightship No. 83 rescued shipwreck victims, narrowly survived collisions, served as an armed training ship in WWII, and made the transition from oil lanterns to electric lighting, radio, and radar. These systems are as significant as any valorous act of its crew. The advancements in shipboard electrification during the ship's working life—most are still in the ship—brought sweeping changes to navigation and safety at sea. In 1960 Lightship No. 83 was replaced by automated offshore buoys and decommissioned. The ship joined the Northwest Seaport museum ship fleet in 1966 and became a National Historic Landmark in 1989.

Acting as floating lighthouses, lightships operated by the US Lighthouse Service and US Coast Guard guided thousands of ships around reefs and shoals into safe harbor channels from 1819 to 1983.

About Northwest Seaport

Northwest Seaport, founded in 1964, preserves and interprets the maritime heritage of Puget Sound and the Pacific Northwest. At Seattle's Lake Union Park Northwest Seaport museum ships, the tugboat *Arthur Foss* (1889) and the Lightship No. 83 "Swiftsure" (1904), provide a hands-on venues for family education, employment training programs and heritage restoration. Recent Northwest Seaport public events include Classic Workboat Show, Gold Rush Tugboats, Stories of the Sea, tugboat story time for toddlers, maritime music, public museum ship tours, and overnight sleepover programs.

Northwest Seaport, www.nwseaport.org

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