United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Snagboat W.T. Preston
other names/site number W.T. Preston

2. Location

street & number Anacortes Waterfront, R Avenue, Foot of 7th Street ☐ not for publication
city, town Anacortes ☐ vicinity
state Washington code 53 county Skagit code 057 zip code

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
☐ private	☐ building(s)		buildings
☒ public-local	☐ district		sites
☐ public-State	☐ site		structures
☐ public-Federal	☒ structure	1	objects
	☐ object		Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A
walls N/A
roof N/A
other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The 1939 snagboat W.T. Preston, formerly operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is displayed in a permanent dry-berth exhibit on the shoreline of Anacortes, Washington. Owned and operated by the City of Anacortes, the vessel is maintained as a museum vessel as if she were still in operation. W.T. Preston was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on March 16, 1972.

W.T. Preston as Built and Operated

As built in 1939, W.T. Preston is a steel-hulled flat-bottomed sternwheel snagboat and bucket dredge 163.6 feet in length with a 34.8-foot beam and a 4-foot draft. W.T. Preston displaces 494 tons. [1] Constructed with welded steel, the hull is divided into six watertight compartments which strengthened the vessel if it grounded. The vessel is also reinforced with steel hogging rods running fore and aft. Fuel and water tanks were built into the hull. The vessel has two spuds, one forward and the other aft, to moor the vessel in the shallows while she snagged. The vessel has five rudders, with three forward and two "monkey rudders" aft of the sternwheel.

While the hull was constructed of steel, the deckhouse was built of wood. The deckhouse has three decks; the main deck houses the engines, boilers, crew's quarters, mess (connected to the galley above by a dumbwaiter), showers and heads, and the hoisting engine, boom, and derrick for the bucket dredge. The cabin deck contains the wardroom, social hall, galley, and cabins for the cook and waiter, master, chief engineer, district inspector, and a visiting officer, with one spare cabin. W.T. Preston's 14-man crew lived aboard the vessel; the snagboat could accommodate 12 people on the main deck and 9 on the cabin deck. The Texas deck

[X] See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☐A ☐B ☐C ☐D NHL CRITERIA 1, 4

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐A ☐B ☐C ☐D ☐E ☐F ☐G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Government	1939-1981	1939
Maritime History	1939-1981	
Architecture (Naval)	1939	
Technology (1914-1939)		
NHL: XII L	Cultural Affiliation	
Business: Shipping & Transportation		

Significant Person

Architect/Builder
Lake Union Drydock Co.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The 1939 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers snagboat and bucket dredge W.T. Preston, with machinery originally installed in 1914 and 1929 in her two predecessors, is one of two Army Corps snagboats surviving in the United States, and is the only such vessel in the west, the other being the 1926 snagboat Montgomery (the subject of a separate nomination) now laid up and a museum vessel in Mobile, Alabama. Different in design and suited for the regions in which they operated, these two snagboats were part of a nationwide, decades-long commitment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to river and harbor improvement in the United States. Representing not only the end of this tradition and serving as the sole survivors of their particular type of vessel, each snagboat is additionally significant in that they served an important regional role that in a larger sense was nationally significant in its development of clear, safe river and harbor navigation in the United States. Last of several hundred sternwheelers on Puget Sound and its tributaries, W.T. Preston's significance transcends her regionally important career.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statements that follow.

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE FOOTNOTES IN TEXT.

☐ See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☒ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☒ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository: Seattle, US ACOE

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	10	528945	5373550
B			
C			
D			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All that area encompassed within the extreme length and beam of the vessel.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the entire area of the vessel as she rests in her dry berth.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian
organization National Park Service (418) date July 9, 1988
street & number P.O. Box 37127 telephone (202) 343-4104
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20013

is open aft for two boats and mounts the stack, a fuel tank for the galley range, and a large auxiliary wooden wheel for conning the ship where maximum visibility was required. Forward on the Texas deck is the wood pilothouse with an attached master's office aft.

The vessel was propelled by a single 17-foot diameter steel frame, wood float sternwheel powered by twin 170-h.p. Gillett and Eaton single-cylinder non-condensing marine steam engines with 14-inch bores and 72-inch strokes. The engines date to 1914 and were originally installed in the snagboat Swinomish and then Transferred to the first W.T. Preston in 1929. When the first Preston's wooden hull became rotten, the engines, as well as donkey, steering, and reversing engines, sternwheel, boom, stack, wheels, whistles (which date to 1884 and were originally installed on Swinomish's predecessor, Skagit), and the ship's bell from Swinomish were in turn transferred to the present vessel when she was constructed in 1939. [2] In addition to this older equipment in the engineroom "new" elements were added in 1939, including the distinctive brass telegraphs, one of which is inscribed "W.T. Preston, 1939, Co. of E" and mounts three gauges.

The boiler is a "locomotive" style firetube boiler originally fired with Bunker C and later modified to burn light diesel #2. The switch in fuels necessitated the installation in 1970 of Ray Power Pressure Burners and a customized control panel that "automated the process of maintaining steam." [3] Another modification was the removal of the original steam generator with twin Perkins diesel generators, in turn replaced with twin General Motors "jimmies." The 70-foot tall boom or derrick, built of laminated fir, is mounted forward on a turntable and is powered by a steam twin-cycle 10- by 12-inch hoisting engine manufactured by the Washington Iron Works of Seattle. The engine hoisted the boom and snags and debris weighing up to 70 tons to a maximum height of 57 feet above the waterline. A single 7- by 8-inch steam-powered swinging engine is mounted on the deck on the starboard side and at a diagonal angle to the hoisting engine. Forward of the boom, the deck is sheathed in wood. The boom originally mounted a clam-shell bucket for dredging, though the bucket was detached at times for some snagging operations. When the snagboat was laid up the bucket was removed and is not on the vessel at present.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

The vessel is maintained in excellent condition, neatly painted in the original white, red, and black. Many original furnishings, including furniture transferred from Swinomish to the first Preston and then to the present vessel are in place. Original tools, equipment, and gear give the impression that the vessel is tied up at dock between jobs with the crew gone ashore. While certain small modifications, which include a "modern" refrigerator and dishwasher in the galley highlight the fact that W.T. Preston was in operation until 1981, the vessel retains a remarkable level of integrity as a 1939 sternwheel snagboat and Army Corps vessel.

NOTES

1
James P. Delgado, ed. Evaluative Inventory of Large Preserved Historic Vessels in the United States, (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1987) n.p. and Frank H. West, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form,`Snagboat W.T. Preston,' Seattle, Washington," (1969), manuscript on file, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

2
Pamela Negri, "History, Management, and Interpretation of the W.T. Preston, a Sternwheel Snagboat," (1982) M.A. Thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, p. 52.

3
"New Burners on W.T. Preston Reduce Air Pollution," Marine Digest XLVIII (34), April 18, 1970, p. 17.

The Role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in River and Harbor Improvement on Puget Sound and Its Tributaries

Initially settled in the 1850s, the Puget Sound region provided an extensive supply of lumber for the rapidly growing city of San Francisco and California's mining camps and other cities. As a result of this trade, the port of Seattle grew up, followed by other lumbering towns--Port Gamble and Port Townsend, for example. Maritime trade with California, Oregon, British Columbia, and Alaska, as well as inland maritime activity on the tributaries and rivers that drained into Puget Sound, resulted in a busy and significant role for ships and shipping in the region. The presence of the thick forests that sparked the settlement of Puget Sound's shores also created an obstacle to safe navigation; the waters of the sound were often filled with floating logs and deadheads and the rivers were clogged, if not blocked, by log jams.

Two major jams on the Skagit River hindered the settlement of the region above the jams until the late 1870s, when enterprising citizens began the slow, laborious task of clearing the river. At the same time Congress was lobbied for federal assistance to clear the river, seeking an extension of the U.S. Army Engineer Department's (later the Army Corps of Engineers) responsibilities from their Portland, Oregon, district office north to Puget Sound and its tributaries and rivers, notably the Skagit. Since its establishment in 1802, the duties of the Corps had increasingly focused on safe navigation, which involved dredging and flood control activities and extensive snagging to clear tree and log-blocked rivers throughout the United States. The commencement of these activities on the burgeoning Pacific Slope had only been a matter of time following the first burst of urbanizations in the 1850s, and in 1871 the Portland District office opened. In 1880 a small appropriation of $2,500 for Engineer acitivity on the Skagit resulted from the lobbying effort of Washington's citizens. This was followed by a more substantial appropriation of $20,000 in 1882 for the construction of a sternwheel snagboat to clear jams and improve navigation on the Skagit, Steilaguamish, Nootsack, Snohomish, and Snoqualmie rivers. Completed late in 1883, the first snagboat built for the Engineers was christened Skagit and immediately went to work on that river in 1884. [1]

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

The responsibilities of the Engineers and Skagit were expanded in 1892 when that year's River and Harbor Act defined their area of operation as "Puget Sound and its tributary waters." In response to this and other factors, in 1896 a district office was established in Seattle. The same year the worn-out wooden hull of Skagit was replaced, with the house, machinery, and equipment of the 1883 vessel transferred to the new hull. The new vessel snagged and cleared the rivers and also engaged in some dredging, participating in the construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal from 1911 through 1914, when the vessel was replaced by a new snagboat. A new, larger vessel, Swinomish, was built in 1914. Some furniture and the ship's whistle were transferred from Skagit to the new dredge, which then commenced operations. Helping complete the Canal and working on the rivers, Swinomish continued the service begun by the first Skagit in 1884. [2]

The wooden hull of Swinomish gradually weakened and rotted, as had those of her predecessors. Accordingly, in 1929, a new hull was built and the engines, equipment, and house from Swinomish were transferred to the new vessel. Unlike Skagit, however, this transfer involved a change in name. The new snagboat was named for W.T. Preston, the only civilian ever to serve as district engineer at Seattle for the Army Corps. Working through the 1930s, W.T. Preston did light dredging, snagging, ice breaking, and disposed of derelict ship hulks laid up after the First World War. Just as was the case in previous decades, the vessel's "work changed little as snagging operations were still conducted primarily on the rivers." [3] After ten years of operation, however, the wooden hull again rotted, necessitating another replacement. This time a new steel vessel was planned and laid down.

Construction and Career of W.T. Preston

Built on Lake Union in the heart of Seattle at the Lake Union Drydock in the summer of 1939, the new snagboat retained the name W.T. Preston. Built with a steel hull, the new vessel continued the tradition of receiving hand-me-down machinery, gaining the engines originally installed in Swinomish in 1914 as well as other equipment and furniture. Among the items passed on was the whistle from Skagit of 1884, retaining a tradition and providing a link to the first snagboat to commence work in the region. Commissioned on January 19, 1940, W.T. Preston underwent trials

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

on Lake Union and was then laid up for several months for modifications to the hogging trusses. The new snagboat then entered into her duties. These included wartime service building nets to protect the Lake Washington Ship Canal dam and locks from floating bombs sent downstream. Laid up in 1943 for the duration of the war, W.T. Preston resumed service in 1946. [4]

The postwar years saw increased operation as the population and marine traffic in the region increased, and the snagboat's area of operation was enlarged to include Lake Washington and the lower reaches of Puget Sound to Tacoma and Olympia as well as farther north to former ports of call such as Anacortes and environs. With a 14-man crew living aboard the vessel, W.T. Preston worked nearly 11 months of each year removing large pieces of drift, waterlogged pilings and logs, and derelict boats, ships, airplanes, and debris. Floating items were snagged with wires, hooked or grabbed by the clamshell bucket, and loaded into a barge towed alongside Preston. This debris was originally burned, but in later years the Corps contracted with private commercial forms to dispose of the debris through landfill, salvage, recycling, and controlled burning. [5]

By the 1960s W.T. Preston was the last sternwheeler operating on Puget Sound. Once common and numbering into the hundreds, the "mosquito fleet" was now represented by the snagboat, which accordingly became more and more of a showpiece as well as a working vessel. The last two decades of operation for W.T. Preston saw her increase participation in civic events and celebrations on the Sound. Costly to operate, the snagboat was retired on October 22, 1981, due to budgetary constraints. [6] Laid up at the Corps' facilities at Hiram Chittenden Locks on the Lake Washington Ship Canal, W.T. Preston was formally transferred to the City of Anacortes, a former port of call, in 1983. Moved ashore into a dry-berth, the vessel has been open as a museum vessel to the public since then, with a formal dedication and opening set for late 1988 when interpretive and access facilities are completed.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

NOTES

1
Pamela Negri, "History, Management, and Interpretation of the W.T. Preston, a Sternwheel Snagboat," (1982) M.A. Thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, pp. 19-21. Also see Helen Barrett, Sternwheelers and the Skagit River (Mt. Vernon, Washington: Skagit County Historical Society, 1971).

2
Negri, op cit. pp. 24-46.

3
Ibid., pp. 46-47.

4
Ibid., pp. 52-59.

5
"Operations Manual, Snagboat W.T. Preston," (1974) manuscript on file at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Seattle District Library, Seattle, Washington.

6
Negri, op cit., p. 72.