

**MARITIME HERITAGE OF THE UNITED STATES NHL THEME STUDY--LARGE VESSELS**

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

**Virginia V**

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

Historic Name: *Virginia V*

Other Name/Site Number: Excursion Steamer *Virginia V*

**2. LOCATION**

Street & Number: 4455 Shilshole Avenue, N.W.

Not for publication: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: Seattle

Vicinity: \_\_\_\_\_

State: WA County: King

Code: 033

Zip Code: 98107

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-local: \_\_\_\_\_

Public-State: \_\_\_\_\_

Public-Federal: \_\_\_\_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): \_\_\_\_\_

District: \_\_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Structure: X

Object: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

\_\_\_\_\_

1

1

Noncontributing

\_\_\_\_\_ buildings

\_\_\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_\_\_ objects

0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register
- \_\_\_\_\_ Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

|           |                      |      |               |
|-----------|----------------------|------|---------------|
| Historic: | Recreation & Culture | Sub: | Water-related |
| Current:  | Recreation & Culture | Sub: | Water-related |

**7. DESCRIPTION**

|                               |     |                    |      |
|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------|------|
| Architectural Classification: | N/A | Materials:         | Wood |
|                               |     | Foundation:        |      |
|                               |     | Walls:             |      |
|                               |     | Roof:              |      |
|                               |     | Other Description: |      |

**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

Owned and operated by the Virginia V Foundation, the excursion steamer *Virginia V* steams on Puget Sound, her home base of operation since 1922 when she was locally built. Maintained in her original trade, and earning her keep, *Virginia V* is also supported by a dedicated corps of volunteers.

**VIRGINIA V AS BUILT AND MODIFIED**

As built and documented with the official number #222170 in 1922, *Virginia V* is a wooden-hulled screw steamer 115.9 feet long, with a 24.1-foot beam, and a 9-foot depth of hold. *Virginia V* was registered at 122 tons gross and 83 tons net. [1] The steamer draws 12 feet. *Virginia V's* passenger capacity is 270 persons. *Virginia V* originally operated with nine crew; she now carries eight crew members. Built entirely of locally-available Douglas fir and iron-fastened, *Virginia V* was laid down with built-in salt pockets between her double-sawn frames to help preserve the hull. The steamer has a straight stem and a round counter stern. The hull is painted white with black trim at the waterway and the rubrail.

*Virginia V* is powered by a triple expansion marine steam engine rated at 400 horsepower, which drives a single propeller. The engine, *Virginia V's* original, was manufactured by the Heffernan Iron Works in 1898. The boiler is the original oil-fired water-tube boiler manufactured by Stoddert and rated at 200 pounds per square inch. The machinery is capable of driving *Virginia V* at 14 knots, but the steamer is usually operated at a more economical speed of 11 to 12 knots. *Virginia V* is also equipped with a condenser and steam auxiliaries, all original. The engine, boiler, and condenser were transferred to *Virginia V's* hull from her immediate predecessor, *Virginia IV*. [2] The engine room is accessible to the public, who are invited to watch it in operation while *Virginia V* is at dock and while underway.

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*Virginia V* was built with two decks. The first, or the freight deck, is enclosed and includes the galley, heads, engineroom and the trunk for the boiler's single stack, which continues up through both decks amidships. The second, or passenger deck, is an enclosed space that includes the aft three-quarters of the hull. It includes seating and ends at an open deck forward. The passenger cabin is finished with cedar tongue-in-groove siding and settees. Pole stanchions support the overhead. Large picture windows line the bulkheads. The pilothouse is perched atop the deckhouse at the Texas deck level. Aft of it is the charthouse, stack, and two lifeboats. *Virginia V* also mounts two pole masts. The pilothouse mounts the steamer's radar array and a searchlight.

*Virginia V* remains basically unmodified from her 1922 construction. The most comprehensive work undertaken on the steamer was in the aftermath of a storm in October 1934 which stove in the starboard side, collapsing the superstructure and toppling the pilothouse. Repairs, including a new pilothouse, were completed by December 1934. This pilothouse was replaced in 1980 with a restoration of the 1922 pilothouse. All modern repair and replacement of fabric has been undertaken with original materials and methods throughout the ship's career, including restoration of *Virginia V* between 1978 and 1983. This work, conducted under Department of the Interior supervision, included hull renewal, the replacement of some boiler tubes, and superstructure repairs. The ship's electrical system was upgraded, and a new generator was added. [3]

With the exception of modern radar, radio, electrical system, *Virginia V* is essentially the same vessel built in 1922, in appearance, form and function. A rare operating example of marine steam technology, she evokes the sights, sounds, and feeling of her period.

## NOTES

1

As listed in the annual *Merchant Vessels of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923.

2

M. S. Kline, *Steamboat Virginia V*, Bellevue, Washington: Documentary Book Publishers, 1985, p. 37. Also see Thomas G. Rhodes and Harley E. Scott, *Steamboats Today: A Pictorial Directory of North American Vessels*, Cayuga Creek Historical Press, 1986, p. 105.

3

Kline, op.cit., pp. 80-82.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide:      Locally:     

Applicable National Register Criteria:       A      B      C X D     

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

NHL Criteria:   1, 4

NHL Theme(s):   XIVB Transportation: Ships, Boats, Lighthouses & Other Structures

| Areas of Significance: | Period(s) of Significance | Significant Dates |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Architecture (Naval)   | 1922-1942                 | 1922              |
| Maritime History       | 1922-1942                 | 1922              |
| Transportation         | 1922-1942                 | 1922              |

Significant Person(s):   N/A

Cultural Affiliation:    N/A

Architect/Builder:   Anderson & Company, Olalla, Washington

**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

The earliest use of the steamboat in the United States was the adoption of steam for small passenger and cargo carrying vessels. Dating to the first decades of the 19th century, these craft in time dominated the American steam excursion fleet. One of two surviving members of the American "mosquito fleet," the large, unlicensed steamers that flitted around like mosquitoes on the inland waters of the United States, *Virginia V* is the only survivor of these small excursion steamers built on the Pacific Coast. The other mosquito fleet vessel, *Sabino*, is the sole surviving East Coast-built small excursion steamer. These two vessels alone represent a fleet that in June 1932 was documented at an astounding 260,983 vessels. The fact of their survival, and a contributing factor in their significance is the fact that both continue in operation, keeping alive a tradition and a technology now vanished.

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

**MOSQUITO FLEET: THE SMALL EXCURSION STEAMER IN THE UNITED STATES**

In 1926, a treatise on American ship types noted that "there is in American waters a larger proportion of ships designed purely for pleasure or excursion purposes than anywhere else in the world..." explaining that this was because of the large population centers at seaport cities such as New York or Philadelphia, on the shores of the lakes, such as Chicago or Detroit, or on the rivers, as was the case with St. Louis or Cincinnati. [1] The excursion steamer, designed to transport large groups of people for leisurely trips for pleasure, occasionally to resorts or recreation centers, was one of the first adaptations of the steamship. Beginning in the mid-19th century, excursion steamers sprang up in large numbers on the eastern seaboard's bays and sounds, spreading to the Great Lakes and the Western Rivers in the decades that followed.

Built for protected waters, these steamers were not designed for the open ocean. Characterized by uniform qualities--a maximum of open deck space, with a maximum number of decks on a minimum of draft and freeboard--the excursion steamers were constructed on long, wide shallow hulls with two or more deck levels above on a lightly constructed wooden superstructure. [2] By the early 20th century, however, variations of the excursion steamer had developed on the various waterways--1) the lakes excursion steamer (as exemplified by the sternwheel steamers *Ticonderoga*, *Columbia*, and *Ste. Claire*); 2) the river excursion steamer (as exemplified by the sidewheel steamers *Delta Queen* and *Belle of Louisville*; and 3) the bay and sound excursion steamer. The latter were usually the smallest, and the largest-numbered group. In June 1932, at the end of the heyday of the excursion era, the United States Department of Commerce registered 260,983 bay and sound excursion steamers, the so-called "mosquito fleet" of America. [3]

The term "mosquito fleet" originated on the west coast for these tiny single-ended, at times unlicensed vessels. Also known as "pointy enders," the terms were little used until after 1900. Once defined in the late 19th century, excursion steamer design changed little. Unlike the larger river and lake excursion steamers, many of the at times tiny bay and sound steamers were screw-propelled. In 1926, it was noted that "the excursion shipbuilding industry is not progressive," in large measure because the trade worked the vessels seasonally, and hence many had careers that spanned decades, long outlasting their oceangoing cousins. [4] The small bay and sound steamers lasted longest, some for 50 years or more, while the river steamers lasted the shortest, averaging four to five years. This meant, on the average, that the excursion trade contained "a larger proportion of ships over 25 to 30 years of age than any other maritime trade." [5]

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**CONSTRUCTION AND CAREER OF VIRGINIA V**

*Virginia V* was, as her name implies, the fifth of the Virginia steamers. Built by M. M. "Matt" Anderson at Maplewood, a small community on Puget Sound opposite Vashon Island, *Virginia V* was ordered and laid down for the West Pass Transportation Company in 1922. Carrying passengers, produce and mail, the company's steamers carried on a tradition of steam navigation on Puget Sound that dated to 1853 and the arrival of the tiny steamboat *Fairy*.

Seattle, the first major settlement on Puget Sound, had blossomed into prominence as a lumber port by the 1870s. While oceangoing ships called at Seattle's wharves, small steamships carried goods and people between the port and the various camps, milltowns, and other ports that had sprung up on the sound. These small vessels were the means by which the network of commerce and communication flowed, linked by the water and steam. Seattle's need for steam links to the rest of Puget Sound intensified by the late 1870s as Olympia, Tacoma, and Port Townsend thrived and competed with Seattle. Competition and the need to link with Tacoma became a primary quest for Seattle after 1883, when the Northern Pacific Railroad made Tacoma its terminus. [6]

The first *Virginia* was built as a towboat in 1908 as *Virginia Merrill* for the Merrill and Ring Logging Company. The 54-foot vessel was sold to a consortium of neighbors who lived along Colvos Passage near Vashon Island. Also known as "West Pass," the area gave its name to a new company, The West Pass Transportation Company, headed by Nels Christensen. Rechristened *Virginia*, the tiny vessel operated and linked the West Pass communities with Tacoma and Seattle. *Virginia* was replaced with *Virginia II* in 1912, and *Virginia III* was added in 1914. In 1918, the steamer *Tyrus* was purchased and renamed *Virginia IV*. These vessels served the West Pass Transportation Company for several years. *Virginia III* was sold in 1927, while *Virginia IV* was sold in 1922 when her engine and machinery were removed for the new steamer *Virginia V*, the last of the Virginia steamers. The success of the company was measured by the fact that competing steamboat lines had withdrawn from West Pass, and by 1930 *Virginia V* was the only steamer operating between Seattle and Tacoma. [7]

*Virginia V*'s keel was laid on October 21, 1921. The hull was framed and planked by Christmas, and the steamer was launched without her engine on March 9, 1922. Towed to Seattle's King Street Drydock, *Virginia V* was fitted with *Virginia IV*'s machinery on April 2, 1922, and on June 11, *Virginia V* made her maiden voyage, beginning a 16-year career serving Colvos Passage, making 13 stops each voyage at the various communities along the way. [8] *Virginia V* worked seven days a week, making a 126-mile daily trip, for a total of 46,000 miles a year. As a member of the mosquito fleet, *Virginia V* joined a waterfront scene that was similar to many other American ports during the century between 1840 and 1940. One Seattle shipping agent later recalled:

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At Seattle's Colman Dock at 5:15 p.m. all these small vessels would pull out...one, two, three, four, five...such congestion and activity, swarming like mosquitoes to carry commuters and supplies to the many communities on the Sound, Poulsbo, Fletcher Bay, Colby, Lisabeula. There they would lay over, firing up early the next morning to bring back to Seattle the banker who worked in the city, the farmer with strawberries, women with chickens, the people and goods of regional commerce, and at 5 p.m. that day the scene was reenacted. [9]

*Virginia V* survived a near disaster on October 21, 1934 when she was caught and beat against the dock at Olalla, Washington, during the "great hurricane" of that decade. Seventy knot winds battered in the superstructure, collapsed the pilothouse, and laid up *Virginia V* with \$11,000 in damages that took two months to repair. By the end of 1934, however, *Virginia V* had returned to service.

The Great Depression, the death of Nels Christensen, and the death of his son Nels C. Christensen, the primary heir, left *Virginia V* in difficult straits by 1938. Temporarily laid up in 1938, *Virginia V* was placed in excursion service in the summer of 1940. The venture into excursion service was not enough, though, and *Virginia V* was withdrawn from Puget Sound and taken south to the Columbia River. In April 1942, *Virginia V* commenced passenger and freight service between Portland and Astoria. She thus became the last commercial steamboat to operate on the great river.

Seized for debts in August 1942, *Virginia V* was sold in December 1943 to Jack S. Katz and Howell Parker of Washington. Brought back to Puget Sound by Capt. Parker in February 1944, Parker returned *Virginia V* to the Seattle-Tacoma run, and after the war placed the steamer on an excursion route along the Sound on weekends. Parker sold *Virginia V* in January 1954 to Philip Luther, operator of the Puget Sound Excursion Lines. The ownership of the line passed through two other hands until 1968, when *Virginia V* was sold again, to the Northwest Steamship Company, a consortium of interested steamboat aficionados who rescued the "V" and began restoration of the steamer. Their efforts led to the placement of *Virginia V* on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 and the creation of a non-profit group, the Virginia V Foundation, in 1976. Federal historic preservation grants followed that repaired worn and weary timbers and upgraded the electrical system. In 1980, *Virginia V* was sold to the Foundation, which by 1985 boasted more than a thousand members. In this fashion *Virginia V* was saved. Active and operating in her 70th year, *Virginia V* is a rare, operating example of history. [10]



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## NOTES

1

A. C. Hardy, *American Ship Types: A Review of the Work, Characteristics, and Construction of Ship Types Peculiar to the Waters of the North American Continent*. (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1927), p. 96.

2

Ibid., p. 97.

3

*The Marine Digest*, September 3, 1932.

4

Hardy, op.cit., p. 103.

5

Ibid, p. 96.

6

Roger Sale, Seattle....

7

M. S. Kline, *Steamboat Virginia V*, Bellevue, Washington: Documentary Book Publishers, 1985. pp. 24-32, pass.

8

Ibid., pp. 35-38, pass.

9

As cited in Howard Lovering, "Virginia V: The Little Vessel That Can," *Tradelines*, June 1981, p. 8.

10

Kline, op. cit., pass.

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

See footnotes in text.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- \_\_\_ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- X Previously Listed in the National Register. (Ref. #73001875)
- \_\_\_ 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:

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: Less than one (1) acre.

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

A 10 546940 5278580

Verbal Boundary Description:

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

Boundary Justification:

The boundary incorporates all that area of the vessel as she lays at her berth.

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: James P. Delgado

Organization: Vancouver Maritime Museum

Date: April 1, 1992

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