

***Hercules* Stop**

23 The Last of Her Kind

Built in 1907, the *Hercules* is the last surviving steam powered ocean tug in the United States. Her story combines technology and humanity in a way that no other surviving vessel today can do.

Technologically, her ocean-going capability is often a big surprise as most people consider tugboats to be small harbor-bound vessels that only assist big ships in docking or undocking. However, with her size, design, engine power, and 8,000 mile cruising radius anything that could float could be towed by *Hercules* on the open ocean. Just like harbor tugs, though, in order to do this job *Hercules* had to have a powerful propulsion system. In fact, approximately two thirds of *Hercules*' interior is occupied by this system. In this way, she aptly fits the tugboat metaphor of being "an engine with a hull around it."

This technical side to *Hercules*' history, however, in no way overshadows her human history. In fact, on any particular voyage *Hercules* was packed with humanity. On her first voyage her crew list records 17 people on board! Imagine living in such close quarters. Few comforts would be available and with so little privacy and even fewer secrets could be kept. This way of life was made all the more challenging during periodic bouts of bad weather. Documented crew accounts tell of horrendous waves that *Hercules* encountered during storms and at one point, during her first voyage, actually resulted in five feet of water flooding into the tug!

This combined story of technology and humanity accompanied *Hercules* throughout her career. Her preservation as a national landmark insures that it will continue to captivate park visitors far into the future.