

The U.S. Fish Commission Steamer *Albatross*: A History

Papers from a Symposium

Introduction

At her launch on 19 October 1882 in Wilmington, Del., the *Albatross* was the world's first large deep-sea oceanographic and fisheries research vessel, and she would go on to have a distinguished 40-year career, ranging from the north Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, around Cape Horn in 1887–88, and into the North Pacific.

By 1908, Deputy Fish Commissioner Hugh M. Smith reported that "The *Albatross* has contributed more to the knowledge of marine biology than has any other vessel." And, of course, her career continued for another 13 years, being decommissioned in late 1921, serving later as a training vessel for nautical cadets, and disappearing from the records in Hamburg, Germany, in late 1928.

Besides her work in biological and physical oceanographic research, the *Albatross* served the United States during two wars, and in the North Pacific she mounted many seal protection cruises and Pacific salmon surveys, as well as carrying investigative commissions (two established by presidential order).

As scientist Charles H. Townsend reminisced in 1934, "Her career as a deep-sea exploring ship has been a notable one ... [that] extended from the

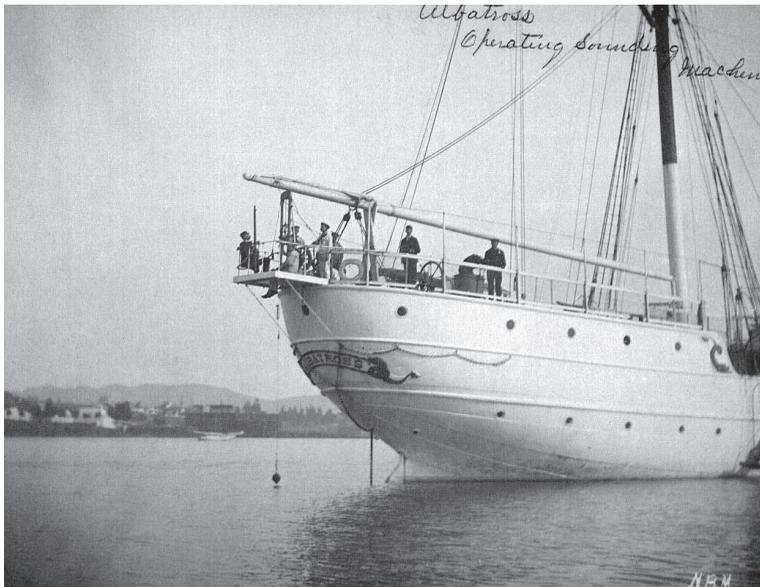
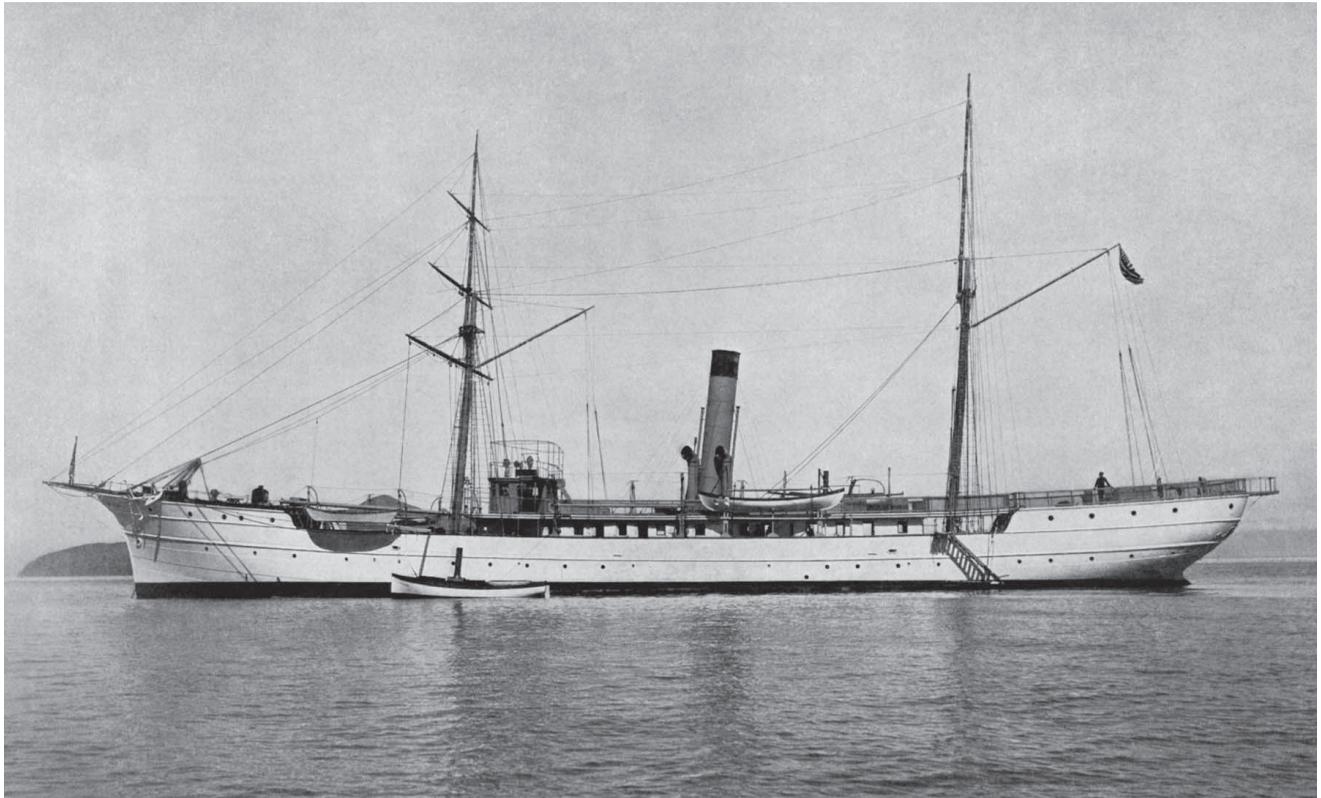
shallow waters of the coast to almost the greatest known depths of the sea.... If ever the American people received the fullest possible value from a government ship, they received it from this one."

Much of the above, as well as the

origin of the *Albatross*, was covered in a symposium held on 30 June 1997 at the University of Washington in Seattle. Organized by Mark Jennings and Kurt Dunbar, several papers from that symposium are presented in this special issue of the *Marine Fisheries Review*.



The *Albatross* in the Galapagos Islands, 1891. Reproduced with permission of the MCZ Archives.



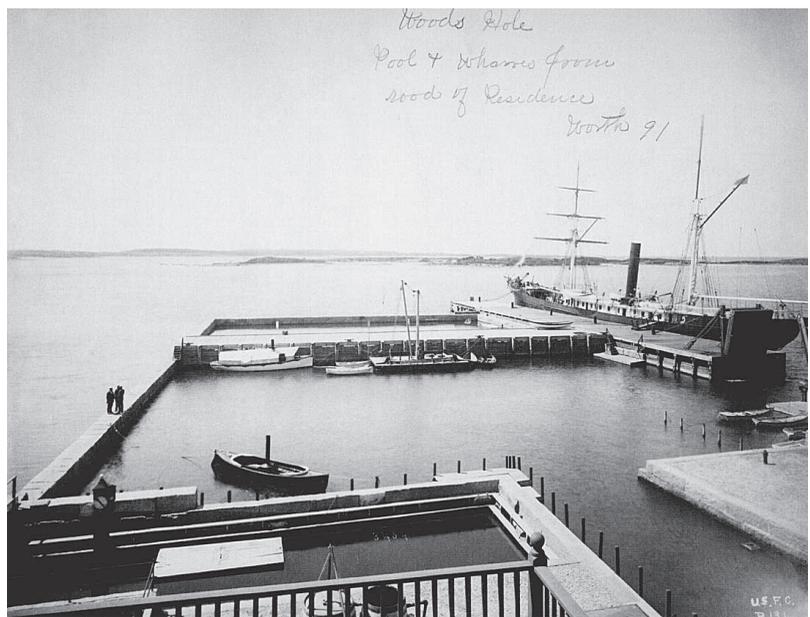
Above: The *Albatross* with a port gang plank down and one of her small steam-powered runabouts which was carried on the deck like the other boats and raised and lowered by winches. USFC photograph.

Left: The elegantly curved stern held the platform for a sounding machine, shown here in operation. NEFSC historical photograph archives.



Above: A ship of the high latitudes as well as the equator, the *Albatross* dropped anchor in Southeast Alaska during a northern cruise. NEFSC historical photograph archives.

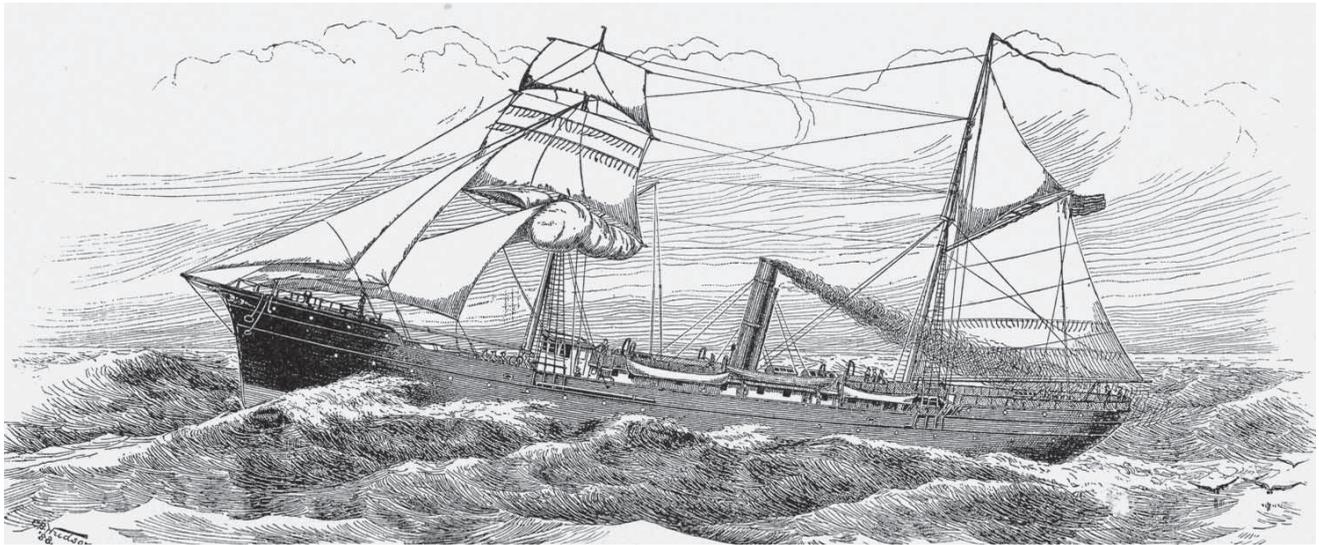
Right: At home in Woods Hole, the *Albatross* is seen from the USFC residence. NEFSC historical photograph archives.



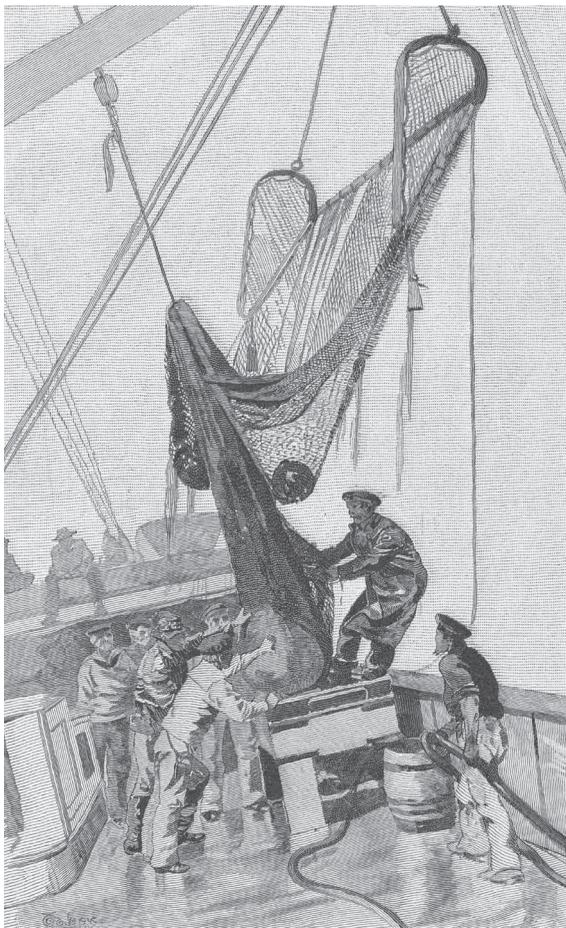
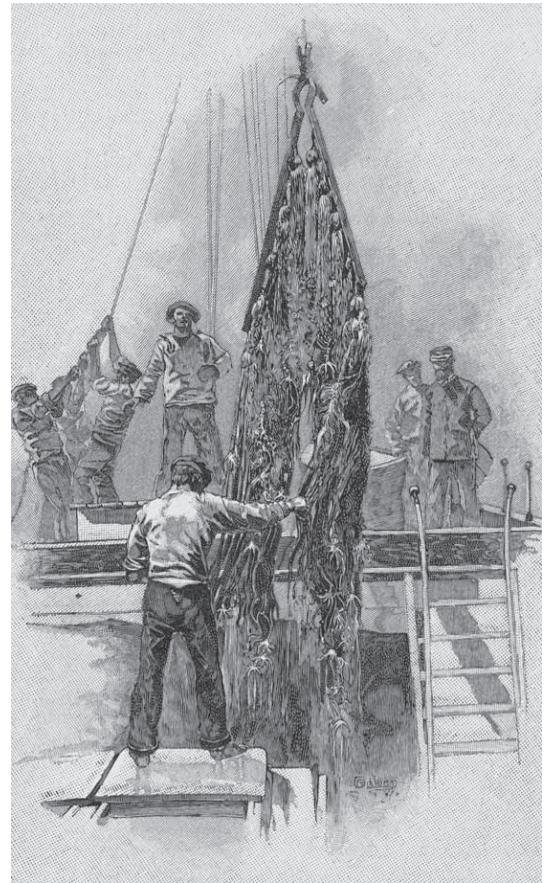


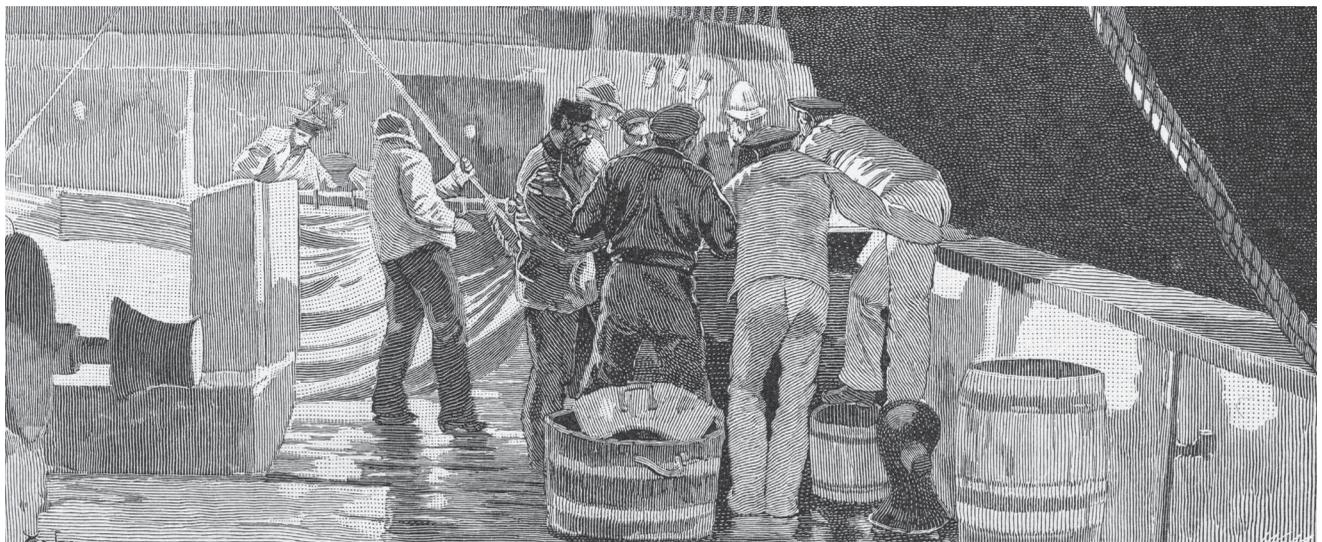
Left: The smoke stack at mid-ships. Although usually powered by her strong, twin-screw engines, the *Albatross* could sail if necessary. NEFSC historical photograph archives.

Below: Artist's rendition of the *Albatross* under steam and sail in heavy weather. Drawing is by C. B. Hudson in *The Century Magazine*.

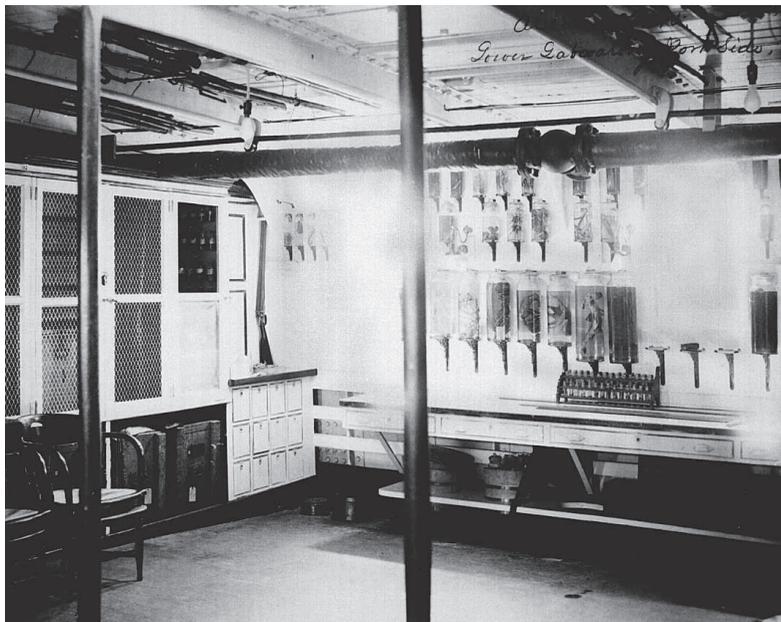


Opposite page: Working while the ship rocked on ocean swells was standard fare. Clockwise from upper left: "Sounding the abyss with piano wire;" "Tangles from the sea-lily grounds, Gulf of Mexico;" The deck and sounding equipment as depicted in action above; and "Landing the beam-trawl on deck." Drawings are by W. Taber in *The Century Magazine*; photograph is from the NEFSC historical photograph archives.





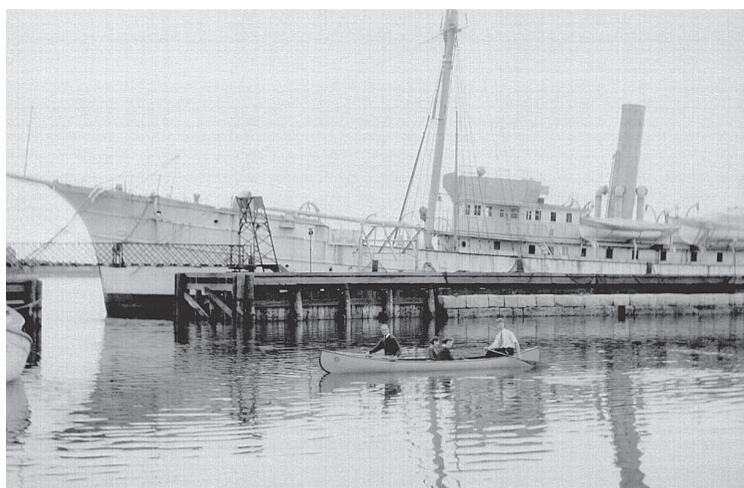
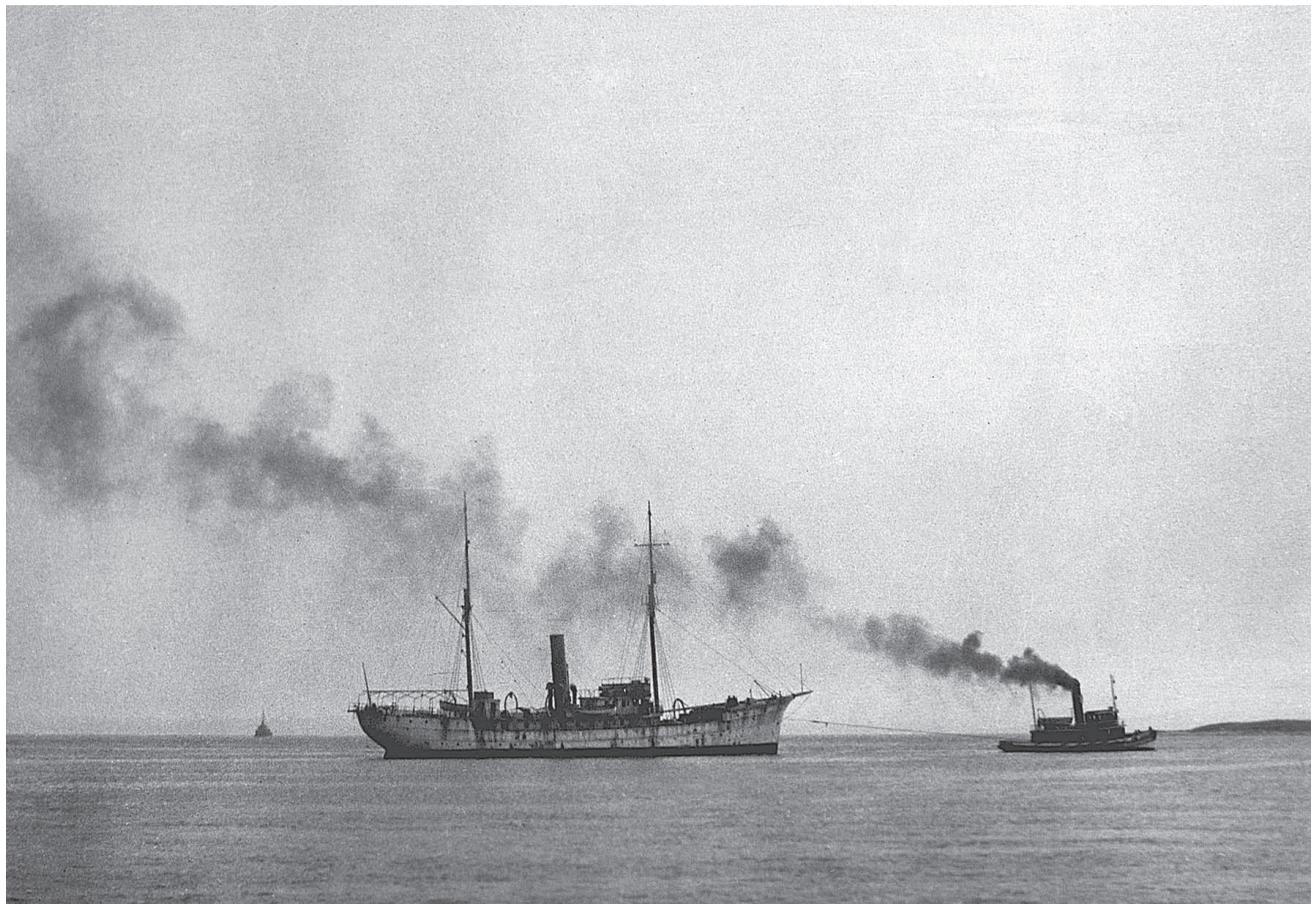
On deck, the men worked in the all kinds of weather, and are shown here examining the contents of a sieve by electric light. Drawn by W. Taber for *The Century Magazine*.



Below deck, the science room was a floating laboratory stocked with supplies and equipment. NEFSC historical photograph archives.



The mess. NEFSC historical photograph archives.



Upon decommissioning in 1920 after nearly 40 years of service, the *Albatross* had worked a full decade past her retirement date. Both images are from the NEFSC historical photograph archives.