

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the history of the U.S. Coast Guard in Oregon and examines the structures they designed prior to World War II. Their mission to protect the lives and property of seafarers was integral in the development of the communities along the Oregon Coast. The identification, evaluation, protection, and interpretation of these structures is vital to our understanding of the impact the Coast Guard has had on the maritime development of Oregon.

Starting out as the U.S. Life-Saving Service in 1871, the forerunner to the Coast Guard arrived in Oregon in 1878. From the humble beginnings of a one-man station near Coos Bay, the Life-Saving Service expanded to protect six of the major waterways along Oregon's Coast. In 1915, the Life-Saving Service joined the Revenue Cutter Service to become the U.S. Coast Guard and added two more stations prior to WWII. Today, the Coast Guard operates seven lifeboat stations on the Oregon Coast (Figure 1).

The scope of this project is to investigate the issues and options for the preservation of the remaining elements of pre-World War II Coast Guard (including the Life-Saving Service) architecture in Oregon. Starting with a review of the history of the Coast Guard in general, a historical overview is given for each station built prior to World War II. Finally, each existing structure is examined for possible strategies in preservation and interpretation.



Figure 1. Current Coast Guard Lifeboat Stations on the Oregon Coast with Location.

The Life-Saving Service and Coast Guard built 13 stations along the Oregon Coast prior to 7 December 1941 (Figure 2). Two more stations were built after WWII began using pre-WWII plans. These stations were placed at the following major waterways to protect shipping: Columbia River, Tillamook Bay, Yaquina Bay, Siuslaw River, Umpqua River, Coos Bay, Coquille River, and Port Orford. All but two of the pre-World War II buildings at the thirteen stations have been deactivated by the Coast Guard. Fortunately, other parties are using the deactivated buildings at these locations: Point Adams, Tillamook Bay, Yaquina Bay, Umpqua River, Coos Bay, Coquille River, and Port Orford. Unfortunately, only three locations have any structures left from the Life-Saving Service era: Point Adams, Tillamook Bay, and Yaquina Bay.

About half (i.e., 24 out of 50) of the primary buildings built before WWII have survived to the year 2000 (Figure 3). These “primary” buildings are defined as station houses, keeper’s dwellings, boathouses, equipment buildings, and lookouts. Very few ancillary structures, such as antennas, fencing, water towers, and boardwalks, survive at any of the stations. Selected buildings at five of the thirteen stations have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places: Tillamook Bay, Yaquina Bay, Umpqua River, Coquille River, and Port Orford.

The Oregon stations were built using standard Life-Saving Service and Coast Guard plans. However, local contractors built the buildings, and there are variations from the standard found at each station. The following is an introduction to each of the station locations in chronological order.

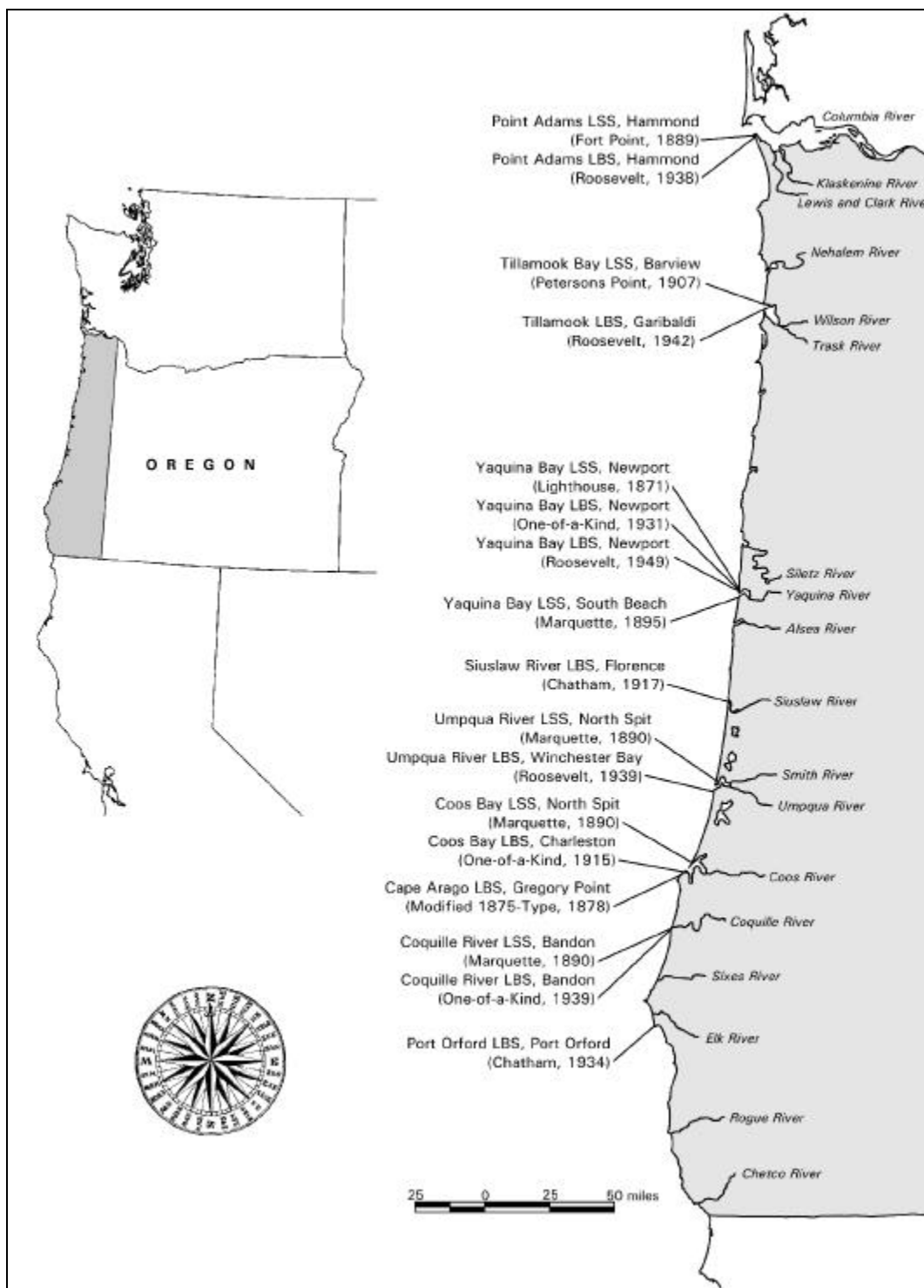


Figure 2. Pre-1950 Life-Saving Service and Coast Guard Stations on the Oregon Coast with Station Type and Year Construction Started.



Figure 3. Principal Buildings Still Standing at the Pre-1950 Life-Saving Service and Coast Guard Stations on the Oregon Coast.

Coos Bay — Coos Bay was an early, active shipping port, thus it received the first life-saving station on the Oregon Coast at Cape Arago in 1878. The station had only a keeper, and when a life-saving crew was finally assigned in 1890, a new station was built at North Spit. In 1915, a replacement station was built at Charleston on the south side of the mouth of Coos Bay. Neither the Cape Arago station nor the North Spit station survive; however, the keeper's dwelling, crew's dwelling, and boathouse at Charleston today make up the campus of the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology.

Point Adams — Located in the small community of Hammond, all that remains of the Point Adams Life-Saving Station (1889) is its Fort Point-type boathouse. In 1939, the original life-saving station was replaced with a Roosevelt-type Coast Guard station. All of the Coast Guard elements other than the boathouse still stand. The National Marine Fisheries Service now owns and uses the station complex.

Coquille River — The extremely hazardous bar at the mouth of the Coquille River necessitated the construction of the Coquille River Life-Saving Station in 1890. Nearly the entire town burned in 1936, including the life-saving station. The Coast Guard built a large, one-of-a-kind facility in 1939. The station still stands today retaining its original integrity. The building is owned by the Port of Bandon.

Umpqua River — The Umpqua River entrance received a station during a build-up along the Oregon Coast in 1890. The station was built in the standard Marquette-style used at four of Oregon's six life-saving stations. A new station was built in 1939 next to the Umpqua River Lighthouse. Three principal buildings still stand with

the station house operated as a local history museum by Douglas County. The boathouse no longer survives; however, a 36' motor lifeboat is on display at the station.

Yaquina Bay — The Yaquina Bay Life-Saving Station was built just south of the entrance to Newport's Yaquina Bay. It was abandoned in 1906 for the vacant Yaquina Bay Lighthouse (1871). In 1931, a waterfront station was built in Newport; however, it burned in a spectacular fire in 1944. A new station was not built until 1949; it still stands today and is used by the Coast Guard. The Yaquina Bay Lighthouse is a State Park property and is operated as a museum.

Tillamook Bay — It was not until 1908 that Tillamook Bay received a life-saving station. The station at Barview was superseded by a new station further inside the bay at Garibaldi in 1942. While in a deteriorated state, all of the elements of the original life-saving station (i.e., station house, boathouse, and workshop) still stand. The buildings at the Coast Guard station at Garibaldi also survive and still serve the active station.

Siuslaw River — The Coast Guard built one of its first Coast Guard stations in Oregon on the Siuslaw River in 1917. The station was in the Chatham style, a forerunner to the standard Roosevelt-type station of the 1930s and 1940s. None of the buildings from the 1917 station have survived.

Port Orford — Port Orford, Oregon's southernmost station, was the last pre-World War II station built. It was constructed high on a rocky headland in 1934. Its crew's dwelling, keeper's dwelling, equipment building, and storage building all survive as a State Park; however, its boathouse was burned down by an arsonist in the 1970s.

Certain terms are integral to the understanding of the research within this thesis as well as to the preservation profession in general. These terms include preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Collectively, these terms are known as “treatments” for historic buildings. They are defined by the Department of the Interior and published as the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*:

Preservation is defined as the act or process of applying measures to sustain the existing form, integrity, and material of a building or structure, and the existing form and vegetative cover of a site. It may include initial stabilization work, where necessary, as well as ongoing maintenance of the historic building materials.

Restoration is defined as the act or process of accurately recovering the form and details of a property and its setting as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of later work or by the replacement of missing earlier work.

Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of returning a property to a state of utility through repair or alteration which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historical, architectural, and cultural values.

Reconstruction is defined as the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.¹

All four of these preservation techniques can be applied to the Oregon Coast stations. All of the structures need preservation if they are to survive. Fortunately, the Coast Guard has always maintained the structures through a strict maintenance policy. It is up to today’s stewards to continue that tradition. For those stations deemed to be vital

¹W. Brown Morton III, et al, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992).

in telling the story of the Coast Guard, all are in need of restoration. Of the stations decommissioned by the Coast Guard, rehabilitation is appropriate as long as the buildings retain their significant historical features. Where money and desire are sufficient, non-speculative reconstructions of station structures can take place to help interpret the history of the Coast Guard. Preservation treatments for each station are proposed in the concluding chapter. It is the attempt of this thesis to provide the reader with an understanding of the Oregon Coast stations and to encourage the sensitive treatment of the historic structures.

The goal of this thesis is not to create a preservation plan or National Register Nomination for each station, but rather to examine the evolution of each station, discuss their present condition, and formulate suggestions for their future. Preservation concepts are given at the end of their respective chapters with an overall conclusion in the final chapter. It is the hope of this author that this document can facilitate activity toward the preservation of these valuable structures.