CHAPTER V

POINT ADAMS STATIONS

The Columbia River is the largest river on the West Coast and separates Oregon from Washington. At Oregon's northwest corner, the Columbia River flows into the Pacific Ocean. Where the two bodies of water meet, the confluence produces some of the most consistently turbulent water anywhere in the world. Due to these hazardous conditions, the area has become known to mariners as the "Graveyard of the Pacific."

At Oregon's northwest corner are Point Adams and the town of Hammond (Figure 72). The area around Hammond was home to the earliest Euro-American settlements in the West. Lewis and Clark settled in for the Winter of 1805-06 just six miles southeast of Hammond on Young's Bay. Five miles to the east, Astoria was the first American city established on the West Coast. Settled as a fur trading post in 1811, Astoria was named for Pacific Fur Company pioneer John Jacob Astor, 88 years before Hammond became a town. The original indigenous populace of the area was the Clatsop Indians.

All the people who settled on the tip of Oregon were drawn by the same thing, the Columbia River. The river acted as a highway into the interior, it provided plenty of fish and ample game along its banks, and there were seemingly inexhaustible supplies of fur-bearing creatures. Despite a tense feud between the British and Americans, Astoria held on and gradually settlers from the East began to populate the area. In the 1840s, Portland

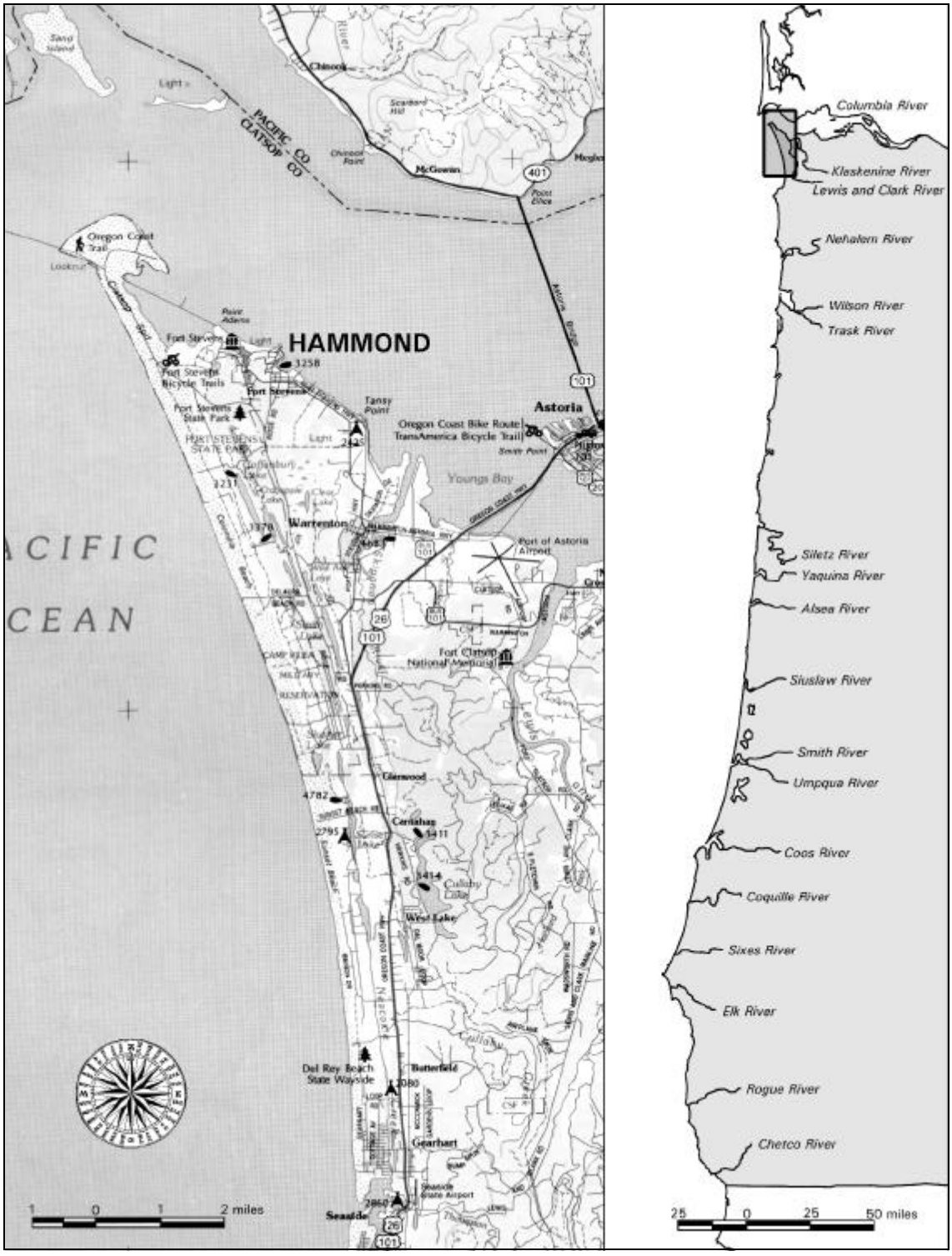

Figure 72. Location of Hammond, Oregon, as Shown on a 1996 DeLorme Topographic Map.

was becoming the major trade center north of San Francisco. The news of gold strikes in California in 1848 solidified the link between Portland and San Francisco, with Astoria being the way point for those traveling by sea. A customs house was established at Astoria in November 1848 to monitor goods sailing between San Francisco and Portland.

Development of the ports along the Oregon Coast was hampered by a lack of aids to navigation. When the *Tonquin* arrived with Astor's party from the Pacific Fur Company in 1811, they lost two boats and eight men while taking soundings to navigate over the Columbia bar.[114] Soon, a primitive range system was set up for river navigation. White flags would be tied to trees on the shore that, when lined up by a ship's pilot, would show that the ship was in the channel. At night, the flags would be substituted with bonfires; however, piloting in the dark was rarely risked. Bar pilots came into use in the 1840s and were licensed by the Oregon provisional government starting in 1846.[115]

The Revenue Cutter *Jefferson Davis* arrived in the Oregon Territory in September 1854. This marked the first federal government assistance to mariners in the region. The ship was sent in response to a request from the Collector of Customs to counter smuggling. The cutter enforced the customs laws by meeting ships offshore and inspecting their cargo. In addition to enforcing customs laws, the *Jefferson Davis*

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[114]Frank Turner, "The Graveyard of the Pacific," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 7 September 1958.

[115]Sally Donovan and Barb Kachel, *National Register Multiple Property Nomination for Lighthouse Stations of Oregon* (Salem, OR: Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, 1992), E.6, E.19.

transported government officials, protected lighthouse personnel and other settlers from harassment by Indians, and rescued survivors of shipwrecks.[116]

Communications and commerce along on the Pacific Coast depended almost exclusively upon water transportation. The local populace relied on the waterways to remain in contact with the East Coast, California, Washington, and other Oregon settlements. However, there were still no modern aids to navigation in the Oregon Territory when the *Jefferson Davis* arrived in 1854. A navigator had to rely on spotting a prominent headland, when the weather cooperated, and using the land form to guide his ship to harbor. At night or in poor visibility, ships would remain well offshore to avoid running aground. Navigators often mistook landmarks and led their ships into danger. It was obvious that a system of navigational aids would be needed to facilitate shipping.[117]

In August 1848, Congress created the Oregon Territory. In that Act, a lighthouse for Cape Disappointment[118] and a system of buoys for the Columbia River and Astoria Harbor were specifically mentioned.[119] Quickly, officers of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey were sent out to find suitable locations for the aids. The survey recommended that 16 lights be constructed along the Pacific Coast: ten in California, five Washington, and one in Oregon at Umpqua River. The light at Cape Disappointment was given high

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[116]Rear Admiral Ed Nelson, Retired, "History of the Coast Guard in Clatsop County" *Cumtux* (Summer 1994).

[117]Ibid.

[118]Cape Disappointment is the headland on the north side of the Columbia River entrance.

[119]Nelson.

priority but was slowed when the bark *Oriole* wrecked on the Columbia bar while carrying supplies to build the lighthouse.[120]

The Cape Disappointment Lighthouse became the first major navigational aid to be established in the Oregon Territory when it was lit on 15 October 1856. A sister lighthouse was constructed on the Oregon side at Point Adams in 1875, but discontinued in 1899, and demolished in 1912. The Cape Disappointment light is still active today and is the oldest on the Pacific Coast. The first revenue cutter to be stationed in Astoria was the *Joseph Lane*, a schooner that arrived on 20 March 1856. The *Joseph Lane* assisted ships over the bar, inspected cargoes, and aided mariners in distress.[121]

In addition to keeping the lights burning, lighthouse keepers were tasked with life-saving duties. The keeper of the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, J.W. Munson, was the first to provide life-saving services at the mouth of the Columbia prior to the arrival of the Life-Saving Service. After 17 died when the *Industry* wrecked on the Columbia bar in March 1865, Munson rebuilt a lifeboat that he found on the beach and fitted it with air tanks. He is credited with providing the first life-saving equipment on the Columbia River.[122] Finally, in 1878, the Life-Saving Service augmented Munson's life-saving operation with the Cape Disappointment Lifeboat Station, converting it to a life-saving station with a full-time winter crew in 1882. By 1888, there was a full-time crew of eight surfmen year-around.

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[120]Donovan and Kachel, E.21.

[121]Nelson.

[122]Ibid.

The crew at Cape Disappointment Life-Saving Station found themselves extremely busy during fishing season. Just outside the mouth of the Columbia lay the favorite fishing ground for gillnetters. Almost every year the *Annual Reports* document the death of one or two of the fishermen near Peacock Spit, a narrow strip of land projecting out from Cape Disappointment. "The fishing ground is dangerous and the men are venturesome, while many of them, notwithstanding the accidents constantly occurring in the vicinity, seem to not fully comprehend the dangers of the place," noted the *Annual Reports*.[123] The boats the gillnetters used were small and crewed by two men, a boatpuller and a netpuller. The nets were long and heavy and often dragged the boat and the men into the breakers. The life-savers would actually go on patrol among the hundreds of fishing boats and wait for trouble at Peacock Spit. They would have a crewman in the lookout tower on Cape Disappointment signal them if there was an emergency and direct the pulling boat to the scene.

Point Adams Life-Saving Station

With the large numbers of rescues occurring at the mouth of the Columbia River in the 1880s, Superintendent Kimball deemed another station necessary. Oregon Senator John H. Mitchell requested an appropriation for a life-saving station at Fort Stevens in early 1886.[124] With a slight alteration of the location to Point Adams, the appropriation for the life-saving station was folded in with another 17 stations under House Resolution

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[123]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1904 Annual Reports*, 34.

[124]Congress, Senate, 49th Cong., 1st sess., S. 1496, 1886.

6975 and approved by Congress on 10 April 1886. Its quick approval showed how vital it was to get an additional station on the Columbia River.

Land was purchased at a lightly populated, waterfront area east of Fort Stevens, on the north edge of what was soon to become the town of Hammond (Figure 73). The Point Adams Life-Saving Station was built during 1889 and put into service in December 1889, according to *The Daily Astorian*. It was the first true life-saving station to be erected in Oregon, as the Cape Arago Life-Saving Station did not have a crew, only a keeper, prior to 1890. The Point Adams station had eight men on duty year-around. Starting in 1900, an extra man supplemented the crew from 1 May to 25 August, the only Oregon station to have such a large crew during the Life-Saving Service era. The Cape Disappointment station across the river also received a ninth surfman in 1900. The Point Adams and Cape Disappointment stations were two of the five most heavily staffed stations in the nation.[125] Some of the greatest tandem rescue efforts in the United States occurred between these two stations. One of them, the wreck of the *Rosecrans* in 1913, is detailed in Appendix B.

The station Albert Buruley Bibb designed for Point Adams was quite novel for its time. Bibb had started working for the Life-Saving Service in 1885 doing remodels of old stations. The first station he designed from scratch was in 1887 and became known as a Bibb #2. The design departed dramatically from its predecessors in what was essentially a 1-1/2 story bungalow with a boatroom attached like a garage. This was the

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[125]According to the *Annual Reports*, the only stations with larger crews were the Fort Point and Golden Gate stations guarding San Francisco Bay which had nine surfmen each year around, and the Baaddah Point station in Washington which had ten surfmen year around.

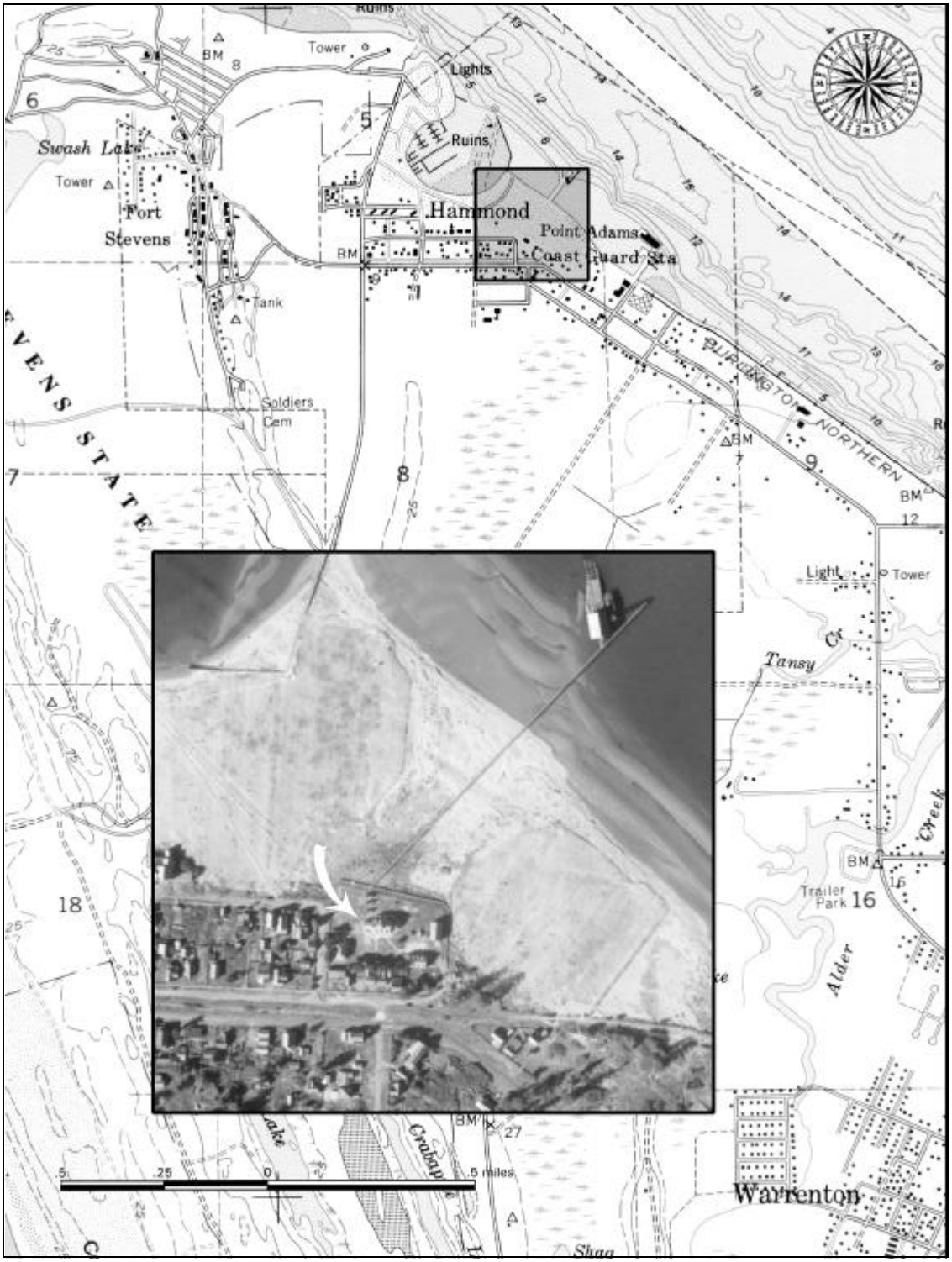

Figure 73. Aerial Photo of the Point Adams Station Area in 1945 Superimposed Over the Warrenton, Oregon, USGS Map (1984 Revision).

first station to emphasize the living quarters over the boatroom. For Point Adams two years later, he went one step further and detached the boatroom entirely from the dwelling (Figure 74). The evolution allowed the boathouse to be placed in a location convenient to launching a boat while the living quarters could be placed in a more protected location. Having the rescue apparatus in its own building also allowed for increased ventilation to dry out the equipment. Only three of what has become known as the Fort Point-type stations were built, but all were constructed on the Pacific Coast.

The Point Adams station house was a symmetrically-planned, gambrel-roofed structure with three prominent dormers (Figure 75). In its symmetry, gambrel roof and front door detailing, the style is nodding to the Colonial Revival. The one sheet shown in Figure 76 is the only drawing that could found for the three stations built. The design was short-lived, as all three stations were built in 1889, and no more would come from the plans. The Fort Point Life-Saving Station on San Francisco Bay was the prototype, followed by the Point Reyes Life-Saving Station just north of San Francisco Bay, and finally the Point Adams Life-Saving Station. The Fort Point Life-Saving Station is the only one that still stands, and it was the last U.S. Life-Saving Service station still in use in the nation when it was decommissioned in 1990. Today, it is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

The plan for the Fort Point Station in Figure 76 shows two additions using the original plan as a base drawing. There is a tiny office to the right of the entry and a three-sided bay on the right-side elevation. These modifications were not made to the Point Adams Life-Saving Station. Variances from the plans made at Point Adams were

Figure 74. Point Adams Life-Saving Station, Circa 1900. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Point Adams File).

Figure 75. Point Adams Life-Saving Station, Circa 1910. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #654-A 10541).

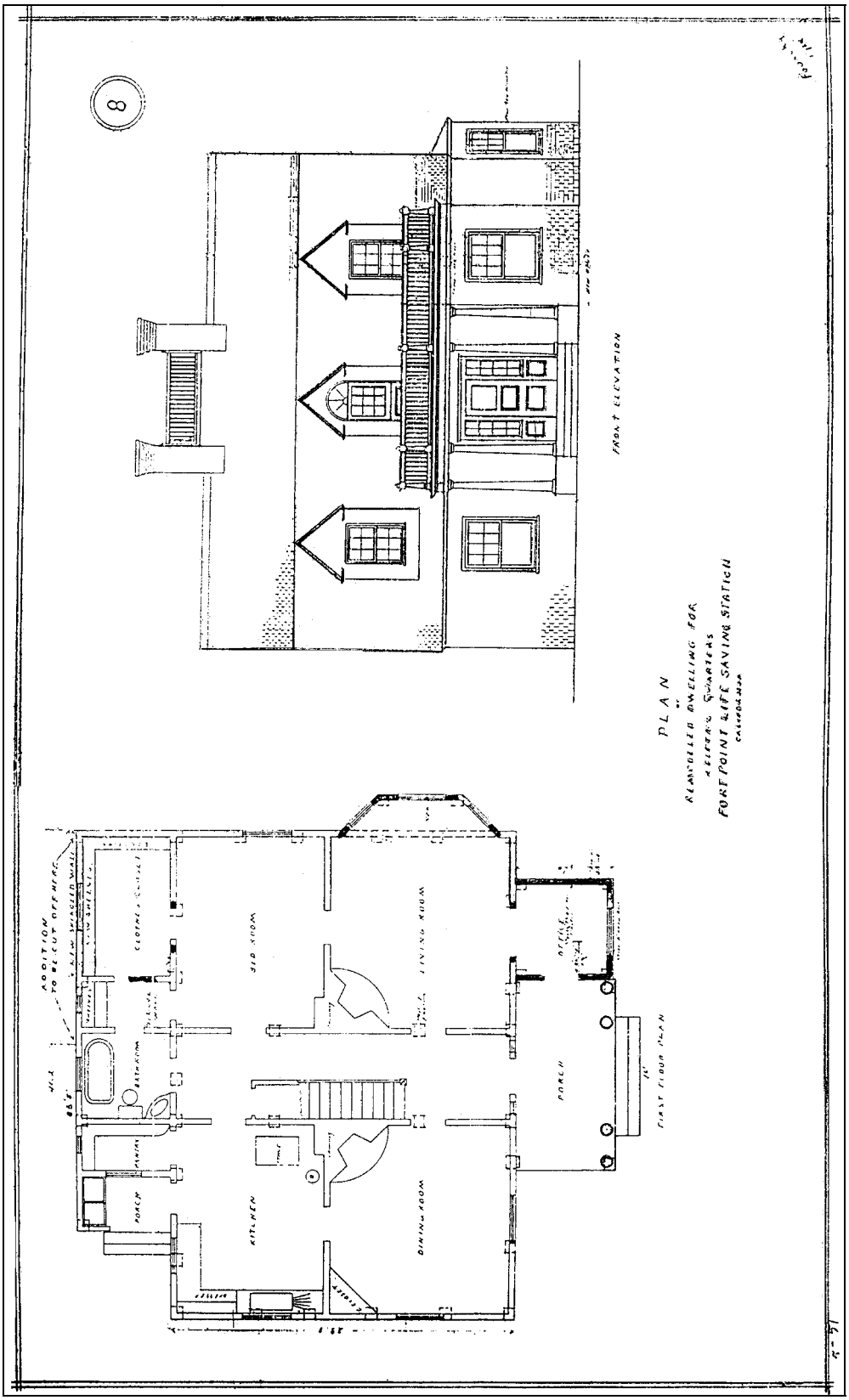

Figure 76. Fort Point-Type Station Plan. Source: Nautical Research Centre (#5-51).

operable shutters, eight-over-eight windows at the first floor, and an entry porch with steps off of all sides. As was typical among Oregon life-saving stations, the plan is symmetrical with a central entry and stair hall. Colonial detailing abounds, such as multi-pane windows with shutters, sidelights at the entry, classical porch columns, a lunette in the central dormer, and eave returns on the dormers. The entire building was sheathed in shingles.

The plans show the central stair hall with dining room and kitchen to the left and living room and bedroom to the right. At the end of the stair hall was a bathroom containing a bathtub, toilet, and sink. This was the first and only life-saving station in Oregon to include a bathroom inside the station house. The second floor would have had a central stair hall leading to four bedrooms for housing the crew, two to a room. The attic space was ventilated at the end walls and would have been used for storage. The roof was surmounted with a lookout between brick chimneys with corbeled caps. Undoubtedly, there was access through the attic to reach the lookout position. There was no basement. Heat was provided by fireplaces in the dining room and living room, and based on the fact there were six flues, there was a fireplace in each of the four crew rooms.

From the Fort Point plans, there was apparently an ell projecting from the rear of the station. A one-story ell is visible in one of the earliest photos of the Point Adams Station and was probably the keeper's bedroom, most likely accessible only from the

Figure 77. Point Adams Coast Guard Station, 1938. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #0020P364-000364-A).

outside. Sometime between 1923 and 1931, the front porch was filled-in (Figure 77). Apparently the door in the middle dormer was sealed off at about the same time, possibly to house a bathroom for the second floor.

The station's boathouse was a standard Fort Point-type boathouse located to the west of the station house. The building was one-story with two bays and measured 24' wide by 40' deep. The hip roof had a flared eave and was capped with a distinctive "witch's hat" ventilator. This standard boathouse plan is thoroughly described in Chapter III.

A short path from the boathouse led to the original riverwall about 150' in front of the station. The wood revetment was built to stem erosion from the Columbia River. At the riverwall was a ramp for launching the pulling boat. There is a note in the 1914 *Annual Reports* that states, ". . . serious erosion of site, necessitating removal of

boathouse and launchway to another location . . .” at Point Adams.[126] The 1915 *Annual Report* clears up the matter when it mentions, “The boathouse has been moved to a new location and the launchway rebuilt.”[127] Photos corroborate that at some point between 1905 and 1923, Point Adams did acquire another boathouse, one built on piles in the water with an attached launchway. Photos in 1923 show a two-bay boathouse, approximately 900' from the riverwall and connected to shore by a long boardwalk, well out into the Columbia River. The one-story, gable roof boathouse was approximately 25' wide and 40' deep. Between the station and the boathouse appears a vast area of sand on the 1945 aerial (see Figure 73). This sand is the dredge spoils produced by the Army Corps of Engineers in the 1930s and 1940s to help retain the Point Adams shoreline and at the same time deepen the Columbia’s channel.[128]

Adjacent to the station house to its east was a square, one-story storehouse with a pyramidal roof and cupola ventilator. Next to the storehouse was a 1-1/2 story, gable-roofed carpentry shop. Both of these were built sometime between 1889 and 1905. However, along with the 1889 station house, they were demolished by 1945.

A shop building was erected east of the station between 1923 and 1939. It was used as a carpentry shop for small boat repair, maintenance, and storage. The shop building, approximately 20' wide by 45' deep, was constructed with a post-and-beam foundation. The one-story structure was a utilitarian building with little detail. The

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[126]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1914 Annual Reports*, 21.

[127]U.S. Coast Guard, *1915 Annual Report*, 35

[128]David Miller, phone interview by author, transcript, Eugene, OR, 10 May 2000.

building had a gable roof and was clad entirely in shingles. Illuminating its interior were horizontal bands of multi-pane windows, four on the side and two on the front, along with a large door on the back.

Point Adams Lifeboat Station

The Point Adams Lifeboat Station was erected to replace the inadequate life-saving station house built 50 years earlier in 1889. The new station was the first of the four Roosevelt-type stations to be built on the Oregon Coast. These stations followed a standard plan developed by the Coast Guard and were for the most part built during Franklin Roosevelt's administration (1933-45), hence the designation, Roosevelt-type. The new Point Adams station was begun in October 1938, and built as a Public Works Administration Project (PWA). George Buckler of Portland was the general contractor and it cost $44,000 to build.[129] What was unusual about the construction process at Point Adams was the proximity of the old and new buildings (Figure 78). The Coast Guard designers wanted to site the new station as close as possible to the site of the old station; however, they also wanted to continue to use the old station until the new station was ready in April 1939. Therefore, the new station was built just a few feet in front of the old station.

Like the former Fort Point-type life-saving station house, the new Roosevelt-type station house was completely symmetrical across the front. However, the new station's Colonial Revival roots were much more apparent. Colonial Revival detailing was

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[129]"Point Adams New Station Nearly Ready," *Astorian Budget,* 16 March 1939.

Figure 78. New Point Adams Coast Guard Station, 1939. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Point Adams File).

represented by multi-pane windows flanked by operable shutters, large Classical corner boards, Tuscan columns, eave returns, a water table with cap, and metal railings in Classical motifs. Even the restricted roof of the entry porch was rimmed with a balustrade. On the rear elevation was an entrance door sheltered by a small gable hood supported by distinguished brackets.

The building was a commodious 80' wide and 32' deep, designed to sleep 17 but could easily handle more people. On the first floor was a central stair hall, dividing officer's quarters to the left from the crew's living space on the right (Figure 79). On the left was the Officer in Charge's (OIC) office, living room, bathroom, and bedroom. On the right was the crew's mess, kitchen, and day room. At the end of the stair hall was a spare bedroom. The second floor was divided symmetrically into four bedrooms for the crew (Figure 80). Each room was setup to sleep four with four beds and four built-in

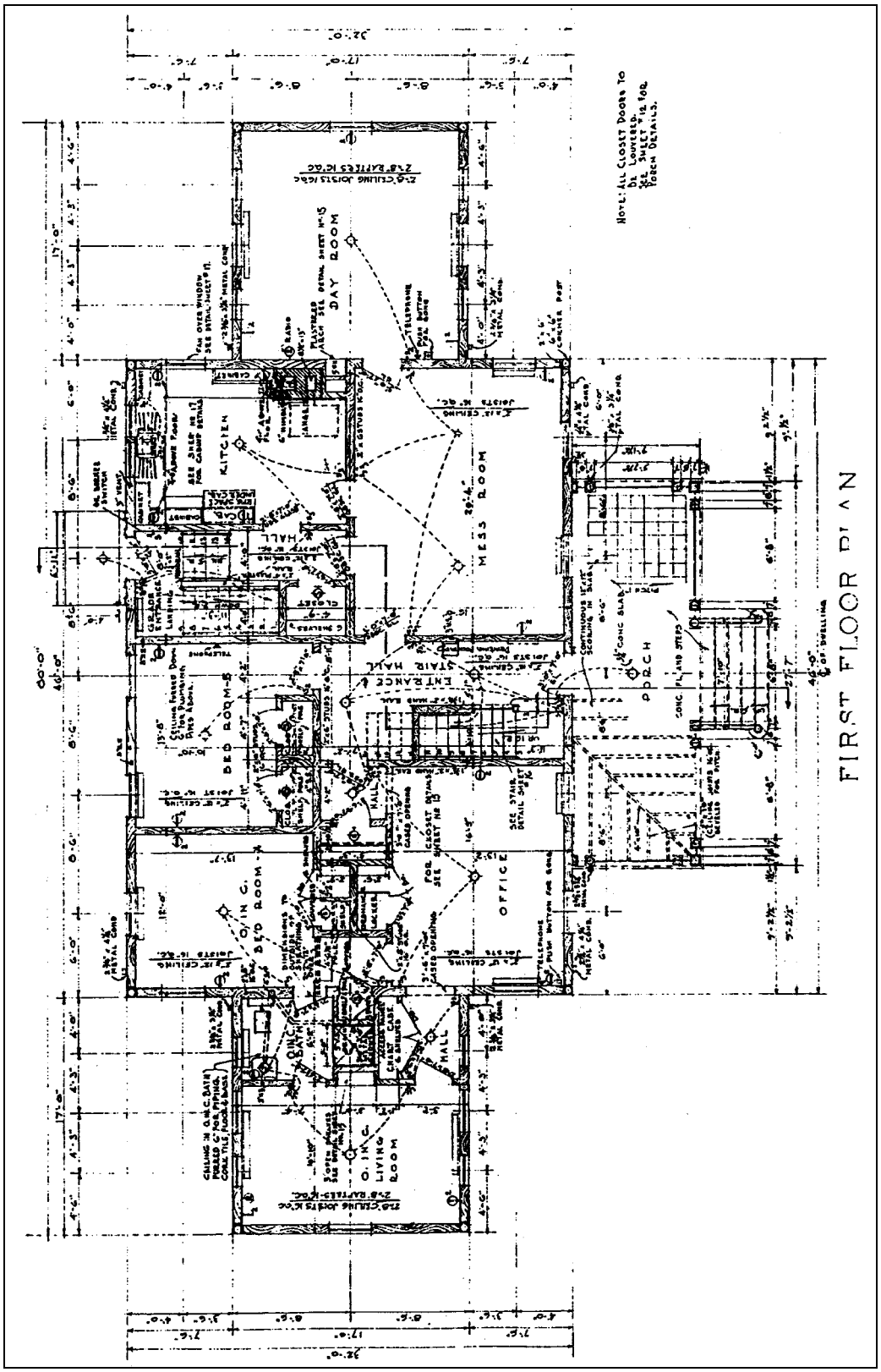

Figure 79. First Floor Plan, Umpqua River Lifeboat Station, Drawn October 1938. Source: Umpqua River Coast Guard Station National Register Nomination.

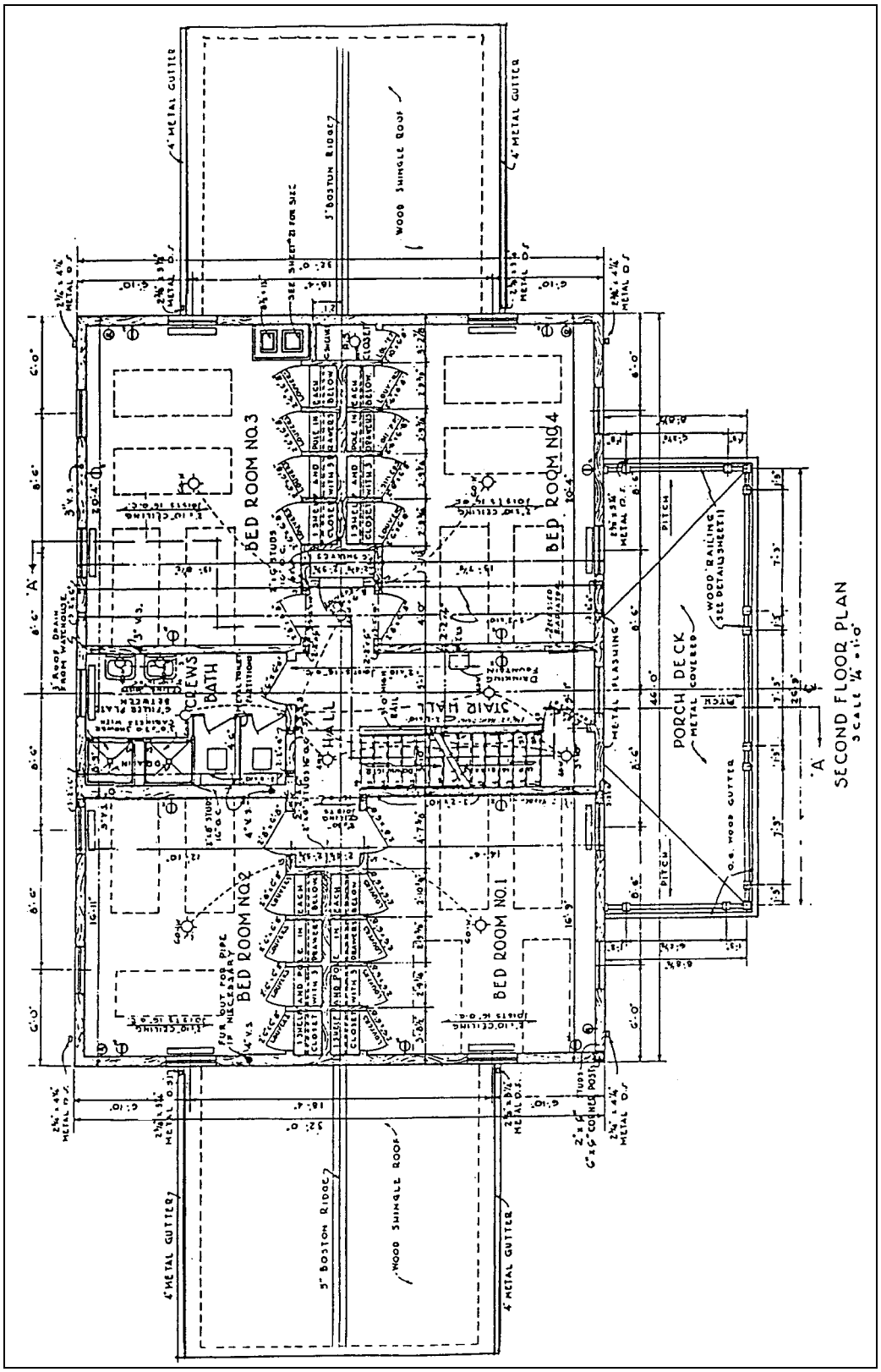

Figure 80. Second Floor Plan, Tillamook Bay Lifeboat Station, Revised Drawing May 1940. Source: Tillamook Bay Coast Guard Station National Register Nomination.

lockers. At the end of the stair hall was the crew's bathroom with two toilets, two sinks, and two showers. In the stair hall, the staircase continued on to the attic which was divided into two large bunk rooms with lockers on the end walls. A fold-down stair in the stair hall provided access to the 9' by 9', continuously manned, lookout.[130] Six dormers, with arched windows, pierced the attic. Under the building was a full basement with a drill room, boiler room, storm clothes room, provision room, and laundry room. The entire building was surrounded by a concrete sidewalk in the form of a large oval.

As for the building's structure, its exterior walls and subfloor were constructed entirely out of "wolmanized" (i.e., pressure-treated) lumber to help prevent dryrot and insect damage. The foundation had an interesting composition where a 10" reinforced concrete wall was poured, covered with an asphaltic waterproofing, and then sandwiched with a 4" concrete wall to protect the waterproofing. Inside, the floors were covered in mottled brown battleship linoleum except in the kitchen where it was green and in the bathrooms which had "the newest type cork tiled floor."[131]

A standard, four-bay equipment building was built in 1939 to the south of the station (Figure 81). Stations starting in the 1930s all had what were called equipment buildings, which served as garages for vehicles and small boats, plus had storage space for equipment in the attic. The plan of the building was approximately 50' wide by 30' deep and built on a concrete foundation. The equipment building continued the Colonial

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[130]Unlike all other Oregon stations, it is believed Point Adams did not have a lookout tower detached from the building. Their principal lookout was integrated into the dwelling.

[131]"Point Adams New Station Nearly Ready," *Astorian Budget*, 16 March 1939.

Figure 81. Equipment Building (1939) at Point Adams Lifeboat Station, 1997. Source: Author.

Revival theme of the station house with its arched, multi-light windows in the dormers, eave returns at the gable ends, a lunette over the gable windows, and water table with cap. Each dormer was centered over a garage door that contained 10 lights over 15 panels. On the back side, there were four more dormers. On the west elevation was an entrance door sheltered by a small gable hood supported by elegant brackets. The building was clad in shingles and finished with classical corner boards.

It appears that at about the same time as the station house and equipment building were being erected, a second boathouse was erected next to the boathouse out in the Columbia River. For awhile there were three boathouses at the station. This 1939 boathouse was also two-bays wide but significantly larger at about 35' wide by 50' deep. It also was one-story, shingle-clad with a gable roof and loft area. For a short time the

two boathouses sat side by side at the end of the long boardwalk, but by 1945, the c.1915 boathouse was gone. The 1939 boathouse was unfortunately lost in 1982 during a winter storm. A good portion of the long walkway remained and was used for a tidal gauge station. However, the rest of the walkway over the water was destroyed by an ice storm in 1988. The Army Corps of Engineers then removed the rest of the walkway pilings back to the shoreline in early 1989.[132] Fortunately, the portion of the walkway over land still remains today.

Preservation

The Point Adams station complex is remarkably intact (Figure 82). The station was decommissioned c.1963 and was used for a brief time by the Clatsop Community College. In 1969, the National Marine Fisheries Service bought the station complex and its 5.8 acres from the Coast Guard to use as a research station. At the time, the National Marine Fisheries Service was well aware of the historic importance of the station and have done their best to preserve what remains over the past 30 years.[133] The Point Adams 1889 station house, the c.1915 boathouse, and the 1939 boathouse are all gone, but the 1889 boathouse, c.1925 shop building, and the 1939 station house and equipment building all survive.

The 1939 station house is the most intact building on the site (Figure 83). It retains its original exterior appearance with only the addition of a non-integral, metal fire

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[132]Miller.

[133]Ibid.

Figure 82. Decommissioned Point Adams Lifeboat Station Complex, 1997. Source: Author.

Figure 83. Station House (1939) at Point Adams Lifeboat Station, 1997. Source: Author.

escape on either side of the building to serve the second floor and attic. The shutters have been removed, but they are in on-site storage. On the interior, the National Marine Fisheries Service has not altered the spatial arrangement, only the use of the rooms. All decorative features have been retained. Much of the original signage, cabinetry, closets, and hardware remains. Unfortunately, most of the light fixtures have been replaced over the years; however, in the entry hall there is an original 1939 light fixture. The National Marine Fisheries Service has even continued to use the same shades of paint, such as pale yellow and pale gray, on the interior. The station house is a good model of adaptive reuse.

The original boathouse from the 1889 station is a rare artifact (Figure 84). The only other boathouse remaining in Oregon from the Life-Saving Service era is at Barview on Tillamook Bay. Of the five Fort Point-type boathouses built in Oregon, Point Adams has the only one remaining. Unfortunately, the boathouse lost its most character-defining feature, the witch's hat ventilator, sometime after 1939. It has also lost its two, paired boatroom doors, its flared eave, and some of its windows. During the Coast Guard era, an entry door was inserted along with several newer windows. However, the boathouse is structurally sound and well maintained. As with all of the buildings on the site, a new cedar shingle roof was installed in 1990. If there was a strong desire, coupled with financial support, this would be a prime building for restoration back to its 1889 appearance. At the very least, National Marine Fisheries Service should continue to maintain the structure and not alter it further.

Figure 84. Boathouse (1889) from Point Adams Life-Saving Station, 1997. Source: Author.

The exterior of the equipment building (1939) is in excellent shape. The attic space has been adapted into a meeting space. The other four-bay, Roosevelt-type equipment buildings in Oregon are at Siuslaw River and Coos Bay and are identical to the one at Point Adams. The Coast Guard still uses the Siuslaw River and Coos Bay equipment buildings and have altered their exteriors significantly to meet their current needs. In contrast, the Point Adams equipment building has excellent integrity. The National Marine Fisheries Service should continue to maintain the building in its current state, its exterior should not be altered, and its interior not be changed any further. The

same applies to the c.1925 shop building. It is in good condition, and it should continue to be used and maintained.

In front of the station were the ubiquitous wreck pole and flag pole. Both of these disappeared sometime after 1945. A bell stand stood in front of the station through WWII, but has also since been removed. The original wood riverwall is still visible in the brush, though it is now well inland behind the dredge spoils. The wooden boardwalk that led to the c.1915 and 1939 boathouses still remains, though it is truncated once it reaches the water's edge. In 1939, a 50', four-legged, steel signal flag tower was erected northeast of the station house. The tower still stands today, making it the only pre-WWII signal flag tower still standing in Oregon.

In summary, the National Marine Fisheries Service should continue to maintain their 1889 boathouse, their c.1925 shop building, and their 1939 station house, equipment building, and signal flag tower. They should retain their concrete sidewalks, the boardwalk out to the Columbia River, and the remains of the old riverwall. Along with the Port Orford Lifeboat Station, Point Adams is the most intact pre-WWII Coast Guard Station in Oregon. At a minimum, the National Marine Fisheries Service should pursue a National Register Nomination for the site encompassing these buildings. Once listed, they could search for additional funds for the preservation of the station's important buildings.