

# Grand Marais U.S. Coast Guard

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Station History

USCG Station Grand Marais opened in 1938 and closed in 1981. The National Park Service began using the station as a ranger station, seasonal residence and maritime museum in 1985. In 2006, the maritime museum was closed and the exhibits moved to the Au Sable Light Station for display.

## A Typical Day

Though numerous rescues and assistance to boats occurred over the years, the day to day routine was - routine. A typical crew consisted of a Chief and ten or eleven other men. A "Record of the Miscellaneous Events of the Day" was recorded by the station chief in the daily "Log of the U.S. Coast Guard" for each station.

Saturday, 1 September, 1950:

6:00 a.m. Test telephone  
6:30 a.m. Called all hands  
7:30 a.m. Crew secured from Police Duties  
8:00 a.m. Morning colors. Crew all present and acc. for  
8:15 a.m. Insp. of Sta. by O.I.C.  
11:30 a.m. Dinner  
12:00 Olson BM2 on 48 hr. liberty 4 pm to Mid  
4:00 p.m. Changed dial on time Det., Dial all properly marked. Evening colors at Sunset  
8:00 p.m. Inspection of station grounds, buildings, boats, and apparatus  
10:00 p.m. Final inspection of sta

On Saturdays a "Field Day" in depth cleaning of the entire station was conducted from about 8:15 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. followed by the O.I.C. inspection of the station. At 12:00 p.m. "Early Liberty" was granted to the off duty section. On Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday "Holiday Routine" was observed and no routine maintenance work was performed.



The Station in the 1940's

## On Watch

In addition to work around the station, the crew kept a watch vigil over the bay and Lake Superior. In 1924, for example, a Coastguardsman walked south to the boathouse, then northwest to the beach and approximately 1 mile west to a check station. This 1.5 mile route took 1 hour and 20 minutes round trip and was scheduled six times daily from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

## The 36 Footer

Many lifeboat stations were assigned the venerable thirty-six foot self-righting motor lifeboat as the primary rescue craft. CG 36528 was assigned to Grand Marais



Robert J. Hughes, Sr. - Engineman 2nd Class in 1950's

with a crew of four. These boats had a two ton keel which would right them in heavy waves. Divided into three sealable compartments, they could hold a total of 40 people including crew. The motor lifeboats were constructed in Curtis Bay, Maryland and were used for many years on both coasts and the Great Lakes.

The Grand Marais boathouse was on the bay side of Coast Guard Point, but is no longer standing. CG 36528 is now on display in the boathouse at Sand Point, which once served as the Munising motor lifeboat station.

## Drill Schedule

Except for Sundays and holidays, drills were scheduled each day of the week to keep crew skills current. These included semaphore, wig-wag, fire, infantry, international code, resuscitation, first aid and physical hygiene.

## The Edmund Fitzgerald

The most famous of all Great Lakes shipping disasters was the loss of the 729 foot ore carrier Edmund Fitzgerald. The Fitzgerald disappeared on the evening of November 10, 1975, in hurricane force winds and 25 foot waves north of Whitefish Point, some 55 nautical miles east northeast of Grand Marais. The last land based radio communications with the Fitzgerald were made from the Grand Marais station late in the afternoon of that fateful day.

## Nearby Maritime Attraction

The Grand Marais Historical Society operates the maritime museum at the end of Coast Guard Point east of the Ranger Station. The building is owned by the National Park Service, and once served as the keepers quarters for the Grand Marais Harbor of Refuge Light. The U.S. Coast Guard operates and maintains the fog signal and rear range light on the pier.



Grand Marais self-righting motor lifeboat 36528 now on display in Munising

# Grand Marais U.S. Life Saving Service

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## Station History

After the Sault Locks were opened in 1855, shipping on Lake Superior steadily grew. That first year, 193 "passages" were recorded. By 1880, lumber, grain, iron ore and other traffic on Superior swelled the number to 3503 passages. Ports like Grand Marais and Munising served as cordwood fuel stops and as harbors of refuge during storms.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiated a harbor improvement project in Grand Marais in 1881. Work included construction of a mile long timber pile break water stretching east-west across the bay to a dredged channel at the western shore. Two piers were constructed on each side of the channel, and the harbor area dredged to a depth of 40 feet, permitting access to the harbor of refuge by the largest vessels of the day.



Captain Truedell and crew - 1910

A light tower and fog bell were erected on the north end of the pier, and the first harbor of refuge light keeper was assigned in 1895. The light was exhibited for the first time on December 10. No keepers dwelling was constructed to accompany the station, so he was forced to construct a temporary shanty on Corps of Engineers property at the south end of the pier.

Between 1895 and 1910, only 15 years, shipping tonnage on Lake Superior increased from 9.5 million tons to 62.5 million tons - 650%. Much of this traffic passed by Grand Marais, which was a harbor of refuge during storms.

In 1898 construction began for a life saving station at the foot of the west pier. On its completion the following year, the station was considered one of the finest on all of the Great Lakes. The crew included a captain and eight surfmen, two surf boats, a 34-foot self-righting life boat, and a full complement of beach apparatus. The station operated from March 1 through December 31 each year from 1899 till 1940. During this time, numerous shipwrecks occurred and members of the Service were responsible for several dramatic rescues.

## Notable Grand Marais Shipwrecks

On November 24, 1912, the packet South Shore ran into trouble west of Grand Marais. At daybreak the ship's white flag was spotted by the Life Saving Station at Grand Marais. The ship was drifting before the northwest wind at the time, about 4 miles from shore and nearly 10 miles west of the station. Captain Ben Truedell led the Life Saving crew out to the sinking vessel in the power lifeboat.



Beach apparatus drill

When they boarded, it was nearly awash, and the Life Savers worked with the exhausted passengers and crewmen to jettison cargo and speed up the pumping process. It became clear immediately that the ship could not be saved, so they took off the 10 sufferers, abandoned the ship not far from the Au Sable Reef and returned to the Station. No lives were lost in the accident.

The H.E. Runnels came to grief in a November storm in 1919 at Grand Marais. The wind was blowing at a gale out of the northwest; temperature was 18 degrees. As the Runnels backed into a great wave trying to make the breakwater channel, the steering gear gave way and the ship floundered. The Grand Marais Life Savers launched the surfboat after unsuccessfully shooting the Lyle gun. As the crew was hauled to safety, several life savers collapsed from exertion and exposure. During the rescue, three surfmen were washed over the side of the tiny rescue craft. As the Life Saving Service crew fell by the wayside, civilian fishermen took up the rescue. Incredibly, all 17 crew men were saved without any loss of life. Gold Congressional medals were awarded to head Life Saver Anderson, seven of his crew, one Coast Guardsman, and four Grand Marais civilians, including fisherman Ora Endress. The Endress medal is displayed in the Grand Marais Historical Society museum.



The Grand Marais crew rowing the surfboat

In late November 1935, the fish tug Lydia attempted to return to port during a threatening nor'wester. Captain Louis Larson and five men made their way to the north end of the breakwater where she was broken up and sunk after striking bottom during large waves. The Captain and two crew members were found washed up on shore near Deer Park, some 17 miles to the east. Two crew members were never found. An investigation of the incident revealed that the station Life Savers had made the correct decision to not attempt a rescue as the potential for loss of the Life Saving crew was deemed significant.