

Assateague Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Assateague Island
National Seashore



Preserving the Coast Guard Station



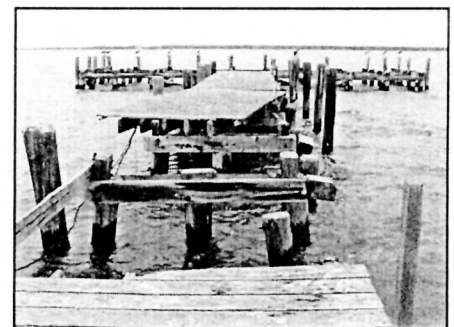
Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station

The Most Valuable Cultural Resource

It has been called by Park Superintendent Mike Hill, “the Seashore’s most valuable cultural resource.” The Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station has been a prominent part of Toms Cove since its construction in 1922. Typical of Coast Guard stations of its time, Station Number 150 at Assateague Beach includes a station house, boathouse, lookout tower, and several outlying service buildings. Coast Guardsmen served at this station from the time it opened until it was decommissioned in January 1967. Those who served risked their lives to rescue mariners caught on shoals, patrolled Assateague’s beaches during wartime, and surveyed the ocean and the mouth of the Chincoteague Bay from its lookout tower. All worked hard to maintain the station in a harsh marine environment. Ed Switzer, a serviceman at Assateague Beach, remarked, “We polished the floors till they shone like glass.” The station is currently the subject of nomination for placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

Seeking Solutions

Today the Coast Guard Station presents some special challenges. With its remote location amidst a fragile wildlife habitat, and its isolation from utility and road systems, it is not easily accessed. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent to preserve the aging historic site, but it hasn’t been enough. The station is perilously close to losing its pier, and the boathouse and stationhouse need additional preventative maintenance and upgrades.



Section of the deteriorating pier

Because traditional sources of preservation funding have been insufficient, the National Park Service is beginning to explore alternative strategies. A market feasibility study was initiated to identify potential uses for the station. Public workshops were held to help us identify additional ways to preserve the station.

Meeting the Challenge

The Assateague Coast Guard Station is a Virginia Historic Landmark and is within the National Park System. Many circumstances must be taken into consideration before any option for alternative use is pursued. The cultural heritage of the area and the site must remain unimpaired. The National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service must continue to cooperate to ensure that nesting endangered birds are not disturbed in the area, and the historic appearance of the buildings must remain unaltered. Most importantly, throughout the process, there must continue to be opportunities for the public to comment and become involved.

It is hard to imagine Toms Cove without the station. It has become a landmark in the memory of generations of local residents, as well as with countless visitors who have come to love Assateague. Ignoring the challenge of preservation will certainly put this cherished site at risk. In the words of Superintendent Hill, "For many years people have worked to protect the station at Toms Cove. This is no time to quit; we've got to do whatever we can. We'll work together to meet the challenge."



Time and the elements have taken a toll on the boathouse

The Planning Process

1. Identify the problem; begin preliminary studies and assessments.
2. Conduct public workshops to generate alternatives.
3. Evaluate alternatives and begin an Environmental Assessment Report (EA).
4. NPS selects feasible alternatives based on natural and historic constraints as part of EA. *
5. Conduct public workshop to discuss findings of EA.
6. NPS selects the preferred alternative based on EA.
7. Implementation of preferred alternative.

* As of Fall 2004, the National Park Service is at step #4 of the planning process.

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