

MUNISING U.S.C.G. STATION

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



Imagine the early 1930's. President Hoover worked diligently to stem the effects of the Great Depression by granting concessions to private industry and planning for massive public works projects. The Lindbergh kidnapping rocked the nation...

A New Station in Munising

Here on Sand Point, the Munising Coast Guard Station was placed into daily service. The main building and associated structures are typical of those constructed by the Coast Guard throughout the United States during the early part of the twentieth century.

Bids for the station were submitted on May 25, 1932, calling for a "two story frame dwelling, 30 feet by 45 feet, with concrete foundations; a one story frame boathouse, 37 feet by 55 feet, with creosoted pile foundation; a creosoted wood pile and timber marine launch way, 32 feet by 128 feet; two creosoted pile and timber bulkheads, each 129 feet long; and a creosoted timber and pile landing wharf, 10 feet by 40 feet; together with all necessary excavation, grading, dredging, etc."

Forty bid invitations were sent out by the Coast Guard and fifteen were returned, with bids ranging from \$26,750 to \$12,230. The low bid, by G.A. Gustafson of Iron Mountain, Michigan, was

accepted. The 7.11 acre plot at Sand Point was acquired from the Cleveland - Cliffs Iron Company (C.C.I.) for \$1.00 on August 17, 1932. On June 6, 1932, the new station was officially designated by the Coast Guard as the "Munising Coast Guard Station."

Construction on the new station was slowed by numerous delays, some caused by weather and others by shortages of materials. Since Gustafson couldn't be held responsible for the weather or subcontractors' failure to live up to contractual agreements, the Coast Guard did not assess penalties.

The lookout tower and watch house were provided by the McClintic-Marshall Corporation of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as one of eight manufactured at a total cost of \$2,092. It was erected by a contractor, F. A. Hunnelwell, for \$865.80.

The Station Becomes Operational

The station was officially accepted by the supervising engineer on April 1, 1933, and a caretaker was installed until an assigned crew arrived. The station was intended to be placed in commission on May 1, 1933, with the transfer of boats and equipment that were stored in Marquette. However, thick ice in Munising Bay delayed the movement of the boats and equipment for over two weeks.

With the crew mustered in blue uniforms, the orders were read, national ensign raised, and the station was commissioned 8 a.m., May 16, 1933. Following the ceremony an inspection was conducted and all buildings and equipment were judged to be in excellent condition.

The crew consisted of the Officer in Charge, one B.M. 1c (Bosun's Mate First Class), one Mo. M.M. 1c (Motor Machinists Mate First Class), and seven Surfmen. The station had four boats: a motor lifeboat, motor surfboat, surfboat and skiff. Other primary lifesaving equipment

included a hand powered fire extinguisher and the normal beach apparatus. A new truck was kept in storage pending the late 1934 completion of the road from Munising to Sand Point. The station experienced some initial problems in



becoming an efficiently functioning facility. A June 1934 inspection by the Eleventh District Commander revealed the "Officer in Charge of

“the necessary snap is not seen...”

this station seems to lack the knack of properly caring for and keeping up a station.” Specifically he noted the *“floors did not have a very neat appearance ... especially in the corners of the stairs.”* When the crew was exercised in the various drills, *“they were found to be proficient although the necessary snap is not seen at this station as at other stations.”* He did, however, suggest improvements would be made, especially when the new road was completed.

The deficiencies noted may well appear very minor to us more than half a century later, but to the Coast Guard of the thirties they were important failings. The tradition of such close inspections was a direct heritage from the old Life Saving Service, Revenue Marine and Lighthouse Service. It was also a tradition that would remain until the eve of World War II, when Coast Guard attention was directed to larger, more pressing matters.

Daily Activities



Five months later the station was inspected again. This time, however, it received a generally excellent rating with the inevitable exception of dirt under the radiators being allowed to accumulate! Nevertheless, it was considered to be a “large improvement.”

A thorough inspection was given, including not only the men’s uniform issue and the building, but also the various crew drills. These included

“boat drill, fire drill, wig wag, semaphore, flash-light, resuscitation, and the manual of arms, school of recruit and the operation of the rifle and pistol.”

Typical daily activities at the station included colors at 8 a.m., followed by selected subject training and routine maintenance duties. Training activities consisted of marlinspike seamanship, boat drill, international code, boat etiquette, infantry drill, first aid, pilot rules and the important beach apparatus drill.

The daily routine was often broken by the classic calls for assistance to small craft. Usually these involved towing disabled fishing boats or searching for overdue pleasure boats. The frequency of these minor rescues was about two per month, averaged throughout the period. On several occasions the crew was even sent on snowshoes during the winter to look for missing ice fisherman. There were, however, three notable exceptions.

The Occasional Rescue

Between August 14 and September 3, 1936, three of the station crewmen with their motor surfboat, together with crews and boats from Portage, Eagle Harbor, North Superior, Marquette and Grand Marais, assisted the National Park Service fight a 34,000 acre forest fire on Isle Royale. Primarily the crews assisted by transporting firefighters and supplies. All told, their boats covered 5,983 miles, hauling 9,390 men and 242,220 pounds of provisions. A second major incident was the November 7, 1940, Sparta wreck after her rudder became disabled in a storm. This was the first of only two large vessel rescues the station participated in. The crew was rescued



but the ship spent the winter on the reef at Mosquito Beach. Finally, in 1941 she was pulled afloat and later cut up for salvage. Five days after the Sparta incident, the second major rescue occurred. At 10:10 p.m., November 12, the station was alerted by the Michigan State Conservation Department that a steamer with 19 people aboard was sinking at Sac Bay near Fayette, on northern Lake Michigan. Rapidly the crew loaded their truck with the beach apparatus,

breaches buoy and with all of the crew save one, headed for the scene. They arrived at 12:30 a.m. where they discovered what eventually proved to be the steamer Sinola 500 feet offshore and broadside to the beach. By 2 a.m. on November 13, the first of the crew was ashore. Ironically, this was the most notable rescue performed by the Munising crew and it was accomplished on Lake Michigan!

The interval between the construction of the station and the eve of World War II was generally without major incident. During this period, the crew strength fluctuated between 10 and 13 men. America’s entrance into World War II had little impact on the station, other than an increase in personnel and what can be assumed to be a stepped up intensity of purpose.

Immediately following Pearl Harbor, the station crew decreased to six, evidently the result of several experienced men being transferred to more important locations. In July 1942, the station received the first of a number of men from the Detroit Recruiting Office apparently for active duty training. Eventually a high of 28 men served at Munising, many of them remaining for the entire war years.

The subjects the new men drilled in and the search and rescue activities performed were nearly identical to those of the pre-war period, with the addition of blackout practice and an increase in small arms practice. With the end of the war, the new men were either transferred or discharged and manning levels returned to those of pre-war.

End of an Era

After the station closed in 1960 it reverted to the City of Munising. In 1966 Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore was established and the station was donated to the park for use as Lakeshore headquarters, a role that continues today. No famous rescues occurred here nor did the station crew perform any act of special distinction. Yet today it serves as a reminder of the role of the U.S. Coast Guard along the nation’s fourth coastline—the Great Lakes.

Future plans call for the station to be restored and interpreted to the 1940’s era as Lakeshore headquarters moves to a new administrative center.