

U. S. Lifesaving Station White Lake - U. S. Coast Guard Station No. 268

By Barbara Bedau Brow

The White River Lifesaving Station was established by an act of Congress in May 1882. Unfortunately, the project sat idle until 1886 when construction was finally begun. It was expected to be completed by May 1, 1896.

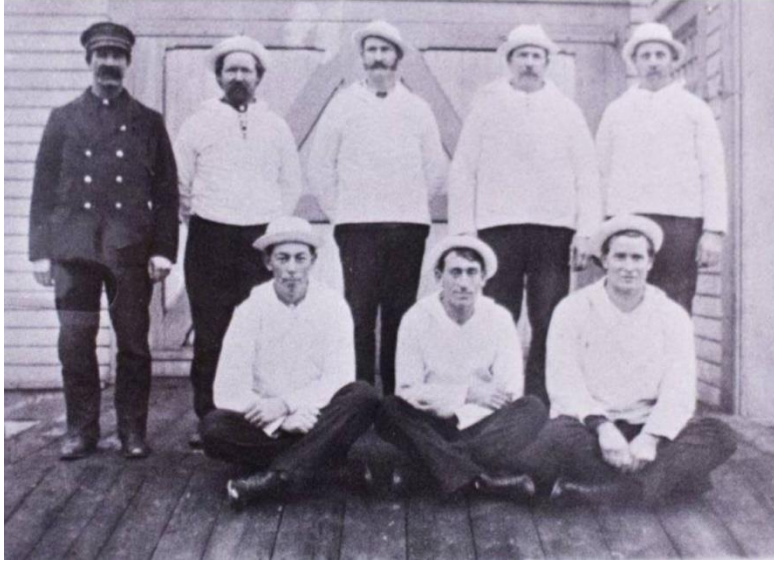


In April, 1887, Captain Charles Lysaght was moving his family from St. Joseph to the station. He would oversee the station until 1904. Those who served under him in 1900 were: Surfmen John P. Whelan, Joseph Edlund, Lafayette Pugh, John F. Yore, Charles F. Padget and 2 unnamed substitutes. In 1902, Charles D. Deneau and Curtis E. Strengam had joined the crew. In 1903 Curtis Strengam and John Yore had moved on and Wilbur Sills was added.

1905 saw a Captain Carlson leading the same crew with the addition of John Swenson and Julius Solmonson. In 1906, Captain E. Bedford took over the crew.

In 1908, Captain Henry Curran took over with a new crew: Charles Padget, Ben Aley, Frank Coleman, Elsworth LaVille, John Johnson, George Robinson and Herbert Vanoost. Frank Coleman resigned in 1910 to accept a position as assistant lighthouse keeper in Kenosha, WI. Orville Lee and John TerBeek were added in 1911.

Picture of an early day crew at White River Life Saving Station, 7 crew and a captain. Frank Coleman , top right and Ben Aley, lower right. Lafe Pugh, top center with mustache. (Muskegon Chronicle archive photo)



1912 saw the return of Padget, Aley, LaVille, Johnson & TerBeek. David Wing was added and Patrick Powers subbed for Herbert Vanoost who was transferred to Holland.

In 1913, the rebuilding of the Life Saving Station took place with the addition of such modern conveniences as bath tubs, lavatories, and a complete waterworks and sewer system. The structure was also moved back 50 feet and enlarged to accommodate a new power surf boat being added to the station equipment. Ray Storm transferred from Big Point Sable and William Leahman came from Chicago. Glen Tallant was also a member of the crew.

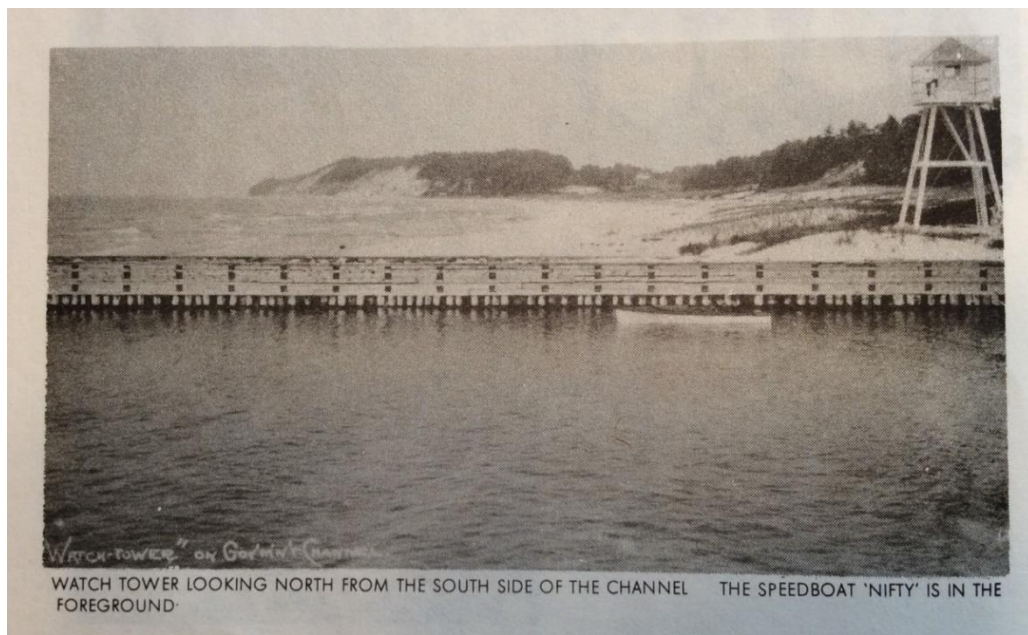


In 1917 Captain John Bernard took over and remained until his death in February 1930. Captain James F. Smith from the Bois Blanc station in the Straits was the new commanding officer. He had served there

for 6 years. He, his wife and five children had to cross over the ice at the Straits by means of dog team to reach the mainland before coming to White Lake.

In 1939 Captain James W. Fitzgerald from the Pentwater Coast Guard Station was transferred to White Lake where he remained for 2 years. He had previously served as part of the crew here back in 1917. He retired from the Coast Guard service in 1945 after serving for 27 years. He died in 1956.

In 1944 the Coast Guard announced the pending closure of the station, which had been in discussion since about 1941. In 1946 the station was put up for sale to the highest bidder. In December 1946 the station was officially sold to Raphael O. Holcomb and in June 1947, the Coast Guard Station was moved to its new location on Life Guard Road by the old channel. Any and all remaining structures at the original site were town down including the old signal tower that had stood on the beach for over 80 years.



WATCH TOWER ON GOVERNMENT CENTER
WATCH TOWER LOOKING NORTH FROM THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE CHANNEL THE SPEEDBOAT 'NIFTY' IS IN THE FOREGROUND

By abandoning the station, the land on which the station was built in 1886 reverted back to the original land grantor – the heirs of the Dowling estate. The Coast Guard had actually voided their lease when they leased the property to R. O. Holcomb to use as a residence and headquarters for a fishing business a couple of years earlier.



The house was significantly remodeled in 1998 and is now a private residence.

