

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, 1886.



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 which consisted of John P. Whelan, Lafe Pugh, Joseph Edlund, Charles S. Paget, Wilbert H. Sill, John A. Swenson and Julius A. Solomonson. Capt. Bedford served the station until 1908.

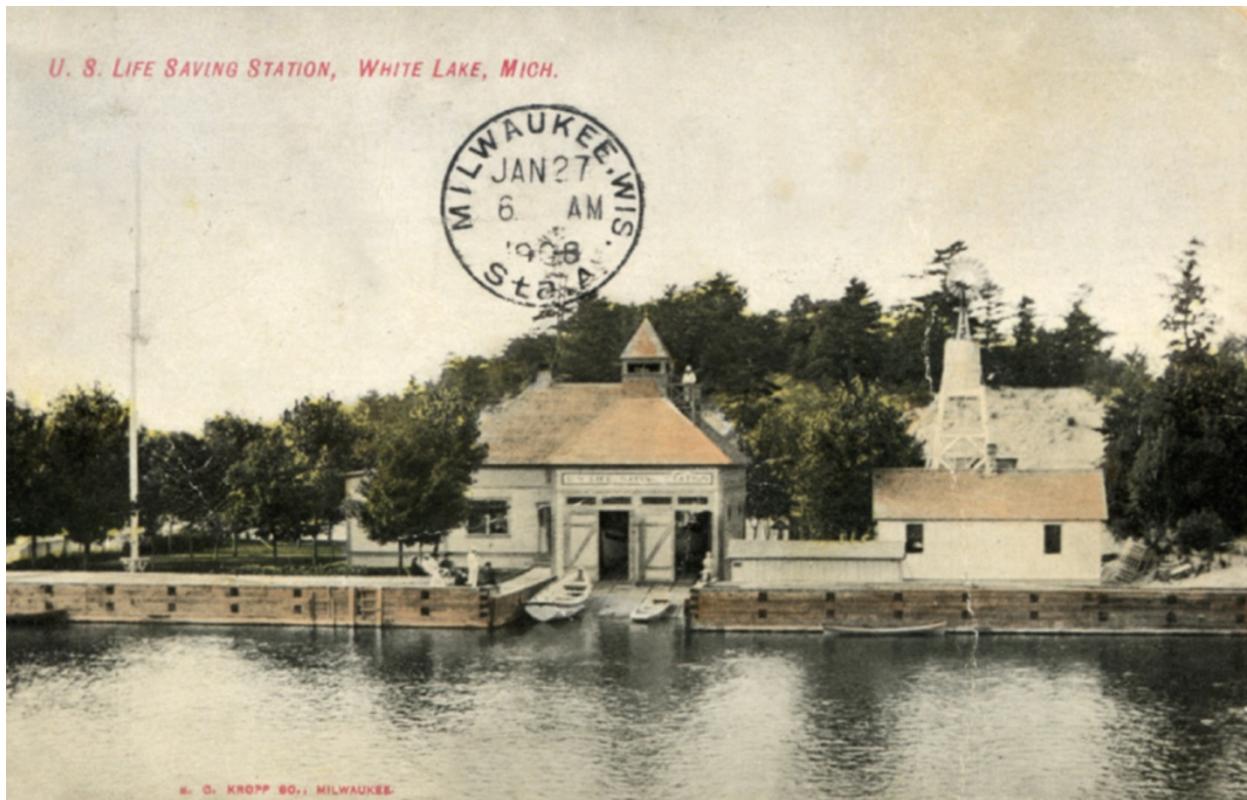


Dates on postcards made from this picture seem to be from around 1906. The picture appears to have been taken in the Spring of the year as there are no leaves on the trees yet.





In May 1907, an item in the local newspaper reported that Capt. Bedford and his crew of sturdy life savers went to town in their surfboat to get supplies, making the trip of six miles in 50 minutes. The sailors looked very trim in their white duck uniforms.

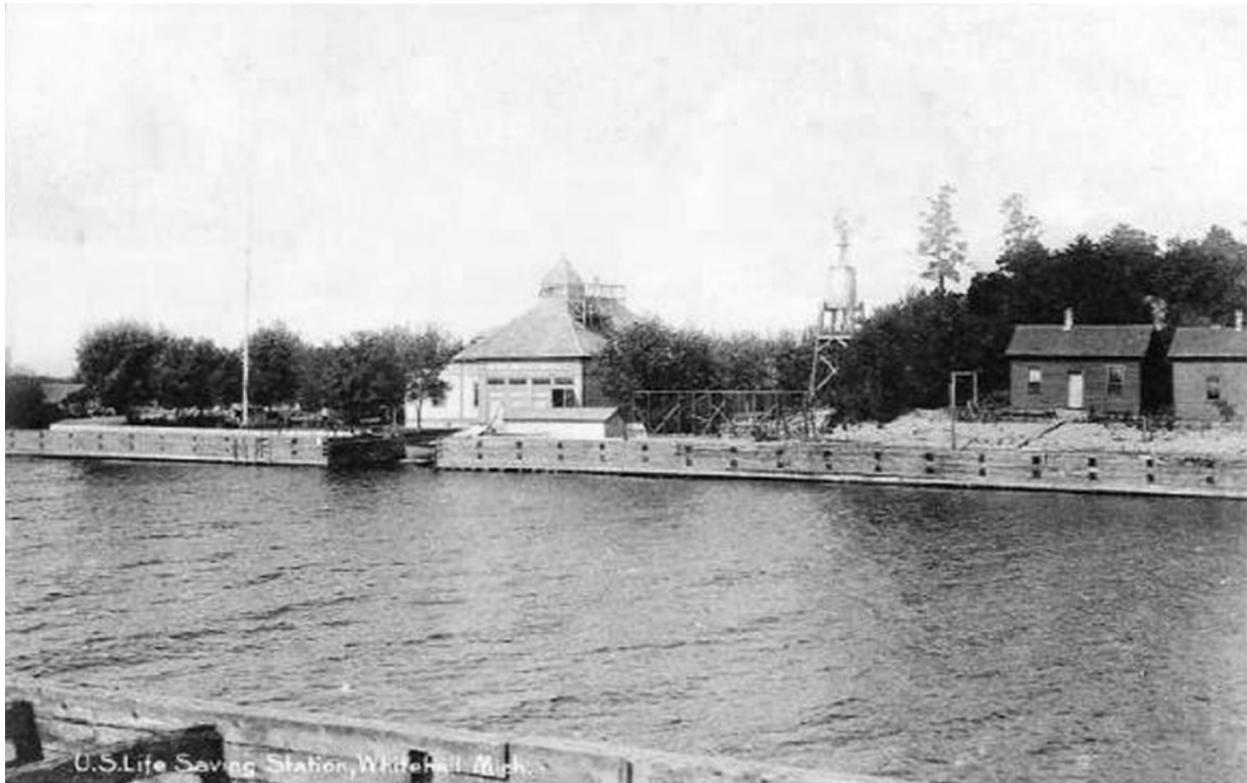


In 1908, Captain Henry Curran took over with a new crew: Charles Padget, Ben Aley, Frank Coleman, Elsworth LaVille, John Johnson, George Robinson and Herbert Vanoost. Frank Coleman resigned in 1910 to accept a position as assistant lighthouse keeper in Kenosha, WI. Orville Lee and John TerBeek were added 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 Lehman came from Chicago. Glen Tallant was also a member of the crew. Capt. Curran retired in 1917 after 38 years in the service.



In 1917 Captain John Bernard took over the station where he remained until his death in February 1930.



Captain James F. Smith, who served 6 years at the Bois Blanc station in the Straits, became the new commanding officer in 1930. 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.



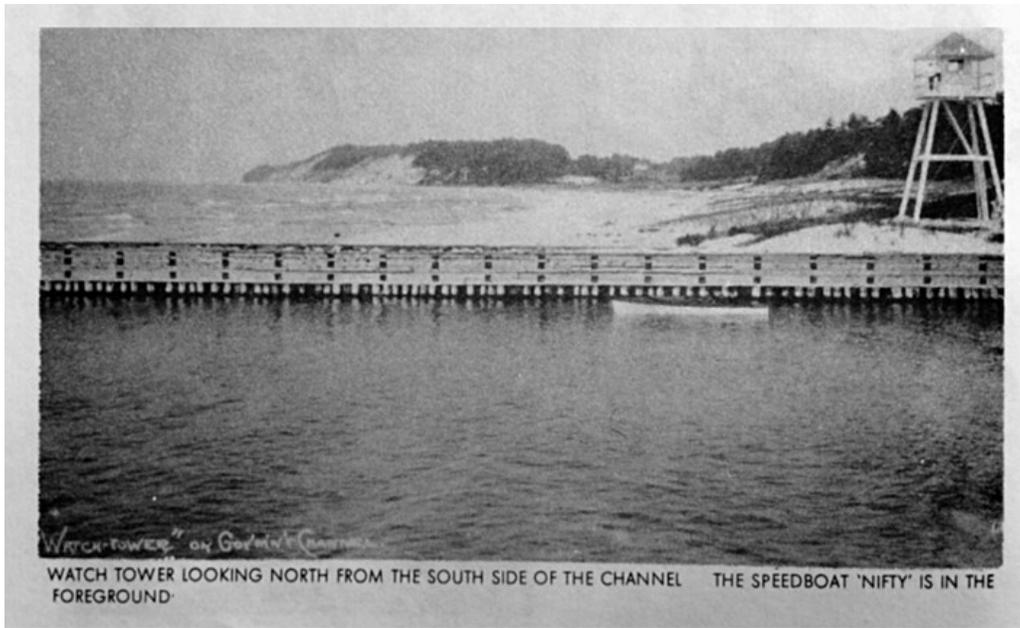
In 1934, Capt. William Long took over the operations of the Coast Guard Station. He was in charge of the station when the channel walls were rebuilt in 1936.



ca 1938

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 torn down including the old watch tower that had stood on the beach for more than 50 years.



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.



In 1956 – The former Coast Guard Station at its new location

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



The property where the original Coast Guard Station was located has since been purchased by the City of Montague and is now the parking area for use by people going to Medbery Park or the channel.



With the departure of the U. S. Coast Guard presence in the area, Jack deFraga, White Lake Yachtsman and harbormaster, was instrumental in forming the White Lake Coast Guard Auxiliary in 1946. Some of those who volunteered early on to patrol the waters were: Clarence Pitkin, Jack Butterfield, James and John Campbell, Jack Farmer, James Spencer and Dr. Leland Holly.



1946ca Jack deFraga and the Lifeboat that was purchased by the WLCGA for use in the White Lake area.

In 1948 Frank Deneke of Whitehall was appointed Harbormaster and Charles Coors of Montague was deputy Harbormaster. They served until about 1955.

J. Marshall Lloyd was named temporary Harbormaster in July 1958 to serve weekends and holidays through September.

Jack Bursey was appointed for the 1959 season.

In 1960, John Rybik was employed as a full-time harbormaster from 10 AM to dark daily until Labor Day and was on-call until the take froze.

By 1963, the duties of lake patrol came under the jurisdiction of the Muskegon County Sheriff's Office Marine Division, as they are today.