

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED OCT 11 1985

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Point Reyes Lifeboat Rescue Station (1927)

AND/OR COMMON

Point Reyes Lifeboat Station

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Drake's Bay, Point Reyes National Seashore

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Not applicable

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

☒ VICINITY OF Inverness

Fifth

STATE

California

CODE

06

COUNTY

Marin

CODE

041

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☐ OCCUPIED☒ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☒ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☒ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

National Park Service, Western Regional Office

STREET & NUMBER

450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco

VICINITY OF

STATE

California 94102

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

County Recorder's Office, County of Marin

STREET & NUMBER

Civic Center

CITY, TOWN

San Rafael

STATE

California

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Anna C. Toogood, A Civil History of Golden Gate . . . and Point Reyes National Seashore

DATE

1978

☒ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS National Park Service, Western Regional Office

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco

STATE

California

8-27-85

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

___EXCELLENT
☒GOOD
___FAIR

___DETERIORATED
___RUINS
___UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☒UNALTERED
___ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ORIGINAL SITE
___MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Point Reyes Lifeboat Rescue Station, built in 1927, is located on Drake's Bay in Marin County, California. Placed near the end of the point, the station is exposed to the extreme conditions of climate and topography that created a need for a lifeboat station: heavy fog, high winds, and rough surf. The boathouse, built on a rare stretch of sandy beach on an otherwise rocky point, stands at the base of the hills and cliffs of the point. Above, perched on the grass-covered hills, stands the rest of the complex.

The station was built to replace an earlier station on Point Reyes Beach (South), which lies some four miles to the northwest of the present station facing the open ocean. Built in 1889 by the U.S. Life Saving Service, the original station was scheduled to be moved when the U.S. Coast Guard took over the mission of the U.S.L.S.S. in 1915. But intervention of the First World War postponed those plans indefinitely, and it was not until 1927 that the Coast Guard abandoned the old station upon construction of the new one. The surf at the original location had proved far too rough, indeed, lethal.

As built, the new station boasted a spacious commander's residence, a boathouse, two garages, storage sheds, pumphouses, rock retaining walls, water tanks, and a flagpole and tower. As it stands today, the station has changed very little, only several minor outbuildings having vanished, a road having been relocated after a landslide, and a water tank dismounted from its wood frame tower and placed on a foundation, all changes made as a part of the operational history of the station. The intact structures are:

Commander's Residence: This commander's residence, also known as the "officer in charge's quarters," was built in 1927 as part of the original complex and is its second most important building. A rectangular two story wood frame structure; 20 by 50 feet with a basement, it has horizontal wood siding painted white. The double hung wood sash windows, six over six, have gray tram.

The gable roof, which features two dormers, one on each side, has wood shingles which have been painted red. A single brick chimney serves a fireplace (now walled up) on the first floor. The structure has two porches. The front porch, which faces north, has been enclosed and glazed, probably an early change due to the harsh climate which proved inhospitable to use of an open porch. The rear porch, much smaller, also has been enclosed.

The interior of the home has changed little, other than some modernization of the kitchen (formica counter tops), modernization of the bathrooms of which there are two, and modernization of some electrical fixtures, as well as the walling in of the fireplace, also due to the harsh climate.

Interior walls are plastered, and the rooms have ceilings about eight feet high. From the first floor a hardwood stairway leads into the second. An original brass cap, shaped like a pyramid, tops the newel post.

There is a full basement, with a toilet which may have been added after 1940.

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Rock Retaining Wall: The rock retaining wall near the commander's residence was built in 1927 as part of the original life-saving complex. It is approximately 330 feet long. It starts along the road that leads to the commander's residence and then follows the road until it reaches a point near the residence. It varies in height from 2-1/2 feet to about 10 feet. Approximately halfway, a concrete stairway leads up to the commander's residence. The wall is constructed of a reddish-brown rough-cut stone which is mortared with concrete. On the bottom of the stairway and attached to one wall is a small brass plaque which commemorates the voyage of Sir Francis Drake, who is credited by some scholars and by local legend with discovering Drake's Bay. The plaque was placed in 1950 by a local chapter of E Clampus Vitus.

Stone Retaining Wall: The stone retaining wall near the pumphouse appears to have been built around 1927 to hold back the eroding soil of the hill near the road leading to the boathouse. It is approximately 30 feet long and 2-1/2 feet tall and is constructed of rough stone set in lime mortar. It is overgrown and partially collapsed in several places.

Road: The road leading to the boathouse and passing through the life-saving station complex was graded in 1937. It starts near the commander's residence where it is sided by the rock retaining wall and then proceeds down the hill to the boathouse on the beach below. It is a gravel road, although at one time it was an asphalt-paved road. The grade is original.

Three Stall Garage: The three stall garage may have been built in 1927 as part of the original life-saving station complex. It is a square wood frame structure about 28 feet square with horizontal wood siding that has been sheathed with No. 1 sawn cedar shingles and painted white. It is built upon timber pilings with a concrete drive.

The building has a wood shingle, hipped roof, painted red. The five windows are double hung wood sashes, one over one. The trim of the windows is painted grey. There are three large garage doors facing the driveway, and a door on the east side. All are original.

The interior of the structure was not viewed. The floor is wood.

Garage: The garage, which serves as the garage for the commander's residence, was built in 1927 as part of the original life-saving station complex. It is a rectangular wood frame structure (12 by 20 feet) with horizontal wood siding that has been sheathed with No. 1 sawn cedar shingles and painted white. The building has a wood shingle hipped roof which is painted red. The four windows, which are double hung wood sashes, one over one, have a grey trim. There is one door on the north facade.

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The structure sits on a concrete pad. There is a large garage door on the west facade which is original. The interior walls have tongue and groove wood siding and ceiling. There is a small attic with access both inside and outside the building.

Pumphouse: The pumphouse was built in 1935 by the United States Coast Guard as part of the life-saving station. It is a square wood frame structure (12 by 12 feet) with horizontal wood siding that has been sheathed with No. 1 sawn cedar shingles and painted white. The hipped roof has wood shingles which are painted red. The five windows, which are double hung wood sashes, two over two, have a grey trim. The building rests upon a concrete pad. There is one door, which is located on the north facade.

The interior has no interior walls or ceiling. The pump and any other apparatus that was originally in the building has also been removed, with the exception of some piping and a small concrete pad on which the pump rested.

Storage Shed (?): The original designation and use of this structure is uncertain. It is currently in use as a fire pumphouse which may have also been the original use. It may have been built in 1927 as part of the original life-saving station. It is a square wood frame structure (10 by 10 feet) with tongue and groove wood siding that has been painted white. The wood shingle roof is painted red. The structure has one window with double hung wood sashes, one over one. The structure rests on a concrete pad. There is one door on the north facade, with six window panes in the top half.

Boathouse: The boathouse, built in 1927, and the most important building in the complex, was designed to store the rescue boats of the station and to house the crew. It is a 2-1/2 story wood frame structure built on timber pilings. The boathouse has a horizontal wood siding which is painted white. The roof, which is finished with cement-asbestos shingles, is red. It is believed that this is the original roofing material. The original copper gutters and downspouts have been temporarily removed to prevent vandalism.

The windows are double hung wood sashes, six over six. The windows have minor trim. The dimensions of the structure, which is rectangular, are 60 by 40 feet. There is an elevated walkway on the west facade of the building. This walkway leads to the boat launching ramp, which is located on the north facade and continues some forty feet into the water. To the west and east of this ramp are two elevated docks which continue for about ninety feet over the water. From the north facade, the boat launching ramp, which supports three boat launching tracks, runs some forty or so feet into the water. The tracks, which are similar to railroad track, begin inside the boathouse and then run out through three large doors on the north wall. Once outside, the tracks converge at a junction some fifteen feet north of the doors and continue along the ramp into the water. Both the ramp and the docks are supported by timber pilings. At one time, a manually-operated davit and lifeboat

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were attached to the west side of the ramp on the dock. The boat has been removed and the dismantled davit apparatus is lying on the dock.

The interior of the building is unequally divided between boat storage and living quarters for the crew. The first floor houses the boat deck which was capable of holding three vessels. Two tracks still possess the original launching cars. The central or main track has an electric winch (with a manual override) for launching the main lifeboat.

Also on the first floor is a mess deck. This contains the mess, a large kitchen, and a pantry. This area appears to have been slightly altered. The floors are covered with linoleum, the kitchen counters and hardware and plumbing are relatively new, and the lights have been changed to fluorescent. The walls are plastered. This is different than the boat deck, which has tongue and groove wood siding for walls. The boat deck has also been converted to fluorescent lighting.

From the mess deck, a stairway leads to the second floor, which houses the living quarters, the radio room, the office and the head. A large recreation room is also located at the northwest end of the building on the second floor. The stairway, with 17 risers has an original hardwood rail with rope lashing on the ends of the rail. This appears to be original.

There are six small crew rooms, approximately 10 by 12 feet, each with a steam radiator. There are no furnishings. The radio room and the office are original. All of the equipment has been removed. The head, which has two showers, has been modernized. All of the plumbing is recent, as are the metal stall showers. All lighting on the second floor has been converted to fluorescent lights.

From the second floor, a stairway leads to the loft, which makes up the next half-story. This loft area is divided into various small closets with an open storage area in the center. Wood drawers, all with their original stenciling, were used to store spare maintenance parts for the building.

There is one chimney in the building, which acts as a flue for the electrically-operated furnace on the first floor. The furnace powers the boiler, which is a small affair located in a small closet-like room near the boat deck. The furnace, which is identified as an "Electrolux 100W," was manufactured by the S.T. Johnson Co., of Oakland, California. It may be original.

Water Tanks (4): Four redwood water tanks (one of them elevated) were constructed in 1927 as part of the original life-saving station complex. Two of these tanks were built on the hill above the boathouse, while the other two (one elevated) were built on the hill above the commander's residence: These two tanks are still in place, but the elevated one has been placed on the ground. The two tanks above the boathouse were moved further up the hill after a severe landslide in 1956.

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Bellpost with Stand: A wooden bellpost with stand, built in 1927 as part of the original life-saving station complex, and approximately eight feet tall, stands to the west of the boathouse. The bell has been removed.

Features no longer extant: Several structures and features of the life-saving station are no longer extant. Among these were several non-official temporary residences built near the boathouse by members of the crew for their families. These were apparently destroyed around 1956. Also gone is the 1927 wooden drill post, a storage shed, a storeroom, and the flagpole and flag tower. It is not known when these features were removed. During the Second World War, a plywood quonset hut was built near the west facade of the boathouse. It was demolished around 1960.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION	
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE	
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE	
☐ 1600-1699	☐ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☒ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER	
☐ 1800-1899	☒ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☒ TRANSPORTATION	
☒ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		☐ INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1927-1937

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Fred J. Maurer/U.S. Coast Guard

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Point Reyes Life-Saving Station was built to rescue seamen whose misfortune it was to be wrecked on the treacherous and dangerous shore of Point Reyes. Prior to its construction many vessels and their crews were lost at the point, clearly indicating a need for a life-saving station. Established to meet that need, the Point Reyes Station performed admirably, despite a change of location in 1927. By 1968, the number of wrecks had declined, and the station was no longer needed and was decommissioned, its function superseded by the new station completed in 1968 at Bodega Bay, farther to the north.

Because of the great service it rendered and due to the importance of the Point Reyes Life-Saving Station to commercial coastal shipping and transportation, it is deemed of Regional significance in the areas of Social/Humanitarian, Transportation, and Commerce. The station is significant as a humanitarian expression; it is a reminder of a time when coastal and oceanic shipping was more hazardous, and more common, than today, and of man's humanity to man in attempting to mitigate those hazards, both to seamen and their passengers. The station was significant to the commercial development of the area by helping to make coastal shipping safer, thus encouraging such commerce. It was significant as a development which aided transportation especially in offering rescue of travelers (passengers) using coastal or oceanic transportation, as well as the crews. The structures of the Point Reyes Life-Saving Station, as built by the United States Coast Guard, are of regional historical significance because the station provided aid and a point of land that was passed by shipping serving the entire Pacific Coast. Furthermore, the station possesses what is probably the last surviving Coast Guard marine railway in California, if not on the entire Pacific Coast. All structures possess integrity of site and of construction, and stand as a monument to the valiant men of the Coast Guard.

Historical background: The history of life-saving activity on the Point Reyes Peninsula dates to the Mexican Era when Marin rancheros Rafael Garcia and John Reed aided the stranded crew of the luckless sailing ship Ayacucho, wrecked on the Limantour Spit on October 27, 184. At that time and for decades thereafter, the local ranchers were the only hands available to assist the crews and passengers of ships stranded or wrecked on the coast. What clearly was needed was a life-saving station, but it was not until 1886, after some six major wrecks in two decades on the north beach, three at the headlands and five in Drake's Bay had pointedly signaled the need for marine rescue at Point Reyes that a life-saving station there became a reality. Not until January 1888 did the U.S. Life-Saving Service acquire the three and a half acre site on the north beach because the landowner, Charles Webb Howard, had "played fast and loose" with the purchasing agent, making it possible for him to secure the deed only "after a great deal of trouble and vexatious delays." The site stood some three miles north of the Point Reyes Light on a sandy beach, giving a view of ships off the beach and

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Anna Coxé Toogood; A Civil History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore, California. (Denver: National Park Service, 1978)

Ralph C. and Janetta Shanks; Lighthouses and Lifeboats on the Redwood Coast. (San Anselmo: Costano Books, 1978).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 13

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,0 5,0,2 4,0,0 4,2 0,5 4,0,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 C 1,0 5,0,2 4,2,0 4,2 0,4 8,7,5

B 1,0 5,0,2 5,0,0 4,2 0,5 0,4,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 D 1,0 5,0,1 9,6,0 4,2 0,5 0,6,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary begins ten feet northerly from the end of the Coast Guard Pier in line with the centerline of the pier, and extends thence 120 feet easterly at right angles to the centerline of the pier. At that point it turns 90 degrees to the right (southerly), and extends across the small beach and up the cliffs to the south side of the dirt road which extends across the grasslands towards the end

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Not applicable	N/A	Not applicable	N/A
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Not applicable	N/A	Not applicable	N/A

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE James P. Delgado, Historian (WRO); Gordon Chappell, Regional Historian (WRO)
 Anna C. Toogood, Historian (DSC); F. Ross Holland, Jr., Historian, WRO (now retired)

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service, Western Regional Office (WRO)

DATE

June 5, 1985 (June 10, 1979)

STREET & NUMBER

450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063

TELEPHONE

(415) 556-4165

CITY OR TOWN

San Francisco

STATE

California 94102

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X

NO

NONE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National ☒ State ☐ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

Chief Historian, Natl. Park Service

DATE

10/7/85

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

William B. Bushong

DATE

11/7/85

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

for KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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headlands. Here, the U.S. Life-Saving Service built a station which was to serve for 38 years. Unfortunately, three surfmen lost their lives while launching their boats in the rough surf of the ocean beach between 1889 and 1927.

The ocean beach station north of Point Reyes faced vicious surf which not only made the launching of boats and efforts to effect rescues from crippled ships extremely dangerous, it also made training in boat launching and rescue techniques unnecessarily hazardous. Furthermore, it did not serve well those ships which foundered around the southeast side of Point Reyes or in Drake's Bay. Both for training in the safer waters of Drake's Bay and to enable better response to shipwrecks southeast of Point Reyes, about 1894 the Life-Saving Service built an auxiliary boathouse on Drake's Bay, and soon was conducting boat drills in the bay. Subsequently, after making a thorough inventory of the station buildings in 1910 and a survey of a new site in 1912, the Service acquired from Charles Howard's heirs in 1913 three small parcels of land, one for a dwelling, another for a new boathouse, and a third for a lookout station all on Drake's Bay, with the intention of building a new Life-Saving Station there to supersede the old one. The new life-saving station site stood barren, however, for another thirteen years, as World War I and unexplained further complications delayed construction. In 1915 the government combined the U.S. Life-Saving Service and the Revenue Service into a new U.S. Coast Guard, which shortly after the signing of the peace treaty renewed efforts to establish the new station. During the early 1920s, the U.S. Navy built a radio compass station just north of the life-saving station on the ocean beach, which undoubtedly assisted the surfmen to be on the watch for endangered ships. By January 1925, when the Coast Guard finally received orders describing the forthcoming construction of the new station, the old station had fallen into disrepair, as maintenance had repeatedly been deferred in expectation of the now long-delayed construction. The 1925 plans called for a station building to house the boats and crew which featured hot water heating, electric lights powered by a generator, and a gasoline-powered hoist to haul the boats up the launchway from the water. The station was also to feature a cottage for the officer-in-charge and for visiting officials. Near this dwelling site, the contractor was to erect a frame combination garage, workshop, and storage building on concrete foundations. At the station site, the contractor was also to erect a small outbuilding for the storage of coal, oil, gasoline, and other flammable items.

A contract with Fred J. Maurer and Co. for the station's construction began at the close of July 1926, Maurer's bid of \$42,162 being the lowest submitted. During construction, the Point Reyes station finally received authorization for its first power lifeboat. This meant that the first story of the station building had to be raised two feet and the height of the center boatroom door had to be raised to

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eleven feet six inches. On September 17, 1927, the crew received orders to move to the new station, although the construction of the garage, power house and coal house had not yet been completed. The station building stood a few hundred feet east of the Lighthouse Service's Drake's Bay landing and right of way, in the lee of Point Reyes' eastern headlands. The dwelling site, containing 2.07 acres, stood about 1300 feet northwest of the station building, on a hillside overlooking the bay and the lookout, within a plot of ground thirty feet by thirty feet, stood about three eighths of a mile southeast of the station building, on the high ground of the headlands.

Before its eventual disbandment and transfer to the National Park Service in 1969, the Point Reyes Coast Guard station underwent several changes and improvements. A well had been dug and connected with the electric pump in the power house in 1926, but the well gradually lost its supply of water so that by 1934, the station crew of fifteen men could only get some forty gallons of water from it per day. Water then was hauled to the station from a Naval Radio Direction Finder Station about four and a half miles away, which proved to be an expensive and time-consuming exercise. The station consumed about 1,000 gallons per day and the truck could only carry about 400 gallons per load, thus requiring several trips. Besides, not enough water could be stored in the station cisterns to protect the buildings from fire. The critical water storage problem continued for well over a year while efforts to locate a reliable source of uncontaminated water near the station were pursued fruitlessly. Finally, the decision was made to drill a well on the station premises.

In 1934, the station also received a second thirty-six foot power boat for which an additional launching carriage had to be constructed. In 1935 a pumphouse was added. By 1936 two cottages had been completed to supplement the two-story officer's residence and the station building's quarters. In 1937 approval came to build a road from the dwelling site down the hill to the station building. The work was delayed briefly in 1938 when Joseph Mendoza, over whose land the road would pass, flatly refused to sign the agreement, stating he was "fed up" with signing papers for the government, but giving the Twelfth District commander verbal permission to construct the road. The Works Progress Administrator insisted that the commander must have a written statement to proceed with construction, so after pleading with Mr. Mendoza to consider the hardship for the station's employees without the road--all supplies had to be slid down the bank on the end of a rope to the station while those taken from the station had to be packed out on the crewmen's backs--Mendoza relented and the forty-foot roadway was built. The next year a lease was signed for a new lookout site for a tower, storm signal tower and any other necessary structures. In 1941 the station received a steel paint locker and a small, frame pumphouse and in 1962 a guyed, aluminum tower, eighty-five feet high, all of which, with the station buildings dating from 1927, came under the administration of Point Reyes National Seashore in 1969, so closing nearly a century of life-saving service at Point Reyes.

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Although details are few on the rescue efforts of this station at their Drake's Bay location, at least one researcher reported in 1936 that in the station's first ten years at its new site, the crew members had saved \$3,000,000 worth of property and had given assistance to forty-five vessels--not a bad record and perhaps a good indication of the continued service the station provided in its waning years.

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Historical Context

The context in which the Point Reyes Lifeboat Rescue Station operated was that of lifeboat stations on the Pacific Coast of the United States between the borders of Canada and Mexico. Unfortunately, the history of lifeboat stations, whether under the United States Coast Guard or its predecessor U.S. Life Saving Service, is an area of American history not yet thoroughly explored. In contrast, there is extensive literature about lighthouses.

Two sources deal with lifeboat stations in California, and are cited in the bibliography. One deals only with those on the coast north of San Francisco, and the other deals principally with the Point Arguello station. How reliable the latter is, remains unknown; it claims that the Point Arguello station was the only such station south of San Francisco. Perhaps that is correct, and it seems to have been correct as of 1940, but it is still somewhat difficult to believe that there never were stations in the vicinity of the port of San Diego and elsewhere where maritime hazards caused wrecks. Nevertheless, this is the limit of available historical data without extensive primary source research and on-site visits beyond the legal authority and funding scope of this regional office.

Based upon the thin available published literature, the following has been derived regarding the known California stations, listed below in chronological order of establishment.

Golden Gate Park - The first station on the Pacific Coast was established on the north side of Golden Gate Park on the western edge of San Francisco at Ocean Beach in 1878. The station apparently never had a marine railway; crews hauled boats from the boathouse to the water across Ocean Beach on wheeled carriages, either by hand or by horsepower. The date this station was discontinued is unknown. Moved to a new location, the architecturally distinctive single story residence now forms the third story of a three story house on the second lot south of the southeast corner of 47th and Cabrillo Streets in San Francisco. The remainder of the station has been demolished.

Humboldt Bay - Built in 1878 also, the original character of this station is unknown. At some point in its history it apparently acquired a marine railway. The station apparently was demolished when replaced by a new station in 1936.

Bolinas Bay - Established in 1881, little is known of the history and character of the original station here, which burned in 1885.

Point Bonita Life Saving Station - Built in 1889 near the Point Bonita Light, this station consisted of a small pyramidal-roofed boathouse east of the Point Bonita Light. That building is now gone, only the badly rusted marine railway laying in the salt water to mark its location. Date of closing is unknown, but probably about 1915 when the Coast Guard enlarged the Fort Point station.

Point Reyes Beach - Built in 1889 north of Point Reyes, this station apparently had no

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marine railway, boats being launched into the surf by other means, probably manpower. It was superseded by the 1927 station on Drake's Bay. The station residence still stands as a private ranch residence; the rest of the buildings apparently are gone.

Fort Point Life Saving Station - Built in 1889 east of Fort Point inside San Francisco Bay, this station originally was of the same architectural style as the Point Reyes Beach station. Its two original buildings still stand, however in 1915 both were moved 700 feet further west to make way for a racetrack being built for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The orientation of the buildings also was changed in relation to each other. However, they served the same function at their new sites, except that the boathouse/carriagehouse thereafter was merely a carriage house, for in 1915 the newly established U.S. Coast Guard erected a new boathouse with three boat stalls and marine railway and with barracks upstairs. This building also survives, however the U.S. Coast Guard removed the marine railway about 1971 with concurrence of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and subsequently the Coast Guard rebuilt the boathouse doors as windows. The Coast Guard still mans and uses the station, but is considering moving across the strait to Fort Baker, where it would build a new station. Even lacking the marine railway, the Fort Point station is considered historically significant.

Southside Station (Fort Funston) - Built south of Golden Gate Park and Ocean Beach in 1894, this station is entirely gone, and its character is not known.

Bolinas Bay - Apparently without a station after the destructive fire of 1885, Bolinas Bay regained a station when the Coast Guard built a new one there in 1915. Of this station, the main building apparently now serves as the Biology Station of the College of Marin. Its integrity is unevaluated.

Point Reyes (Drake's Bay) - About 1915 the Coast Guard built a new boathouse inside Drake's Bay, apparently on the west or northwest side of the bay, although the men who manned this boathouse came from the other station on Point Reyes Beach facing the Pacific Ocean. Whether or not this station had a marine railway is unknown; it is now gone, probably demolished about 1928 when the new Drake's Bay station was built.

Point Reyes Lifeboat Rescue Station - Built in 1927, this is the station which is the subject of this nomination form.

Humboldt Bay - The U.S. Coast Guard built an entirely new Humboldt Bay station in 1936. The boathouse still stands and is in use, and the marine railway still exists, but the boat bays have been turned into offices, and the boat doors have been removed and replaced with a wall featuring windows. Nine years younger than the Drake's Bay Station, it is of an entirely different style.

Point Arguello - Built in 1936 and abandoned in 1941, this station is believed recently to have been demolished by the U.S. Air Force in order to make way for a station for recovery of booster-stage rockets employed in the launching of missiles and space shuttles at Vandenburg Air Force Base.

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Information regarding stations in Oregon and Washington is even more difficult to obtain. According to Roald Bendixson, Environmental Specialist for the 13th District, United States Coast Guard, there are no published histories of life saving stations in Oregon or Washington, but on the basis of personal knowledge, he cited the existence of the following:

Three "older" stations which had, and apparently still have, marine railways:

Willpa Bay, Washington

Point Robinson, Puget Sound, Washington - marine railway characterized as "rails lying on the beach"

Tillamook Bay, Oregon

Stations with other means of launching boats, all apparently recent stations built during or since the 1960s:

Depoe Bay, Oregon

Florence, Oregon

Stations with boom-hoist boat launching systems:

Burrows Island, Washington

Destruction Island, Washington

Cape Flattery, Tatoosh Island, Washington

Other stations, character and launching systems unknown:

Point Adams, Oregon - station relinquished to GSA by the USCG

Cape Disappointment, Washington

The dates of establishment and discontinuance, the architecture, the integrity, and the individual histories of these stations remain unknown at present.

Bandon, Oregon - The NPS Regional Historian for the Pacific Northwest Region, Stephanie Toothman, was aware of one station not mentioned by the Coast Guard at Bandon, Oregon, which, apparently abandoned by the Coast Guard some time ago, has become a small local museum. Other stations may have at one time existed whose existence today has been forgotten.

On the basis of the foregoing, it may be useful to note that some stations duplicated the design, plan, and architecture of others, while some were unique in architecture, plan, or design, at least insofar as the Pacific Coast stations are concerned.

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The Point Bonita and early Humboldt Bay stations, for example, apparently were quite similar if not identical, as were the Fort Point and Point Reyes Beach stations. However, the design and plan of the Point Reyes (Drake's Bay) station which is the subject of this nomination does not seem to have been duplicated among the California stations - whether or not it was among the Oregon and Washington stations is unknown. It was therefore unique among the California stations.

Among the California stations, only three marine railways still exist, and two of those are at stations whose integrity has been impaired (Humboldt Bay) or destroyed (Point Bonita). Only the Point Reyes (Drake's Bay) Lifeboat Rescue Station, among those in California, appears to retain complete integrity of its boathouse and marine railway. But how this compares with stations in Oregon and Washington, whose integrity remains unevaluated and whose history is unexplored, is unknown. Furthermore, the marine railway at Point Bonita is believed to be of the early type which employed switches, the one at Point Reyes being of the switchless type, as was probably that at Humboldt Bay.

The Point Reyes Lifeboat Station appears to be the last intact and unaltered Lifeboat Rescue Station built by the U.S. Coast Guard in California. Whether or not it may be the last unaltered station on the Pacific Coast is unknown.

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UTM Coordinates, Zone 10, continued: E 10 5/02/000 42/05/160

Verbal Boundary Description, continued:

of the foot of the point to the east. Then the boundary follows the south edge of that dirt road westward to its intersection with the paved road; from that point it follows the south side of the paved road to the gate and fence on the east side of the station commander's residence compound. Then it follows the fence southeast, southerly, westerly, then northerly, around that portion of the residence compound which is south of the paved road, until it reaches the gate west of the residence; then it continues on the same line down the hill and down the cliff to the 20 foot elevation contour on the cliff; then it turns easterly again, following the 20 foot elevation contour along the cliffs inside Drake's Bay until reaching the north side of the paved road between the residence compound and the boathouse as it descends along the edge of the hillside eastward toward the boathouse, following the south edge of that road to a point which is 120 feet west of the centerline of the pier at which point it turns northerly and runs parallel to the centerline of the pier until it reaches a point in the water on a parallel with a point ten feet beyond the end of the pier and at right angles to its centerline; then the boundary turns easterly again in alignment with the first segment described, following that line to the starting point.

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Photographs accompanying this nomination which show present conditions were taken in 1979. However, in order to complete a sketch map to accompany this form, Regional Historian Gordon Chappell reinspected this resource early in 1985 and found the station unchanged in appearance since 1979, so that the 1979 photographs reflect 1985 appearance as well.

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Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Propertyhistoric name Point Reyes Lifeboat Station

other names/site number _____

2. Locationstreet & number Drakes Bay☐ not for publicationcity, town Point Reyes☒ vicinitystate California

code

CA

county

Marin

code

041

zip code

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

☐ private☐ public-local☐ public-State☒ public-Federal

Category of Property

☒ building(s)☐ district☐ site☒ structure☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

639

Noncontributing

 buildings sites structures objects Total

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 9**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined eligible for the National
Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.☐ removed from the National Register.☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government-lifesaving

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Coast Guard Standard Plan

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete / pilingswalls woodroof composition shingleother N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Point Reyes Lifeboat Station, built in 1927, consists of National Register of Historic Places listed structures located within the boundary of Point Reyes National Seashore at the western end of Drakes Bay on the California coast. Closed by the United States Coast Guard in 1968, the station is now owned by the National Park Service.

THE DRAKES BAY LIFEBOAT STATION AS BUILT AND MODIFIED

The Point Reyes Lifeboat Station was built on a rare stretch of sand on an otherwise rocky coastline south of Point Reyes, which abruptly thrusts out into the Pacific 40 miles northwest of San Francisco, creating the western end of Drakes Bay. Placed near the end of the point, the station is exposed to the extreme conditions of climate and topography that created a need for a lifeboat station: heavy fog, high winds, and angry surf. The boathouse, the principal structure of the station, stands at the base of the hills and cliffs of the point, with its piers and lifeboat launching marine railway extending into the bay. Above, perched on the hillside, stands the rest of the complex.

As built, the station included the boathouse, a spacious officer-in-charge's residence, two garages, storage sheds, powerhouse, water storage tanks, a flagstaff, lookout tower, and rock retaining walls. As it stands in 1989, the station has changed little. Several minor outbuildings have vanished, a dirt road was relocated farther up the hill after a landslide, and a water tower removed from its wood frame base and placed on concrete foundation. These changes were all made during the operational history of the station. [1]

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Boathouse

The primary structure at the station is the boathouse, built in 1927. Designed to house type "T" 36-foot motor lifeboats, the boathouse quartered the station's crew on its second floor. A rectangular, two-and-a-half story wood frame structure 60 by 40 feet in area, the boathouse rests on a concrete and wood piling foundation. Finished with horizontal wood siding, the boathouse is painted white with gray trim and has a hip roof covered with red cement-asbestos shingles. The windows are double-hung wood sashes, six over six. The interior of the building is equally divided between boat storage and living quarters for the crew. The first floor is primarily occupied by the boat deck, which as built housed a 36-foot motor lifeboat and a 26-foot rail-launched surfboat. A second 36-foot motor lifeboat was added to the station in 1934 and the surfboat was placed outside. In May 1940, a shed addition on the eastern facade of the boathouse allowed the shifting of the tracks for the second 36-foot motor lifeboat to that side of the building. [2] The rails for the surfboat were removed from inside the station, leaving only the two rails for the motor lifeboats. Each set carries a launching cradle. The third set of rails were retained outside the boathouse, though, so that the surfboat could be placed on a cradle and launched down the launchway like the motor lifeboats.

As built the boathouse employed a gasoline-powered winch to haul up the boats. In 1965, an electric winch, with manual override, was installed as a replacement. [3] It remains in the building and is operational. The walls of the boat deck are tongue-in-groove siding; on the front facade are the three sets of double-hung doors that swing out for boat launching. The Electrolux 100W electric furnace, manufactured by the S.T. Johnson Co. of Oakland, California, is located on the boat deck. It exhausts into a flue that leads to the boathouse chimney.

The first floor also houses the mess deck. A large kitchen, remodeled by the Coast Guard in 1951, 1963, and recently rehabilitated by the National Park Service, and the pantry, now converted into a bathroom, are located at this level. The floors are linoleum, the walls plastered, and the lighting is fluorescent tube. From the mess deck, a short flight of stairs step down to the boat deck, while another stairway, with 17

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risers, leads to the second floor. The stairway has a hardwood rail with the ends served with lashing in a nautical manner. The second floor, or the berth deck, contains six 10- by 12-foot bedrooms, each sleeping two men, a radio room (with all equipment removed), an office, a large recreation room, and a bathroom with showers. The bathroom was originally a smaller space; it was enlarged and two shower stalls installed in 1942. It was again modernized, along with the galley, in 1963. [4] From the second floor, a stairway leads to the loft, which makes up the half-story. The loft was divided into various small closets with an open storage area in the center. During 1988-1989 renovation, firewalls were installed to divide the loft into several smaller spaces while preserving the closets and a series of wood drawers containing spare plumbing and electrical parts for the building.

An elevated walkway on the eastern facade of the boathouse leads to the launching ramp in front of the building. The heavily planked ramp, mounting the launching rails, continues out 40 feet to the water's edge, the rails converge into a single set of tracks that run another 60 feet or more into the water, resting for much of their length on pilings tied together with heavy wooden beams. On each side of the railway are two elevated piers that extend to the end of the railway. Around 1940, davits with a manual windlass were mounted on the northern dock for launching the surfboat formerly stowed in the boathouse. The davit and windlass assembly was dismantled after 1968.

Officer-in-Charge's Quarters

The officer-in-charge's quarters, built in 1927, is a rectangular, two-story wood frame structure 20 by 50 feet in area. It has a full basement. Covered with horizontal wood siding painted white, the building has double-hung wood sash windows, six over six, with a plain surround painted gray. The gable roof, with two dormers, is wood shingled and painted red. A single brick chimney for the fireplace is located at one end. There is a front and a back porch; both are enclosed because of the harsh, damp, cold climate. There are six rooms on the first floor; the living room, kitchen, pantry, a bathroom, bedroom, and small office. There are four rooms on the second floor; two bedrooms, each with spacious walk-in closets, and two large storerooms. The interior walls are plastered, with high

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ceilings, hardwood floors, and a hardwood stairway that leads to the second floor. An original brass cap, shaped like a pyramid, tops the newel post. The interior has not been substantially modified and reflects the utilitarian accommodations of government-supplied quarters. The bathrooms, kitchen, and electrical fixtures were modernized by the Coast Guard in 1966. Around the same time, the fireplace was bricked up because of the violent winds that occasionally swept down the chimney. [5]

Outbuildings

Between 1927 and 1942 the Coast Guard built fourteen outbuildings and auxiliary structures as part of the lifeboat station complex. Outbuildings constructed in 1927 were a three-car garage, a one-car garage, two storage sheds, a powerhouse, four redwood water tanks, bellpost, drill post (for rigging the breeches buoy), lookout tower, and flagstaff. As of 1989, only the two garages, powerhouse, and the watertanks remain at the station. A pumphouse built in 1935, as well as the gravel road leading into the station and stone retaining walls alongside the road, are the other structures present. The road originally went only to the officer-in-charge's residence; it was extended in 1937 to reach the boathouse.

The three-car garage, a square wood frame structure about 28 feet square with horizontal wood siding, sheathed with No. 1 sawn cedar shingles, and a wood shingle hipped roof, is painted white with red roof and gray trim. There are five wood sash windows, double hung, one over one. Three garage doors face the driveway, with a small door on the east side. The one-car garage, which was probably built as a workshop and later housed the officer-in-charge's automobile, is a 12- by 20-foot rectangular wood frame structure. It has horizontal wood siding sheathed with No. 1 sawn cedar shingles, painted white. The hip roof is wood shingled and painted red. There are four double hung wood sash windows, one over one, with the garage door on the west facade and a small door on the north facade.

The powerhouse is a square, 12- by 12-foot wood frame structure with horizontal wood siding sheathed with No. 1 sawn cedar shingles painted white. The generator and an electric pump

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installed in the building were later removed and the interior of the building is empty except for the concrete pad and steel piping that connects to the station's well, which went dry in 1934. To replace it, a new well was drilled and a pumphouse was built in August 1935. This small 10- by 10-foot wood frame building has horizontal wood siding, painted white. [6] It is connected to the new well and feeds the station's four redwood water tanks. The four redwood water tanks for the station remain on site, two on the hillside above the residence and two above the boathouse. The two tanks above the boathouse were moved from their original location after a landslide in 1956; they are now farther up the hillside.

Structures not present that were built after 1927 include several non-official residences built on the hillside by the surfmen for their families, two cottages built in 1936 for station personnel, a WWII temporary Quonset hut that was built as a recreation room around 1942, and an 85-foot high guyed aluminum radio tower erected in 1962 and removed in 1968. The residences were demolished sometime around 1956. The Quonset hut was demolished by the Coast Guard around 1960.

36-FOOT MOTOR LIFEBOAT NUMBER 36542

One of the 36-foot motor lifeboats employed at this station is now owned by the National Park Service and is usually housed in the boathouse. Built at the Coast Guard yard at Curtis Bay, Maryland, in 1953, the boat, a type "TRS," is numbered 36542. There were three types of 36-footers; the original type "T," the "TR" of 1931, and the "TRS" of 1938. Number 36542 is an excellent example of the once-common 36-foot motor lifeboats, hundreds of which were built between 1908 and 1956; less than a dozen of these vessels survive in the United States today. 36524 is currently at the Marshall Boat Works in nearby Marshall, California, where it is hauled out. The 36-foot motor lifeboat is a rescue craft designed to remain afloat and self-right in adverse sea conditions. It was the first standard motor-propelled lifeboat type adopted by the Coast Guard for lifesaving. The double-ended hull is fully-enclosed by three turtleback trunks and two well decks. The hull is divided into several watertight compartments, with a GM 4-71 marine diesel

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engine turning a single screw. The oak-framed and oak and cypress-planked vessel has a solid oak keel reinforced with a cast-brass shoe, with clamps and stringers providing longitudinal support along with two substantial rubrails on the outer hull. The hull is 36.8 feet long, with a 10.6-foot beam and a 3.4-foot draft. [7]

NOTES

1

The station was previously documented for the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and 1985; see James P. Delgado, Gordon Chappell, Anna C. Toogood, and F. Ross Holland, Jr., "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Point Reyes Lifeboat Rescue Station Station," Unpublished manuscript report, National Park Service, Western Regional Office, San Francisco, June 10, 1979 and June 5, 1985. For the purposes of this study, another site evaluation was undertaken by the author on June 12, 1989.

2

"Point Reyes Station, Additions-Alterations & Repairs to Boathouse and Launchway, U.S. Coast Guard, Civil Engineering Office, San Francisco," drawing # 3759-31, May 1940. Copy on file at Point Reyes National Seashore, Point Reyes, California.

3

"Point Reyes Station, Electric Drive Motor for Boat Hoisting Winch," U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District, Engineering," drawing D-663-1, August 11, 1965. Copy on file at Point Reyes National Seashore, Point Reyes, California.

4

"Point Reyes Lifeboat Station, Improving Bath & Washing Facilities in Sta. Bld'g, United States Coast Guard, San Francisco District, Engineering," drawing 3759-38, April 1942. Also see "Pt. Reyes Lifeboat Station, Alterations to Existing Barracks Building, U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District, Civil Engineering," drawing D-425-1. October 28, 1963. Copies on file at Point Reyes National Seashore, Point Reyes, California.

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5

"Point Reyes Station LB, Family Quarters Remodeling, U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District, San Francisco, Civil Engineering," drawing D-781-1, December 7, 1966. Copy on file at Point Reyes National Seashore, Point Reyes, California.

6

"Pump House & Piping, Layout for Water Supply, Point Reyes C.G. Station, Pt. Reyes, Calif., U.S. Coast Guard, Office of the Civil Engineer, Government Island, California," drawing 3759-18, September 1935. Also see "Point Reyes Station Water Well, U.S. Coast Guard, Civil Engineer's Office, Washington, D.C.," drawing 101180, November 2, 1935. Copies on file at Point Reyes National Seashore, Point Reyes, California.

7

Don Birkholz, "Conditional Survey of 36' Motor Lifeboat #36542, for Point Reyes National Seashore, National Park Service." Unpublished manuscript report, Tri-Coastal marine, Inc., October 1987, pp. 2-3.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D NHL CRITERIA 1,4

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Maritime

Politics/Government

Humanitarian

NHL XII L: Business: Shipping and Transportation

NHL XIV B: Ships, Boats, Lighthouses, and
Other Structures

Period of Significance

1927-1939

1927-1939

1927-1939

Significant Dates

1927

1927

1929, 1930, 1931

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

U.S. Coast Guard

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Point Reyes Lifeboat Station was built to rescue seamen whose misfortune it was to wreck on the treacherous shores of the Point Reyes peninsula, which abruptly interrupts the ocean highway off the Pacific coast. Vessels making landfall from transpacific passages usually aimed for, and turned south at Point Reyes for San Francisco. Strong currents, thick fogs, and shifting winds drove ashore vessels seeking shelter in the point's lee. Between 1595 and 1939, more than 30 vessels engaged in coastal and transpacific trade were lost there, and more than 20 other major vessels were stranded or victims of maritime accidents. Because of the large number of shipwrecks on the peninsula, a lifesaving station was built in 1888 on the Ten-Mile Beach of Point Reyes, serving until 1927, when it was relocated to Drakes Bay.

The United States Life-Saving Service, later incorporated with other services to create the U.S. Coast Guard, was established in 1878 to render aid to the hundreds of shipwrecked vessels and mariners lost annually on the nation's coasts and lakeshores. A variety of station types were developed for various launching conditions, most employing manually launched surfboats hauled across beach sands to the ocean. Other stations on rocky coastlines employed railways to launch boats. The development of motor lifeboats in the early years of the 20th century revolutionized lifesaving, and a number of earlier stations built on sand beaches were decommissioned in favor of more centrally

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located rail-launching stations on more protected shores because the motor lifeboats had a quicker response time. The result was felt at Point Reyes with the relocation of the station and the construction of a boathouse and launchway for motor lifeboats in the lee of the Point on the protected waters of Drakes Bay. This type of station served until the mid-1960s, when the development of the 44-foot motor lifeboat led to the quick abandonment of the 36-foot motor lifeboat and the rail-launching lifeboat stations.

For 80 years the lifesaving and lifeboat stations of Point Reyes provided a humanitarian service to Pacific coast shipping, one of the nation's vital maritime trades routes; half of those years were served by the station on Drakes Beach with its motor lifeboats. A typical example of a rail-launching station with launchway and cradle-launched 36-foot motor lifeboats, the Point Reyes Lifeboat Station is the only unaltered station of this nationally employed type remaining on the Pacific Coast. It retains its principal structures, the majority of its secondary structures, and most importantly its launchway, tracks, launching cradles, and one of its 36-foot motor lifeboats.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statements that follow.

THE UNITED STATES LIFE-SAVING SERVICE AND THE COAST GUARD

It is a traditional responsibility of mariners to assist vessels in distress, and the annals of the sea are filled with accounts of masters and crews who risked all to save others on foundering or burning ships. U.S. Government vessels honored this tradition, but it was not until 1832 that the government formally introduced the concept of Federal responsibility for rescuing mariners in distress. That year, the Secretary of the Treasury instructed the masters of several U.S. revenue cutters to cruise in the winter months to render what aid they could to shipwrecked vessels. However, many ships were cast upon the nation's shores where no other vessel could reach them, and the saving of life and property was the responsibility of those ashore. In 1786, the Massachusetts Humane Society was founded to provide assistance to those wrecked on the shores of Cape Cod, and other

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organizations followed suit, building houses of refuge on isolated beaches so that men cast ashore would not perish from the elements. [1]

In 1847, the federal government first recognized the need for a government response to shoreside wrecks. A small appropriation was granted for lifesaving equipment at a number of lighthouses. In 1848, this appropriation, which was not used, was followed by a \$10,000 appropriation to place lifesaving equipment on the New Jersey shore, where large numbers of vessels were cast up after failing to make the New York harbor entrance. Under the supervision of the United States Revenue Marine, stations were built to house the equipment, but skilled lifesavers were not provided. [2] In 1854, superintendents for the Jersey stations were provided for by Congress, but paid crews were not made available until after 1871, when Congress allocated \$200,000 for that purpose.

The need for a professional government-supported service devoted to lifesaving became a paramount concern, and in 1878, Congress established the United States Life-Saving Service (USLSS), with money to build additional stations and provide for professionally-trained, paid crews to man them. Within four years, the service had grown to encompass 189 stations across the United States--139 on the Atlantic seaboard, seven on the Pacific coast, five on the Gulf coast, 37 on the Great Lakes, and one at the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville, Kentucky. [3] In nearly all cases, these stations were isolated boathouses and quarters built on sandy stretches of ocean beaches; the pounding surf forced the lifesavers to haul lifeboats on surf carts over the sand and launch them into the waves by hand. The majority of East coast lifesaving stations were of this surf-launching type; it was only on rocky coastlines, sheltered harbors, the Great Lakes, and the Pacific coast that elevated launchways were built to slide boats down a ramp and into the water. However, some stations with launchways were built on sandy beaches after 1900 to accommodate a new type of lifeboat.

The Life-Saving Service was never able to utilize marine steam propulsion in its lifeboats; steam engines were too bulky and heavy, as well as too easily extinguished in a swamped, surf-

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lashed boat. In September 1899, though, the first motor lifeboat, a standard 34-foot pulling boat fitted with a 12-horsepower Superior gasoline engine, was launched and tried out on Lake Michigan. The USLSS commissioned a group of experts, headed by Professor C.H. Peabody at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to study lifeboat mechanization and design. "The commission threw its weight in favor of power boats and offered invaluable technical advice." [4] The USLSS began mechanizing its boats in 1905; more than a dozen motor lifeboats were in service by year's end. By 1913, more than 70 motor lifeboats and 70 power surfboats were in service; two years later, as the Life-Saving Service merged with other agencies to constitute the U.S. Coast Guard, 80 motor lifeboats and nearly 150 power surfboats were on the inventory. [5] There were two types of motor lifeboats--the original 34-foot boat, with 25 hp engines, and the 36-footer, introduced after 1905, with a heavier 35 hp engine.

These craft, with fixed propellers and heavier construction, could not be surf launched. Hence, after the introduction of the motor lifeboat, a number of former lifesaving stations were rebuilt as lifeboat stations with elevated marine railways; the first was Wood End Station on Cape Cod, with the ways leading into the sheltered waters of Provincetown Harbor. The 1908 introduction of the 36-footers, however, set a standard for the American motor lifeboat that lasted for five decades. Throughout the United States, motor lifeboats were employed at lifeboat stations--those with launchways--while the old-style "pulling" surfboats were used at lifesaving stations.

These two basic station types were built in numerous architectural variations and adapted to regional conditions. By 1924, the 36-foot motor lifeboats made up the majority of craft used, though a number of pulling boats, and, thanks to improved technology, 26-foot, 12 hp gasoline engined surfboats were also found in the various stations around the country. The newly created United States Coast Guard continued to maintain the old stations, building new ones as well, so that by 1929, the apparent "high water mark," there were approximately 250 lifesaving and lifeboat stations in the United States. [6]

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THE POINT REYES LIFESAVING AND LIFEBOAT STATIONS

The Point Reyes peninsula claimed California's first recorded shipwreck in 1595, when the Spanish exploring vessel San Agustin was driven ashore in Drakes Bay. No other vessel is known to have wrecked there until 1841, but following the discovery of California gold in 1848, the rise of San Francisco as the nation's principal port on the Pacific and increased transpacific and coastal shipping resulted in more wrecks. Only the ranchers who lived on the peninsula, and occasionally the keepers of Point Reyes light were available to rescue stranded mariners, and often they were of little or no help, as eight major wrecks between 1866 and 1886 demonstrated. In the latter year, the U.S. Life-Saving Service, which had established its first station on the Pacific coast at San Francisco just eight years before, approached Point Reyes landowner Charles Webb Howard to negotiate acquiring a station site. In January 1888, the USLSS purchased a 3-1/2-acre plot on the peninsula's "Ten-Mile Beach" from Howard. The site stood three miles north of the point, and as the name implies, on a flat ten-mile expanse of sand, giving a view of ships off the beach and the headlands. A lifesaving station was built in 1888 and equipped with surfboats; it served for 39 years. [7]

The station faced vicious surf which not only made rescue attempts dangerous but also made training in boat launching and rescue techniques unnecessarily hazardous. Three surfmen lost their lives while launching their boats on the beach between 1889 and 1927. The station was also ill-sited to assist wrecks in Drakes Bay around the southeast side of the point, and it was there that the majority of wrecks occurred as vessels sought shelter in the lee of Point Reyes. Around 1894, the USLSS built an auxiliary boathouse on Drakes Bay to respond to wrecks there and for training; in 1913, they purchased three adjacent parcels of property on the bay for a new boathouse, residence, and lookout.

The new station was not built for thirteen years. This was because of the 1915 absorption of the USLSS into the Coast Guard, the United States' entry into the First World War in April 1917, and unexplained further complications. The deteriorating old

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station on Ten-Mile beach remained in use. Then, in January 1925, the Coast Guard drew up plans for the new station on Drakes Bay. The new facility was to be a lifeboat station, with launchway, gasoline-powered winch to hoist the boats up, a combination boathouse/crew's quarters, officer-in-charge's residence, hot water heating, electrical lighting, and garages; all considered luxuries to the crew in a nearly 40-year old station suffering from years of deferred maintenance. The Fred J. Maurer Company's low bid of \$42,162 was accepted early in 1926, and in July of the same year Maurer's men began to work. During construction, the station received its first authorization for a power lifeboat. On September 17, 1927, the crew moved into the new boathouse and residence, even though all of the station buildings were not yet complete. [8]

In the 41 years the station at Drakes Bay was in commission, the surfmen responded to numerous distress calls, hauling fishing boats and yachts out of the surf, and towing out of gas vessels to the fish company piers on Drakes Bay. In this fashion, in just ten years, the new station's crew saved \$3,000,000 worth of property and assisted 45 vessels in distress. [9] Included in those figures were three major shipwrecks in the immediate vicinity of the station. The first was on the evening of June 27, 1929. The 946-ton steam schooner Hartwood, laden with wire cable, steel, pipe, and sugar, and carrying 26 persons, crashed ashore on the rocks of the point. The heavy seas and rocks began to break the wooden hull apart, and the captain ordered all hands to abandon ship. Two boats were launched. Thirteen people, including the captain's wife, 5-year-old son, and the 7-year-old son of the first mate, slid down the falls into the boats. Heavy seas prevented the launching of the smaller workboat, leaving 13 men stranded on the ship.

The lifeboat crews had meanwhile responded to Hartwood's telegraphed SOS and quickly located the steam schooner's boats. The occupants were taken to the station while the Coast Guardsmen rigged a breeches buoy on the cliffs above the wreck. As the cable alternately sagged and snapped taut with each roll of the ship, three men were hauled to safety. The breeches buoy was abandoned after the third came ashore, however, as the increasing swell was cracking the cable like a whip. By running the motor

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lifeboat close to Hartwood, the crew was able to pass a line to the ship. Most of the men crossed over the line, hand over hand, to reach the launch. Meanwhile, the crew on shore raised the breeches buoy cable and pulled the last two Hartwood crew members ashore. The steam schooner quickly broke up. [10]

Nearly a year later, on May 8, 1930, the Atlantic Richfield Company gasoline tanker Richfield stranded on the reefs off Chimney Rock, tearing her hull open to the sea and spreading gasoline over the water. The crew abandoned ship and were rescued by the motor lifeboat crew from the Point Reyes Station, who had witnessed the tanker's grounding. Attempts to pull the tanker free failed, though, and the Coast Guard posted a mariner's warning prohibiting open fires at sea in the vicinity of Point Reyes until the ship had broken up and her gasoline cargo dispersed on the waves. On November 7, 1931, the freighter Munleon, carrying 800 tons of general cargo, ran ashore at the point near the spot Hartwood had been lost at two years previous. Holed by rocks, Munleon settled into the water as the Coast Guard motor lifeboat hove into view. Three separate trips in the lifeboat brought the 28-man crew to safety, but Munleon was abandoned to the surf and rocks as a total loss. [11]

Apart from these and a few other adventures, the Coast Guard crew at the station, like firemen, spent much of their time preparing for the time when disaster would strike. Maintaining equipment and drilling occupied much of the time. Other than assistance calls and the occasional shipwreck, nothing altered the routine except once, when tragedy struck the station on November 23, 1960. The 36-foot motor lifeboat CG 36542, with two Coast Guardsmen as crew, were dispatched that evening to tow a disabled fishing boat into Bodega Bay. Late that night, about an hour away from the station, the crew radioed that they would soon dock. That was the last time they were heard from. The next morning, searchers found the lifeboat cast up on Ten-Mile Beach, with the propeller turning. The crew was gone. An air-sea-land search failed to turn up the missing men, but by year's end their bodies washed ashore. The best explanation was that a large wave capsized the boat off the point, throwing the two men into the water. The self-righting lifeboat came up, and, engine running, continued on its way, leaving the crew behind in rough, dark seas. [12]

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The 36-foot motor lifeboats were fast becoming obsolete by the 1960s. Coast Guard experiments resulted in the postwar development of the 44-foot motor lifeboat. The 36-footers were last built in 1956, when the final batch of 58 boats was launched. The 44-foot motor lifeboat, a steel-hulled craft with twin diesel engines, fire and salvage pump, and modern navigation equipment, has been termed "the finest rescue boat in the world." The first built, CG 44300, was launched and successfully tested in 1962. The Coast Guard ordered 25 of the new boat, which gradually began to replace the 36-footers. By the 1970s, only a handful of 36-footers were left in service, as compared with 105 of the 44-foot boats. [13] A number of older station with adequate dock facilities were converted into 44-foot boat stations, with their launchways removed or left idle and the boat deck converted into offices or quarters. This was done, for example, in 1971 at the Fort Point Station inside the Golden Gate. Other older stations that could not be converted to 44-foot boat use were decommissioned, sold, or demolished.

The impact of this decision was felt at Point Reyes. The old station was not equipped to handle the new boats. Many of its responsibilities were taken over by a new station at Bodega Bay to the north. Commissioned on July 6, 1963, the Bodega Bay Station employed both a 44-foot and a 36-foot motor lifeboat. Lifeboat CG 36542, used at Point Reyes, was transferred to Bodega Bay in 1963. There, it and the 44-foot boat were engaged in some 150 routine calls per year, usually assisting fishermen with engine trouble. By 1978, CG 36542 was the last 36-foot motor lifeboat in active service in the United States, another indication of the rapid changes wrought by the introduction of the 44-foot boat. [14] As Bodega Bay shifted into operation, Point Reyes declined, and in 1968, the station was decommissioned after 41 years of lifesaving service at Drakes Bay and 80 years of service on the Point Reyes peninsula. The vacant station was transferred to the National Park Service in 1969 since the surrounding land was now part of Point Reyes National Seashore; in 1981 the Coast Guard transferred 36-foot motor lifeboat 3CG 36542 to the National Park Service for interpretive use at the station.

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THE RAIL-LAUNCHING LIFEBOAT STATIONS OF THE PACIFIC COAST

The construction of the new station building at Bodega Bay, and the reconstruction of the lifeboat station at Fort Point, and equipping both with the new 44-foot motor lifeboat reflected similar moves elsewhere in the Coast Guard. One of the few dozen lifesaving and lifeboat stations built on the Pacific coast, the Point Reyes station outlasted many of its predecessors. There were only eight stations in California, around a dozen stations in Oregon, and an equal number in Washington. [15] Of these, approximately a dozen employed a launchway; these were among the last stations to be closed in the 1960s in favor of new stations deploying the 44-foot motor lifeboats now in service, or remodeled for the same. Of all of these stations, only four are known to possess a launchway; these have been closed off, the boat decks converted, and their doors removed or sealed. Only Point Reyes retains an unaltered boathouse, launchway, with rails, cradles and boat on the Pacific coast. As such, she is the best example of the Pacific coast variation of a nationally-employed and significant type of lifeboat station.

NOTES

1

Robert Erwin Johnson, Guardians of the Sea: History of the United States Coast Guard, 1915 to the Present (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1987), p. 4.

2

See Robert F. Bennett, Surfboats, Rockets, and Carronades (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Coast Guard/Government Printing Office, 1976) pp. 10-31 passim.

3

Johnson, Op.cit, p. 7.

4

Stephen H. Evans, The United States Coast Guard, 1790-1915: A Definitive History (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1949), p. 187. The annual report for the U.S. Life-Saving Service for 1913 reports on the rapid incursion of the 36-foot motor lifeboat.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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- 5
Ibid, p. 188.
- 6
Johnson, Op.cit, p. 124.
- 7
Ralph C. Shanks, Jr. and Janetta Thompson Shanks, Lighthouses and Lifeboats on the Redwood Coast (San Anselmo, California: Costano Books, 1978) pp. 28-31.
- 8
James P. Delgado, Gordon Chappell, Anna C. Toogood, and F. Ross Holland, Jr., "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Point Reyes Lifeboat Rescue Station," unpublished manuscript report, National Park Service, Western Region, 1979, section 8, p. 3.
- 9
Ibid, section 8, p. 4.
- 10
See David Buller and James P. Delgado, "Losses of Major Vessels Within the Drakes Bay Survey Area," in Larry Murphy, ed. Submerged Cultural Resources Survey, Portions of Point Reyes National Seashore and Point Reyes-Farallon Islands National Marine Sanctuary: Phase I-Reconnaissance (Santa Fe: National Park Service, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, 1984) pp. 57-58.
- 11
Ibid, pp. 72-80 passim.
- 12
Shanks, Op.cit, pp. 40-41.
- 13
Johnson, Op.cit, p. 313.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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14

Shanks, Op.cit, p. 40.

15

See Delgado et al., Op.cit, section 8, p. 5-8, and Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, "Historic U.S. Coast Guard Life-Saving Facilities on the Oregon Coast," unpublished manuscript, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, Salem, July 1980.

9. Major Bibliographical References

PLEASE SEE FOOTNOTES CITED IN TEXT.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☒ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☒ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository:

Point Reyes National Seashore

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 13

UTM References

A

1	0
5	0
2	4
0	0

4	2	0	5	4	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

C

1	0
5	0
2	4
2	0

4	2	0	4	8	7	5
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

E 1 0 5 0 2 0 0 0 4 2 0 5 1 6 0

B

1	0
5	0
2	5
0	0

4	2	0	5	0	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

D

1	0
5	0
1	9
6	0

4	2	0	5	0	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Please see continuation sheet.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the original boundary of the station and incorporates all nominated features.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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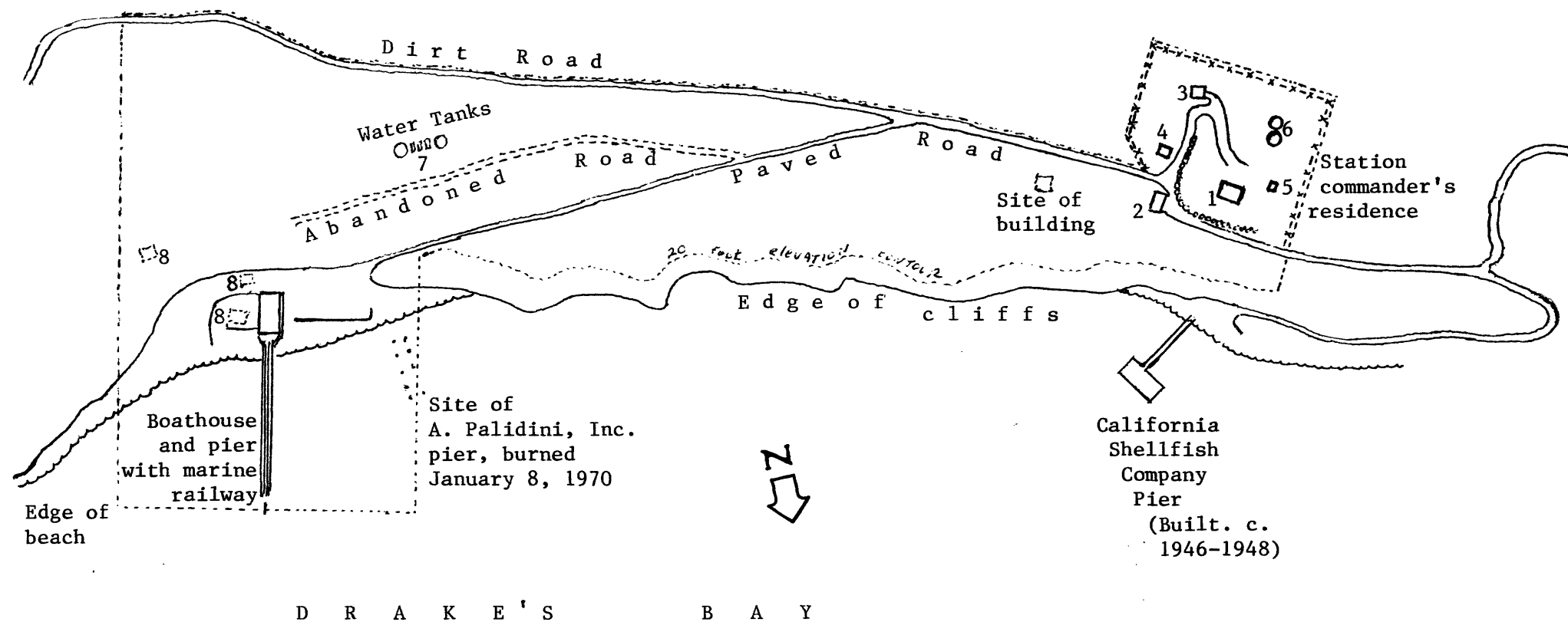
P A C I F I C O C E A N

cliffs

grasslands

P O , I N T R E Y E S

Point Reyes Lifeboat Station
United States Coast Guard
1927--1969
Drake's Bay
Point Reyes National Seashore
Marin County, California



1. Commander's Residence
2. Garage (3-stall)
3. Garage (1-stall)
4. Storage Building
5. Pumphouse
6. and 7. Water Tanks
8. Sites of buildings now gone

Not to scale